



Undergraduates' Social and Psychological Functioning: The Need for Social Re-orientation

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between authors AKO and ERN. Author AKO designed the study, performed the statistical analysis, wrote the protocol and worked on the analyses of the study. Author ERN worked on the first draft of the manuscript and managed the literature searches. The two authors jointly worked on the general corrections and approved the final manuscript.

Article Information

DOI: 10.9734/BJESBS/2015/13085

Editor(s):

(1) Aurora Adina Ignat, Faculty of Educational Sciences, Stefan cel Mare University Suceava, Romania.

Reviewers:

(1) Anonymous, Ilam University of Medical Sciences, Iran.

(2) Shubham Mehta, Department of Psychiatry, SMSMedical College, Jaipur, Rajasthan 302004, India.

Complete Peer review History: <http://www.sciencedomain.org/review-history.php?iid=816&id=21&aid=6849>

Original Research Article

Received 2nd August 2014
Accepted 23th August 2014
Published 6th November 2014

ABSTRACT

Transition from secondary school to higher institution, is a critical period in psychosocial functioning and development of individual which is marked by an expansion of peer networks, increased importance of friendships including romantic relationships, and recognition. Primarily, positive psychosocial functioning and development contribute in important ways to individual's wellness and mental being. Therefore, this study was designed to examine the need for social re-orientation on undergraduates' social and psychological functioning. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design of ex-post-facto type. In this study, a total of 450 undergraduates from three universities (one federal, one state, and one private universities), Ogun State, Nigeria were randomly selected. self-developed instrument tagged "Undergraduates' Psycho-sociological Functioning Questionnaire (UPFQ)" was used to measure undergraduate's ability to relate well with self and others, connect and maintain positive relationships with significant others - family, friends, co-students, faculty and staff; and wellbeing. Data analysis was done with descriptive statistics, Pearson Product Moment Correlation, and analysis of variance (ANOVA).

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The results showed a direct relationship between undergraduates' social and psychological functioning ($r = .533$ at $P = .01$); significant gender differences was found in undergraduates' psychological functioning ($t\text{-cal} = 3.900$, $t\text{-crit} = 1.960$, $P @ .05$) and sociological functioning ($t\text{-cal} = 2.876$, $t\text{-crit} = 1.960$, $P @ .05$). Also, a statistical significant influence of age existed on undergraduates' social ($P < .05$, $F(3,432) = 2.780$) and psychological ($P < .05$, $F(3,432) = 8.591$) functioning. This study concluded that individual social and psychological life (functioning) of individual is only one of many life domains that play an important role in overall happiness, life satisfaction, or subjective well-being. Also, this study recommended that individual changes in social perception, social emotion, and social cognition are instantiated in their wellbeing.

Keywords: Social re-orientation; undergraduates; social and psychological functioning.

1. INTRODUCTION

There are more students today, both male and female entering post-secondary school than ever before with its attendant stress. Thus, for a more satisfying personal life and academic life, individual should aim to understand self and cope with the challenges that life can bring physically, socially and psychologically. Therefore, there is a need to balance personal responsibilities together with an active social life and wellbeing. At times, personal life may be overwhelming to individual irrespective of their age and gender, especially in terms of pressures from peers, family, school mates, as well as intrapersonal relationship [1].

[2] see social support as a buffer against life stressors as well as an agent promoting health and wellness. Social support from family and peers has been recognized as a protective factor for undergraduates in the university. Research has shown that social support plays an important role in managing psychological problems. Lack of social support has been found to be one of the factors that lead to many psychological problems among students [3,4].

Social support has also been recognized to have significant impact on the achievement of the students. Since family and friends are the individuals' first source of reference, supports from these two sources have been found to give a significant influence on academic achievement [5,6,7]. The support received by the students could help to decrease their psychological problems since they feel that someone is there to help them, thus helping them to perform well in academic life [8]. Social support-seeking differs by gender. Under stress, women generally seek support more frequently than men [9,10]. In a study of university students [11], women reported higher likelihoods of utilizing family and friend social support networks than males. A study by

[12], showed that support from family and friends was virtually unrelated to life-satisfaction for women, but showed a positive relationship for men. However, more information is needed to understand the role perceived stress plays in differential use of social support by gender.

