

Perceived Social Support as a Predictor of Mental Health among First-Year College Students at a State University

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Abstract. The perceived support from family, friends, and peers plays a critical role in helping students navigate the challenges of university life. Strong social support is shown to alleviate stress and improve overall well-being. In contrast, insufficient support is linked to poorer mental health outcomes. While existing research has explored the general link between social support and well-being, the specific ways perceived social support predicts mental health outcomes among first-year college students have not been thoroughly studied locally. This study highlights how perceived social support predicts first-year students' mental health, which can be used to develop targeted counseling support interventions. This quantitative study utilized a predictive correlational design to investigate the relationship between perceived social support and mental health among first-year college students ($n=104$) at a state university in Pampanga, Philippines. The sample size was determined through G*Power 3.1.9.7, and the respondents were selected using a purposive sampling technique. Data analysis using JAMOVI version 2.4.14 revealed a weak and negative connection ($p < 0.001$, $R = -0.48$) between perceived social support and mental health among first-year college students. Furthermore, the data demonstrated that first-year college students' mental health can be predicted by 23% of perceived social support. The findings indicate that while perceived social support can benefit some, excessive support can lead to distress, psychological suffering, hindered autonomy, and weakened stress-coping abilities. Perceived support from a demanding family environment can decrease mental health outcomes among first-year college learners. Stressor type and support provider characteristics may influence this negative association. The importance of perceived social support in predicting mental health emphasizes the need for supportive environments that increase mental well-being among first-year college students.

Keywords: College students; Counseling; Mental health; Perceived social support.

1.0 Introduction

Transitioning to college life from the secondary level can be challenging for first-year students. Significant changes can lead to pressure and concern, like adapting to a fresh setting and creating new contacts. This study assessed the correlation and prediction of first-year college students' perceived social support and mental health. Student independence helps develop the skills and mindset needed for academic success and lifelong learning, allowing them to become engaged, self-reliant learners (Szwedo et al., 2017). This transition introduces factors that can significantly impact first-year college students' mental health, such as social challenges, academic pressure, and mental health issues. Studying these issues is essential to enhance student support systems, leading to better mental health and educational outcomes. Adapting to a new social environment can be intimidating; students may struggle to fit into a new environment, and an unfamiliar support system can intensify feelings of loneliness

compared to what they are used to. Adjusting to college life can be overwhelming for first-year students, as academic pressure, such as maintaining good grades, can cause various mental health issues. Stress, anxiety, and depression are usual during this transition period. Students who lack social support may find it hard to handle these mental health issues. Mental health professionals should assess social support networks and consider cultural and individual differences when designing interventions (Huang et al., 2021).

Evidence shows that students with better self-reported perceived social support have improved mental health outcomes. Perceived social support is defined as reliable confirmation from the social environment that one is cared for by family, friends, and peers (Cobo-Rendon et al., 2020). Student's mental health is a fundamental aspect of a person's overall well-being, characterized as the relationship functioning of mental processes in thought, mood, and behavior, enabling productive activities, positive social interactions, and the ability to adapt, change, and cope with adversity (Hersi, 2017). According to Torres-Harding et al. (2020), depression is a common and treatable condition that exerts a profound significance on one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors, resulting in despair, loss of enthusiasm for once-enjoyed activities, and potential mental and physical complications. Stress encompasses feelings of anxiety or mental pressure stemming from challenging situations that, when managed effectively, can catalyze personal growth (World Health Organization, 2022). Transitioning to college is an era of remarkable stress for students due to the new social and academic environment and personal struggles. If learners cannot handle stress well, it can lead to anxiety and depression. Lack of social support will lead to a higher rate of mental health issues among the students. However, if students perceive strong social support, it serves as a key source of help. Social support helps first-year college students manage stress more efficiently, minimizing the chance of depression, which leads to enhanced mental health. The mental health needs of students are described in the literature as affecting approximately 35% of students on a college campus; these students can even meet the diagnostic criteria for at least one common mental health condition (Auerbach, 2018).

