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Social Support and Mental Wellbeing of Secondary School Students in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study investigated the relationship between social support and mental well-being of secondary school students in the Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Three research questions and three corresponding null hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted a correlational research design. The population comprised 6,303 senior secondary school II students in public secondary schools in the study area. A sample of 567 students was selected using a multi-stage sampling procedure. Data was collected using a researcher-developed instrument titled "Social Support and Mental Well-Being Questionnaire". The instrument was validated by experts, and a reliability coefficient of 0.77 was obtained using the Cronbach Alpha's method. Data collected were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The findings

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revealed that informational support ($r = 0.71, p < 0.05$) and emotional support ($r = 0.78, p < 0.05$) had strong positive and significant relationships with students' mental well-being, while appraisal support ($r = 0.54, p < 0.05$) had a moderate positive and significant relationship with mental well-being. Based on the findings, it was concluded that social support plays a significant role in enhancing students' mental well-being. It was recommended among others, that schools, counselors, and parents should provide adequate informational, appraisal, and emotional support to students to promote their mental health and overall well-being.

Keywords: social support, informational, appraisal, emotional, mental wellbeing, students

Introduction

Secondary school students operate in a dynamic academic environment that requires continuous interaction with peers, teachers, counselors, and school administrators. These interactions often demand emotional stability, effective communication, and adequate support systems to ensure students' mental well-being. Mental well-being, therefore, remains a crucial factor in determining students' academic success, social functioning, and overall development. According to Ukaegbu and Ekpenyong (2025), mental well-being refers to a state in which individuals are able to cope with normal life stresses, realize their abilities, and function effectively in their environment. Mental wellbeing involves emotional balance, positive self-concept, and the ability to maintain healthy relationships. Similarly, Desmond (2019) noted that mental well-being encompasses emotional, psychological, and social stability that enables students to function optimally in school. Poor mental well-being among students may result in anxiety, depression, low academic performance, and poor interpersonal relationships. Students experiencing poor mental well-being often struggle with persistent worry, fear, and emotional instability, which may interfere with their concentration and ability to participate actively in classroom activities. Such students may also exhibit signs of

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sadness, withdrawal, and loss of interest in academic tasks, leading to reduced motivation and declining academic achievement. In addition, poor mental well-being can affect students' ability to relate effectively with peers, teachers, and family members, resulting in conflicts, social isolation, and difficulty in forming meaningful relationships.

One major factor that may influence students' mental well-being is social support. Social support refers to the assistance, care, and encouragement individuals receive from significant others such as parents, peers, teachers, and the wider community. It serves as a protective factor against stress and emotional difficulties. According to Assim-Ittah and Ukaegbu (2026), social support is a network of relationships that provides individuals with psychological and material resources needed to cope with challenges. Social support enhances individuals' ability to manage stress and maintain emotional stability. Social support includes various dimensions such as informational support, appraisal support, emotional support, and instrumental support. However, in this study, only three dimensions of social support, namely informational support, appraisal support, and emotional support, are investigated.

Informational support refers to the provision of useful advice, guidance, and information that helps students understand situations and make appropriate decisions. It enables students to access relevant knowledge about academic tasks, personal issues, and coping strategies. Through informational support, students are better equipped to handle academic and social challenges, which help may improve their mental well-being. Appraisal support involves the provision of constructive feedback, affirmation, and evaluation that helps students assess themselves and their situations. It allows students to gain insight into their abilities and behaviors, thereby enhancing their confidence and self-worth. Appraisal support can help students to develop a positive self-image and make necessary adjustments to improve their functioning (Williams & Anderson, 2020).

Emotional support, on the other hand, refers to expressions of care, love, empathy, and concern from significant others. It provides students with a sense of belonging, security, and acceptance. Emotional support helps students to cope with stress, reduce feelings of loneliness, and maintain emotional stability, which can

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contribute significantly to their mental well-being. Emotional support also fosters a sense of belonging and acceptance, enabling students to feel valued and confident in their social and academic environments, as stated by Ukaegbu and Obikoya (2017).

From the foregoing, there is a need to focus on the mental wellbeing of secondary school students because it is essential for their academic success, emotional stability, and effective functioning within the school environment. Students who receive adequate social support are more likely to experience positive mental health outcomes, while those lacking such support may be vulnerable to emotional distress and maladjustment. It is against this background that this study investigated the relationship between social support and mental well-being of secondary school students in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The increasing awareness of the importance of students' mental well-being notwithstanding, poor mental well-being has remained a visibly pronounced challenge among secondary school students. The researcher's personal observation revealed frequent incidents of anxiety, emotional instability, low self-esteem, depression, and inability to cope effectively with academic and social pressures among students. These conditions not only affect students' academic performance but also hinder their emotional balance, interpersonal relationships, and overall development. Many students appear isolated, lack confidence in expressing themselves, and struggle to manage stress, suggesting possible deficiencies in the level of social support available to them. While schools attempt to promote students' well-being through guidance and counseling services, such efforts often do not adequately address the role of support systems such as family, peers, and teachers in enhancing students' mental health.

Despite various interventions and counseling programs introduced in schools, many students in secondary schools in the Uyo Local Government Area have continued to struggle with maintaining positive mental well-being and adapting to academic and social demands. This persistent challenge highlights a

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critical gap in understanding the role of social support in shaping students' mental well-being. Without adequate support from parents, peers, and teachers, students may remain vulnerable to emotional distress and maladjustment. However, there is limited empirical evidence on how social support influences the mental well-being of secondary school students in this context. Without a thorough investigation into this relationship, efforts to improve students' mental health and overall functioning may remain inadequate and ineffective. Thus, the problem of this study was to determine the relationship between social support and the mental well-being of secondary school students in the Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between social support and mental well-being of secondary school students in the Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The study specifically aimed to explore the relationships between the following factors:

- i. Informational support and mental well-being of secondary school students.
- ii. Appraisal support and mental well-being of secondary school students.
- iii. Emotional support and mental well-being of secondary school students.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study would be beneficial to students, school counselors, teachers, parents, educational planners, and future researchers. To students, the study would help them understand the importance of social support in enhancing their mental well-being. It would also enable them to appreciate the role of seeking information, accepting feedback, and building supportive relationships in coping with academic and social challenges.

More so, school counselors would benefit from the findings as they will provide them with empirical evidence on how informational, appraisal, and

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emotional support influence students' mental well-being. This will guide them in designing appropriate counseling programs and interventions aimed at improving students' mental health. Teachers would find the study useful, as it will highlight the importance of providing constructive feedback, guidance, and emotional care to students. This will encourage teachers to adopt supportive teaching practices that promote students' psychological well-being. In addition, parents would also benefit from the study, as it will sensitize them to the need to provide adequate emotional, informational, and evaluative support to their children. This will help in fostering a positive home environment that enhances students' mental health.

Educational planners would find the study valuable as it will provide data that can inform policies and programs aimed at promoting students' well-being in schools. It will also emphasize the need for strengthening guidance and counseling services in schools. Finally, the study would serve as reference material for future researchers who may wish to carry out further studies on social support and mental wellbeing or related variables.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- i. What is the relationship between informational support and the mental well-being of secondary school students?
- ii. What is the relationship between appraisal support and the mental well-being of secondary school students?
- iii. What is the relationship between emotional support and the mental well-being of secondary school students?

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Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses guided the study:

- i. There is no significant relationship between informational support and the mental well-being of secondary school students.
- ii. There is no significant relationship between appraisal support and the mental well-being of secondary school students.
- iii. There is no significant relationship between emotional support and the mental well-being of secondary school students.

Scope of the Study

This study focused on the relationship between social support and mental well-being of secondary school students in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The study specifically investigated three dimensions of social support, namely informational support, appraisal support, and emotional support, as independent variables, while mental well-being served as the dependent variable. The study was delimited to senior secondary school II students in public secondary schools in Uyo Local Government Area. The choice of SS II students was based on their level of maturity and ability to provide reliable responses.

Theoretical Framework

Social Support Theory by Cobb (1976)

The Social Support Theory was propounded by Sidney Cobb in 1976. The theory emphasizes the importance of social relationships in promoting individuals' psychological well-being. According to Cobb, social support refers to the care, information, and reassurance individuals receive from others, which makes them feel valued and part of a social network. The theory identifies different forms of support, including informational, appraisal, and emotional support, which help individuals cope with stress and life challenges. The theory further posits that social support acts as a buffer against stress by reducing its negative effects on mental

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health. Individuals who receive adequate support from family, peers, and teachers are more likely to experience emotional stability and better adjustment, while lack of support may lead to anxiety, loneliness, and poor well-being. The relevance of this theory to the present study lies in its explanation of how informational, appraisal, and emotional support contribute to students' mental well-being. Students who receive adequate support are more likely to cope effectively with academic and social challenges, thereby enhancing their overall mental health.

Mental Wellbeing Theory by Ryff (1989)

The mental wellbeing theory was developed by Carol Ryff in 1989. The theory views mental well-being as a multidimensional concept involving positive functioning and personal development. According to Ryff, mental well-being includes dimensions such as self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, autonomy, and positive relationships. The theory emphasizes that individuals achieve mental well-being when they are able to function effectively, maintain meaningful relationships, and cope with life demands. It also highlights that both personal abilities and external factors such as social support influence an individual's mental state. The relevance of this theory to the study lies in its emphasis on the role of social relationships in promoting mental well-being. Informational, appraisal, and emotional support help students develop confidence, manage challenges, and build positive relationships, thereby enhancing their psychological well-being.

Related Empirical Literature

A study that investigated the influence of informational support on the mental well-being of secondary school students in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, was conducted by Nwankwo (2021). The study adopted a correlational research design. The population comprised 8,450 students, from which a sample of 600 was selected using stratified random sampling. Data were collected using the Informational Support and Mental Wellbeing Scale, which had a reliability coefficient of 0.84. Data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The findings revealed that informational support significantly enhances students' mental well-

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being. It was recommended that schools should provide adequate information to support students' mental health. Similarly, Smith (2020) examined informational support and mental well-being among secondary school students in Canada. The study adopted a survey design with a sample of 300 students. Data were analyzed using regression analysis. The findings indicated that informational support does not significantly predict mental well-being when considered alone. It was recommended that multiple support systems should be considered.

A study that investigated the influence of appraisal support on the mental well-being of secondary school students in Calabar, Nigeria, was conducted by Effiong (2022). The study adopted a correlational research design with a sample of 500 students selected through multistage sampling. Data were collected using the Appraisal Support and Mental Wellbeing Questionnaire with a reliability coefficient of 0.81 and analyzed using Pearson correlation. The findings revealed that appraisal support significantly improves students' mental well-being. It was recommended that teachers should provide constructive feedback to students. In a related study, Johnson (2021) examined appraisal support and mental well-being among adolescents in the United States using a survey design with a sample of 220 students. Data were analyzed using regression analysis. The findings showed that appraisal support does not significantly predict mental well-being when other variables are considered. It was recommended that broader factors should be examined.

A study that investigated the influence of emotional support on the mental well-being of secondary school students in Enugu State, Nigeria, was conducted by Okafor (2020). The study adopted a correlational research design with a sample of 720 students selected through stratified sampling. Data were collected using the Emotional Support and Mental Wellbeing Scale with a reliability coefficient of 0.86 and analyzed using Pearson correlation. The findings revealed that emotional support significantly enhances students' mental well-being. It was recommended that parents and teachers should provide emotional care for students. In a similar study, Brown and Clark (2022) examined emotional support and mental well-being among secondary school students in Australia using a survey design with a sample of 350 students. Data were analyzed using multiple regression. The findings

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revealed that emotional support does not significantly predict mental well-being when used alone. It was recommended that different types of support should be combined.

