PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT AS DETERMINANT OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The goal for every academic institution is the provision of quality education. Most university students are in a state of transition from adolescence to adulthood. During this period, they grapple with issues of identity and less adult supervision. This study examined psychosocial support as a determinant of academic achievement among students in Kenyan universities. The study utilized *Psychosocial Theory of Development* by Erik Erikson. The research was designed as a Cross-Sectional Analytical research. The population targeted was 2nd and 3rd-year students in 4 purposively selected universities in Kenya. A total of 340 students, 80 peer counselors, 4 deans of students and 4 student counselors participated in the study. Data collection tools included a Students' Questionnaire, Interview Schedules for both the Deans of Students and the Student Counselors as well as a Focus Group Discussion guide for peer counselors. Data was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (version 20)for inferential and descriptive statistics. Inferential statistics were conducted using Path Analysis while qualitative data was thematically analyzed. Research findings indicated that students relied more on family members, friends, and peer counselors for psychosocial support. The Path Analysis Model revealed that psychosocial support directly impacted GPA scores. Therefore, psychosocial support was established to be a determinant of academic achievement among university students in Kenya. Policymakers can use these findings to improve psychosocial support services awareness to enhance academic achievement among University Students.

Keywords: Academic achievement, psychosocial support, Psychosocial Theory of Development, peer counselling

1. Introduction

Yikealo and Tareke (2018) acknowledged that students experience heightened anxiety when they move away from friends and family members to unfamiliar surroundings in their quest for university education. They are more anxious as a result of geographical changes, academic rigors, exposure to unfamiliar surroundings, and the necessity to develop new interpersonal ties.The complex and numerous institutional and academic challenges, vocational decision-making as well as teaching and evaluation systems that students encounter in the university make psychosocial support very fundamental (Valdebenito, 2017).

Psychosocial support assists university students to overcome stressful life events to enable them meet the university set standards for successful completion of their degree course within the stipulated time. Lack of adequate psychosocial support may aggravate mental health-related problems. Academic performance of university students improves when psychosocial support improves their mental health and mitigates stressful life situations (Alsubaie, Stain, Webster, & Wadman, 2019).

Counseling is considered as a critical service for students enrolled in Kenyan universities. The Commission for University Education (2015) included counseling services as a mandatory requirement for university accreditation in Kenya. Counseling services in the universities are essential for the psychological and emotional well-being of students.

In Kenya, Gathoni Nyutu (2020) examined the effectiveness of counseling services on university students' academic performance and retention rates. The study was phenomenological and utilized a quasi-experimental approach. The sample comprised 104 students and six counselors. Questionnaires, observation, and Focus Group Discussions were used to collect data from participants. The study findings established that the performance of the students who were counselled was better than the non-counselled. Counseling contributed to the improvement of students' problem-solving and study skills, enabling them to improve their academic achievement. Another study by Thuryrajah, Ahmed, and Jeyakumar (2017) which sampled students from four Malaysian universities found that counseling interventions resulted in tangible improvement in students' academic performance.

Most research studies that have been conducted in Kenya mainly focus on academic achievement among secondary school students. They include: Family background and economic status of parents as predictors of academic achievement among form three students in Kericho counties

(Sang, 2018),academic motivation and self-regulated learning as predictors of academic achievement in public secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya (Mutweleli, 2014).

There is scanty empirical evidence of studies done on determinants of academic achievement among university students in Kenya. Specifically, none has looked at psychosocial support as a determinant of academic achievement among students in Kenyan universities. Thus, the current research sought to establish whether psychosocial support was a determinant of academic achievement among Kenyan university students.

2. Study Objective

The objective of this study was to evaluate whether Psychosocial Support is a determinant of Academic Achievement for University Students in Kenya.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Participants

This study was conducted in Meru, Nyeri, and Kajiado counties, and employed a cross-sectional analytical research design. The study focused on 340 students,80 peer counselors, 4 deans of students and 4 student counselors. The population targeted was 2nd and 3rd-year students in 4 purposively selected universities.