Understanding the predictors of mental health among first-year students can provide insight into what sets changes in mental health among the population. The prevalence of mental health problems in university students is increasing and attributable to academic, financial, and social stressors. According to Alsubaie et al. (2019), the lack of social support is a known determinant of mental health problems. Harandi and Taghinasab (2017) explained that perceived social support is a phenomenon that involves interactions between people, so when a person offers social interaction, it has a significant role in his health. It represents the number of supports that a person perceives. According to Cox and Naylor (2018), social support has been identified as predicting students' integration into academic life. It represents the amount of support a person perceives and reports. Family support has consistently been recognized as necessary for academic persistence, while support derived from peers and support groups is associated with positive academic outcomes (Kim et al., 2018). To optimally benefit from their educational experiences, students must learn to cope effectively with stress (Carnicer et al., 2019), and higher levels of social support have consistently been identified as associated with lower stress levels and a more remarkable ability to manage stressors (Mishra, 2020).

The range of social support that students receive from the student's families, friends, and the academic community can directly influence the person's ability to deal with the challenges associated with university life. The transition to university life introduces significant challenges for first-year students, which include academic pressure, social adjustments, and living independently. Mental health issues such as stress, anxiety, and depression are common among this group of people. Research conducted in multiple countries has identified that the experience of transition to third-level education is a potential source of stress for students (Cage et al., 2021). During the early stages of university life, students often experience the highest stress levels compared to the remainder of that student's studies (Conley et al., 2020). Individuals who believe that everyone has the necessary social support are generally less stressed. In addition, it influences the way people respond to stress, interact with others, and make wise decisions. Mental health is crucial at all phases of life, from early childhood and teenage years to maturity. Positive student outcomes, including academic achievement and overall well-being, are consistently linked to social support (Maymon et al., 2019). Moreover, Harikandei (2017) has discovered that higher life satisfaction relates to higher levels of social support from friends and family.

This study is supported by the Social Support Theory, which asserts that people will seek emotional, practical, and information help from social connections and relationships during stressful or difficult times. This theory

suggests that an individual's social support network can significantly enhance their mental health, coping abilities, and overall well-being. Many can offer social support, including friends, family, coworkers, and community groups. By understanding the importance of social support in people's lives, people can better figure out how to provide meaningful help to those going through difficult times (Blackbyrn, 2023). Whereas in this study, social support is believed to be linked to better mental health, what processes underlie this association is still unknown. A strong perceived support system can make challenging events feel less intimidating, leading to improved mental health and a reduced risk of adverse psychological outcomes (Acoba et al., 2024).

While prior research has found a general link between social support and mental health results, there is a gap in understanding how perceived social support relates to the mental well-being of first-year college students going into a critical life transition. Moreover, few studies have been conducted on this issue locally. This study filled that gap by analyzing the correlation and prediction of first-year college students' perceived social support and mental health. Using this insight, the study seeks to understand how to enhance student social support. The findings can be used to improve support systems that can lead to better student outcomes and a more supportive learning environment. Furthermore, identifying predictors of mental health can help school counselors recognize what flourishes and languishes in the well-being of first-year college students at an early stage. Moreover, it can be used to design appropriate interventions that address the mental health issues of students. This study answers the following questions: What is the demographic profile of the first-year college students at a state university in Pampanga, Philippines? What are the perceived social support and mental health levels among first-year students? Is there a significant relationship between perceived social support and mental health among first-year college students? Does perceived social support predict the mental health outcomes of first-year college students? Exploring these questions provided valuable insights for school counseling interventions that foster first-year undergraduates' well-being.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study uses a quantitative method, collecting numerical data to investigate patterns and relationships. According to Allen (2017), quantitative research allows the use of data from a sample population to explore psychological, social, and economic phenomena. This study used survey questionnaires to gather data on perceived social support and mental health among first-year college students. Specifically, a predictive correlational design was utilized to explore how perceived social support predicts the mental health of first-year college students. Predictive correlational design is a research approach that examines relationships between variables to make predictions. It is commonly used in educational and psychological studies (Bozkurt et al., 2023). A correlation must be established to understand the connection between perceived social support and mental health, which measures the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables (Kumari & Yadav, 2018). Furthermore, this design can determine how much perceived social support (independent variable) explains first-year college students' mental health (dependent variable). This research method and design quantify the relationship and provide valuable insights into how perceived social support may impact first-year college students' well-being.

