

**PEER RELATIONS AS A PREDICTORS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF
UNDERGRADUATES IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN ANAMBRA STATE**

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Abstract

This study investigated peer relations as a predictor of psychological well-being among undergraduates of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu university, Igbariam campus, Anambra state. Two research questions and two null hypotheses stated at 0.05 level of significance guided the study. The study adopted correlational research design. A total of 261 undergraduates constituted the sample of the study. The simple and stratified random sampling techniques were employed in drawing the sample of the study. Data were collected using the Peer Relations Questionnaire (PRQ) and the Psychological Well-being Scale (PWBS). The data collected were statistically analyzed using simple and multiple regression statistics. The result of data analysis showed that peer relations significantly and positively predicted psychological well being of undergraduates and peer relations also significantly and positively predicted psychological well-being of male and female undergraduates in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu university, Igbariam campus. The study recommended that educational psychologists and counsellors should assist students build interactive classroom environment with suitable motivational strategies that will foster positive peer relations as well as promote psychological well-being which is essential to mitigate the negative effects of poor peer relations.

INTRODUCTION

University is an institution of higher learning that grants access to facilities for research, teaching and learning as well as approves academic degrees to undergraduates and postgraduates in various disciplines. The transition to university can be challenging for many students, and it is essential to support their psychological well-being during this time.

Psychological well-being is a growing issue of universal concern emerging in the entire academic realms particularly in Nigerian universities. Today's busy world and economic issues have led to frustration, anxiety, stress and depression among university undergraduates. The frequent major issues faced by undergraduates are higher educational demands, changes in peer relations, fear of failure, inferiority complex, worrying too much, feeling of worthlessness, negative self-image and getting anxious without any apparent reasons (Dhanabhakym & Sarah, 2023).

Psychological well-being involves humanity deeply and life satisfaction of an individual. Individuals with low life satisfaction usually face difficulties in achieving well-being in life especially young people. Well-being in life determines and affects daily life either positively or negatively towards psychological development and individual attitude. To buttress this, Zeike et al (2019) asserted that psychological well-being consist of the full rampage of what is good for a person participating in a meaningful social role; feeling happy and hopeful; living according to good values, as locally defined; having positive social relations and a supportive environment; coping with challenges through the use of appropriate life skills, having security and protection as well as access to quality services.

The researchers defined psychological well-being as being positive about one's life in thinking,

feeling and acting towards oneself and others. It is a person's subjective experience of being happy or pleased, feeling capable of managing life's challenges and having satisfying relationships, feeling of accomplishments and life satisfaction. Psychological well-being helps one to ensure sound mental health, which is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood and aging. It also helps determine how one can be established and maintained among students when they hold healthy relationship with each other.

Peer relations obviously are important concept in the substance of psychological well-being. Peer relations play an important role in adolescents and children development. Peer relations reveal crucial role in students lives. The university is a unique social environment where students form new friendships and establish social networks outside of their families and communities. As such peer relations can be a source of positive support and influence for students. This study can help identify the specific ways in which peer relations impact undergraduates psychological well-being.

Peers relations refer to interaction between individuals, friends, age mates or classmates. Peer relations are interpersonal interaction established during social communications among peers or individuals with similar levels of psychological development (Olakekan, 2016). Peer relations involve interaction with individuals working on the same level of the organizational hierarchy with no formal authority over each other (Nesi, et al, 2018b). Peer relations entail the tendency of students to communicate and interact with course mates and other people in the institution. This is attributed to the idea of Gowning (2019) who opined that students' relationship with school is a significant aspect in their relationship with the institution which can be highly significant in terms of the quality of their overall school experience.

Peer relations is characterized as good interaction among friends who have common interests, likes or hobbies, comfortable with sharing private thoughts, feelings or stories, understand each other, being able to resolve conflicts, arguments and problems among themselves without interferences from other people. (Nesi et al & Prinsten, 2018b). The relationships formed between students and school staff members are at the heart of psychological well-being. These groups are marked by concern for one another and shared activities and or culture (Bos & Standfort 2015). Ascertaining quality peer relations could help to develop sound psychological well being. Through these interactions, students explore their interest in others and learn more about social behaviour including how to express themselves and interact with one another. The researchers described peer relation as interactions between individuals of similar age, interest and social status and gender.