3.2 Tools and Analysis Method

A students' questionnaire, interview schedules for Deans of students and Student counselors and a Focus Group Discussion guide for peer counselors were used to collect data.A pilot study was conducted to ascertain the validity as well as the reliability of the instruments for collecting data. The internal consistency of the study's nine psychosocial support items was good, as indicated by the Cronbach's coefficient alpha of .75. Data was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 to obtain inferential and descriptive statistics. Percentages, frequency tables, mean, maximum and minimum scores, skewness and kurtosis were used to summarize the descriptive statistics whereas inferential statistics were computed using path analysis. Qualitative data was thematic and aligned with the research's objectives. Confidentiality regarding the data provided and protection of the respondent's rights were guaranteed by ensuring anonymity of respondents and their universities. The objective of the study was concisely explained in order to gather accurate and relevant data. The information gathered through the use of various research instruments was used solely to address the study's objectives and accomplish its purpose.

4. Results and Discussion

An overall of 340 questionnaires were distributed to the designated participants, out of which 277 questionnaires were successfully completed; translating to 81.5% response rate. Descriptive and inferential statistics utilized for analyses are outlined in this section.

4.1 Descriptive Analysis of Study Variables

Psychosocial support was examined using nine parameters. The study one summated scale in looking at "psychosocial support". Cronbach's coefficient Alpha for the seven items on psychosocial support was .75; hence the internal consistence of items related to psychosocial support was good. A total of nine statements were posed to the respondents, where they were required to indicate their opinions, on a scale ranging from "very often" (indicating strong agreement with a particular statement) to "never"(indicating strong disagreement with a statement). The Frequency "F" of each response is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

University Students' Use of Psychosocial Support Services

Psychosocial Support Item	Very Often F	%	Often F	%	Sometimes F	%	Rarely F	%	Never F	%
I seek psychological support from relevant university medical staff when I encounter challenges.	40	14.4	53	19.1	74	26.7	58	20.9	52	18.8
Friends and colleagues have been instrumental in offering psychosocial support to me.	53	19.1	99	35.7	92	33.2	21	7.6	12	4.3
Peer counsellors have been instrumental in offering psychosocial support to me.	28	10.1	64	23.1	107	38.6	33	11.9	45	16.2
Academic advisors have offered vital psychosocial support to	33	11.9	74	26.7	77	27.8	49	17.7	44	15.9

me.

Family members have been instrumental in offering psychosocial support to me.	85	30.7	71	25.6	77	27.8	26	9.4	18	6.5
I think of joining a gang in order to get psychosocial support whenever I have mental issues.	12	4.3	12	4.3	46	16.6	48	17.3	159	57.4
My involvement in clubs and societies offer social networks which I have used to get assistance when faced with various challenges.	56	20.2	43	15.5	86	31.0	49	17.7	43	15.5
Good interpersonal relationship with opposite gender has been a source of psychosocial support during tough times.	51	18.4	70	25.3	101	36.5	42	15.2	13	4.7
Community members have been a source of psychosocial support for me.	18	6.5	46	16.6	73	26.4	82	29.6	58	20.9

Source: Field data collected and processed Anne Ntoiti

The key Research Question posed to respondents was them to indicate how often they utilized various psychosocial support services. Results in Table 1 indicated that nearly two thirds of the respondents to some extent sought psychosocial support from medical practitioners at the university. The respondents who rarely or did not seek psychosocial support from university medical staff were 110 (39.7%). These findings are an indication that more needs to be done. For

instance, the medical personnel could aggressively market themselves as psychosocial support providers to remove the notion that they only treat pathological diseases.

Further, the findings indicated that respondents highly relied on friends and colleagues for psychosocial support. This is evident from the responses that indicated that 53 (19.1%) of the respondents very often, 99 (35.7%) of them often and 92 (33.2%) of the respondents sometimes felt that they could turn to friends and colleagues for psychosocial support when faced with stressful life events. This could be attributed to the fact that they are peers. There is no age gap; hence, they can relate and empathize with them easily since they could be experiencing the same challenges or might have already experienced and surmounted the problems or challenges. Thus, 88.1% of the respondents to some extent chose friends and colleagues as the most preferred source of psychosocial support.

Cumulatively, 71.9% of respondents sought psychosocial support from peer counselors, demonstrating the critical role of peer counseling in the lives of students. Peer counselors receive training which equips with the knowledge and necessary skills; thus they can provide effective service to students. They are required to maintain confidentiality for their clients (students) to have confidence in them and thus, share their concerns freely.

