

# EFFECTS OF SOCIAL SUPPORT ON ADOLESCENTS' MENTAL HEALTH DEVELOPMENT IN EPE, LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

*Social support is the degree to which an individual receives assistance and acceptance from others. These assistance and acceptance are important in the mental health development process as it will boost adolescents' confidence, self-esteem, belief and the way they perceive self, others and situations they encounter. Two hypotheses were raised and a self-structured questionnaire (Social Support Coping Scale – SSCS –  $r = 0.87$ ) utilised for data collection. The SSCS was administered on 200 respondents (95 females and 105 males) and has 15 test items on a 4-point Likert scale. Data gathered were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Multiple Linear Regression Analysis. Results of the first hypothesis revealed that there was a significant relationship between social support and adolescent mental health development, ( $r(198) = 0,312, p < .05; (x)$  and  $SD 31.15$  and  $8.113$ ). The other hypothesis also showed that there is a significant relative contribution of each of the measured variables - friends ( $Beta = ,754, t = 10.982, p < .001$ ) family ( $Beta = ,189, t = 3.331, p < .005$ ), and significant others ( $Beta = ,152, t = 2.803, p < .001$ ) on adolescents mental health development. The study therefore recommends that during the adolescence years, families, friends and significant others (such as teachers, counsellors, the school, religious and political leaders, celebrities and government) should ensure that there is a balance between morality, reality and falsehood that adolescents are exposed to or experience as they all contribute to their mental health development.*

**Keywords:** Adolescents, Mental health development and Social supports

## **Introduction**

Mental health is a growing concern worldwide as many people are seen to be on the bend emotionally and psychologically. Many of these people are individuals whose conditions were shaped from childhood experiences and exposure as well as daily life challenges that have facilitated frustration and hopelessness. The childhood exposure and experience come in form of abuse (rape, verbal and physical threats/attacks,

starvation of food, negative labelling and others) and acceptance/love; while daily life challenges include poverty, war and displacement, accidents, marital disharmony, bereavement, loss of job among others. Thus, an obvious inability to resolve experience and exposures in early lives, as well as adjust and cope with daily life challenges have significant effects on mental health development of an individual.

Mental health development is the process in which an individual's cognition is influenced and shaped based on factors that are genetic (biological) or environmental (nurture). WHO (2022) refers to mental health development as a complex continuum, which is experienced differently from one person to the next, with varying degrees of difficulty and distress and with potentially very different social and clinical outcomes. It has further been defined as interaction between internal and external factors leading emotional, psychological, and social well-being (CDC, 2023). Mental health development is significantly affected by socialisation and relationship with people surrounding an individual. To this end, the process of mental health development is hinged on internal factor (genetic) and external factors. The internal or genetic factor determines the extent of an individual mental health development based on genes inherited from birth parents and severe sickness resulting in malfunctioning in the central nervous system. The external factors that has to do with socialisation and the environment as a whole is affected by personal relationship with the family, friends, significant others in the person's life as well as the society at large. One major fact in mental health development, however, is that the ability to cope varies from one person to another; and these variations is even more noticeable among adolescents.

The adolescence is a point in an individual's life where childhood and pre-adulthood behaviour are at a midpoint to form and develop a personality that will become a permanent. Blakemore (2019) refers to adolescence as a time of change: changes to

hormones and the body, changes in the social environment, and changes to the brain and the mind. Thus, the adolescent years is characterized by complex expectations, beliefs, opinions, actions, and inactions; and thereby exploration and experimentation is common before arriving at self-acceptance. It is also the "flooding phase", as the adolescent is yet to come to terms with childhood experience and exposure while being pushed to realise that daily life events will not always go as wished. WHO (2021) sees adolescence as a unique and formative time which is unfortunately accompanied by physical, emotional, and social changes, including exposure to poverty, abuse, or violence and make adolescents vulnerable.

