

## Impact of marital status and perceived social support on the psychological wellbeing of mothers

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### Abstract

This study aimed at evaluating the impact of marital status and perceived social support on the psychological well-being of mothers. A total of 154 women participated in this factorial design with their ages ranging from 16years to 45years and above. Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support and Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing Scale Short-Form were used for data collection. Three hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance to find out whether marital status alone, perceived social support alone, or marital status and perceived social support together have significant effect on the psychological well-being of mothers. Results indicated that marital status had significant effect on the psychological wellbeing of mothers, means, 70.50, 52.57, 54.13, 57.50,  $F(3, 146) = 3.444$ ,  $p = 0.018$ ; with those that are singles having higher psychological wellbeing mean score. Furthermore, perceived social support had significant effect on the psychological wellbeing of participants, means, 66.36, 50.99,  $F(1, 146) = 11.023$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ; with those that had low perceived social support having higher psychological wellbeing mean score. However, significant interaction effect between marital status and perceived social support on the psychological wellbeing of mothers was not found, means, 86.00, 55.00, 59.09, 46.05, 55.00, 53.25, 66.33, 49.67,  $F(3, 146) = 1.084$ ,  $p = 0.358$ . The study concluded that the psychological wellbeing of mothers is influenced by marital status as well as perceived social support.

**Keywords:** Marital status, perceived social support, psychological well-being, mothers.

### Introduction

Marital status and perceived social support may have significant influence and impact on the psychological well-being of individuals including mothers especially in the family, community, places of work, places of worship, and the society at large. Perceived social support is a vital element in the life of individuals especially mothers in our contemporary society. Also, the cognition on how individuals like mothers perceived the quality of social support they received from different sources is also pertinent. The beneficial impact of perceived social support has been associated with physical and mental health outcomes (Wilks, 2008). Thus, marital status and perceived social support are two different essential factors that when evaluated, they can immensely aid in the determination of psychological well-being of mothers.

According to Brissette, Scheiver and Carver (2002), social support has been found to promote psychological well-being of individuals as well as buffer the effects of stress. Gurung (2006) found that social support is the experience of being valued, cared for, loved and respected by others who are present in one's life. Therefore, the assessment of marital status and perceived social support among mothers has tremendous impact, because it does not only allow the understanding of the study of marital status and perceived social support, it also provide insight into the overall outcome on the psychological well-being of mothers.

According to Eskin (2003), lack of social support is associated with psychological problems as well as distress such as depression and anxiety. Research reveal that genders differ in their needs, use and provision of social support, with indication that females typically both require and

provide more social support than males (Shwarzer, Jerusalem & Hahn, 1994). In this study, marital status simply refers to a state where a person is either single, married, divorced, separated or widowed. Perceived social support means the perception of support received from people. Psychological wellbeing is the state of happiness.

Empirical evidence suggest that marital status plays significant role in determination of psychological well-being. Reneflot and Mamelund (2012) studied the association between marital status and psychological well-being in Norway. They used a Norwegian nationally representative survey to examine whether cohabitants exhibited lower levels of psychological well-being than their married counterparts in a context where cohabitation is claimed to be largely indistinguishable from marriage. In the study, six indicators of mental health were considered, and all adult ages and marital statuses were also included. The results revealed overall partnered living (married or cohabitating) is associated with higher level of psychological well-being than being single. Again, single living subsequent to a divorce was experienced as particularly negative. Also, when compared with married and divorced, cohabitants were more likely to report a problem with alcohol and this holds for those who have dependent children. Divorced cohabitants were also more likely to report a history of depression than the married.

Soulsby and Bennett (2015) study on marital status and psychological well-being to identify the role of perceived social support in the relationship indicated that married people consistently reported better levels of psychological well-being compared with the unmarried ones. Using a cross-sectional questionnaire design, Soulsby and Bennett's (2015) study also examined to what extent

this relationship between marital status and psychological well-being can be explained by perceived social support. The data indicated that after controlling for demographic variables, number of daily hassles and coping strategies, widowed and divorced adults reported significantly poorer psychological well-being compared with those who remain married. However, while there was limited evidence that perceived social support moderates the association between marital status and psychological well-being, perceived social support did emerge as a significant mediator of the relationship. Furthermore, perceived social support explained the influence of being widowed, divorced and never married on psychological well-being, such that lower levels of social support in these groups resulted in poorer psychological well-being.