2.2 Research Locale

The study was conducted in a state university in Pampanga, Philippines. The institution provides an accessible education to diverse students. This setting was selected due to its substantial number of first-year participants adjusting to college life, making it ideal for studying perceived social support and mental health.

2.3 Research Participants

The participants for this study are 104 first-year college students from a state university in Pampanga, Philippines. Through G*Power software, the researchers determined the needed sample size. G*Power is a free software tool widely used for sample size calculation and power analysis in research. It supports various statistical methods and is valued for its ease of use and time-saving capabilities (Santabarbara, 2022). The set parameters are a statistical power of 95% chance and a significance level 0.05. In this case, there is a 95% chance that the real value is within 5% of the measured value. Moreover, purposive sampling was used to select participants for this study. This method was chosen because it targets individuals who meet specific criteria relevant to the research. The respondents were first-year students in a transitional period of their college life, 17-18 years old, bonafide students

at the chosen state university, and living in Pampanga, Philippines. The study revealed how perceived social support influences the mental health of these students during this critical transition phase.

2.4 Research Instrument

The researcher utilized two open-access survey questionnaires for this study. First, the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) was developed by Zimet et al. (1990) is a 12-item questionnaire with a 7-point Likert scale ranging from “1-Strongly Disagree” to “7-Strongly Agree” The instrument assesses perceived support from family, friends, and significant others. The MSPSS has shown excellent internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values typically above 0.90. Test-retest reliability is good, with coefficients ranging from 0.78 to 0.90. The scale has demonstrated convergent validity through correlations with measures of life satisfaction, depression, and health-related quality of life (Cartwright et al., 2020). The scores for the 12 items are divided into three subscales: (1) significant other: sum across items 1, 2, 5, and 10, then divided by 4. The (2) family subscale: sum across items 3, 4, 8, and 11, then divide by 4. Moreover, (3) friends subscale: sum across items 6, 7, 9, and 12, then divide by 4. The researchers emailed the authors to convert the instrument into digital format.

The second scale used is the Adolescent Mental Health Continuum-Short Form (AMHC-SF) developed by Keyes (2009). This 14-item questionnaire measures the frequency of first-year college students' mental health experiences regarding emotional, social, and psychological well-being. The scale has a 6-point Likert scale ranging from “1-Everyday” to “6-Never.” The instrument is reliable and valid across various populations. It exhibits high internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.73$ to 0.90) and test-retest reliability ($\alpha = 0.86$ to 0.93). Meanwhile, convergent validity shows an acceptable coefficient of 0.77 (Söderqvist & Larm, 2021). A score of 1 or 2 indicates flourishing on at least one of the three emotional well-being items and six or more on the 11 positive functioning items. A score of 5 or 6 marks languishing on at least one of the emotional well-being items and six or more on the positive functioning items. Moderate mental health describes those who are neither flourishing nor languishing. Similarly, the researchers contacted the developers for permission to convert the scale into Google Forms.

2.5 Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers initiated the study by emailing the developers of the two survey questionnaires to request permission for use. The researchers then distributed an online survey through Google Forms to 104 first-year student respondents from a state university, including questions on the demographic profile and the actual statements from each scale. Respondents were invited to complete the form at their convenience, and all responses were securely stored. After collecting all the data, the researchers reviewed the responses and compiled the information to analyze the results. JAMOVI 2.4.14 software was utilized for data cleaning, coding, and analysis. The preliminary assumptions were checked, and it was identified that the internal consistency for Social Support is ($\alpha=0.94$) while Mental Health is ($\alpha=0.91$). The collinearity statistics revealed a variance inflation factor of 1.00, which means that the two variables studied are independent. The normality test through Shapiro-Wilk probability showed that the dataset is normally distributed (p . 0.31). Descriptive analysis was used in this study to gather specific data for the respondents' demographic profiles, including age and sex assigned at birth. Moreover, the researchers used the mean and standard deviation (SD) to determine first-year college students' perceived social support and mental health levels. Second, correlation analysis was used in this study to identify a significant relationship between perceived social support and mental health. The results from this correlation analysis indicated the direction and strength of the connections between the variables, shedding light on how social support contributes to the mental well-being of students. Lastly, linear regression analysis examines respondents' prediction of social support and mental health. According to Georgia State University (2024), linear regression tests the effect of predictor(s) on the outcome variable. It quantifies how much the perceived social support explains the mental health of first-year college students.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