[13] study found that good relations with parents help both male and female students to adjust to the university. However, female students were more vulnerable to family problems than males. Therefore undergraduate students need to renegotiate existing relationships with their parents and families to adjust well into university life. A study by [14] suggests that males adjust faster than females. In addition, the study revealed that females rely on social support more than their male counterparts to adjust to the university life. In addition, peer support and peer networks were critical in a person's adjustment into university life [15]. This is consistent with [16] assertion that adjustment to university is critical for academic success. The researchers argue that poor college adjustment correlates with poor academic performance, low graduation rates and poor success later in life. It is therefore intriguing that most high school graduates have academic and social difficulties that delay their adaptation to the new university environment. Furthermore, research suggests that male students adapt to the new university environment better than their female counterparts [17].

A growing number of literature and empirical research have indicated the relationships between social support and psychological problems among students. Therefore, this study attempts to understand the role of social support in managing the psychological problems faced by the students based on gender differences. Determining the college students who are at risk in getting low social support is also important. It is also important to explore their perceived social support and help them to understand the

importance of perceived social support for increasing their life satisfaction. This study also studies the gender-related differences among these aforesaid relationships to determine if particular sources of support were more or less salient for one gender versus the other. The level of perceived social support one gets from the family and friends would determine the level of life satisfaction among the students.

1.1 Social Orientation

Not all action is social, if it is not oriented to the behavior of others. Social orientation is mastering new ways of life. It is the act of figuring out again where you are in relationship to your environment. In other words, it is figuring out where you are and putting yourself in the right direction [18]. Reorientation refers to changing once again, a position or attitude, relative to the situation or circumstances [19]. In other words, it is the state of being redirected differently, rearrangement or realignment intellectually or emotionally. It denotes change in thought pattern, inclination or interest [20]. When students enter the university they face lots of challenges, which range from intellectual, social and psychological problems that require a somewhat balancing act. They need a quick reorientation so they won't run the wrong way and this involves rethinking and changing the way they approach something. To achieve these, they need to have a positive attitude towards life and develop the skills to engage these processes so as to improve their effectiveness as learners [21].

Thus, Social reorientations are particularly important and it includes the student's experience, expression, and management of emotions and the ability to establish positive and rewarding relationships with others [22,23]. It encompasses both intra- and interpersonal processes. The core features of social reorientation is the ability to identify and understand one's own feelings, to accurately read and comprehend emotional states in others, to manage strong emotions and their expression in a constructive manner, to regulate one's own behavior, to develop empathy for others, and to establish and maintain relationships [24].

In other words, social reorientations increase the likelihood of high-quality positive relationships among students [25]. Studies have shown that developing good social orientation with both family and friends are vital for healthy social and

emotional development. This is because experiences with family members and peers provide an opportunity for university students to learn about social exploration and predictable interactions. Parents tend to influence a young person's long-term decisions, such as career choices, values and morals. Their friends are more likely to influence short-term choices, such as appearance and interests [22,26,27].

Positive parental orientation helps predict less aggression and conduct problems for girls and increases leadership and social skills for boys [28,29,30]. Perceptions of supportive family relationships have been linked with increase in indicators of wellness such as life satisfaction and subjective well-being [31]. Peer support has also been shown to correlate inversely with other indicators of internalizing psychopathology in adolescents and co-occur with psychological wellness among adolescents [32,33].

Social orientation is essential in that on entering a University, if one is overwhelmed by the stresses of University life, it is better to try reaching out to get support before you explore your feelings or thoughts, or before you act to alleviate the problem. It's hard to maintain perspective when you're all alone. There are many resources apart from friends available on campus and in the community to help one deal effectively with campus challenges like the Counseling Center, Student Affairs Unit and so on. They can provide the student with confidential counseling, support, and consultation at no charge. They can also provide guidance on additional specialized campus and community resources available related to eating disorders, substance abuse, sexual assault, study and test-taking skills, medical or spiritual issues, and other areas of concern.