In addition, Hsu and Barrett (2020) conducted a study to determine the association between marital status and psychological wellbeing (both negative and positive) with negative psychological well-being measured as depressive symptoms and positive psychological well-being measured as autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, self-acceptance, and purpose of life. The study used wave two (2) of midlife in the United States (2004-2006) and had 1,711 participants. Findings revealed that marital status is associated with psychological well-being, with the married faring better than both the formerly married and never married. They also found that the continuous married fared better on the negative dimension than the formerly married. The indications for some measures of positive psychological well-being also revealed on advantage for the continuously married compared with the formerly married and the never-married.

Furthermore, findings for other positive measures indicated that the unmarried, and the married fared better - not worse – than the continuously married. Also, greater benefits were suggested for remarried or never-married women. Also, there are evidences which empirically report relationship or association between perceived social support and psychological well-being. Shamin, Perveen and Butt's (2013) comparative study on a sample of 160 students with 80 (40 males and 40 females) each from nuclear families and extended families examined the relationship between perceived social support and psychological well-being among participants. These participants were asked to fill perceived social support scale (Procidano & Heller, 1983) and also psychological well-being scale (Ryff, 1989).

Results revealed a positive relationship between perceived social support and psychological well-being; students who belonged to extended families indicated high psychological well-being compared to nuclear families; and students who belonged to nuclear families showed high perceived social support compared to extended families. However, students with single parent indicated reduction in level of psychological well-being and perceived social support; participants with low family income revealed high psychological well-being compared to middle family income and high family income; and those with middle family income indicated high perceived social support compared to high family income and low family income. Also, students whose parents' educational qualifications were above Bachelors of Arts (B.A) indicated high perceived social support and psychological well-being compared to those students whose parents' educational qualifications were below Bachelors of Arts (B.A).

Talwar, Kumaraswamy and Mohd Fadzil's (2013) study in a Malaysian university indicated that social support generally promote psychological well-being of participants. Batool and Ahmed (2014) in a study to investigate the influence of perceived social support on psychological well-being of teenagers revealed some interesting findings. The study compared the levels of perceived social support on the psychological well-being of teenagers with one parent alive and with both parents alive. A sample of 212 teenagers that is 106 with one parent alive and also 106 with both parents alive. The ages of participants were from 13 to 19 years and sample was drawn from different cities of Pakistan. Findings indicated that perceived social support is a significant determinant of psychological well-being of teenagers. Also, participants with one parent alive revealed lower levels of perceived social support and psychological well-being compared with those with both parents alive.

Kalpna (2016) also studied the association between perceived social support and psychological well-being among young working adults. Using 286 participants (173 males and 113 females who were currently employed) within the age range of 21 to 28 years, the study revealed that perceived social support has a significant positive correlation with psychological well-being of participants, meaning that the higher the level of perceived social support, the higher the level of psychological well-being; and the lower the level of perceived social support, the lower the level of psychological well-being. Onuoha and Akintola (2018) assessed the direct impact of perceived social support on psychological well-being dimension among a sample of undergraduate students in Nigeria. A cross-sectional ex-post facto study using 304 participants (142

males and 163 female non-indigenous students) in a state-owned university during their first year of undergraduate study, the study indicated significant main effect of perceived social support on the psychological well-being of participants. Damilep, Gonkhir and Oyakose (2019) also observed that there was a significant main effect of perceived social support on the psychological well-being of undergraduate students. This was in a study based on 200 participants, 104 males and 96 females with age range from 16 to 31 years and above. The result indicated that there was a significant main effect of perceived social support on the psychological well-being of undergraduate students.

Damilep, Saleh, Azi and James's (2021) assessment of motherhood duration and perceived social support as determinants of psychological wellbeing among mothers showed that the psychological wellbeing of mothers is determined by perceived social support, meaning that the higher the level of perceived social support the higher the level of psychological wellbeing, and the lower the level of perceived social support the lower the level of psychological wellbeing. Despite the foregoing, it has been observed that very scanty study had been done in the area of marital status, perceived social support and psychological wellbeing. This study attempts to bridge the research gap as it examines whether the psychological wellbeing of mothers can be influenced by marital status and perceived social support. It further evaluates marital status and perceived social support on the psychological well-being of mothers.

### *Hypotheses*

The following hypotheses were tested:

1. Single mothers would significantly have better psychological well-being

compared with married, divorced/separated, and widowed mothers.

2. Participants with low level of perceived social support would significantly have better psychological well-being compared with those with high level of perceived social support.
3. Marital status and perceived social support would have significant interaction effect on the psychological well-being of mothers.

## Method

### Design

The research design adopted for this study is a factorial design, specifically a four by two (4x2) factorial design. This is because there are two (2) independent variables (IVs) and each IV has levels. Thus, IV1 (marital status) has four levels (single, married, divorced/separated, and widowed), and IV2 (perceived social support) has two levels (high and low).

### Participants

A total of 154 women who were purposively selected participated in this study. Majority 71 (46.1%) were 46 years and above, 67 (43.5%) were between 31-45 years while 16 (10.4%) were between 16-30 years old. In relation to marital status, most 124 (80.5%) of the participants were married, 18 (11.7%) were widows, 7 (4.5%) were single and 5 (3.2%) were divorced. Most 130 (84.4%) of the participants were employed compared to only 24 (15.6%) of their counterparts that were not employed. Among them, 94 (61.0%) had 1-3 children, 52 (33.8%) had 4-6 children and 8 (5.2%) had 7 or more children. In terms of educational attainment, 9 (5.8%) completed primary school, 33 (21.4%) hold only Senior Secondary Certificate, 42 (27.3%) had Diploma or

National Certificate in Education, and 70 (45.5%) hold Higher National Diploma or Bachelors' degree and above.

### Measures

#### **Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS).**

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) by Zimet, Darlem, Zimet and Farley (1988) which is made up of 12 items rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from "very strongly disagree" to "very strongly agree" was used for data collection. This scale is meant to measure the perception of individual on how he or she perceives social support. The MSPSS consists of three (3) subscales namely family, friends and significant others. MSPSS demonstrates excellent internal consistency and test-retest reliability with Cronbach's alpha of 0.92 to 0.94 in clinical samples. Evidence for validity and reliability of the MSPSS as a measure of perceived social support come from several sources. The principal components factor analysis confirms that individuals make distinctions on the basis of the source of support: family, friends and significant others. Finding supports the results of previous studies of the MSPSS (Zimet, Darlem, Zimet & Farley 1988). The internal reliability investigation which used Cronbach's alpha support earlier evaluation of MSPSS reliability (Zimet et al 1988; Zimet, Powell, Farley, Werkman & Berkoff 1990). The MSPSS has been examined across different populations and settings. This is important because the extent to which an instrument's data are valid can differ across different groups and setting.

#### **Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing Scale Short-Form (PWBSs).**

Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing Scale Short-Form (PWBSs) that is made up of 18 items was used to measure the psychological well-being of participants. The PWBSs is rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".



Lee, Sun & Chiang (2019) examined the psychometric validity of Short-Form of Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWBSs) using Cross-sectional design and randomized cluster sampling to recruit clinical nurses from a medical center in Taipei, Taiwan, from July to October 2015. So nurses that worked for more than 3 months in the medical center were recruited. Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWBS) with 84-items was used to assess Psychological Wellbeing (PWB). Based on exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis in the study, an 18-item version of Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale was developed using 474 respondents. The Short-Form PWBS was tested for internal consistency, construct validity, and criterion-related validity. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the six subscales of the 18-item PWBS ranged from 0.72 to 0.81,

except 0.57 for autonomy subscale. The overall alpha coefficient for the 18-item PWBS was 0.88. There was a positive correlation between perceived health and the 18-item PWBS ( $r = 0.20$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ), indicating that criterion validity is acceptable.

### Procedure

The researchers sought for the consent of the participants, and they were informed that participation is completely voluntary. Also, their confidentiality was assured by informing them that all information provided will be confidential and strict for research purpose. Instruments of data collection were administered individually to participants during women's meetings and fellowships in some communities in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State.

## Results

### Descriptive Results

**Table 1:** Mean, standard error, lower and upper bound scores of psychological wellbeing across marital status

Marital Status	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Single	70.500	5.915	58.810	82.190
Married	52.565	1.093	50.406	54.725
Divorced/Separated	54.125	6.123	42.025	66.225
Widowed	57.500	3.463	50.655	64.345

Table 1 reveals the mean scores, standard error, lower and upper bound scores on psychological wellbeing across marital status. The table reveals that participants that were singles had mean psychological wellbeing scores of 70.50, with 95% of participants in the group having scores between 58.81 and 82.19 (lower and upper bound). Participants that were married had mean psychological wellbeing scores of 52.57, with 95% of participants in the group having scores between 50.41 and 54.73

(lower and upper bound); while participants that were divorced/separated had psychological wellbeing mean score of 54.13, with 95% of participants in this group having scores between 42.03 and 66.23 (lower and upper bound). Finally, participants that were widows had psychological wellbeing mean scores of 57.50, with 95% of participants in this group having scores ranging between 50.66 and 64.35 (lower and upper bound).

**Table 2:** Mean, standard error, lower and upper bound scores of psychological wellbeing across perceived social support

Perceived Social Support	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Low	66.355	4.208	58.038	74.671
High	50.990	1.926	47.185	54.796

Table 2 shows the mean score, standard error, and lower and upper bound scores on psychological wellbeing across perceived social support. The result revealed that those with low social support had psychological wellbeing mean scores of 66.35, with 95% of participants in this group having

psychological wellbeing scores ranging between 58.04 and 74.67 (lower and upper bound); while those with high social support had mean psychological wellbeing scores 50.99, with 95% of those in this group having scores ranging between 47.19 and 54.80 (lower and upper bound).

**Table 3:** Mean, standard error, lower and upper bound scores of psychological wellbeing across marital status and perceived social support

Marital Status	Perceived Social Support	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Single	Low	86.000	10.952	64.354	107.646
	High	55.000	4.471	46.163	63.837
Married	Low	59.086	1.851	55.427	62.744
	High	46.045	1.161	43.751	48.339
Divorced/separated	Low	55.000	10.952	33.354	76.646
	High	53.250	5.476	42.427	64.073
Widowed	Low	65.333	6.323	52.836	77.830
	High	49.667	2.828	44.078	55.256

Table 3 reveals the mean scores, across marital status and perceived social support interaction. The results indicated that participants that were singles and had low social support had psychological wellbeing mean scores of 86.00, with 95% of those in this group having psychological wellbeing scores ranging between 64.35 – 107.65 (lower and upper bound). Participants that were singles with high social support had psychological wellbeing mean scores of 55.00, with 95% of participants in this group having psychological wellbeing scores ranging between 46.16 – 63.84 (lower and

upper bound). Furthermore, participants that were married with low social support had psychological wellbeing mean scores of 59.09, with 95% of those in this group having psychological wellbeing scores of ranging between 55.43 – 62.74 (lower and upper bound); while participants that were married with high social support had psychological wellbeing scores of 46.05, with 95% of those in this group having psychological wellbeing scores ranging between 43.75 – 48.34 (lower and upper bound). Those that were divorced/separated with low social support had psychological

wellbeing mean score of 55.00, with 95% of those in this group having psychological wellbeing scores ranging between 33.35 – 76.65 (lower and upper bound); while those that were divorced/separated with high social support had psychological wellbeing mean scores of 53.25; with 95% of those in this group having psychological wellbeing scores ranging between 42.43 – 64.07 (lower and upper bound). Participants that were widows with low social support had

psychological wellbeing mean scores of 65.33, with 95% of this group having psychological wellbeing scores ranging between 52.84 – 77.83 (lower and upper bound); while those that were widows with high social support had psychological wellbeing mean scores of 49.67, with 95% of those in this group having psychological wellbeing scores ranging between 44.08 – 55.26 (lower and upper bound).

