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THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT ON THE PSYCHOSOCIAL ADAPTATION OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN CAMEROON

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of social support on the psychosocial adaptation of internally displaced secondary school students in Cameroon. The study was motivated by the on-going crises socio-political crises in the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon, which began in October 2016 and has greatly affected the life of internally displaced secondary school students, affecting their emotional, mental, psychological and above all their social wellbeing. The researcher adopted the mixed method approach. In the quantitative phase, a sample of 317 participants was drawn from some selected public secondary schools in three regions. The qualitative data obtained from the field with the aid of an Interview guide. Data was analysed used analysing using both descriptive and inferential statistics and Interview guides was analysed using the process of thematic content analysis. The finding revealed that social support significantly influences the psychosocial adaption of internally displaced secondary school students in Cameroon. The study highlights the importance of social support in addressing the psychosocial challenges experienced by internally displaced secondary school students and promoting their psychosocial adaptation, resilience and overall well-being

Keywords: Social support, *psychosocial adaptation, internally displaced students, (IDPs) Resilience*

22INTRODUCTION

The exposure of individuals to different degrees of problems and situations from the environment always pushes humans to adapt depending on the nature of the problem. In such situation the support from family, friends and other forms are very crucial. Such social support aids individuals in the maintenance of positive mental health and successful adaptation during stressful situations. Social support is based upon the premise that people must depend on one another to satisfy certain basic needs (Cutrona, 1996), and social support allows individuals to feel that they are loved, cared for, and belong to a network of communication and mutual obligation (Cobb, 1976). The act of offering assistance to others is a natural and common aspect of human interaction, expressed through various methods such as using persuasive techniques, engaging in educational efforts, and providing entertainment.

Social support holds significant importance in nurturing emotions of fondness, care, and a deep sense of connection within individuals. It also helps in the development of a web of interpersonal interactions and mutual obligations (Cobb, 1976). This is perspective is based on the understanding that individuals are interconnected and rely on one another to meet their basic needs (Cutrona, 1996). The consensus among experts is that there are indeed various characteristics to consider in this context. However, it is important to acknowledge that there are numerous interpretations and definitions of social support.

According to Xu and Burleson (2001), the concept of "social support" refers to the provision of assistance by individuals to others in order to aid them in dealing with various life changes and situational demands. Difficult situations most often pose significant obstacles that impede individuals' ability to independently surmount these challenges. Individuals in need often seek assistance, which is commonly perceived as a form of social support. According to Caplan (1974), social support can be understood as a collection of ongoing social connections that offer individuals the chance to receive feedback about themselves and to have their expectations of others affirmed. Social support is not solely contingent upon individuals assisting each other exclusively during challenging or demanding circumstances. Instead, it encompasses the notion that individuals possess the capacity to assist one another through ongoing interactions

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Rittenour & Martin (2008) presented an alternative perspective, suggesting that in the context of communication, social support covers a range of components including empathy, sympathy, concern, compassion, validation of emotions, and encouragement towards others. Social support can be perceived as a multifaceted phenomenon that encompasses a range of emotional expressions, which in turn serve as catalysts for individuals to extend help and support to others. In the realm of interpersonal dynamics, Kaplan, Cassel, and Gore (1977) propose an intriguing notion known as social support. This concept revolves around the notion of individuals having their fundamental needs met, such as seeking approval, esteem, and succor, from those who hold significant roles in their lives. The connection between providing social support and the feeling of fulfillment that individuals experience towards those they support has been established.

Xu & Burleson (2001) posit that social support can be conceptualized as the facilitation of aid to individuals as they navigate through various challenges within ever-changing circumstances. It is interesting to note that alternative scholarly perspectives have brought attention to the significance of social support as a means of fostering positive social interaction within continuous situations. The notion of social support can be understood by classifying it into either transient or ongoing situations. Cutrona (1996) offered a comprehensive elucidation of two discrete classifications of social support. The initial classification pertains to the continuous support and enhancement of an individual's holistic welfare, encompassing elements such as a feeling of safety and belief in one's abilities. The second category revolves around the provision of immediate support to individuals who are faced with stressful or

adverse life events, such as dealing with challenges related to a demanding instructor. Scholars have offered a wide range of perspectives on the concept of social support.