Moreover, the study revealed that academic advisors play a critical role as they act as the source of psychosocial support for university students. They are vital in guiding and advising students on academic matters. The study's findings indicated that 33 (11.9 %) of respondents *very often* sought psychosocial support from academic advisors, 74 (26.7%) frequently sought psychosocial support from academic advisors, and 77 (27.8 %) occasionally sought psychosocial support from academic advisors(s). This finding indicated that 66.4% of the respondents sought psychosocial support from academic advisors. Evidently, academic advisors play a critical role as they help students to develop educational plans that are in line with their life goals. At the university, academic advisors furnish students with information about requirements for various degree programs and carefully review the students' academic progress as well as assist them when they are faced with challenges. Guidance and Counseling focuses more on social, emotion and psychological issues of students as compared to their academic achievement.

The family members were the second most utilized source of psychosocial support for majority of the participants. The results indicated that 85 (30.7%) of the participants *very often*, 71 (25.6%) of them *often* and 77 (27.8%) of the respondents *sometimes* felt that they could turn to family for psychosocial support when faced with stressful life events. This is an indication that 84.1% of the respondents relied on family members for their psychosocial support. Stice, Ragan & Randall (2004) state that family support is the most important element in an adolescent's life. Therefore, university students being adolescents require family support as they navigate through

transitions associated with developmental changes and university life. Inadequate support from parents can easily lead to stress, depression, anxiety, and even maladaptive behaviour.

The study findings also indicated that 25.2 % of the respondents thought of joining a gang to get psychosocial support whenever they faced challenges and stressful life situations in their lives. This implies that, a quarter of the respondents considered joining a gang to get psychosocial support whenever they faced challenges and stressful life situations in their lives.

The results also revealed that 56 (20.2%) of the participants *very often*, 43 (15.5%) of them *often* and 86 (31.1%) of the respondents sometimes felt that their involvement in clubs and societies offered social networks which they used to get assistance when faced with various challenges. This implies that two thirds of the respondents felt that social networks offered through involvement in clubs and societies were essential for psychosocial support. Societies in the university comprise all religious movements such as Christian union, Catholic action, Seventh-day Adventists, and Muslim League. Active participation in these movements offers students an opportunity to connect with other members.

Additionally, the results indicated that 51 (18.4 %) of respondents *very often*, 70 (25.2 %) respondents *frequently*, and 101 (36.5 %) of respondents occasionally felt that positive interpersonal relationships with the opposite gender provided psychosocial support during difficult times. This is an indication that approximately four fifths of the respondents to some extent relied on a good interpersonal relationship with the opposite gender for psychosocial support.

The results also showed that 18 (6.5%) of the respondents very often, 46 (16.6%) of them often and 73 (26.4%) of the respondents sometimes felt that community members had been a source of psychosocial support for them. This implied that 49.5 % of the respondents to some extent relied on community members for psychosocial support. The fact that very few respondents sought to confide with community members could be an indication of the deteriorating social ties within the community with a shift towards closer immediate family members.

It is apparent from the results that they mostly sought psychosocial support from friends and colleagues (88.1%), family members (84.1%), and peer counselors (71.9%). Only 25.2 % of the respondents thought of joining a gang for psychosocial support. This was the least form of psychosocial support sought by students because of the penalty meted out to members of a gang.

4.2 Academic Achievement

Xiao, et al., (2009) acknowledge that one of the important aspects of life for university students is achievement in academics. It is a core criterion for determining the success of university

students (Lepp et al., 2014).The GPA is a measure of an acceptable average academic performance across the courses being offered in a given semester (McKenzie et al., 2004). The overall performance of a student on various assessment procedures is taken as the GPA.

As shown in Table 2, the GPA for the second-year participants for the past two consecutive semesters ranged from 1.7 to 4.0 with a mean of 2.897 (SD = .5768). In terms of skewness and kurtosis, the data exhibits a minor departure from perfect symmetry, but it does not deviate significantly from a normal distribution. The Z-values kurtosis and skewness are -1.404 and -1.778 respectively, falling within the range of -1.96 to 1.96. These Z-scores are obtained by dividing the kurtosis and skewness statistics by their respective standard errors. Thus, the academic achievement data for second year participants can be regarded as approximately normally distributed in relation to skewness and kurtosis.

Table 2: GPA Statistics for Second Year Students

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Standard. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
							Std. Error		Std. Error
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Error	Statistic	Error
GPA	137	1.7	4.0	2.897	.5768	-.368	.207	-.577	.411

N- Sample Size   Min- Minimum   Max- Maximum   Std- Standard

Source: Field data collected and processed Anne Ntoiti

4.3 Hypothesis Testing

Path analysis was utilized to examine whether psychological support was a significant determinant of academic achievement among university students in Kenya. The findings are displayed in Table 3, 4, and 5; as well as Figure 1 and 2.

As showcased in Table 3, the multiple R for the relationship between the set of independent variables and the dependent variable is .447which implies a moderate positive correlation. Adjusted R^2 tells us the proportion of the variation in the dependent variable that is explained by the three predictors. This implies that 19.1% of the variation in academic achievement (GPA score) can be explained by the three parameters namely; mental health, psychosocial support, and stress coping strategy.

Table 3: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.447	0.199	0.191	0.5429

a. Predictors: (Constant), Mental health, Psychosocial support, Stress coping strategy

b. Dependent Variable: Academic Achievement

Source: Field data collected and processed Anne Ntoiti

As shown in Table 4, the probability of the F statistic (22.669) for the overall regression relationship is <.001, less than the level of significant of .05. The null hypothesis that there is no relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable ($R^2 = 0$) was thus rejected. The research hypothesis that there is a statistically significant relationship between the set of independent variables and the dependent variable was subsequently supported.

Table 4: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	20.041	3	6.680	22.669	0.000
	Residual	80.452	273	0.295		
	Total	100.493	276			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Mental health, Psychosocial support , Stress coping strategy

b. Dependent Variable: GPA Score (Academic achievement)

Source: Field data collected and processed Anne Ntoiti

Table 5 indicated that both psychosocial support and mental health significantly affected the dependent variable (GPA score – academic achievement). Therefore, a unit change in psychosocial support leads to a -0.019 change in GPA score and a unit change in mental health to a -0.012 change in GPA score as shown by coefficients in Table 5. Stress coping strategy has no direct effect on GPA score, but has an indirect effect on GPA score through mental health.

Table 5: Summary of Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.689	0.299		12.338	0.000
	Psychosocial support	-0.019	0.006	-0.176	-3.181	0.002
	Stress coping strategy	0.006	0.007	0.051	0.868	0.386
	Mental health	-0.012	0.002	-0.428	-7.459	0.000

a.   Predictor: Mental health, Psychosocial support, Stress coping strategy

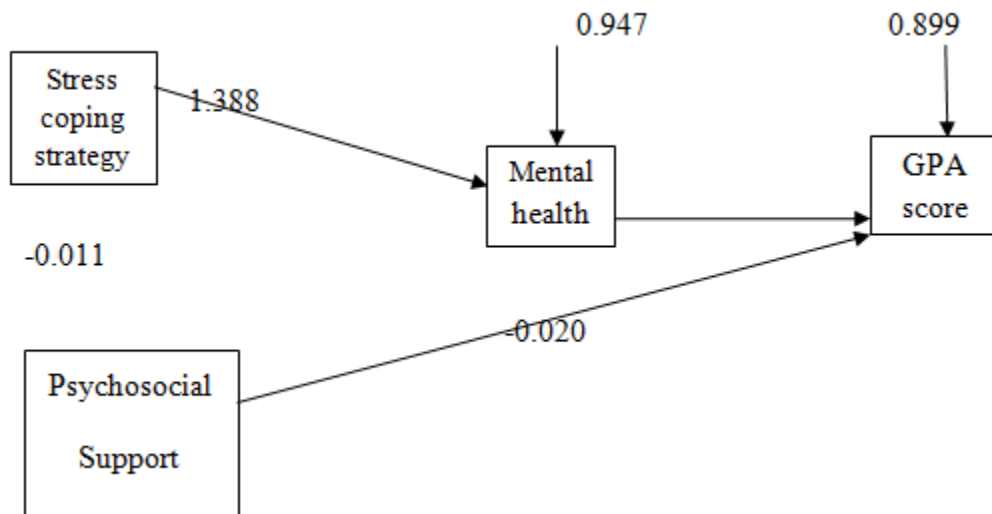b.   Dependent Variable: GPA Score (Academic achievement)