Using support as a positive coping strategy, means reaching out to someone you trust for help. This could be anyone: a friend, parent, teacher, counselor, or clergy. Be as honest as possible with this person so he or she can understand the problem from your perspective, and better assist you. Remember, too, that the need for support during times of stress is universal. It's part of what makes us human. It's smart! Explaining your feelings to someone you trust will help you feel less overwhelmed, confused and alone. As you talk you may gain a different perspective. It may become clearer to you what steps you need to take to solve the problem [7].

1.2 Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were stated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant relationship between undergraduates' social and psychological functioning.
2. There is no significant gender difference in undergraduates' social and psychological functioning.
3. There is no significant influence of age on undergraduates' social and psychological functioning.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design of ex-post-facto type. This is so because this method enabled the researchers to carefully analyze the sampled population with a view to assessing the difference and relationship between male and female undergraduates' social and psychological functioning.

2.2 Sample

The target population for this study comprised of 450 undergraduates from three universities (one federal, one state, and one private universities), Ogun State, Nigeria. Samples were selected through a stratified random sampling technique. The mean age of the respondents was 19.7 while the standard deviation was 8.1 and the age range was between 15-27 years.

2.3 Research Instruments

A self-developed instrument tagged "Undergraduates' Psycho-sociological Functioning Questionnaire (UPFQ)" used to

measure undergraduate's ability to relate well with self and others, connect and maintain positive relationships with significant others - family, friends, co-students, faculty and staff; and wellbeing. Items were constructed in five-point likert format measured along 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). UPFQ has demonstrated high internal consistency of Cronbach alpha of .81 in this study.

2.4 Procedure

A set of questionnaires for assessing undergraduates' psycho-sociological functioning and demographic data information were administered on the sample with the help of two other colleagues. A total of 450 questionnaires were distributed, adequately filled and returned for the data analysis. Therefore, 100% return of questionnaire was ensured.

2.5 Data Analysis

In order to facilitate the analysis of the statistics generated from the data, this study made use of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient, t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA).

3. RESULTS

On the relationship between undergraduates' social and psychological functioning, Table 1 depicts the correlation between the two variables (undergraduates' social and psychological functioning) to be positively related ($r = .533$ at $P = .01$). This shows that there is a support for a direct relationship between undergraduates' social and psychological functioning. The first hypothesis was not supported by the outcome of this finding.

Table 1. Correlation matrix of the relationship between undergraduates' social and psychological functioning

		Psychological functioning	Sociological functioning
Psyfunctioning	Pearson correlation	1	.533**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	448	448
Socfunctioning	Pearson Correlation	.533**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	448	448

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The results presented in Table 2 revealed that the obtained value of t is 3.900 for the gender difference in undergraduates' psychological functioning which is greater than the t- critical value of 1.96 at 446 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance (t-cal = 3.900, t-crit = 1.960, P = .05). This implies that there is a significant gender difference. Further analysis of the result based on the respondents' mean scores reveal that male undergraduates with average mean score of 55.736 psychologically functioned more than their female counterparts with a mean score of 52.036.

Also, the aspect that measures gender difference in undergraduates' sociological functioning revealed that male undergraduate students had an average mean score of 49.850 while their female counterparts had a mean score of 46.974. Therefore, there is a significant gender difference in undergraduates' sociological functioning (t-cal = 2.876, t-crit = 1.960, P = .05).

The result in the Table 3 shows that a statistical significant influence of age existed on undergraduates' social (P<.05, $F_{(3,432)}= 2.780$) and psychological (P<.05, $F_{(3,432)}= 8.591$) functioning. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significant influence of age on undergraduates' social and psychological functioning was rejected.

4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study examined gender differences in social and psychological functioning and the need for

social reorientation among Babcock University undergraduates. Hypothesis one revealed that a relationship exist between student social and psychological functioning($r = .533$ at $P = .01$). Thus the hypothesis was rejected. This shows that the impact of a stressful situation for example can be decreased when students have good social support. This finding certainly supports the previous research findings. Several studies revealed that social support correlate negatively with psychological problems such as stress, depression and other psychiatric disorders [2,8,34,35,36]. A study by [5] also indicated that social support from family and friends influence students' well-being in which these supports were found to positively affect the academic life.

Thus, the impact of psychological problems could be reduced if the students have good and sufficient social support. This is because the existence of social support may assist students in dealing with various stressors in their academic life and facilitate a positive adjustment process. This finding further supports the importance of recognizing and managing social support, so as not to let the psychological problems affect students' academic performance. Students and educators should be aware of the importance of social support and existence of psychological problems so that these problems might be under control.