Some aim to shed light on how social support functions in everyday situations, while others focus on its role during times of crisis. The notion of social support can be further divided into two distinct forms: support that is given and support that is received (Wethington & Kessler, 1986). Perceived support refers to the deeply personal experience of an individual's subjective perception of receiving affection and admiration from their social network, which encompasses the important relationships they have with their family and friends. On the contrary, the concept of support can be understood as the concrete aid or direction offered by these individuals. The phenomenon of social support has captured the attention of scholars due to its extensive research. As a result, there have been different perspectives, definitions, and conceptualizations of this phenomenon (Goldsmith, 2004). It is interesting to note that despite the variations in these definitions, there are indeed commonalities that can be observed. The intricate connection between social assistance and individuals' emotional and material conditions is undeniable. It is through these interpersonal connections that the delivery of such assistance takes place. The presence of various interpretations and understandings of social support can be traced back to its profound influence on individuals and the extensive body of research that has been carried out in this domain. The examination of social support has been the subject of extensive research in relation to health, particularly chronic illnesses (Kaplan & Toshima, 1990; Ptacek, Pierce, Dodge, & Ptacek, 1997), as well as mental health, with a specific focus on stress (Cobb, 1976; Cohen & McKay, 1984, 2005).

Previous research endeavours have been dedicated to establishing a holistic comprehension and shedding light upon the various forms of social support and the attributes that accompany them. The study conducted by Xu and Burleson (2001) aimed to explore and categorise different types of social support. They identified five distinct categories, which include emotional support, esteem support, network support, tangible support, and informational support. The different forms of support that individuals often seek are often categorized as "intangible support," which encompasses emotional, esteem, and network support. Intangible support pertains to the offering of non-physical assets, such as goods, services, or other resources. Emotional support encompasses the significant provision of affection, understanding, and care. Esteem support involves offering words and actions that demonstrate admiration, recognition, and belief in oneself, which can help improve individuals' self-image. Network support entails the cultivation of emotions related to social interconnectedness by employing verbal and non-verbal cues that strengthen an individual's perception of inclusion.

The categorization of social support, as described by Shinar (2000), encompasses four distinct categories that play a significant role in our lives. These categories include emotional support, which involves the provision of empathy and understanding during challenging times. Informational support, on the other hand, involves the sharing of knowledge and advice to help individuals navigate through various situations. Instrumental support refers to the tangible assistance provided to individuals, such as practical help or resources. Lastly, companionship support

emphasizes the importance of social connections and the presence of others in our lives. In examining the categorization put forth by Xu and Burleson (2001), one could posit that there is merit in considering instrumental support and companionship support as separate and distinct manifestations of social assistance. The form of support that requires immediate assistance is often referred to as instrumental support. The provision of assistance can take various forms, such as offering financial support, helping with childcare, facilitating transportation, and providing assistance with tasks. The provision of companionship support allows individuals to partake in social and recreational activities, such as outings and cultural events. It seems that Cohen,

Mermelstein, Kamarck, and Hoberman (1985) have identified four different types of social support. These categories include belonging support, self-esteem support, tangible support, and assessment support. According to Cohen, Mermelstein, Kamarck, and Hoberman (1985), the notion of belonging support revolves around the existence of individuals with whom one can partake in activities, while appraisal support pertains to the presence of someone with whom one can openly converse about personal matters. The study delves into the definitions of different forms of social support, which interestingly correspond to the justifications put forth by previous researchers.Cobb (1979) explored the multifaceted nature of social support, looking into different forms such as material, instrumental, active, emotional assistance, as well as network and esteem support.

Cobb (1979) proposed that material support refers to the act of providing food or services, whereas active support pertains to the nurturing actions performed by mothers towards their infants or nurses towards their patients. It is intriguing to observe the similarities in the characteristics of material support and active support. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that these two types possess distinct differences, as illustrated by the case of the overburdened executive. The act of equipping the executive with tools that enhance the efficiency of their work process can be classified as a form of material support. On the contrary, engaging in the active assistance of the executive in accomplishing a particular aspect of their work can be regarded as a form of active support. It is interesting to note that besides the well-known classifications of social support, many scholars have also identified various additional typologies of social support.

According to Cutrona and Russell (1990), House put forth a range of support options, which encompassed emotional aspects such as liking, affection, and empathy, as well as practical assistance in the form of goods or services. Additionally, House emphasized the importance of providing information and feedback that could aid individuals in their self-evaluation process. In Cobb's influential study in 1979, he eloquently delineated between two distinct forms of social support: material support, which encompasses concrete resources like goods and services, and instrumental support, which pertains to intangible aid such as counselling. It is interesting to note that Kahn, as cited in Cutrona & Russell (1990), has provided a definition of social support that includes emotions, affirmations, and assistance. On the other hand, Weiss has categorized social support as encompassing attachment, social integration, reinforcement of self-worth, guidance, and opportunities for nurturing. These different perspectives highlight the multifaceted nature of social support and the various ways in which it can manifest in our lives. Academic scholars

have embarked on the endeavour of distinguishing between various types of social assistance, assigning unique designations to these forms of support, and elucidating their corresponding impacts.

Cutrona and Russell (1990) observed that although different dimensions of social support may have distinct characteristics, they are closely interconnected and collectively contribute to individuals' overall well-being and interpersonal relationships. These forms of support are particularly important in understanding the psychosocial adjustments of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), whose displacement often exposes them to various social, emotional and psychological challenges. In this regard, the present study examines five fundamental dimensions of social support and their contribution to the psychosocial well-being and resilience of IDPs. Although these dimensions have different characteristics and functions, they originate from the broader concept of social support and complement one another in addressing individuals' needs. Collectively, they provide important resources that enable displaced individuals to cope with adversity, maintain meaningful social relationships, overcome psychological difficulties and develop the capacity to adapt to challenging circumstances. For instance, Cohen et al. (1985) and Jacobson (1987) have examined instrumental support, also referred to as tangible support, in previous studies. Similarly, self-esteem support, discussed by Cohen and Wills (1985), represents an important aspect of emotional support that reinforces individuals' sense of personal worth and self-confidence. Although scholars have identified several variations of social support, there is considerable consensus regarding five fundamental components (Cutrona & Shur, 1994). These components provide a useful framework for understanding how different forms of support collectively contribute to the psychosocial adjustment and resilience of vulnerable populations, particularly IDPs.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

The mixed method approach was used in this study. This approach involves the systematic collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, followed by the integration of these distinct data types, and the application of specific research designs that may encompass underlying philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks. The fundamental principle that underlies this strategy asserts that the incorporation of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies leads to a more holistic comprehension of a research subject when compared to the utilization of either approach independently (Creswell, 2011). The purposive sampling technique was used and a sample of 317 participants was drawn from three public schools in three selected regions since the researcher have good knowledge of the research participants and can identify the participant (internally displaced secondary school student) in their different schools. A self-developed questionnaire item based on a modified Likert scale of strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), and Disagree (D) and strongly Disagree (SD) was used. Data was analyzed used analyzing using both descriptive and inferential statistics and Interview guides was analyzed using the process of thematic content analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This table below present the findings of the influence of social support on the psychosocial adaptation of internally displaced secondary students in some public schools in the cities of Bafoussam, Douala and Yaounde as presented on the table below.

