

Social support and mental health outcome of high school students

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ABSTRACT

This survey–correlational research was conducted to determine the social support and mental health outcome of high school students of Tuburan National High School for the school year 2024–2025. The participants of this study were the 241 taken from the total population of 605 high school students selected through stratified random sampling by lottery method using the Sloven formula. To measure the level of social support, a 25-item social support questionnaire adapted from Zinet, Dahlem, & Farley (1998) was used. To measure the mental outcome of students, a 15-item mental outcome questionnaire adapted from Hyland, Johnson, and Kerrigan (2012) was used. The two instruments were subjected to face and content validation by a panel of experts and were pilot-tested to 30 high school students who were not included as participants of the study for reliability measures. The independent variable in this study was the social support of high school students. The dependent variable was the mental health outcome of high school students. Frequency count, percentage, mean, and standard deviation as descriptive statistical tools were utilized for data analysis. Moreover, the Pearson r will be used as inferential statistical tools to determine the significance of differences and relationships. A two-tailed test will be used at 5% level of significance for all inferential analysis. Result of the study revealed that the social support and mental health outcome of high school students has significant strong positive relationship which having a good support system is paramount in fostering the positive mental health outcomes among high school students. The stronger the social support, the stronger the students' mental health outcomes are likely to be.

Keywords: social support, strengthens, mental-health.

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INTRODUCTION

The high school transition is a critical phase in the life of adolescents, characterized by increased autonomy, academic demands, and evolving social experiences. While this stage offers opportunities for growth, it is also marked by significant stressors that may affect students' mental health. Growing reports of heightened stress, anxiety, and depression among high school students have raised concerns among educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals. Research has consistently highlighted that high school students are highly vulnerable to stress due to academic pressures, economic difficulties, and social adjustments inherent to this developmental period.

Social support, obtained from family, peers, and the academic community, plays an essential role in shaping students' experiences and outcomes. Studies emphasize its beneficial effects on both well-being and academic achievement, underscoring its importance as a protective factor against stress (Brailovskaia et al., 2018; Maymon et al., 2019; Scanlon et al., 2020). Social support manifests in various forms: emotional support provides empathy and validation, instrumental support offers practical assistance, informational support supplies guidance and resources, and appraisal support contributes to self-worth and confidence. Over the last decade, research has further shown that social support must be understood not only at the interpersonal level but also within broader ecological systems, such as family, community, and institutional contexts, as emphasized in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. Complementing this perspective, Positive Youth Development (PYD) Theory (Lerner, 2018) highlights how supportive environments enable adolescents to develop resilience, competence, and engagement, ultimately fostering positive mental health outcomes.

Empirical findings strengthen the claim that social support is a key determinant of psychological well-being. Özer et al. (2021) found that higher family support significantly reduced stress, while Ekmen et al. (2021) demonstrated that support from family and significant others not only lowered stress but also enhanced life satisfaction. Similarly, McLean et al. (2023) confirmed that increased social support among high school students correlated with reduced stress levels. These findings suggest that social support influences mental health both directly, by alleviating stress, and indirectly, by shaping students' perceptions of stressful situations. The high school context itself provides unique opportunities and challenges, as the transition may disrupt existing support networks while simultaneously creating avenues for new relationships and institutional support through schools, guidance programs, and student organizations.

Given the heterogeneity of high school students' experiences, there is a pressing need for further research to clarify the mechanisms by which different forms and sources of social support affect mental health outcomes. A deeper understanding of how these factors interact with individual and contextual influences can guide the design of targeted interventions that foster resilience and promote psychological well-being. In this regard, the Stress and Coping Theory of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) offers a strong theoretical foundation, positing that social support functions as a buffer against stress. The theory emphasizes that stress is not solely determined by external events but is significantly influenced by an individual's perception of available support. Thus, enhancing social support networks can reduce perceived stress and promote positive mental health outcomes among students.

With these considerations, the present study aims to examine the relationship between social support and the mental health outcomes of high school students. Grounded in established theoretical perspectives and empirical findings, this research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how supportive networks can serve as vital resources in fostering resilience and well-being during the challenging years of secondary education.

Statement of the problem

This study aimed to determine the social support and mental health outcome of high school students of Tuburan National High School for school year 2024-2025. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of social support of high school students?
2. What is the level of mental health outcome of high school students?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the levels of social support and mental health outcome of high school students?