In the process of developing an adolescent mental health, the interaction between psychological and social factors plays major significant roles. Psychological factors include the adolescent self-efficacy, self-esteem, anxiety level, self-belief, and others. Self-efficacy is the belief in personal capability. To this end, adolescent's self-efficacy which is influenced by mental health development may be determined by the relationship and responses received from people in their lives. Self-esteem characterised by an emotional feeling of worth or personal significance, just like the self-efficacy is enhanced by the social supports available to the adolescent. An adolescent who receives the right amount of attention and acceptance will see themselves as a significant individual and the one denied of this benefit may grow up with the mindset of "me against them" or a low self-esteem. Anxiety level, however, has to do in the ability of the adolescent to be able to think

and analyse things before reacting. Many times, people just view things at face value and react according and thus, the anxiety level of the adolescents will influence their perception on social supports and people around them.

On the other hand, social factors include parents, siblings, friends and significant others in the life of the adolescent. The parent over the years have been identified as the first contact in the process of socialisation. They are responsible for inculcating cultural and social values, supporting the adolescent emotionally and financially; and present themselves as available supervisors and counsellors in the life of the adolescent. Thus, their behaviour and responses to the adolescents may significantly impact on the adolescent's mental health development. Siblings are the adolescent's brothers and sisters, many times, sibling rivalries rear its head and if the situation is not properly managed can lead to behavioural problems exhibited beyond the home. Where the siblings have a harmonious relationship, this is observable in the adolescents response to things and other people around. Friend and significant others are people who the adolescent respect, sometimes model and may likely respond to events based on their command, opinions and defined values. This then make friends and significant others important in the mental health development of the adolescent especially as positive or negative behaviour exhibited by the adolescent may be attributed to their relationship with this group. In view of the above, it is important to note that perception is key in mental health development and many times, the social factors in the life of an

adolescent will determine the adolescent overall personality.

It is therefore necessary to understand that mental health development is characterised by the relationship existing between an adolescent and their social factors. The involvements of social factors established through the process of socialisation with the adolescent is referred to as social supports. Thus, social support is the degree to which an individual receives assistance and acceptance from others. These assistance and acceptance are importance in the mental health development process as it will boost their confidence, self-esteem, belief and the way they perceive self, others and situations they encounter. Singstad, et al (2021) seessocial support as the presence of individuals who offer care, value, and love, thereby contributing to one's overall well-being. The presence of social supports enhances overall quality of life and serves as a vital mechanism in mental health development (Alshammar, et al.,2021). Yu, et al. (2022)classified the structure of social support into three main dimensions of subjective support, objective support, and utilization of support. Many researchers have conducted studies on mental health and social supports over the years, among them are: Bauer et al (2021) discovered that parents' ability to mobilise social support for themselves and their children impacted on the children's mental health development and future ability of the children to mobilise social support. Bauer et al. (2021) research implies that social support is a behaviour that can be cognitively learned from observing existing phenomenon around an individual. In addition, Poudel, et al. (2020) discovered

that perceived social support affects mental health development of adolescents. Thus, adolescents who perceive good social support had higher self-esteem which contributes to their perceived well-being. Ayamolowo et al (2018) found a significant moderately strong negative correlation between respondents' level of social support and depression among pregnant and child-rearing teenagers in Nigeria. In another vein, Ibimiluyi (2020) investigation showed that social support is not significantly related to the development of depressive symptoms among adolescents. Dykxhoorn, et al., (2022) discovered that the individual, family, community, and structure play key roles in mental health development. Going through the researches listed above, one can assume that mental health focus for many of these researchers are on mental health challenges and risk factors that can influence mental illness. It is with this awareness that this study focuses on effects of social supports on mental health development of the adolescents. Before the issue of mental health challenges arise, it is imperative to understand variables that affect and contribute to mental health development of adolescents especially as most of the mental health challenges investigated can be assumed to have underlining traces to childhood or adolescence years.

### **Purpose of the Study**

- i. To test the relationship between social supports and adolescent mental health development.
- ii. To examine the relative contribution of family, friends and significant others on adolescent mental health development.