Table1: Distribution of Respondents according to Social support

Perceived social support	Stretched			Collapsed		
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agreed	Strongly agreed	Disagreed	Agreed
I always depend on other people to satisfy certain basic needs in some situation	00 (00%)	61 (19.2%)	170 (53.6%)	86 (27.1%)	61 (19.2%)	256 (80.8%)
I give assistance to other people when need be	00 (00%)	39 (12.3%)	171 (53.9%)	107 (33.8%)	39 (12.3%)	278 (87.7%)
There is someone I can turn to for advice about handling my problems	00 (00%)	63 (19.9%)	160 (50.5%)	94 (29.7%)	63 (19.9%)	254 (80.1%)
I am able to connect with people outside of my family easily	00 (00%)	42 (13.2%)	198 (62.5%)	77(24.3%)	42 (13.2%)	275 (86.8%)
Social interaction provides affection and love which support me when I am need it	00 (00%)	41 (12.9%)	166 (52.4%)	110 (34.7%)	41 (12.9%)	276 (87.1%)
Assistance from others help me to recover faster from illnesses and reduces stress levels	00 (00%)	46 (14.5%)	188 (59.3%)	83 (26.2%)	46 (14.5%)	271 (85.5%)
My psychological and physical well-being has helped me to maintain social relationships	00 (00%)	33 (10.4%)	190 (59.9%)	94 (29.7%)	33 (10.4%)	284 (89.6%)
I always control my feelings in the heart of problems and challenges	00 (00%)	48 (15.1%)	172 (54.3%)	97 (30.6%)	48 (15.1%)	269 (84.9%)
I am not carried away by my challenges	00 (00%)	55 (17.4%)	182 (57.4%)	80 (25.2%)	55 (17.4%)	262 (82.6%)
Having positive belief about myself has always influence me positively	00 (00%)	48 (15.1%)	197 (62.1%)	72 (22.7%)	48 (15.1%)	269 (84.9%)
Emotional support helped to maintain group morale and ameliorated feelings of neglect	00 (00%)	44 (13.9%)	186 (58.7%)	87 (27.4%)	44 (13.9%)	273 (86.1%)
My understanding of stressful circumstances helps them cope with problematic events	00 (00%)	36 (11.4%)	167 (52.7%)	114 (36.0%)	36 (11.4%)	281(88.6%)
Believing in myself has always been a way of handling my problems	00 (00%)	33 (10.4%)	168 (53.0%)	116 (36.6%)	33 (10.4%)	284 (89.6%)
Financial aids, material resources and other services are the key of reducing stress.	00 (00%)	40 (12.6%)	165 (52.1%)	112 (35.3%)	40 (12.6%)	277 (87.4%)
Engaging in various forms of social and recreational activities is one of the ways of handling stress.	00 (00%)	39 (12.3%)	185 (58.4%)	93 (29.3%)	39 (12.3%)	278 (87.7%)
Multiple responses set (MRS)	**00 (00%)**	**682 (14.3%)**	**2639(55.5%)**	**1434(30.2%)**	**682(14.3%)**	**4073(85.7%)**

The findings on the table above revealed that majority (80.8%) respondents agreed they always depend on other people to satisfy certain basic needs in some situation while few (19.2%) respondents disagreed. Again, majority

(87.7%) respondents agreed that they give assistance to other people when need be while few (12.3%) respondents disagreed. Alike majority (80.1%) respondents agreed that there is someone they can turn to for advice about handling their problems while few (19.9%) disagreed. Again, majority (86.8%) respondents agreed they are able to connect with people outside of my family easily while few (13.2%) respondents disagreed. Likewise, majority (87.1%) respondents agreed that social interaction provides affection and love, which support them when they need it while few (12.9%) respondents disagreed.