In conducting this study, the researchers prioritized the participants' rights and well-being by obtaining informed consent and allowing the students to understand the study's goal and procedures before deciding to participate. Confidentiality was ensured by anonymizing data and securely storing the dataset on a password-protected device, which the researchers can only access. The researchers only gathered and kept the necessary information, adhering to the Data Privacy Act 2012. The study allowed participants to understand their experiences better and contributed to gaining new knowledge. The results were promised to be communicated to the participants after

the completion of the study. The researchers ensured that the respondents were not harmed during the data-gathering procedure and provided necessary assistance to the subjects whenever necessary.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the respondents, focusing on age and sex assigned at birth. The data revealed that there was a total of 104 first-year college students who participated in this study. Regarding age, 98 students (94.23%) are 18, while only 6 (5.77%) are 17. This distribution suggests that the sample primarily consists of students of legal age. For sex assigned at birth, there are 31 male respondents (29.81%) and 73 female respondents (70.19%). This suggests that there are more females in this research.

Table 1. *Demographic Profile of First-Year Students*

Age	Frequency	Percentage
17	6	5.80
18	98	94.2
Sex		
Male	31	29.8
Female	73	70.2

3.2 Levels of Social Support among First-Year College Students

The data presented in Table 2 revealed that participants generally recognized a strong sense of perceived social support, as specified by high mean scores for statements such as "There is a special person with whom I can share joys and sorrows" ($m=5.29$, $SD=1.62$) and "I have friends with whom I can share my joys and sorrows" ($m=5.20$, $SD=1.50$). Friends are the foundation of social support groups and the cornerstone of wholesome relationships. Both individuals volunteer to be essential to each other's support system around a friend. When help is most needed, close companions are the ones who will prioritize assisting. Friends are often preferred over relatives because they tend to be less critical and less inclined to lecture on their beliefs and ideals. Some might even argue that friends understand them better than their relatives do. (Psychology Today, 2024). Moreover, one of teenagers' most significant social ties is with peers. Peer relationships are interpersonal bonds formed via collaboration and communication between people of comparable age. It is one of the most critical metrics for accurately assessing teenagers' capacity to adjust to their social surroundings and handle challenges (Zhou et al., 2023).

Table 2. *Levels of Perceived Social Support among First-Year College Students*

Indicators	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. There is a special person who is around when I am in need.	5.13	1.61	Mildly Agree
2. There is a special person with whom I can share joys and sorrows.	5.29	1.62	Mildly Agree
3. My family really tries to help me.	5.11	1.51	Mildly Agree
4. I get the emotional help and support I need from my family.	4.86	1.45	Mildly Agree
5. I have a special person who is a real comfort source.	4.96	1.83	Mildly Agree
6. My friends really try to help me.	5.19	1.44	Mildly Agree
7. I can count on my friends when things go wrong.	5.16	1.47	Mildly Agree
8. I can talk about my problems with my family.	4.24	1.70	Neutral
9. I have friends with whom I can share my joys and sorrows.	5.26	1.50	Mildly Agree
10. There is a special person in my life who cares about my feelings.	4.93	1.76	Mildly Agree
11. My family is willing to help me make decisions.	4.99	1.49	Mildly Agree
12. I can talk about my problems with my friend.	5.17	1.55	Mildly Agree
<i>Overall Family</i>	4.78	1.42	<i>Mildly Agree</i>
<i>Overall Friends</i>	5.20	1.37	<i>Mildly Agree</i>
<i>Overall Significant Others</i>	5.08	1.54	<i>Mildly Agree</i>
Overall Weighted Mean	5.02	1.21	Mildly Agree

