PERCEIVE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT AND SELF-ACCEPTANCE AMONG MALE AND FEMALE OF DIPLOMA COLLEGE STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

This study aimed to determine the association between perceived social support and self-acceptance, with further analysis conducted to compare gender (male and female) in perceived social support and self-acceptance among diploma college students. A cross-sectional survey was conducted with 177 students who consented to participate (90 males, 87 females), with an age range between 18 and 25 years old. The respondents were recruited using convenience sampling. Validated measures, including the Multidimensional Perceived Social Support (MPSS) and the Unconditional Self-Acceptance Questionnaire (USAQ), were employed in this study. Descriptive analysis and inferential analysis using Pearson's correlation and independent t-tests were utilized to analyze the data. The current findings suggested a non-significant relationship between perceived support from family and self-acceptance. Conversely, there was a significant positive relationship between perceived support from friends and self-acceptance, as well as between perceived support from significant others and self-acceptance. Furthermore, no significant differences were found between male and female polytechnic students regarding perceived social support, including family, friends, and significant others. However, a significant difference was observed in gender and self-acceptance, with the mean score for male self-acceptance lower than that of females. These findings contribute to the existing literature and underscore the importance of social support and self-acceptance in the well-being of polytechnic students.

Keywords: *Perceive Social Support, Self-Acceptance, College Students*

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Abstrak

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menentukan hubungan antara persepsi dukungan sosial dan penerimaan diri, dengan analisis lanjut yang dijalankan untuk membandingkan gender (lelaki dan perempuan) dalam persepsi dukungan sosial dan penerimaan diri di kalangan mahasiswa diploma. