PSYCHO-SOCIAL PREDICTORS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AMONG FEMALE UNDERGRADUATES

Azikiwe, Judith Chineye, Sulaiman, Sikirulai Alausa, Babalola, Omoyemi Helen & Adeoye, Adesewa Grace
Department of Psychology
Federal University, Oye-Ekiti

ABSTRACT

Psychological well-being of female undergraduates in Nigerian universities is a critical concern due to rising academic stress, emotio23nal isolation, and declining self-worth. This study investigated perceived social support, loneliness, and self esteem predict psychological well-being of female undergraduates. Using a cross sectional survey, female undergraduates from the Federal University Oye-Ekiti responded to a compiled psychological instrument on social support, loneliness, self esteem, and psychological well-being. The result shows that there was significant joint prediction of social support, loneliness and self-esteem on psychological wellbeing, $F(3,196) = 45.56$, $R^2 = 0.41$; $p<.05$]. The $R^2 =0.41$ indicates that the independent variable of social support, loneliness and self-esteem explained 41% variation in dependent variable (Psychological wellbeing). Further results show that social support ($\beta= .49$; $t= 5.32$; $p<.05$), loneliness ($\beta= .27$; $t= 3.18$; $p<.05$) and self-esteem ($\beta= .15$; $t= 2.17$; $p<.05$) independently and significantly predict psychological well-being among female undergraduates. The findings offer valuable insights for higher education stakeholders in Nigeria, suggesting that evidence based, culturally sensitive programs targeting these variables can meaningfully enhance student mental health across campuses. By situating these results within established theories and recent empirical work, the present study affirms that enhancing social support, reducing loneliness, and fostering self-esteem are critical targets for promoting psychological well-being among female undergraduates. Interventions designed in alignment with stress-buffering, social provisions, and self esteem frameworks are likely to yield substantive benefits, ultimately supporting these students' academic success and personal flourishing.

Keywords: Psychological well-being, perceived social support, loneliness, self-esteem, female undergraduates, Nigerian universities

INTRODUCTION

Widely defined by the coexistence of favorable mental health indicators and the relative rarity of enduring negative affective states, psychological well-being has historically been viewed as a vital cornerstone of life satisfaction and everyday operational capacity (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Keyes, 2002). Across diverse cultural, national, and situational landscapes, the attainment and sustenance of this form of wellness is deemed indispensable for personal maturation, scholastic involvement, physiological health, and broader societal contribution (Diener, Oishi, & Tay, 2018; World Health Organization [WHO], 2022). As modern global pressures ranging from fluctuating economic conditions to swift technological shifts continue to escalate, individuals are increasingly faced with psychological stressors that demand resilient internal and interpersonal resources to safeguard mental stability. Within tertiary education settings, these demands are frequently more acute, as university students grapple with unfamiliar social environments, escalated academic obligations, and ongoing identity formation (American Psychological Association [APA], 2020). Despite widespread acknowledgment of psychological well-being's importance for scholastic achievement and individual growth, female university students often encounter a multifaceted array of psychosocial elements that threaten their mental health. Although extant literature emphasizes the substantial roles that social support networks, feelings of isolation, and self-perception play in dictating mental health trajectories (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010; Orth & Robins, 2014), there remains a notable scarcity of knowledge regarding how these factors specifically interact within the lived experiences of women enrolled in higher education. These demographic warrants particular investigative focus owing to their distinct psychosocial pressures and the intricate dynamics

influencing their emotional stability (Tosevski & Milovancevic, 2006; Johansen et al., 2021; Wang, Zhang, & Zimmerman, 2021). While university life offers rich opportunities for intellectual advancement and personal autonomy, it simultaneously presents substantial obstacles, including rigorous academic demands, monetary limitations, cultural role expectations, and fragile self-confidence. Young women in these settings frequently contend with supplementary pressures associated with prescribed gender norms, the juggling of familial and educational duties, and the pursuit of professional ambitions within traditionally male-dominated or patriarchal academic disciplines (Corcoran & Nobiling, 2020). Empirical evidence indicates that female undergraduates commonly exhibit lower thresholds for coping with stress and emotional upheaval (Van-Droogenbroeck, Spruyt, & Keppens, 2018; Johansen et al., 2021; Yalcin-Siedentopf et al., 2021). Taken together, these converging stressors generate conditions under which psychological wellness is placed at considerable jeopardy, underscoring the imperative for an in-depth exploration of the determinants shaping mental health outcomes among this population.

Regarding social support, the quality and accessibility of one's social circle constitute a critical predictor of mental wellness. This construct is frequently characterized as the perceived or actual receipt of care, validation, practical assistance, or encouragement drawn from family, friends, and other close relations (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Heaney & Israel, 2008; Yalcin-Siedentopf et al., 2021). Such support can function as a protective shield against stressors, diminish the perceived severity of adversities, and fortify an individual's coping repertoire, thereby fostering superior mental health results (Thoits, 2011). For female undergraduates who are culturally expected to rely heavily on peer and familial networks, substantive interpersonal

backingencompassing both emotional reassurance and tangible aidcan instill a robust sense of community and fortitude (Johansen et al., 2021; Yalcin-Siedentopf et al., 2021). Conversely, a shortfall or absence of such support can aggravate isolation, impede academic participation, and detrimentally affect overall psychological health.Loneliness, which is extensively correlated with adverse psychological consequences (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010; Kong & You, 2013), refers to the subjective impression of social detachment or a perceived deficiency in the quality or amount of one's interpersonal connections. Despite being analytically distinct, loneliness and social support frequently exhibit reciprocal influences: limited support can heighten vulnerability to isolation, and chronic loneliness can, in turn, impair one's capacity to initiate or sustain rewarding relationships (Çiçek, 2021). At the undergraduate stage, feelings of isolation may stem from inadequate opportunities for forming genuine friendships, difficulties acclimating to an unfamiliar academic milieu, or a perception of being alienated by faculty and fellow students (Peng, Chen, & Long, 2020; Çiçek, 2021). These difficulties may be particularly pronounced for female students, given cultural prescriptions regarding women's social roles and their often-elevated sensitivity to interpersonal stressors. Sustained loneliness has been linked to a spectrum of mental health complications, encompassing depressive symptoms, anxiety disorders, and diminished self-worth, all of which directly undermine psychological well-being (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010; Çiçek, 2021; Wang et al., 2021).

Another pivotal factor in the equation of mental wellness is self-esteem, defined as an individual's overall evaluative appraisal of their own worth (Orth & Robins, 2014; Rosenberg, 1965). Individuals possessing elevated self-esteem generally perceive themselves as competent, valued, and

deserving of respect, which facilitates adaptive coping mechanisms when confronting life's hurdles (Kong, Zhao, & You, 2018; Çiçek, 2021). In contrast, low self-esteem is tied to amplified vulnerability to stress, heightened reactivity to perceived rejection, and a generalized negative self-concept, all of which can precipitate declines in psychological well-being (Orth & Robins, 2014; Kong, Zhao, & You, 2013; Çiçek, 2021). For female undergraduates, self-regard may be especially susceptible to influences such as body image concerns, academic performance pressures, physical appearance standards (e.g., bust, buttocks, hip-to-waist ratio), or pervasive stereotypes questioning women's intellectual prowess. Evaluating self-esteem in conjunction with social support and loneliness is crucial within the university context to illuminate the pathways leading to healthier psychological states, as peer comparisons and negative social feedback can accentuate feelings of personal inadequacy.Scholarly discourse has persistently underscored the interconnected nature of social support, loneliness, and self-esteem in sculpting mental health outcomes. Foundational paradigms, notably Cohen and Wills' (1985) stress-buffering hypothesis, propose that ample social backing can insulate individuals from the damaging impacts of stress. More contemporary integrated models emphasize bidirectional relationships among these constructs, positing, for instance, that diminished self-esteem may cause individuals to perceive their social networks as insufficient, thereby magnifying isolation (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Çiçek, 2021; Arslan, Yıldırım, Ayub, & Lolaty, 2022). Investigating these interconnections within the female undergraduate population is especially pertinent, as their transitional life phase generally involves deep-seated identity development and the solidification of interpersonal ties.

The relevance of comprehending these dynamics has intensified alongside shifts in the educational environments of Nigerian tertiary institutions and evolving student demographics. For example, the escalating enrollment of young women across various disciplines and global institutions has highlighted the necessity of investigating elements that either promote or impede their welfare (UNESCO, 2021). Broader societal transformations, including the redefinition of gender roles and the worldwide acknowledgment of mental health as a critical public health issue, have also propelled psychological well-being to prominence on academic and policy agendas (WHO, 2022). Within this fluid context, universities are incentivized to craft interventions, counseling services, and infrastructural supports that address the distinct requirements of diverse student bodies, especially female learners who may confront unique psychosocial hurdles. Despite this acknowledged importance, significant lacunae persist in the literature concerning the collective influence of social support, loneliness, and self-esteem on the psychological well-being of female undergraduates. Prior investigations have frequently isolated these constructs, examining, for example, the link between perceived support and stress reduction, or the effects of isolation on academic drive (Kong, Zhao, & You, 2013; Holt-Lunstad, Smith, Baker, Harris, & Stephenson, 2015; Peng et al., 2020). Other studies have focused on self-esteem's contribution to academic adaptation and mental health (Orth & Robins, 2014; Kong et al., 2018). However, few inquiries have embraced a more holistic perspective that treats the interplay among these variables as an interconnected system shaping the mental health of female students. This comprehensive outlook is essential because these factors typically exert concurrent, rather than sequential, effects. A female undergraduate's self-esteem might influence

her interpretation of the support available, which in turn might modulate her susceptibility to loneliness. If these dynamics remain opaque, mental health practitioners, counselors, and policymakers may struggle to devise interventions that adequately target the fundamental sources of psychological distress. Ultimately, an integrative approach is necessary to clarify how social support, loneliness, and self-esteem coalesce to affect psychological well-being within this demographic.The complexity is further deepened by cultural influences. Societal attitudes regarding gender roles, normative expectations for emotional expression, and culturally ingrained perceptions of help-seeking all shape how female undergraduates experience and interpret social support and loneliness (Antonucci & Akiyama, 1987; Heaney & Israel, 2008). Cultural mores may determine whether seeking assistance is viewed as an indicator of fortitude or frailty, thereby moderating the effect of support on self-esteem and overall mental health. Similarly, culturally prescribed beauty standards and definitions of success may disproportionately impact female students' self-assessments, amplifying their susceptibility to mental health difficulties. By integrating these cultural and contextual considerations, researchers can formulate more nuanced models that account for variations across heterogeneous populations.The academic ramifications of psychological well-being for this group are profound. Evidence indicates that students maintaining robust mental health tend to exhibit superior academic performance, higher persistence rates, and deeper engagement with their educational surroundings (Diener et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2021). For female undergraduates, positive mental health may also facilitate leadership cultivation, effective negotiation of career trajectories, and heightened readiness for professional environments. Conversely, when psychological well-being

deteriorates due to insufficient social backing, pervasive isolation, or fragile self-regard, academic output may suffer, and students may encounter obstacles that impede their full intellectual and vocational potential (Corcoran & Nobiling, 2020). Addressing the interplay of these three factors is not only academically and personally advantageous but also ethically obligatory. Given that higher education institutions are increasingly held responsible for student welfare, comprehending these variable interactions can direct the development of focused mental health services and community-building efforts (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015). Potential initiatives include organizing peer-support groups, offering mentorship programs, and establishing campus resources designed to enhance self-esteem and resilience. Pinpointing evidence-based approaches that strengthen support networks, diminish loneliness, and foster positive self-regard will assist universities in fulfilling their duty of care toward their female undergraduate cohorts.

Theoretically, integrating these constructs draws upon several psychological frameworks. Humanistic theories, for instance, highlight the significance of unconditional positive regard and genuine relationships in nurturing mental wellness (Rogers, 1961, as cited in Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Positive psychology viewpoints emphasize the contribution of personal strengths and significant connections in cultivating flourishing mental states (Seligman, 2011; Diener et al., 2018). Furthermore, self-determination theory suggests that feelings of competence, relatedness, and autonomy underpin overall psychological health, proposing that augmenting social support, mitigating loneliness, and reinforcing self-esteem may collectively address these foundational psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Investigating these variables within an integrated framework can thus enhance

theoretical models that account for the nuanced synergy between interpersonal and intrapersonal elements. Empirical work has started to clarify these relationships. Studies demonstrate that interventions designed to boost peer belonging and group solidarity can decrease loneliness and enhance well-being among female students (Kong & You, 2013; Peng et al., 2020). Similarly, initiatives focusing on self-esteem enhancement through skills training, constructive feedback, and affirmation of individual merit have shown efficacy in improving psychological functioning (Kong et al., 2018). Nevertheless, a gap remains in understanding the precise mechanisms by which these interventions operate and the conditions that optimize their benefits.

An additional underexplored dimension involves the interplay of digital and face-to-face support in the contemporary era. With the proliferation of social media and virtual communication, female undergraduates may encounter novel interaction formats that either alleviate or aggravate loneliness and affect self-regard. While online communities can provide a sense of belonging and immediate peer access, they can also foster social comparison and reinforce negative self-perceptions (Hagger-Johnson et al., 2017). Understanding the intersection of virtual and in-person support and their influence on psychological well-being is becoming increasingly vital in today's digitized world. Once the foundational factors contributing to female undergraduates' mental health are clearly identified, universities can tailor prevention and support programs aligned with the cultural, social, and economic realities of their students. This is particularly crucial on multicultural campuses like Federal University Oye-Ekiti (FUOYE) or those situated in regions where gender norms may influence help-seeking behaviors and the perception of available resources (UNESCO, 2021). Hence, addressing these knowledge gaps and advancing

understanding of how social support, loneliness, and self-esteem jointly impact psychological well-being among female undergraduates serves multiple objectives. Given these considerations, the current investigation seeks to illuminate the intricate relationships between social support, loneliness, self-esteem, and psychological well-being among female undergraduates. By situating these constructs within a comprehensive analytical framework, this study will generate insights that are both theoretically grounded and practically actionable. Such insights can guide interventions, shape policy decisions, and ultimately contribute to a campus atmosphere conducive to holistic female student development and flourishing.

Empirical evidence suggests that inadequate social backing intensifies stress responses, chronic isolation erodes a sense of belonging, and poor self-regard heightens psychological vulnerability (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Peng et al., 2020). Nonetheless, the precise extent to which these variables jointly influence psychological well-being among female undergraduates remains ambiguous. This knowledge gap is problematic because it constrains the design of focused interventions and the formulation of supportive campus policies capable of effectively tackling the unique difficulties faced by female students. Without clarity regarding the interplay between social support, loneliness, and self-esteem, attempts to bolster their psychological well-being may remain disjointed or ineffective. Furthermore, a robust theoretical framework elucidating these relationships is required to steer both academic inquiry and real-world application. The urgency of this matter is underscored by rising global anxiety over student mental health and calls for gender-sensitive psychosocial support (WHO, 2022).Reviewing relevant empirical contributions, Luo, Liu, and Zhang (2020) utilized structural equation modeling to assess the mediating roles of perceived

social support and self-esteem in the link between psychological maltreatment and loneliness among Chinese children aged 9–13. Their results indicated that maltreatment significantly increased loneliness, operating through two primary mediating pathways: one via perceived social support alone, and another through a sequential mediation involving both perceived social support and self-esteem. This work underscores the essential functions of support and self-appraisal in mitigating loneliness, suggesting that interventions focused on these factors could offset the negative impacts of maltreatmentinsights that are transferable to understanding parallel dynamics in university settings.Çiçek (2021) investigated the mediating function of self-esteem in the loneliness-psychological well-being nexus among university students. Using a sample of 340 individuals and measures including the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, UCLA Loneliness Scale, and Flourishing Scale, the analysis revealed that loneliness negatively predicted both self-esteem and psychological well-being, whereas self-esteem positively influenced well-being. Mediation testing showed that self-esteem partially mediated the loneliness-well-being relationship. Gender variations emerged, with female participants displaying higher self-esteem and psychological well-being, yet lower loneliness scores compared to males. This inquiry highlights self-esteem as a crucial shield against loneliness, reinforcing its importance in promoting mental health among university populations.

In Norway, Johansen, Espetvedt, Lyshol, Clench-Aas, and Myklestad (2021) conducted a cross-sectional examination of gender disparities in mental health and the protective role of social support among young adults. Their findings demonstrated that social support significantly reduced mental distress specifically for young women (but not men), pointing to gendered variations in support's protective effects.

Additionally, a strong sense of coherence correlated with lower distress across all demographics. These outcomes advocate for gender-tailored mental health strategies for women that emphasize strengthening social support networks to counteract psychological challenges.Özdogan (2021) explored the connections between subjective well-being, social and emotional loneliness, and life meaning among university students. With data from 477 participants aged 18–33, path and correlation analyses revealed substantial relationships between well-being, loneliness, and perceived meaning in life. Both social and emotional loneliness significantly predicted reduced subjective well-being, with this effect mediated by the perceived meaning in life. This research underscores existential factors as potential buffers against the detrimental consequences of loneliness, offering a distinctive angle for addressing isolation among students.Lee (2022) analyzed the effects of social comparison orientation on psychological well-being within social networking site contexts. Examining data from 236 South Korean participants, the study found that comparison orientation negatively impacted well-being, with self-esteem serving as a notable mediator. Interestingly, perceived social support did not independently mediate this relationship; however, a serial mediation pathway involving perceived social support followed by self-esteem was identified. These findings suggest that negative emotions triggered by online comparisons can reduce perceived support and self-esteem, ultimately damaging psychological well-beinga critical insight for understanding digital-age psychosocial challenges faced by female undergraduates.Sharifi (2022) assessed whether self-esteem moderates the relationship between loneliness and psychological well-being among 129 international university students. The moderation effect was not statistically significant, yet significant gender

differences were noted, with female students reporting greater loneliness than their male peers. This outcome implies that while self-esteem may not directly alter the loneliness-well-being interaction, it remains a relevant factor for interpreting gender-based mental health disparities.

Vicary, Kapadia, Bee, Bennion, and Brooks (2024) performed a systematic review and narrative synthesis to evaluate the influence of social support on university students living with mental illness. Synthesizing data from ten studies encompassing 3,669 participants, the review concluded that elevated social support levels markedly alleviated depression, anxiety, and general psychological distress. Barriers to accessing support emerged as critical obstacles, with some students encountering negative social interactions that worsened their mental conditions. The present investigation aims to articulate and empirically evaluate the predictive power of social support, loneliness, and self-esteem on psychological well-being. In doing so, it intends to fill a notable void in the existing literature and lay the groundwork for informed strategies designed to foster mental health, resilience, and academic flourishing among female undergraduates in Nigerian universities, with particular focus on Federal University Oye-Ekiti (FUOYE). The following research question guides this inquiry:"What is the combined predictive influence of social support, loneliness, and self-esteem on psychological well-being among female undergraduate in FUOYE?"Ultimately, the primary objective of this study is to examine how social support, loneliness, and self-esteem influence the psychological well-being of female undergraduates. More specifically, it aims to assess the collective predictive capacity of these three variables on the psychological well-being of female undergraduate students at FUOYE.

Only one Hypothesis was tested in this study -Social support, loneliness, and self-esteem will jointly and independently predict psychological well-being among female undergraduates in FUOYE.

METHODS

Research Design

This study adopted an *ex post facto*r research design. This design is appropriate because it does not involve manipulation of the independent variables but rather examines the influence of already existing conditions on the dependent variable. In this study, the independent variables are social support, loneliness, and self-esteem, while the dependent variable is psychological well-being.

Population Participants and Sampling Technique

The population for this study comprises female undergraduates of the Federal University Oye-Ekiti (FUOYE), covering students from both campuses (Oye and Ikole). This population was selected due to the increasing concerns about the psychological well-being of female students in Nigerian universities. Two hundred (200) female studentswere selected across departments of Federal University Oye-Ekiti. Purposive and convenient sampling techniques were employed in choosing study participants. Only females who were readily available participated in the study. The respondents below 18 years of age were 24(12.0%), 107(53.5%) were 18-20 years of age, 31(15.5%) were 21-23 years of age while 38(19.0%) were 24 years of age. Respondents in 100 level were 41(20.5%), 113(56.5%) were in 200 level, 30(15.0%) were in 300 level while 16(8.0%) were in 400 level.

Instrument

The instrument for this study was a compiled set of psychological scales structured in form of questionnaire designed to assess the key variables: social support, loneliness, self-esteem, and psychological well-being. The questionnaire consisted of five sections (A–E) and all the scales were adapted from previously validated scales.

Section A: Demographic Information- This section gathered background data on participants, including age, academic level, campus location, department, and marital status.

Section B: Social Support-This section utilized the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)

developed by Zimet et al. (1988). The scale comprises 12 items, measuring perceived support from family, friends, and significant others, rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Very Strongly Disagree* to 7 = *Very Strongly Agree*. Higher scores indicate greater perceived social support.Sample Items:"There is a special person who is around when I am in need."; "I get the emotional help and support I need from my family." This study reported a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.70

Section C: Loneliness-This section employed the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3) developed by Russell, Peplau, and Cutrona (1996). The scale contains 20 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Never* to 4 = *Often*. It measures participants' subjective feelings of social isolation and dissatisfaction with social relationships. Higher scores reflect greater loneliness. Sample Items:"I feel isolated from others."; "I lack companionship."Cronbach's Alpha in this study is 0.79

Section D: Self-Esteem- This section featured the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) developed by Rosenberg (1965). The scale consists of 10 items, rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 4 = *Strongly Agree*. Higher scores indicate higher levels of self-esteem. Sample Items:"I feel that I have a number of good qualities."; "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself."Cronbach's Alpha in this study is 0.61

Section E: Psychological Well-Being- The final section applied the Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being (RSPWB) – Short Form developed by Ryff (1989) and revised by Ryff & Keyes (1995). This 18-item scale evaluates six dimensions of well-being: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Responses are measured on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 6 = *Strongly Agree*. Higher scores reflect greater psychological well-being.Sample Items:"I am not afraid to voice my opinions, even when they are in opposition to the opinions of most people." and "I have a sense of direction and purpose in life."Cronbach's Alpha in this study is 0.71

Ethical Considerations

The administration of copies of questionnaire was conducted in a safe and serene environment free from any form of disturbances to the research respondents. The participants were informed of the purpose of the study and assured of

voluntary participation their anonymity and confidentiality was guaranteed.

Procedure of Data Collection and analysis

Hard copies of the questionnaire were administered in person at the university campuses in lecture halls, hostels, and other communal areas. Each participant took approximately15-20 minutes to complete the survey. The researchers ensured that participants understood the instructions in each section of the survey. Completed copies were collected immediately and entered into a secure database for analysis.

The data collected were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. Both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were employed. Participants' demographic characteristics were analysed using frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation. Independent sample t-tests were employed to test hypotheses one through three, while multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the fourth hypothesis.

RESULTS

Hypothesis- Social support, loneliness and self-esteem will jointly and independently predict psychological wellbeing among female undergraduates.

Table 1: Summary of Multiple regression table showing joint and independent prediction of social support, loneliness and self-esteem on psychological well-being among female undergraduates

Predictors	**B**	**T**	**p**	**R**	**R^2**	**F**	**p**
Social support	.49	5.32	<.05				
Loneliness	.27	3.18	<.05	0.64	0.41	45.56	<.05
Self-esteem	.15	2.17	<.05				

Table 1 shows that there was significant joint prediction of social support, loneliness and self-esteem on psychological wellbeing, $F(3,196) = 45.56$, $R^2 = 0.41$; $p<.05$]. The R^2 =0.41 indicates that the independent variable of social support, loneliness and self-esteem explained 41% variation in dependent variable (Psychological wellbeing). Further results show that social support (β= .49; t= 5.32; p<.05), loneliness (β= .27; t= 3.18; p<.05) and self-esteem (β= .15; t= 2.17; p<.05) independently and significantly predict psychological well-being among female undergraduates. The hypothesis is therefore accepted.

DISCUSSION

This study examined how perceived social support, loneliness, and self esteem independently and jointly predict the psychological well-being of female undergraduates at the Federal University Oye-Ekiti (FUOYE). The hypothesis anticipated that social support, loneliness, and self esteem would collectively account for variance in psychological well-being. This hypothesis was confirmed. Multiple regression analysis confirmed a significant joint prediction, indicating that 41% of the variance in psychological well-being was explained by these three variables. Additionally, each of the independent variables (social support, loneliness, and self-esteem) made significant contributions. This integrative finding aligns with Kong *et al.* (2013), who found self esteem both mediates and moderates the effect of social support on subjective well-being, and Luo, Liu, and Zhang (2020), whose structural equation model highlighted parallel mediating roles of social support and self esteem in reducing loneliness. The result extends the theoretical premise that these intrapersonal and interpersonal factors interact in complex ways, collectively shaping female students' psychological flourishing.