The need for this study is justified by gaps in existing literature. Most previous studies were conducted outside Uyo Local Government Area and may not reflect the local context. In addition, findings are inconsistent, and many studies explored social support generally rather than its specific dimensions. Therefore, there is a need for a context-specific study to investigate informational, appraisal, and emotional support in relation to students' mental well-being.

Methodology

The study adopted a correlational research design to determine the relationship between social support and mental well-being of secondary school students in the Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to determine the extent of relationship among the variables without manipulating them. The population of the study comprised 6,546 senior secondary school two students in 15 public secondary schools in the area. A sample of 567 SS II students was selected using a multi-stage sampling procedure. At the first stage, public secondary schools in the area were stratified. At the second stage, nine schools were selected using a simple random sampling technique. At the final stage, 63 students were randomly selected from each school, giving a total of 567 respondents.

Data were collected using a researcher-developed instrument titled "Social Support and Mental Wellbeing Questionnaire." The instrument consisted of two sections. Section A measured social support with 18 items covering informational support, appraisal support, and emotional support, while Section B measured mental well-being with 15 items. The items were structured on a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). The instrument was face-validated by three experts in the Faculty of Education, University of Uyo, who examined it for clarity, relevance, and suitability. Their suggestions were incorporated into the final version.

To establish reliability, a trial test was conducted using 30 SS II students outside the study sample, and the data obtained were analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding coefficients above 0.60, indicating that the instrument was reliable. The researcher, assisted by two research assistants, administered the questionnaire to the respondents after obtaining permission from relevant school authorities. The copies of the questionnaire were distributed and collected immediately to ensure a high return rate. Data collected were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient of the relationship between informational support and mental wellbeing of students in Uyo LGA (n = 567)

Variables	n	r	p-value	Remark
Informational support relationship;				Strong positive
	567	0.71	.000	Significant.
Mental wellbeing				

Table 1 shows that there is a strong positive relationship between informational support and the mental well-being of students ($r = 0.71$). This indicates that higher informational support is associated with better mental well-being. Since the p-value (.000) is less than 0.05, the relationship is statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient of the relationship between appraisal support and mental well-being of students in Uyo LGA (n = 567)

Variables	n	r	p-value	Remark
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Appraisal support relationship;				Moderate positive
	567	0.54	.004	Significant.
Mental wellbeing				

Table 2 shows that there is a moderate positive relationship between appraisal support and mental well-being of students ($r = 0.54$). This indicates that increased appraisal support is associated with improved mental well-being. Since the p-value (.004) is less than 0.05, the relationship is statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient of the relationship between emotional support and mental well-being of students in Uyo LGA (n = 567)

Variables	n	r	p-value	Remark
Emotional support relationship;				Strong positive
	567	0.78	.000	Significant.
Mental wellbeing				

Table 3 shows that there is a strong positive relationship between emotional support and the mental well-being of students ($r = 0.78$). This indicates that higher emotional support is associated with better mental well-being. Since the p-value (.000) is less than 0.05, the relationship is statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The finding of the study revealed that informational support has a strong positive and significant relationship with students' mental well-being. The reason for this finding may be that students in Uyo Local Government Area rely heavily on timely

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and relevant information to navigate academic and social challenges, thereby making informational support more impactful on their mental well-being. This finding is in agreement with the earlier study by Nwankwo (2021), who found that informational support significantly enhances students' mental well-being by helping them understand and manage academic and personal challenges. However, the finding disagrees with Smith (2020), who reported that informational support does not significantly predict mental well-being when considered in isolation.

The finding also indicated that appraisal support has a moderate positive and significant relationship with students' mental well-being. The reason for this finding may be that constructive feedback from teachers and significant others helps students develop confidence and a positive self-image, which contributes to improved mental well-being.