Gender is an important factor on peer relations, and psychological well being. Researches (Bojanowski & Piotrowski, 2018) showed that studies on peer relations and psychological well-being are not conclusive while recent researcher point out to gender difference in almost every aspect of psychological well-being, gender difference in psychological well-being were investigated. In line with this, studies about the differences between men and women on measures of psychological well-being have not yielded consistent outcomes (Ferguson & Gunnel, 2016).

Although, differences between male and female in relation with peer relations and psychological well-being have been found in numerous studies, neither the cause nor effect relationship is known. It is against this background that the present study was contemplated to examine the predictive value of peer relations on psychological well-being of undergraduates in a public universities in Anambra state.

Statement of the Problem

The psychological well-being of students is considered as vital in the life of undergraduates in the universities. Students have continued to strive at achieving better psychological wellbeing such as Joy, happiness and satisfaction. Unfortunately these desires have not been fully achieved due to some psychological factors such as stress, anxiety, poor peer relations, lack of social support, depression, phobia, low self esteem among others.

This ugly development has provoked studies among scholars to improve the mental health of students in secondary schools. Most of these studies were carried out by scholars at the secondary and primary school levels and among adult workers. Not much empirical studies have been conducted at the tertiary level using university students. It is this gap in knowledge that the present study sought to fill; hence the problem of this study is stated thus: what is the predictive value of peer relation on psychological well-being of undergraduates in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Anambra state.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study was to examine the predictive value of peer relations on psychological well-being of undergraduates in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu university, Anambra state. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine the predictive value of peer relations on psychological well-being of undergraduates.
2. Examine the predictive value of peer relations on psychological well-being of male and female undergraduates.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions.

1. What is the predictive value of peer relations and psychological well-being of undergraduates
2. What is the predictive value of peer relations on psychological well-being of male and female undergraduates.

Hypotheses

The study formulated and tested the following null hypotheses stated at 0.05 level of significance.

1. Peer relations would not significantly predict the psychological well-being of undergraduates .
2. Peer relations would not significantly predict the psychological well-being of male and female undergraduates.

METHOD

The study adopted a correlational research design. The study was conducted in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu university, Igbariam campus, Anambra state. The population of the study comprised 12,876 undergraduate of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University Igbariam Campus. The sample consisted of 266 (102 males and 164 females) randomly selected from five faculties (Education, Law, Management Sciences, Arts and Social Science) using stratified random sampling technique involving balloting. The stratification was based on gender.

The instruments employed for data collection were the Peer Relations Questionnaire (PRQ) by Ridgy and Slee (1994) and Psychological well-being Scale (PWBS) by Ryff (1989). The two instruments were standardized and have been used in Nigerian sample by Nnoli and Obikeze (2024) with coefficient values of 0.87 for Peer Relations Questionnaire and 0.88 for psychological well-being scale.

The researchers with the help of five trained research assistants administered 266 copies of the questionnaire on the respondents. Out of the 266 copies administered only 261 (100 males and 161 females) were retrieved. The six copies which were wrongly completed were discarded. The exercise lasted for two weeks.

In the course of administering the instrument, ethical considerations of debriefing, confidentiality, informed consent and freedom were duly observed. The data collected were statistically analyzed using simple and multiple regression statistics. The data collected were entered into SPSS version 26.

Results

The data collected from the field were analyzed and presented in tables in accordance with the research questions and hypotheses that guided the study.

Research Question I: What is the predictive value of peer relations on psychological well-being of undergraduates?

Table I: Simple Regression Analysis showing the predictive value of peer relation in psychological well-being of undergraduates.

Model Summary												
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	R	Std. Error the Estimate	R Square Change	F change	Df1	Df2	Sig Change	F	Remark
1.	0.893	0.797	0.779		2.52776	0.797	17383.286	1	253	0.000		Strong prediction

a. Predictors (Constant) Peer Relations

The result in Table I showed the regression analysis for the variation in psychological well-being among undergraduates in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University in Anambra state that was predicted by peer relations. The result showed that when the responses of respondents on peer relations were correlated with psychological well-being, a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.893 with associated coefficient of determination (R²) of 0.797 were obtained. This coefficient of determination (R²) of 0.797 denoted that

79.7% variation in psychological well-being was predicted by peer relations.