Furthermore, majority (85.5%) respondents agreed that assistance from others help them to recover faster from illnesses and reduces stress levels while few (14.5%) respondents disagreed. In the same way majority (89.6%) respondents agreed that, their psychological and physical well-being has helped them to maintain social relationships while few (10.4%) respondents disagreed. Consistently, majority (84.9%) respondents agreed that they always control their feelings in the heart of problems and challenges while few (15.1%) respondents disagreed. Correspondingly, majority (82.6%) respondents agreed that they are not carried away by their challenges while few (17.4%) respondents disagreed. More so, majority (84.9%) respondents agreed that having positive belief about themselves has always influence them positively while few (15.1%) respondents disagreed. Still majority (86.1%) respondents agreed that emotional support helped to maintain group morale and ameliorated feelings of neglect while few (13.9%) respondents disagreed.

More over majority (88.6%) respondents agreed that their understanding of stressful circumstances help them cope with problematic events while few (11.4%) respondents disagreed. Congruently, majority (89.6%) respondents agreed that believing in themselves has always been a way of handling their problems while few (10.4%) respondents disagreed. Similarly, majority (87.4%) respondents agreed financial aids, material resources and other services are the key of reducing stress while few (12.6%) disagreed. Equally, majority (87.7%) respondents agreed that engaging in various forms of social and recreational activities is one of the ways of handling stress while few (12.3%) respondents disagreed. In addition, the findings from the multiple responses set revealed that majority (87.7%) respondents agreed that social support influence the psychosocial support of internally displaced secondary students while few (14.3%) respondents disagreed.

Interviews conducted revealed the influence of social support on the psychosocial support of IDP students. The interviewees indicated that they belong to a group, emotional support, informational support, self-esteem and material support as presented in the table below

Table 2: Thematic analysis on self-efficacy of IDP students

Question	Themes	Groundings	Quotations
Explain how social support influence your behaviour	Belong to group	08	"…I have a group of friends which I interact with them and we assist one another in different tasks and activities."
	Emotional support	07	"…when I am stressed up my friends make me feel happy when they comfort me and talk me out of the stressful situation…I equally depend on my parents to help me out to function well."
	Informational support	08	"…I depend on friends, parents and other people for information on what I do not know or important information."
	Self-esteem	07	"…My interaction with other people has made me to value myself so much and I belief I can succeed in anything I do."
	Material support	08	"…my parents, friends and other well wishes always support me with material things which I need for my wellbeing."

The findings on the table above revealed that different social supports influence the psychosocial support of IDP students. These included the fact that they belong to groups, have emotional support, informational support, self-esteem and material support Interviewees stated that they are belong to groups of friends which they socialize and interact freely. This is evident as a one of the IDP students pointed out that "…I have a group of friends which I interact with them and we assist one another in different tasks and activities." Interviewees further stated that they have emotional support from friends and family. This is clear as an interviewee stated that "…when I am stressed up my friends make me feel happy when they comfort me and talk me out of the stressful situation…I equally depend on my parents to help me out to function well."

Equally, interviewees pointed out that they depend on friends, parents and other people for information purpose. This is clear as a student pointed out "…I depend on friends, parents and other people for information on what I do not know or important information." In addition, the interviewees stated that they have a high self-esteem through their interaction with other people. This is evident as an interviewee reiterated "…my interaction with other people has made me to value myself so much and I belief I can succeed in anything I do." Similarly, interviewees stated that they have material support from parents and friends. This is evident as an interviewee insisted that "…my parents, friends and other well wishes always support me with material things which I need for my wellbeing."

To further assess the influence of social support of internally displaced students a cross-tabulation to determine the association between background indicators of the IDP students and their social support was calculated as indicated on the table below.