This result supports the study by Effiong (2022), who found that appraisal support significantly improves students' self-esteem and mental well-being through constructive feedback and affirmation. On the contrary, the finding disagrees with Johnson (2021), who reported that appraisal support does not significantly predict mental well-being when other variables are considered.

Furthermore, the study revealed that emotional support has a strong positive and significant relationship with students' mental well-being. The reason for this finding may be that emotional care, empathy, and a sense of belonging play a critical role in helping students cope with stress and maintain psychological stability within the study area. This finding is consistent with the study by Okafor (2020), which established that emotional support significantly enhances students' mental well-being by reducing stress and promoting emotional stability. However, the finding contradicts Brown and Clark (2022), who found that emotional support alone does not significantly predict mental well-being without the presence of other forms of support.

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Conclusion

The study concluded that students who receive adequate guidance, constructive feedback, and emotional care are more likely to experience improved mental health, emotional stability, and better adjustment to academic and social demands.

Implications for Counseling

The findings of this study have important implications for counseling practice in secondary schools. School counselors should recognize the critical role of social support systems in enhancing students' mental well-being. Counselors need to incorporate strategies that strengthen informational, appraisal, and emotional support within the school environment. They should provide students with relevant academic and personal information, offer constructive feedback to boost self-esteem, and create a supportive atmosphere where students feel valued and understood. Additionally, counselors should collaborate with teachers and parents to ensure that students receive consistent support both at school and at home. This will help students develop resilience, cope with stress effectively, and maintain positive mental health.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

- i. School counselors and teachers in the Uyo Local Government Area should provide regular and accurate informational support to students on academic, social, and personal issues to enhance their understanding and decision-making.
- ii. Teachers and parents in the Uyo Local Government Area should offer consistent appraisal support through constructive feedback, encouragement, and recognition of students' efforts to boost their self-confidence and mental well-being.
- iii. Secondary schools in the Uyo Local Government Area should create a supportive environment that promotes emotional support by encouraging

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positive teacher-student and peer relationships, as well as organize programs that foster care, empathy, and a sense of belonging among students.

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SOCIAL SUPPORT AND MENTAL WELLBEING QUESTIONNAIRE (SSMWQ)

Instruction: Choose your response from the number of alternatives by ticking appropriately in the box provided.

Keys: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD)

Section A: Social Support

S/N	Informational Support	SA	A	D	SD
1	My parents provide me with information that helps me make good decisions.				
2	I get guidance from teachers on how to handle academic challenges				
3	My friends share helpful information about schoolwork with me.				
4	I feel understood by my spouse during conversations.				
5	I am always informed about school rules by the principal.				
6	I receive useful advice from teachers on how to improve my studies.				
	Appraisal Support				
7	My teachers encourage me when I perform well				
8	I receive positive feedback from my parents.				
9	My friends recognize and appreciate my achievements.				
10	My teachers correct me in a way that helps me improve.				
11	My parents acknowledge my strengths.				
12	I feel confident when I am positively evaluated.				
	Emotional Support				
13	I can share my feelings with my friends.				

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14	I receive encouragement when I feel discouraged.				
15	I am comforted when I am upset.				
16	My parents listen to me when I have problems				
17	I have someone who supports me when I am stressed.				
18	My parents show empathy towards me.				

Section B: Mental Wellbeing

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD
1	I am satisfied with my life.				
2	I feel happy most of the time.				
3	I am able to balance my school and personal life.				
4	I maintain a positive attitude even during difficulties.				
5	I feel emotionally balanced most of the time.				
6	I am not easily overwhelmed by stress.				
7	I feel in control of my life.				
8	I am able to balance my school and personal life.				
9	I am able to manage my emotions.				
10	I feel hopeful about the future.				
11	I am able to handle challenges effectively.				
12	I am able to concentrate on my studies.				
13	I feel good about myself.				
14	I feel emotionally stable.				
15	I have a positive outlook on life.				