Research Question 2: What is the predictive value of peer relation of psychological well-being of undergraduates in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University.

Table 2: Simple regression analysis for peer relations predicting psychological well-being among male and female undergraduates.

Variables	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Std. Error the Estimate	R Square Change	F change	Df1	Df2	Sig Change	F	Remark
Male Peer Relations	0.851 ^a	0.724	0.712		2.31392	0.724	8598.998	1	98	0.000		Strong prediction
Female Peer Relation	0.889	0.790	0.771		2.68287	0.790	9030.366	1	153	0.000		

a. Predictors: (Constant), Peer Relations

As displayed in Table 3, the peer relations strongly predicted male peer relations in psychological well-being was shown by the regression coefficient ($R = 0.851$). Invariably, peer relations also strongly predicted female peer relations in psychological well-being as shown by the regression coefficient ($R = 0.889$). The coefficient of determination for male ($R^2 = 0.724$) and that of the variations in Male and Female psychological well-being were accounted for by the variations in peer relations accounted for by the variations in peer relations. The adjusted R^2 of male (Adj. $R^2 = 0.712$) and of female (Adj $R^2 = 0.771$) supported R^2 of Male and female by indicating that 71.2% for male and 77.1% for female of the total variation in the dependent variable (Undergraduates male and female psychological well-being) was explained by the independent variable (peer relations). Hence, peer relations strongly predicted male and female undergraduates psychological well-being.

Testing of Hypotheses

Hypothesis I: Peer Relation would not significantly predict psychological well-being among undergraduates in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University.

Table 3: Regression ANOVA test of significance for the variation in psychological well-being by peer relations.

ANOVA ^a Summary					
Model	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig
Regression	111071.649	1	111071.649	17383.286	0.000b
Residual	2415.256	253	6.39		
Total	113	254			

a. Dependent Variable: Psychological well-being

b. Predictors (constant). Peer Relation

Result in Table 6 indicated that the variation in psychological well-being that were predicted by peer relations was significant ($F(1,253) = 17383.286$, $p = 0.000$). This gave the fact that the associated probability value of 0.000 when compared with 0.05 level of significance at which the hypothesis was tested, was found to be significant since 0.000 was less than 0.05. Thus the null hypothesis was rejected and the conclusion drawn was that peer relations was a significant factor for predicting psychological well-being among undergraduates.

Hypothesis 2: Peer relations would not significantly predict psychological well-being among male and female undergraduates.

Table 4: Regression ANOVA Test of significance for the variation in psychological well-being of male and

female undergraduates predicted by Peer Relations.

ANOVA ^a Summary							
Variable	R	R Square	Adequate R Square	R	F-ratio	P-Value	Remarks
Male Peer Relation	0.851 ^a	0.724	0.712		8598.998	0.000 ^b	Significant
Female Peer Relation	0.889	0.790	0.771		9030.366	0.000 ^b	Significant

a. Dependent Variable: Male and Female Undergraduates well-being

b. Predictors (constant) Male and Female Peer Relations.

The summary of simple regression analysis of male and female undergraduates psychological wellbeing as shown in Table 8 indicated that F-ratio associated regression was 8598.998 for male and p-value of 0.000 while F-ratio associated with regression was 9030.366 for female and p-value of 0.000. Since the p-values (0.000 and 0.000) were less than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis of no significant prediction of male and female undergraduates psychological well being by peer relation was rejected. In the same vein, peer relations significantly predicted male and female undergraduates psychological well-being.

Summary of Findings

Based on the analysis of this study, the following findings were made.

1. Peer relations strongly and positively predicted psychological well-being among undergraduates.
2. Peer relations strongly and positively predicted psychological well-being among male and female undergraduates.

Discussion

The results of the study were discussed in line with the specific purposes of the study under the following sub-headings.