Table 3: Association between background indicators and social support

Background indicators	Categories	Disagreed	Agreed	N	Chi square test
Sex	Male	314 (14.4%)	1861 (85.6%)	2175	$\chi 2=5.76$
	Female	400 (15.5%)	2180 (84.5%)	2580	P=0.222
Age group	10-15	69 (08.5%)	741 (91.5%)	810	$\chi 2=6.87$
	16-20	557 (16.7%)	2788 (83.3%)	3345	P=0.342
	21 and above	88 (14.7%)	512 (85.3%)	600	
Years of not schooling	1	93 (09.8%)	852 (90.2%)	945	$\chi 2=5.78$
	2	482 (18.0%)	2203 (82.0%)	2685	P=0.266
	3	139 (12.4%)	986 (87.6%)	1125	
Region of origin	North West	446 (15.6%)	2404 (84.4%)	2850	$\chi 2=7.22$
	South West	268 (14.1%)	1637 (85.9%)	1905	P=0.321
School	Lycee Bilingue Bafoussam Rural	119 (20.9%)	451(79.1%)	570	$\chi 2=4.33$ P=0.403
	Lycee Bilingue Bafousam	60 (09.8%)	555 (91.2%)	615	
	Lycee Bilingue Biyemassi	91 (17.8%)	419 (82.2%)	510	
	Lycee Bilingue Bonaberi	74 (12.6%)	511 (87.4%)	585	
	Lycee Bilingue Etougebe	65 (12.7%)	445 (87.3%)	510	
	Lycee Bilingue Japoma	83 (17.8%)	382 (82.2%)	465	
	Lycee Bilingue Mendong	50 (09.8%)	460 (91.2%)	510	
	Lycee Bilingue Technique D'Akwa	82 (18.2%)	368 (81.8%)	450	
	Lycee Technique Banego	90 (16.7%)	450 (83.3%)	540	

The findings from table 3 above indicate that social support of IDP students does not depend on sex, age, years of not schooling, region of origin, and the school of students. The chi-squared tests for the various background indicators at P=0.05 were not significant showing there is no association between the different categories of the background indicators and social support of the IDP students. This is because there is uniformity in the responses given by IDP students. The influence of social support on the psychosocial adaptation of IDP students was further appraised using the Logistic Regression model as indicated below.

Research Hypothesis I: **(H0): There is no significant effect of social support on the psychosocial adaptation of internally displaced secondary school students**

Research Hypothesis II: **(HA): There is significant effect of social support on the psychosocial adaptation of internally displaced secondary school students**

The effect of social support on the psychosocial support of IDP students in selected secondary schools in the cities of Bafoussam, Douala and Yaounde was appraised using Logistic Regression Model. The results of the model are found on the table below.

Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients	Explanatory/predictive power of the model (Pseudo R-Square) based on Nagelkerke R Square
$\chi 2$=30.236 df=380 P=0.000	0.132

Table 1: Model fitting information and predictive power for the predictive component social support on the psychosocial adaptation of IDPs in Secondary Schools.

*Dependent variable: Psychosocial adaptation

The variability explained by this model was significant (Omnibus Test of Model Coefficient: $\chi 2$=30.236; df=380; P=0.000). This therefore implies that this predictive component significantly predicts psychosocial support of IDPs in Secondary Schools with an Explanatory Power (EP) / Predictive Power of 13.2% (Nagelkerke R Square=0.132). Generally, if IDP students in secondary schools use better social support strategies they would be a significant improvement in psychosocial adaptation of the IDP students. Thus, the alternative of the hypothesis stated above is then accepted; therefore, there is a significant effect of social support on the psychosocial adaptation of internally displaced secondary students.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the influence of social support on the psychosocial adaptation of internally displaced secondary school students in Cameroon. The findings established that social support significantly influences students' psychosocial adaptation, helping them cope with displacement-related challenges, develop resilience and promote holistic development. The mixed-methods findings further highlighted the importance of supportive relationships and social resources in promoting students' adaptation and emotional stability. The findings revealed a significant effect of social support on the psychosocial adaptation of IDP students'.The study therefore emphasizes the need for schools, families, communities, and humanitarian organizations to strengthen psychosocial programs through counselling, peer-support programmes, and inclusive educational interventions. Ultimately, effective social support systems are essential for enhancing the resilience, psychosocial adaptation, and educational experiences of internally displaced students in Cameroon.

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