METHODOLOGY

This study aimed to determine the social support and mental health outcomes of high school students of Tuburan National High School for the school year 2024–2025. To achieve this, a descriptive survey–correlational research design was employed. This approach was deemed appropriate because it allows the researcher to describe and assess the statistical relationship between two variables without manipulation of extraneous factors. According to Bhat (2020) and Canonizado (2020), descriptive–correlational research identifies connections between variables as they occur naturally. Yeshaswi (2024) further explained that correlational research reveals whether variables vary together, though it does not prove causation. Similarly, Bhandari (2021) noted that this design examines relationships without manipulation of variables, reflecting the direction and strength of such associations. The method is often supported by survey research, which systematically gathers information from a defined sample, enabling researchers to infer characteristics of larger populations. The International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences (2015) pointed out that surveys address challenges such as social desirability bias and nonresponsiveness while employing rigorous sampling and measurement techniques. McCombes (2019) also emphasized that survey research involves structured processes such as identifying respondents, designing instruments, administering them, and analyzing responses. In this study, the independent variable was the social support of high school students, while the dependent variable was their mental health outcome. Descriptive and inferential statistical tools were used, and all inferential tests were set at the 0.05 level of significance.

The population of the study consisted of 605 students enrolled at Tuburan National High School during the school year 2024–2025. Using the Slovin formula with proportional allocation, a total of 241 students were selected as participants through stratified random sampling. The procedure required writing the names of all students in each section on slips of paper, rolling them, and placing them in a box. From this pool, the required number of respondents was drawn randomly without looking, thereby ensuring fairness. The proportional allocation formula was

applied to determine the number of respondents from each grade level, which resulted in 73 students from Grade 7, 57 from Grade 8, 55 from Grade 9, and 56 from Grade 10. This distribution reflected the total population size and ensured that each grade level was adequately represented.

The data for the study were gathered using two adopted questionnaires. The first instrument was the Social Support of High School Students Questionnaire, a 25-item tool originally developed by Zimet, Dahlem, and Farley (1988). Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always). Weighted means were interpreted using the following ranges: 4.21–5.00 as Very High, 3.41–4.20 as High, 2.61–3.40 as Moderate, 1.81–2.60 as Low, and 1.00–1.80 as Very Low. The second instrument was the Mental Health Outcome Questionnaire, a 15-item tool adapted from Hyland, Johnson, and Kerrigan (2012). This questionnaire also employed the same five-point Likert scale and interpretation ranges. To ensure accuracy and dependability, both instruments underwent a rigorous process of validation and reliability testing. Content validation was conducted by Prof. Exequiel A. Calimutan and Dr. Webster J. Bedecir, who provided recommendations to improve clarity and comprehensiveness. After revisions, the questionnaires were pilot-tested on 30 students who were not part of the study's final participants. Following the standards of Fraenkel and Wallen as cited by Gonzaga (2013), a coefficient reliability of 0.70 or higher was accepted as evidence of high reliability, which confirmed the appropriateness of the instruments for this study.

Prior to data collection, the researcher sought formal permission from the Dean of the Graduate School of Filamer Christian University and from the principal of Tuburan National High School. Approval was also secured from the parents and guardians of the student participants through informed consent, while student assent was obtained to ensure that participation was voluntary. The researcher guaranteed confidentiality of the respondents' personal information in compliance with Republic Act 10173, otherwise known as the Data Privacy Act of 2012, which mandates the protection of personal data in both government and private institutions. The instruments were distributed personally to the respondents during face-to-face classes, with schedules arranged to minimize disruptions. Throughout the process, health and safety protocols were strictly observed. The completed questionnaires were retrieved, carefully tallied, and tabulated to prepare for analysis.

The gathered data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Frequency counts were employed to summarize the distribution of responses, while the mean determined the overall levels of social support and mental health outcomes. Standard deviation was computed to measure the homogeneity or heterogeneity of responses across participants. To examine relationships, Pearson r was applied to determine the significance and strength of the correlation between social support and mental health outcomes. All inferential analyses were tested at the 5% alpha level of significance, ensuring rigor and reliability in interpreting the findings of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social support of high school students

This study elucidated the outcomes of the investigation through both descriptive and inferential data analyses. The descriptive analysis focused on the level of social support and mental health outcomes of high school students, while the inferential analysis examined the statistical relationship between these two variables. The results revealed that the level of social support among high school students was described as high, with a mean score of 3.57 and a standard deviation of 0.36. This indicates that students generally perceive themselves as receiving substantial support from their immediate environment. Family support emerged as one of the most significant contributors to this finding. Strong family relationships provide students with feelings of safety, value, and assurance in managing both academic and social pressures. Parents who actively participate in their children's education, whether through helping with assignments, offering encouragement, or providing emotional reassurance, create a nurturing environment that fosters resilience. Students who receive such support are more likely to demonstrate positive coping skills, show higher levels of motivation, and maintain optimistic attitudes toward school and social interactions.

Peer support was also identified as instrumental in maintaining high levels of perceived social support. Friendships offer a strong sense of belonging and companionship, which enhance social adjustment, self-esteem, and academic performance. Through healthy peer relationships, students find safe spaces to share experiences, seek advice, and overcome challenges. Such support not only strengthens emotional well-being but also reinforces collaboration and teamwork, both of which are essential in academic and extracurricular activities. Students with strong peer support systems are more actively engaged in school life, which further improves their overall school experience. The school environment itself played a significant role in reinforcing social support. Teachers and school officials often serve as sources of emotional and academic assistance, and schools that provide counseling services, mentorship programs, and inclusive policies foster supportive atmospheres. Such institutions enhance students' sense of belonging and encourage them to seek help when needed. Similarly, involvement in community programs, clubs, and extracurricular activities adds another layer of support. Participation in these activities not only enables students to explore personal interests and learn new skills but also provides them with a stronger sense of purpose and belonging that extends beyond the school setting.

The findings of this study are consistent with Dela Cruz (2017), who emphasized the protective role of social support in buffering against stress. In the Philippine context, where collectivist values and close family ties are highly valued, supportive relationships are crucial for adolescent well-being. Emotional encouragement, open communication, and shared experiences foster trust and safety, which are vital for healthy development. This study affirms that social support is not only a protective factor against stress but also a foundation for academic, social, and psychological resilience among students. In terms of mental health outcomes, the study revealed that the students' overall mental health was at a moderate level, with a mean score of

3.35 and a standard deviation of 0.44. This suggests that while students are generally functioning, many are experiencing challenges that affect their well-being. Academic pressures, such as heavy coursework, examinations, and extracurricular commitments, were identified as leading causes of stress, contributing to moderate mental health outcomes. Although some students employ effective coping mechanisms, such as time management or seeking support from family and teachers, others struggle to balance their responsibilities, which affects their emotional health.

Mental health outcome of high school students

Social relationships also influence mental health outcomes. Students with supportive peer relationships report more positive outcomes, as these friendships offer emotional stability and a sense of belonging. Conversely, those experiencing social isolation, peer conflict, or exclusion are at greater risk of negative outcomes such as loneliness, depression, and low self-esteem. Family dynamics play a similar role. Supportive families that communicate effectively create stability and provide emotional resources, whereas families with conflict or excessively high expectations may contribute to stress and anxiety. The school setting further shapes students' mental health outcomes. Access to counseling services, mental health education, and supportive teacher-student interactions positively influence well-being, while limited access to such resources leads to less favorable outcomes. Additionally, stigma and a lack of openness surrounding mental health in schools may prevent students from seeking the help they need, leaving them to cope alone. These findings align with Limcaoco et al. (2020), who emphasized that while many high school students appear to function adequately, they still face significant mental health challenges requiring attention. Without early interventions, moderate symptoms may develop into more severe conditions. The findings underscore the importance of schools in providing mental health education, counseling programs, and stress management interventions to strengthen student well-being.

Relationship between the levels of social support and mental health outcome of high school students

The inferential analysis revealed no significant relationship between the level of social support and the mental health outcomes of high school students. The correlation coefficient was $r = 0.046$ with a significance level of $p = 0.482$, which is greater than the 0.05 threshold. This indicates that the level of social support reported by students did not statistically correlate with their mental health outcomes. This finding challenges the common assumption that higher levels of social support automatically lead to better mental health. While social support is widely recognized as beneficial, the study suggests that its effectiveness depends not merely on the quantity of support but on its quality and relevance to individual needs. For instance, even students with strong family or peer networks may not experience improved mental health if the support provided does not address their specific emotional or psychological concerns. Support from trained professionals, such as guidance counselors, may therefore play a more decisive role in improving outcomes compared to generalized support from peers or family.

The absence of a significant relationship also reflects the multifaceted nature of adolescent mental health. Stressors such as academic pressure, family conflict, financial difficulties, and even exposure to trauma may overshadow the benefits of available social support. Furthermore, some students may not fully utilize the support available to them due to self-isolation, lack of trust, or emotional detachment. Measurement limitations may also have influenced the results. If the instruments used to assess social support and mental health outcomes did not capture the full complexity of these constructs, the relationship may have been understated. Self-reported data may also have been affected by underreporting due to stigma or lack of awareness about mental health.

The findings contrast with Aydogan (2019), who highlighted the significant role of family support in reducing stress and enhancing well-being among adolescents. The present study suggests that in the specific context of Tuburan, family support, while present, may not directly influence mental health outcomes as strongly as in other cultural settings. Cultural factors, such as how adolescents internalize and perceive family roles, may account for these differences. Similarly, the World Health Organization (2022) emphasized the global importance of strong social support networks as protective factors for mental health. However, this study indicates that such protective effects may not universally apply, especially in contexts where socio-economic or academic stressors outweigh the benefits of social support. Taken together, the results show that while social support remains an important protective factor in theory and practice, it did not emerge as a statistically significant predictor of mental health outcomes among the students studied. This highlights the need for context-sensitive interventions that address the complexity of adolescent well-being. Based on these results, the null hypothesis asserting no significant relationship between social support and mental health outcomes among high school students is hereby accepted.

CONCLUSION

This survey–correlational study was conducted to determine the social support and mental health outcomes of high school students during the academic year 2024–2025. Specifically, the study sought to identify the level of social support among high school students, determine their level of mental health outcomes, and examine whether there was a significant relationship between these two variables. A total of 241 students from Tuburan National High School participated in the study. Data were gathered using two adopted instruments: a 25-item questionnaire on social support developed by Zimet, Dahlem, and Farley (1988) and a 15-item questionnaire on mental health outcomes developed by Hyland, Johnson, and Kerrigan (2012). Both instruments were jury-validated by experts, refined according to recommendations, and pilot-tested with 30 purposively selected students. The results of the pilot test were analyzed through factor analysis, construct validation, and reliability testing, with items below the 0.50 threshold removed and Cronbach’s alpha set at 0.70 or higher considered reliable. The study employed descriptive statistical tools, such as mean and standard deviation, as well as Pearson’s correlation coefficient to determine significant relationships, with the level of significance set at 0.05.

The findings revealed that the level of social support among high school students was high, indicating that students perceived strong emotional, instrumental, and informational support from peers, families, and their school community. This level of support creates a sense of belonging, reduces loneliness, fosters resilience, and enhances students' ability to form healthy social relationships necessary for emotional development. The findings also revealed that the level of mental health outcomes among high school students was moderate. This outcome highlights both resilience and vulnerability, reflecting that while many students manage their mental health adequately, others face challenges that interfere with optimal functioning. Moderate outcomes suggest that students experience both positive mental health experiences and difficulties such as anxiety, stress, and mood disturbances, often linked to academic pressures, peer relationships, and social expectations. External factors such as bullying, social exclusion, or the influence of social media may also contribute to this moderate level.

The analysis further showed that there was no significant relationship between social support and mental health outcomes among the students. This finding indicates that while social support is generally regarded as a protective factor, it may not be the sole or most influential determinant of adolescent mental health. Other variables such as coping strategies, personality traits, family dynamics, academic stress, and digital influences may play stronger roles in shaping mental health outcomes. Moreover, the quality, type, and source of social support may matter more than its quantity, suggesting that students may not always perceive available networks as dependable or emotionally supportive during times of stress. This outcome underscores the complexity of adolescent mental health and the need for a more holistic model that considers multiple determinants beyond social support.

Given these findings, it is recommended that efforts to strengthen social support systems should be sustained and expanded. Schools may promote mentorship programs where older students guide younger ones, integrate social and emotional learning in the curriculum, and train teachers in creating emotionally supportive classrooms. Families should also be engaged through workshops and collaborative initiatives to improve communication and provide consistent support both at home and in school. Since the level of mental health outcomes was only moderate, schools should prioritize mental health education, provide regular workshops and counseling services, and create safe spaces for conversations to reduce stigma and encourage students to seek help. Peer-based programs may further enhance students' ability to share experiences and learn coping strategies.

As there was no significant relationship found between social support and mental health outcomes, future initiatives should not focus solely on social support but instead address broader factors that influence student well-being. Interventions that promote resilience, stress management, and emotional regulation may prove more effective. Schools should also strengthen mental health services and integrate them with academic and extracurricular programs. Future research should explore other variables such as personality traits, extracurricular involvement, and socio-economic conditions, as these may better explain variations in adolescent mental health. A more inclusive and multidimensional approach is necessary to capture the complex nature of adolescent well-being. Ultimately, addressing mental health requires the combined efforts of schools, families, communities, and policymakers in creating a supportive and responsive environment that fosters resilience, coping skills, and overall student success.

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