However, certain statements, such as "I get the emotional help and support I need from my family" ($m=4.86$, $SD=1.45$) and "I can talk about my problems with my family" ($m=4.24$, $SD=1.70$), reflect more nuanced or fluctuating social support. The weighted mean is 5.02, and the standard deviation is 1.21, indicating that participants somewhat agreed with the statements about perceived social support, recognizing its presence in students' lives, even though it was not always robust. Parungao (2024) emphasizes that perceived social support plays a crucial role in safeguarding students' mental health by providing emotional and practical assistance, which helps them navigate academic challenges more effectively. Although close family members offer different kinds of support, learners might have discovered that peers are more approachable or empathetic when discussing private matters.

This finding highlights the importance of students having more extensive social networks to share experiences and overcome challenges. Not having parental support is terrible and requires establishing friendly ties with parents (Kapur, 2023). Social support from relatives, close companions, and other individuals boosts life satisfaction and serves as a crucial safeguard in opposition to mental health issues (Alshammari et al., 2021).

3.3 Levels of Mental Health among First-Year Year College Students

Table 3 shows the levels of mental health among first-year college students, covering perceptions of happiness, growth, societal views, and relationships that are measured by mean scores. The highest mean score is from the item "In the past month, how often did you feel that our society is a good place, or becoming a better place, for all people?" ($m=2.93$, $SD=1.06$); this indicates a relatively positive outlook on societal progress. Likewise, the item "That you had something important to contribute to society?" ($m=2.78$, $SD=1.14$) suggests that respondents perceive themselves as having a meaningful role or purpose. While the items "That people are basically good?" ($m=2.73$, $SD=1.05$) and "That the way our society works makes sense to you?" ($m=2.61$, $SD=1.08$) reflect moderate trust in others and an understanding of the societal system.

Table 3. *Levels of Mental Health among First-Year Year College Students*

Indicators	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. Happy...?	2.29	0.83	Almost Every Day
2. Interested in life?	2.21	0.96	Almost Every Day
3. Satisfied with your life?	2.40	1.16	Almost Every Day
4. That you had something important to contribute to society?	2.78	1.14	About 2 or 3 times a week
5. That you belonged to a community (like a social group, your neighborhood, your city, your school)?	2.43	1.24	Almost Every Day
6. In the past month, how often did you feel...: that our society is a good place, or becoming a better place, for all people?	2.93	1.06	About 2 or 3 times a week
7. That people are basically good?	2.73	1.05	About 2 or 3 times a week
8. That the way our society works makes sense to you?	2.61	1.08	About 2 or 3 times a week
9. That you like most parts of your personality?	2.45	1.14	Almost Every Day
10. Good at managing the responsibilities of your daily life?	2.31	1.00	Almost Every Day
11. In the past month, how often did you feel...: that you had warm and trusting relationships with others?	2.28	0.92	Almost Every Day
12. That you had experiences that challenged you to grow and become a better person?	2.04	0.98	Almost Every Day
13. Confident to think or express your own ideas and opinions?	2.52	1.06	About 2 or 3 times a week
14. That your life has a sense of direction or meaning to it?	2.56	1.10	About 2 or 3 times a week
Overall Weighted Mean	2.47	0.72	Almost Every Day

