**An Investigation in the Potential Association between Perceived Parental Support, Mental Health, and Academic Success in Undergraduates**



Undergraduates are a group commonly identified in mental health research as being particularly vulnerable to forms of psychological distress such as stress, anxiety, and depression. Most research has found that social support systems can buffer this distress, especially those in proximity including the friends made while attending university. Peer support has been highlighted by some studies as even more influential to undergraduates’ mental health and academic success than that of family.



As many move away from family and into new living situations with their peers on campus, the creation and perceived support of friends is what most previous support system research focuses on when it comes to mental health and academic influence.



However, with the recent lockdown and closure of many university campuses, the once flowing availability to meet new peers and friends was now severely limited compared to previous years, challenging the consistently recommended coping mechanism.

Many undergraduates for the past few years ended up staying in their family homes with their parents. With this in mind, it would be worth investigating deeper into the effectiveness perceived parental support may have on undergraduates mental health and academic success. Through self-determination theory, healthy levels of perceived parental support, including through expressions of warmth, involvement, and autonomy support, was theorized to act as a source for intrinsic motivation for undergraduates to have an enhanced sense of self and aspire to academic success. As potentially the closest, most exposed to support system for those living at home during lockdown, significant associations here could help better target mental health interventions for those undergraduates experiencing psychological distress and encourage direct communication between parents and their children about how best to support undergraduates even after they move away from home.



The purpose of this study was to investigate how perceived parental support could relate to undergraduates’ mental health and academic success. It was hypothesized that higher perceived parental support scores would be significantly associated with lower scores of stress, depression, and anxiety. It was also hypothesized that living situation would be influential over the relationship between perceived parental support, mental health, and academic success observed in undergraduates, with those living with their family being more likely to report significant relationships compared to those living with family or alone.

Through a series of Pearson’s product-moment correlation coefficient analysis, it was observed that higher overall perceived parental support scores were significantly associated with lower anxiety, depression, and stress scores in a sample of 92 participants, indicating that perceived parental support may offer an effective intervention method for mental distress. These findings were also significantly observed in the participants living with family, but not among those living alone or with a flat mate, indicating proximity to a specific social support system may indeed make it more influential than others. There were no significant observations for academic success and perceived parental support, however future studies should investigate academic motivation instead.

Chart, scatter chart

Description automatically generatedChart, scatter chart

Description automatically generatedChart, scatter chart

Description automatically generated