The robust effect of perceived social support underscores humanistic and self determination frameworks that posit relatedness as a core psychological need (Deci& Ryan, 2000), while the deleterious impact of loneliness confirms positive psychology's emphasis on cultivating meaningful connections (Seligman, 2011). The role of self-esteem corroborates positive affect theories highlighting self worth as a resilience resource (Lyubomirsky *et al.*, 2005). This finding suggests that the interplay of support, isolation, and self evaluation is similar among Nigerian female undergraduates as in other cultural contexts (Johansen *et al.*, 2021; Yalcin-Siedentopf *et al.*, 2021).

These findings have important implications for future research. Longitudinal studies are needed to establish causal pathways among these variables, particularly to determine whether bolstering social support can proactively prevent loneliness and enhance self-esteem over time. Experimental or intervention designs—such as randomized trials of peer mentoring, digital support platforms, or self esteem workshops—would clarify the mechanisms through which support and self perceptions improve well-being. Moreover,

given the rise of online social networks, future work should compare virtual and face-to-face support modalities to ascertain their differential effects on loneliness and psychological health. Finally, qualitative investigations could explore the lived experiences underlying quantitative patterns, yielding richer insights into how cultural norms and academic environments shape female undergraduates' support systems and self views.

CONCLUSION

This study has illuminated the significant roles that perceived social support, loneliness, and self-esteem play in shaping the psychological well-being of female undergraduates at the Federal University Oye-Ekiti. It establishes that perceived social support, loneliness, and self-esteem are not only significant on their own but work in tandem to shape the psychological health of female students in higher education.

IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study carry significant implications for the context of female undergraduates in Nigerian universities, the broader challenge of student mental health, and stakeholders who can benefit from these insights. With perceived social support emerging as a strong predictor of psychological well-being, universities must recognize that creating a supportive campus culture is critical. The context of high academic and social demands amplifies stress, and understanding this dynamic suggests that community building initiatives can reduce students' sense of isolation. This relevance emphasizes why policies and resources should be directed toward strengthening family ties, peer networks, and mentoring programs within the institution.

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

One limitation of this study is its cross-sectional design, which does not allow for establishing cause and effect. All data were collected at a single point in time, so it is not clear if social support, loneliness, and self-esteem lead to changes in psychological well-being or vice versa. Another limitation is the use of self-report measures, which can be influenced by bias and social desirability. Finally, the sample was limited to female undergraduates at one university, which means the findings may not apply to male students or to students at other institutions.

REFERENCES

American Psychological Association. (2020). *Stress in America: Stress and mental health among college students*. APA. Retrieved from https://www.apa.org

Antonucci, T. C., & Akiyama, H. (1987). Social networks in adult life and a preliminary examination of the convoy model. *Journal of Gerontology, 42*(5), 519–527. https://doi.org/10.1093/geronj/42.5.519

Arslan, Yıldırım, Ayub, &Lolaty, 2022

Çiçek, İ. (2021). Mediating role of self-esteem in the association between loneliness and psychological and subjective well-being in university students. *International Journal of Contemporary Educational Research, 8*(2), 83–97. https://doi.org/10.33200/ijcer.850485

Cohen, S., & Wills, T. A. (1985). Stress, social support, and the buffering hypothesis. *Psychological Bulletin, 98*(2), 310–357. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.98.2.310

Corcoran, K. E., &Nobiling, B. D. (2020). Gender roles and mental health: Exploring the impact on college students. *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy, 34*(2), 147–166. https://doi.org/10.1080/87568225.2019.1581857

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The "what" and "why" of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry, 11*(4), 227–268. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01

Diener, E., Oishi, S., &Tay, L. (2018). Advances in subjective well-being research. *Nature Human Behaviour*, *2*(4), 253–260. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-018-0307-6

Hagger-Johnson *et al.*, 2017

Hawkley, L. C., & Cacioppo, J. T. (2010). Loneliness matters: A theoretical and empirical review of consequences and mechanisms. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, *40*(2), 218–227. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12160-010-9210-8

Heaney, C. A., & Israel, B. A. (2008). Social networks and social support. In K. Glanz, B. K. Rimer, & K. Viswanath (Eds.), *Health behavior and health education: Theory, research, and practice* (4th ed., pp. 189–210). Jossey-Bass.

Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T. B., Baker, M., Harris, T., & Stephenson, D. (2015). Loneliness and social isolation as risk factors for mortality: A meta-analytic review. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *10*(2), 227–237. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691614568352

Johansen, R., Espetvedt, M. N., Lyshol, H., Clench-Aas, J., &Myklestad, I. (2021). Mental distress among young adults - gender differences in the role of social support. *BMC public health*, *21*(1), 2152. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-12109-5

Keyes, C. L. M. (2002). The mental health continuum: From languishing to flourishing in life. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, *43*(2), 207–222. https://doi.org/10.2307/3090197

Kong, F., & You, X. (2013). Loneliness and self-esteem as mediators between social support and life satisfaction in late adolescence. *Social Indicators Research*, *110*, 271-279.

Kong, F., Zhao, J., & You, X. (2013). Self-esteem as mediator and moderator of the relationship between social support and subjective well-being among Chinese university students. *Social indicators research*, *112*, 151-161.

Kong, F., Zhao, J., & You, X. (2018). Self-esteem as mediator and moderator of the relationship between social support and subjective well-being among Chinese university students.

International Journal of Psychology, 53(6), 458–465. https://doi.org/10.1002/ijop.12407

Lee, J. K. (2022). The effects of social comparison orientation on psychological well-being in social networking sites: Serial mediation of perceived social support and self-esteem. *Current Psychology, 41*, 6247–6259. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-020-01114-3

Luo, S., Liu, Y., & Zhang, D. (2020). Psychological maltreatment and loneliness in Chinese children: The role of perceived social support and self-esteem. *Children and Youth Services Review, 108*, 104573. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2019.104573

Lyubomirsky, S., King, L., & Diener, E. (2005). The benefits of frequent positive affect: Does happiness lead to success? *Psychological Bulletin, 131*(6), 803–855.

Orth, U., & Robins, R. W. (2014). The development of self-esteem. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 23*(5), 381–387. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721414541461

Özdogan, A. Ç. (2021). Subjective well-being and social-emotional loneliness of university students: The mediating effect of the meaning of life. *Journal of Pedagogical Research, 5*(1), 18–30. https://doi.org/10.33902/JPR.2021166894

Peng, H., Chen, C., & Long, R. (2020). The impact of loneliness on psychological well-being among Chinese university students: The roles of social support and coping strategies. *Journal of Adolescence, 82*, 46–57. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2020.05.013

Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and the adolescent self-image*. Princeton University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400876136

Russell, D. W. (1996). UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3): Reliability, validity, and factor structure. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 66*(1), 20-40.

Ryff, C. D., & Keyes, C. L. (1995). The structure of psychological well-being revisited. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69*(4), 719–727. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.69.4.719

Sharifi (2022)

Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. Atria Books.

Thoits, P. A. (2011). Mechanisms linking social ties and support to physical and mental health. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 52*(2), 145–161. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022146510395592

Tosevski, D. L., &Milovancevic, M. P. (2006). Stressful life events and mental health. *Current Opinion in Psychiatry, 19*(2), 201–208. https://doi.org/10.1097/01.yco.0000214343.44380.2b

UNESCO. (2021). *Education for sustainable development: Building a better future for all*. Retrieved from https://www.unesco.org

UNESCO. (2021). *Global education monitoring report 2021/2: Gender equality in education*. Retrieved from https://www.unesco.org

Vicary, Kapadia, Bee, Bennion, and Brooks (2024)

Wang, J., Zhang, Y., & Zimmerman, M. A. (2021). Empirical evidence on the relationship between social support and mental health among college students: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Adolescence, 94*, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2021.06.001

World Health Organization (WHO). (2022). *Promoting mental health: Concepts, emerging evidence, and practice*. Retrieved from https://www.who.int

Yalcin-Siedentopf, N., Pichler, T., Welte, A. S., Hoertnagl, C. M., Klasen, C. C., Kemmler, G., ... & Hofer, A. (2021). Sex matters: stress perception and the relevance of resilience and perceived social support in emerging adults. *Archives of Women's Mental Health*, *24*, 403-411.

Zimet, G. D., Dahlem, N. W., Zimet, S. G., & Farley, G. K. (1988). The multidimensional scale of perceived

social support. *Journal of personality assessment*, *52*(1), 30-41.