The lower mean scores are observed in personal fulfillment and social connections items. The item "Interested in life?" ($m=2.21$, $SD=0.96$) and "Happy...?" ($m=2.29$, $SD=0.83$) indicate that many respondents find joy and interest in life. Likewise, the items "In the past month, how often did you feel that you had warm and trusting relationships with others?" ($m=2.28$, $SD=0.92$) and "That you had experiences that challenged you to grow and become a better person?" ($m=2.04$, $SD=0.98$) highlight areas for self-development and relationship improvement. Also, items like "Good at managing the responsibilities of your daily life?" ($m=2.31$, $SD=1.00$) and "That you like most parts of your personality?" ($m=2.45$, $SD=1.14$) suggest moderate self-assessments in terms of daily life management and self-esteem or acceptance. The item "Confident to think or express your own ideas and opinions?" scores slightly higher ($m=2.52$, $SD=1.06$), showing some confidence level but still having space for growth. The mean scores from these statements indicate that while respondents show strengths in personal fulfillment, relationships, and growth opportunities, improvements are needed in societal optimism and a sense of contribution. The overall mean ($m=2.47$, $SD= 0.72$) suggests that while students report moderate social support and well-being levels, personal fulfillment and relationships need improvement. Social support positively reduces stress, particularly during the critical transition to university. Higher levels of support have been linked to lower stress, contributing to better well-being. This aligns with the mean for societal optimism and the sense of contribution to society observed in this study. McLean et al. (2023) observed similar trends, noting that social support varies in effectiveness depending on gender and individual circumstances. Fostering social support tailored to students' diverse needs cannot be understated. Initiatives such as creating opportunities for meaningful relationships and addressing stress have been shown to enhance well-being. Overall, this finding reflects moderate well-being among first-year college students, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to address students' challenges during a crucial transition period.

3.4 Correlation between Perceived Social Support and Mental Health

Table 4 presents the correlational analysis of perceived social support and mental health among first-year college students. It revealed a significant and weak relationship between variables ($p < 0.001$, $R = -0.48$). The researchers, therefore, rejected the null hypothesis. The relationship between social support and mental health is observed as unfavorable, which means that as social support increases, the mental health of first-year students decreases. Conversely, when social support decreases, the mental health of first-year students increases.

Table 4. *Correlation between Perceived Social Support and Mental Health*

Variables	R-value	p-value	Decision	Remarks
Perceived Social Support and Mental Health	-0.48	<0.001	Reject Ho	Significant

This implies that among first-year college students, the greater perceived social support is linked to poor mental health. First-year college students may feel incapable when there is too much social support, leading to low psychological well-being. Seidman et al. (2006) suggested that higher levels of perceived social support do not necessarily result in better mental health but may instead be linked to increased distress. Perceived social support may be deemed a "mixed blessing," decreasing poor results for some while causing psychological suffering for others (Gleason et al., 2008). Moreover, excessive perceived social support can impede resilience and personal agency. If social support fosters dependency, it can limit an individual's ability to develop autonomy (Lepore et al., 2008). Reliance can lead to feelings of helplessness and compromise coping abilities among adolescent students. Parungao (2024) also supports this by highlighting how excessive reliance on perceived social support can be detrimental, especially when it leads to dependency and hampers students' autonomy. The study by Zniva et al. (2017) highlighted the need to balance support and autonomy among undergraduate students. It was suggested that overprotection can weaken the person's stress-coping abilities in the long run. On the other hand, autonomy-enhancing support can help individuals perceive stressors as challenges rather than threats. Hence, overprotective support can increase stress reactivity and subjective stress when the support is discontinued.

3.5 Regression Estimates of Perceived Social Support

Table 5 shows the prediction of perceived social support for the mental health of first-year students. The beta coefficient obtained for the perceived social support (predictor) is -0.28. The standard error computed is 0.05, while the t-value is -5.46. Moreover, the ANOVA for this regression model gauges an F-value of 29.8 with a probability value of <0.001. These results revealed that perceived social support can explain the significant variance in mental health among first-year college students. The coefficient of determination was shown as 0.23, meaning that 23% of perceived social support can predict mental health among first-year college students.

Table 5. *Regression Estimate of Perceived Social Support*

Predictor	Estimate	SE	t-value	p-value	Remarks
Intercept	3.89	0.27	14.51	<0.001	Significant
Perceived Social Support	-0.28	0.05	-5.46	<0.001	Significant

Note. DV= Mental Health, $R^2=0.23$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.22$, $F\text{-value}=29.8$

While generally beneficial, social support may negatively impact mental well-being in specific contexts, including perception of the receiver, self-reliance, family demands, and providers' characteristics. When social support is provided by family members or peers who are judgmental and controlling, it can harm the students' mental health instead of enhancing it. Negative perceptions of family support strongly correlate with emotional and behavioral problems in adolescents, while negative school perceptions relate specifically to behavioral issues and negative peer perceptions to emotional difficulties. Furthermore, studies have found that demanding family environments can increase stress and depression among college students (Khallad & Jabr, 2017). The relationship between received support and mental health outcomes can be detrimental in some situations, influenced by factors like stressor type and support provider characteristics (Uchino et al., 2022). Moreover, young people who are more self-reliant are less likely to seek help to address their mental health needs, which can lead to poor mental health outcomes. Ishikawa et al. (2022) highlighted that higher self-reliance in young people is associated with lower intentions to seek informal and professional help for mental health issues, with perceived social support fully mediating the association.