Table 2. T-test analysis showing gender difference in undergraduates' psychological and social functioning

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean	Mean difference	Df	T- calculated
Psyfunctioning	Male	254	55.736	10.104	.634	3.700	446	3.900
	Female	194	52.036	9.742	.699			
Socfunctioning	Male	254	49.850	8.485	.532	2.876	446	3.065
	Female	194	46.974	11.379	.817			

Table 3. Analysis of Variance on the moderating influence of age on undergraduates' psychological and social functioning

		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Psyfunctioning	Between groups	2454.823	3	818.274	8.591	.000
	Within groups	41144.856	432	95.243		
	Total	43599.679	435			
Socfunctioning	Between groups	780.744	3	260.248	2.780	.041
	Within groups	40437.678	432	93.606		
	Total	41218.422	435			

The second hypothesis also revealed that there is a significant gender difference in the undergraduates' psychological ($t\text{-cal} = 3.900$, $t\text{-crit} = 1.960$, $P = .05$) and social functioning ($t\text{-cal} = 2.876$, $t\text{-crit} = 1.960$, $P = .05$). These results were in favor of the male undergraduates compared to their male counterparts. This corroborates the findings of [37] that gender differences in social and emotional strengths may provide valuable insight to why girls earn higher grades than boys across subject areas and grade levels. Yet, despite the academic success of girls relative to boys, girls tend to experience more internal distress. Turner (1994) in his study on gender and social support in adult attempted to understand the discrepancy that though women tend to report more social support, which is thought to be a protective factor, they also are more likely to be depressed. Turner concluded that women reported both social support and depression because they were more likely to experience both the positive and negative aspects of relationship. This is based on the fact that though women had more frequent contact with their support network, greater intimacy, emotional disclosure, and empathy, they also reported more conflict and negative interactions. Turner therefore concluded that females were most likely to experience psychological distress than men.

The third hypothesis further showed that age influences undergraduates' social ($F_{(3,432)} = 2.780$, $P < .05$,) and psychological ($F_{(3,432)} = 8.591$, $P < .05$) functioning. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significant influence of age on undergraduates' social and psychological functioning was rejected. [38] in their study found that girls experienced more challenges in early adolescence than the boys compared to later adolescence thus; they were more at risk for developing depressed affect in the university. [39] further buttressed the influence of age in his research findings when he observed that in adulthood, women are more than twice more likely to be diagnosed with depression and internalizing syndromes than men and these differences come from differences in socialization.

5. CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical evidence with regards to the need for social re-orientation on undergraduates' social and psychological functioning. Specifically, the findings revealed a direct positive relationship between undergraduates' social and psychological

functioning while gender differences was found in undergraduates' psychological functioning and sociological functioning. Also, age was found to be a predictor of undergraduates' social and psychological functioning.

In general, the findings suggest a positive relationship between social and psychological functioning of the undergraduates, and the role they may play in males' and females' wellness. Despite important contributions, the results should be interpreted with the following cautions in mind. First, the findings were obtained from university undergraduates in three universities within a state. Thus, the extent to which the findings generalize to clinical levels of social and psychological functioning is unknown. Second, the sample included a diverse ethnic mix of undergraduates, with a large representation of Yorubas. Nevertheless, it will be useful to evaluate potential ethnic and cultural differences in greater detail in future studies, particularly on adolescents' adjustment in relation to social and psychological functioning. Third, information was obtained solely from the students; it would be informative to incorporate parents, peer and teachers' reports in future work.

6. IMPLICATION FOR COUNSELLING

Since an increase in individual's social and psychological functioning may lead to enhanced interpersonal and intrapersonal relationship, which may also promote a meaningful and fulfilled life. Adequate knowledge and understanding on this area could help many parties, such as educators, counselors, and psychologist to design and develop proper intervention program to reduce psychosociological isolation among students. This study could be of great benefit to the students themselves by bringing about adequate self-acceptance, objective self-evaluation, improved psychological well-being, enhanced relationship with self and others, social competence, as well as rational and positive co-existence among people of the world.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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