Source: Field data collected and processed Anne Ntoiti

Figure 1: Determinants of Academic Achievement: The Full Path Model
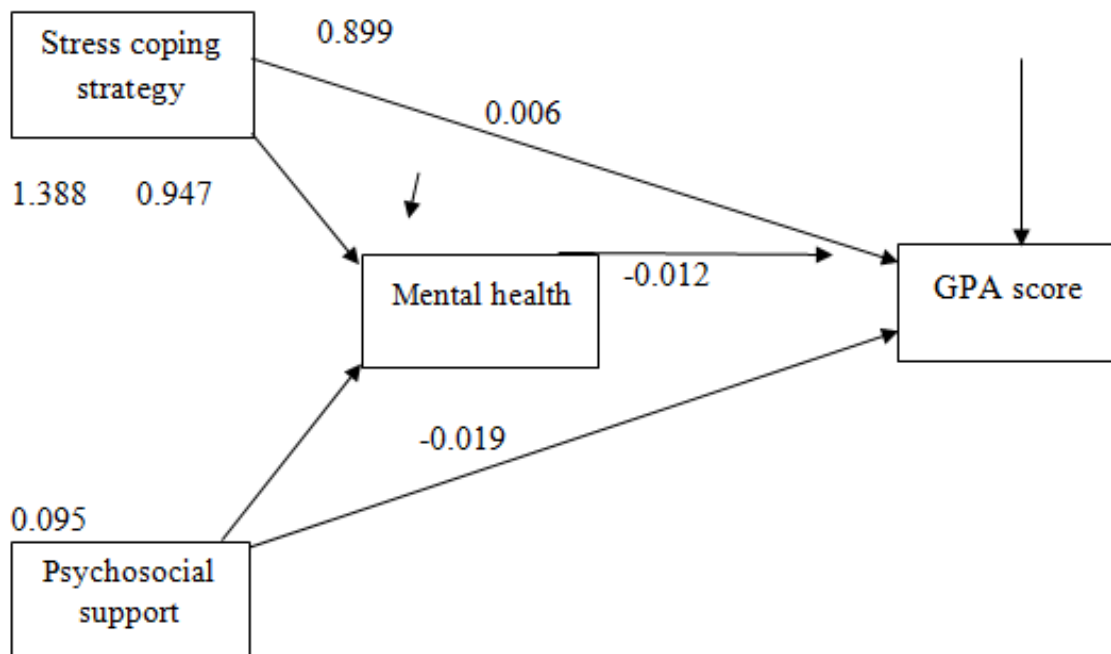
Source: Field data collected and processed Anne Ntoiti

Figure 2: Determinants of Academic Achievement: The Reduced Path Model

Source: Field data collected and processed Anne Ntoiti

The results from the reduced path model indicated that psychosocial support has a direct effect on academic achievement. Thus, it was concluded that psychosocial support is a significant determinant of academic achievement among university students.

4.3 Discussions of Qualitative Data

In an interview, the student counselors and dean of students were requested to state some of the psychosocial interventions that have been put in place to address stress among the university students. The respondents indicated that their respective universities have various programs such as recreational activities, sporting activities, peer counseling programs, an enhanced health care system, and an office of student counselors which offers psychosocial support for individual students who voluntarily seek counseling or referral cases emanating from staff or parents. They indicated that these programs enable students to release stress or share their fears and also help in preventing some of the stress emanating from over thinking.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Evidence deduced from the findings of the current study affirmed that psychosocial support is a determinant of academic achievement. Academic achievement is a great concern for students, parents, guardians and other stakeholders. It is imperative that universities put in place psychosocial support that effectively and efficiently addresses students' Psychosocial Support needs to ensure enhancement of their academic achievement. Every student, parent, or guardian

awaits with great expectation for Graduation Day since it marks the successful completion of a certain level of university education.

5.1 Recommendations to policymakers

The following recommendations are based on the study findings:

1) Psychosocial support should be enhanced by increasing the number of counselors who offer counseling services.

2) The study found that most universities had an in ordinately low student-counselor to student population ratio. There is need to train more peer counselors to beef up counseling services within the university.

5.2 Recommendations for further research

Psychosocial support as a determinant of academic achievement among students in selected universities in Kenya was studied using a cross-sectional analytical research design. The study made the following considerations for further research:

i. Psychosocial support as a determinant of academic achievement among university students be replicated using a longitudinal research design so that respondents are studied for a longer time.

ii. A study on the role of counselors and chaplains in mitigating the effects of stress and mental health problems occasioned by the COVID-19 Pandemic among university students.

iii. The same study is replicated in Middle-level colleges.

iv. Psychosocial support and mental health as predictors of academic engagement among university students.

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