### **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses will be tested at a significant level of 0.05

- i. There will be no significant relationship between social supports and adolescent mental health development.
- ii. There will be no significant relative contribution of family, friends, and significant others on adolescent mental health development

### **Methodology**

This research is a descriptive survey as the essence is to assess and understand the effect of social support on adolescents' mental development. Simple random sampling technique was utilised to select 200 (95 females and 105 males) in-school adolescents from the two Local Council Development Areas (LCDA) in Epe, Lagos State. A self-structured questionnaire (Social Support Coping Scale - SSCS) with a reliability score of 0.87 after pilot testing through test-retest was administered on respondents. The Social Support Coping Scale - SSCS is divided into two main sections. Section A – demographic variables of respondents (age, family type, gender, class). Section B was sub-divided into three: Family support scale, Friends supports scale and the significant others support scale. This section was designed in a 4-likert scale and items were structured to elicit responses on effects of social supports on adolescents mental health development. Maintaining a test of 0.05 level of significance, data collected were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Multiple Linear Regression Analysis.

## Results

**Ho1:** There will be no significant

relationship between social supports and adolescent mental health development.

**TABLE 1: summary table showing significant relationship between social supports and adolescent mental health development**

| Variables                             | N   | Mean (x) | SD    | R     | Df  | P    |
|---------------------------------------|-----|----------|-------|-------|-----|------|
| Adolescents mental health development | 200 | 34.28    | 7.066 | 0.312 | 198 | Sig. |
| Social support                        | 200 | 31.15    | 8.113 |       |     |      |

The above analysis shows that there is a significant relationship between social support and adolescent mental health development,  $r(198) = 0,312$ ,  $p < .05$ . Also, the Mean (x) and SD for social support is calculated as 31.15 and 8.113. Thus, the hypothesis was rejected. The above analysis has confirmed that social social support play

significant role in adolescents mental health development and how their perceptions are shaped.

**Ho2:** There will be no significant relative contribution of family, friends, and significant others on adolescent mental health development

**TABLE 2: summary table showing significant relative contribution of family, friends, and significant others on adolescent mental health development**

| Model              | Unstandardized coefficients |            | Standardized coefficients |        |      |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|------|
|                    | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      | t      | Sig. |
| (Constant)         | -35.820                     | 5.616      |                           | -6.653 | .000 |
| Family             | .336                        | .073       | .189                      | 3.331  | .001 |
| Friends            | 1.046                       | .085       | .754                      | 10.971 | .000 |
| Significant others | .149                        | .061       | .152                      | 2.803  | .000 |

The above analysis shows that there is a significant relative contribution of each of the measured variables (family, friends and significant others) on adolescents mental health development. the most significant variable in the above analysis are friends (Beta = ,754,  $t = 10.982$ ,  $p < .001$ ). After friends, the family is revealed as the other most significant contributor to adolescents' mental health development (Beta = ,189,  $t = 3.331$ ,  $p < .005$ ) while significant others was identified as the last contributory factor in

adolescents mental health development (Beta = ,152,  $t = 2.803$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This implies that adolescents' mental health development is significantly influenced by the existing relationship they have with friends and families. Thus, the hypothesis was rejected.

## Discussions

Based on the results arrived at in this study, social supports have significant effects on adolescents mental health development. This outcome is in line with Alshammar, et al.,

(2021) who concluded that the presence of social supports enhances overall quality of life and serves as a vital mechanism in mental health development. As seen in the results, friends have greater capacities in contributing to adolescents' mental health development. The perception of similarities in age, emotions, view about life and many more may have influenced this result. Thus, a case of “them against us” is revealed in the analysis. Moreover, the fact that many of these adolescents are at an impressionable age and tends to admire one another physically, intellectually, status and fashion wise could have contributed to the wide margin of significance recorded against family and significant others.