Predictive value of peer relations on psychological well-being among undergraduate

The responses of the respondents in Table 1 and 3 indicated that undergraduates agreed that peer relation strongly and positively predicted psychological well-being. The outcome of this study is in consonance with Adebayo and Bammeké (2019) who emphasized that peer relations significantly predicted psychological well-being of students. Similarly, Bammeké (2019) maintained that positive peer relations increased psychological well being of out-of-school youths. In the same Vein, Adebowale (2016) upheld that peer relations significantly predicted psychological well-being of in-school adolescents. Likewise, Wang and Wang (2019) advocated that peer relations was significantly and positively correlated with psychological well-being; students with higher levels of peer support reported better psychological well-being; qualitative findings highlighted the importance of emotional support, practical help and social companionship from peers; students reported feeling less lonely, more supported and more confident when they had strong peer relationships.

Predictive Value of Peer Relations on Psychological Well-being among Male and Female Undergraduate

The opinion of the respondents as shown in Tables 2 and 4 revealed that peer relations strongly and positively predicted psychological well-being of male and female undergraduates. This implied that peer relations is associated with psychological well-being among male and female undergraduates. The findings showed that female undergraduates had slightly stronger relationship than their male counterparts on peer relations, which implied that females displayed more stability than males in their interactions with individuals and relationships. To buttress this assertion, recent evidence (Muokwue et al 2022) suggested that women and men hold their networks differently and obtained different benefits because of different network structures. This is rightly supported by Friebel et al (2021) who stressed that women tend to have smaller social networks than men and that women's network features more strong links and fewer weak links. This finding is also in line with the findings of Colarossi as cited in Poudel et al (2020) who maintained that female adolescents as compared to male adolescents are more oriented towards peers for social support and are also more satisfied with the support gained from their peers. This findings is inconsistent with the findings of Olurunfemi and Adfebowale (2017) who emphasized that men usually have a larger number of same-sex friends, but they tend to experience less emotional intimacy in their friendship than women do in theirs. This however can be traced to some extent, to the influence of the traditional masculine roles that

promote activity based friendship and put down feminine traits. They further stated that masculine gender role may inhibit two fundamental aspects of intimacy, which is self-disclosure and responsiveness.

Implications of the Study

This study has implications for educational psychologists, guidance counsellors and university management. The result of this study pointed to the importance of peer relation on psychological well-being of undergraduates in a public university. Hence, the result of this study had provided valuable data for university administrations, counsellors and educational psychologists. More specifically, the result of this study stressed that students engaged in peer relation network irrespective of being male and female.

Summary and Conclusion

This study x-rayed peer relations as predictor of psychological wellbeing among undergraduates and universities should foster peer support networks and programmes to enhance students well-being.

Universities and mental health professionals can use these findings to develop targeted interventions in promoting positive peer relationships and psychological well-being. By understanding the conclusions of this study, educators, policy makers and mental health professionals can work together to promote undergraduate mental health and well-being.

Both male and female undergraduates should be engaged in positive peer relations characterized by trust, intimacy and shared activities, which predicted better psychological well-being.

Recommendations

In the light of the foregoing, the following recommendations are made.

1. The educational psychologists should promote ethical behaviours among students through inculcating discipline, decision making skills and providing a rich, interactive classroom environment with suitable motivational strategies.
2. The university management should provide opportunities for students to engage in programmes that will enable them relate with one another and share useful ideas and experience about life. Such activities as games, sports and other social activities should be promoted in the university campuses.
3. The policy makers should allocate resources for mental health services and programmes, develop policies promoting students well-being, develop national guidelines for university mental health support, encourage inter university collaboration, support research on undergraduate mental health, allocate funding for mental health initiatives, inform public health policy, and support research on undergraduate mental health.

Limitations of the Study

The study was limited by some challenges which may have affected the outcome of this study.

Firstly, the sample of this study was delimited to undergraduates responses on peer relations and psychological well-being in a public university in Anambra state. The findings of this study may be generalized on other populations such as graduate students and undergraduates in private universities. It may not be feasible therefore to generalize the findings across Nigeria. Such generalizations should be done with caution as results in other areas may not be the same.

Again, the study was based on self report measures. Participants may have responded with considerable bias or answered in a socially desirable manner.

Areas for Further Studies

There is need to conduct further research with larger and more demographically diverse populations that would strengthen the findings of this study. Therefore it was suggested that future studies be conducted in private and faith-based universities and among students with varying abilities and different regions of Nigeria.

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