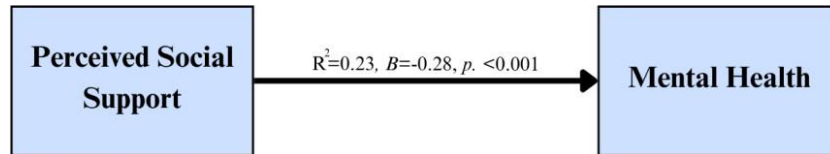


Figure 1. Simple Linear Regression

Figure 1 presents a simple linear regression analysis between perceived social support (x) and mental health (y) among first-year college students. The results show a significant connection between the two variables ($p. < 0.001$). Perceived social support predicts 23% of the variance in mental health ($R^2=0.23$, $B=-0.28$). The beta coefficient is -0.28, implying that each one-unit increase in perceived social support leads to a 0.28-unit decrease in mental health. This indicates a negative relationship between perceived social support and mental health. Furthermore, it suggests that mental health tends to decrease as perceived social support increases, though the relationship is relatively weak. While perceived social support can benefit some, excessive support can lead to distress (Seidman et al., 2006), psychological suffering (Gleason et al., 2008), hindered autonomy (Lepore et al., 2008), and weakened stress-coping abilities (Zniva, 2017). Demanding family environments can increase stress and depression among college students (Khallad & Jabr, 2017), while the relationship between received support and mental health outcomes can be influenced by factors such as stressor type and support provider characteristics (Uchino et al., 2022). Additionally, higher self-reliance can reduce help-seeking behaviors mediated by perceived social support, leading to poor mental health outcomes (Ishikawa et al., 2022).

4.0 Conclusion

The researchers concluded that higher perceived social support is linked to poor mental health among first-year college students. Excessive social support can make students perceive themselves as incompetent, lowering their psychological wellness. At this stage, the ability to make their own choices and do what is needed to succeed and finish college is part of the greater independence that first-year college students desire. Young people explore their identities, try different roles, and experiment with various activities and behaviors to build a strong sense of self and mental health. Students who make choices and take charge of their education can better overcome obstacles and adjust to novel circumstances. Moreover, enhancing academic performance helps adolescents prepare for the demands of the workforce. Being independent as students builds the skills and mindset needed for school success and lifelong learning, helping them become active and self-sufficient learners. Creating positive social support networks through counseling that support students without increasing pressure is essential to foster better mental health. When developing interventions, mental health professionals must evaluate social support systems and consider cultural and personal differences. These programs should focus on building personal agencies and overcoming academic transitions among first-year college students. Moreover, future studies should explore the interaction between perceived social support and other variables, such as coping styles, cultural contexts, family dynamics, stressors, support provider characteristics, and individual tendencies toward self-reliance, to further refine understanding of its impact on student well-being. School counselors must provide interventions considering the students' support network dynamics and personal perceptions of the social support received by friends, family, and significant others. Institutions should implement policies that ensure the integration of mental health services into the campus environment, particularly for first-year students. Future research should investigate the long-term effects of perceived social support on mental health, using longitudinal studies to establish more conclusive causal relationships. Potential researchers can also examine the types of support that contribute most to student well-being and their role in promoting mental health. One limitation of this study was the small sample size, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, forthcoming researchers must increase the sample size to enhance the universality of the conclusions. Additionally, using probability sampling techniques, such as random stratified sampling, could ensure a more representative sample, improving the results' accuracy and providing insights into different subgroups within the student population.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

The authors indicate equal contribution to each section. The authors reviewed and approved the final work.

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7.0 Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interest in the publication of this paper.

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