### Inferential Results

**Table 4:** ANOVA source table for psychological wellbeing across marital status, perceived social support and interaction

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Marital Status	1239.545	3	413.182	3.444	.018
Perceived Social Support (PSS)	1322.265	1	1322.265	11.023	.001
Marital Status * PSS	389.975	3	129.992	1.084	.358
Error	17513.313	146	119.954		
Total	23961.227	153			

a. R Squared = .269 (Adjusted R Squared = .234)

The result of hypothesis 1 revealed that single mothers significantly had better psychological well-being compared with married, divorced/separated, and widowed mothers, means; 70.50, 52.57, 54.13, 57.50,  $F(3, 146) = 3.444$ ,  $p = 0.018$  ( $p < 0.05$ ). The hypothesis is supported. This means that single mothers are predisposed to exhibiting higher psychological wellbeing compared with those that are married, divorced/separated, and widowed.

The result of hypothesis 2 indicated that mothers with low level of perceived social support significantly had better psychological well-being compared with those with high level of perceived social support, means; 66.36, 50.99,  $F(1, 146) = 11.023$ ,  $p = 0.001$  ( $p < 0.05$ ). The hypothesis is supported. This implies that mothers with low level of perceived social support are

predisposed to higher level of psychological wellbeing.

The result of hypothesis 3 revealed that there is no significant interaction effect of marital status and perceived social support on the psychological wellbeing of mothers, means, 86.00, 55.00, 59.09, 46.05, 55.00, 53.25, 66.33, 49.67,  $F(3, 146) = 1.084$ ,  $p = 0.358$  ( $p > 0.05$ ); the hypothesis is not supported.

### Discussion

The study is aimed at evaluating the impact of marital status and perceived social support on the psychological well-being of mothers. Results of hypothesis 1 showed that marital status had significant effect on the psychological wellbeing of mothers, indicating that the psychological wellbeing of mothers can be determined based on marital status. This finding is in line with Reneflot and Mamelund's (2012) study



identified that there is association between marital status and psychological well-being, a finding corroborated by Hsu and Barrett (2020). Therefore, marital status is a determinant of psychological wellbeing of mothers. Findings of hypothesis 2 indicated that perceived social support had significant effect on the psychological wellbeing of participants, implying that the psychological wellbeing of mothers is determined by perceived social support. The finding is in line with Kalpana (2016) which found association between perceived social support and psychological well-being among young working adults. In addition, Onuoha and Akintola (2018) revealed significant main effect of perceived social support on the psychological wellbeing of undergraduate students. This was affirmed by Damilep et al (2019) and Damilep et al (2021).

The results of hypothesis 3 revealed that there is no significant interaction effect of marital status and perceived social support on the psychological wellbeing of mothers. It means that the psychological wellbeing of mothers cannot be determined by the interaction of marital status and perceived social support. Soulsby and Bennett's (2015) study on the relationship among marital status, psychological well-being and perceived social support revealed, based on marital status, that widowed and divorced adults reported significantly poorer psychological well-being compared with the married. There was limited evidence that perceived social support moderates the association between marital status and psychological well-being; and perceived social support did emerge as a significant mediator of the relationship. This is not in line with the findings of hypothesis 3. More studies are recommended to be done in the area of marital status, perceived social support and psychological wellbeing due to dearth of literature.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, findings show that marital status had significant effect on the psychological wellbeing of mothers. This indicates that the psychological wellbeing of mothers is determined by marital status, which revealed that mothers that are single experienced different levels of psychological wellbeing compared with those that are married, divorced/separated or widowed. Also, perceived social support had significant effect on the psychological wellbeing of mothers. It implies that the psychological wellbeing of mothers can be influenced by perceived social support, which revealed that participants with low level of perceived social support had better psychological wellbeing compared with those participants with high level of perceived social support.

Contrarily, marital status and perceived social support have no significant interaction effect on the psychological wellbeing of mothers. It means that the psychological wellbeing of mothers cannot be influenced by the interaction of marital status and perceived social support. Therefore, the study concluded that the psychological wellbeing of mothers is influenced by marital status as well as perceived social support, which implies that marital status alone and/or perceived social support alone can determine the psychological wellbeing of mothers, but not the interaction of marital status and perceived social support.

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