However, the significance of family as a secondary social support that influence adolescents' mental health development cannot be overlooked. In fact many adolescents who enjoy close relations with parents and siblings are not likely to depend on friends as social supports. Homes where adolescents concerns are attended to with love and attention, where adolescents are sure that their voice matters even if the parents will end up giving them reason why their ideas cannot be accepted are most likely to be seen as an essential support centre. Unfortunately, what is seen is that many parents are busy chasing after survival owing to stiff economic challenges and either returns home late or with worries and have little or no time to be attentive to emotional and academic needs of their children. Moreover, sibling rivalry may exist and as such, the adolescent does not see any of the siblings as a dependable social support. To this end, these adolescents are forced to turn

to friends who are available than family members.

In the same context, significant others in the lives of adolescents varying from extended family members, teachers and counsellor, religious and political leaders as well as celebrities that adolescents admire are impactful on adolescents' mental health development. These people behaviour and value about life will impact significantly on adolescents' mental health development. Teachers and counsellor that attend to adolescents in schools shape the adolescents based on existing relationship they have. Religious and political leaders will shape the adolescents based on their perceived behaviour and values while the celebrities determines what the adolescents consider trendy and acceptable norms in today's world. Until recently, the “Marlians” wave was common among many adolescents in Nigeria. Associated with this label is experimenting with drugs, extreme rebelliousness observed in dressing, sexual behaviour and gangsterism. It is therefore important to consider the resultant effect of this antisocial behaviour on the mental health development of adolescents and how they will perceive life. This summation corroborates Poudel, et al., (2020) who concluded that perceived social supports affects mental health development of adolescents, as well as, Dykxhoorn, et al., (2022) who affirmed that the individual, family, community, and structure play key roles in mental health development.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study assessed the effect of social support on adolescents' mental development

in Epe, Lagos State. Social support is important in mental health development of every human especially adolescents who are in the developmental phase. To this the family, friends and significant others in the lives of adolescents were considered in this study. The essence of this focus is to understand the effects of social supports on adolescents' mental health development. The study unlike many that focused on mental health status have been able to identify the significant role of the three main social support units (family, friends and significant others) on the adolescents' mental health development.

In view of this, the following recommendations were made: -

Parents need to understand that interpersonal relationship especially with peers is important to adolescents. Thus, parents should establish bonded relationships with their children which does not restrict them from having friends but provide necessary and appropriate guidance on how to manage interpersonal relationships.

Likewise, parents should see themselves as role models who consciously or unconsciously shape perception and values of their children and as such should relate and act with their children in ways and manners they desire them to be. That is, beyond being simply a provider parents, they must model love, support, and understanding; and be the first teacher of moral values as all these are contributors to adolescents' mental health development

Significant others which vary from extended family members to teachers, counsellors

should make themselves accessible whenever possible to the adolescents, as their perceived acceptance or rejection of the adolescents is significant in their mental health development. Many adolescents a times need the advice of an older individual who is not their parent when faced with challenges and attitude or available of such a significant person may determine if the adolescents should stick to their friends opinion or do otherwise.

Religious, political leaders and celebrities they see virtually and physically also fall into the category of significant others in the lives of adolescents. The behaviour and perceived value associated with these people contribute to adolescents' mental health development. These people therefore, need to strike a balance between morality, reality and falsehood.

Government should effectively implement policies that will provide opportunities for the adolescents to have the right kind of social, physical, emotional and mental development. For starter, government schools and libraries should be well funded and given the necessary teaching-learning facilities; health centres and hospitals should be adequately equipped to attend to adolescents' health challenges and worries; and recreational centres should be established to provide opportunities for many of them to develop their innate talents

Finally, adolescents need to understand that life is not a given and social supports have no guarantee. With this knowledge comes the understanding that mental health development is first and foremost an internal

reaction to external forces, and if the situation is not carefully managed can result to lifelong challenge. Thus, many cases of mental health challenges associated to people stem from the inability to cope, manage and adjust to events that occurred during the mental health developmental phase.

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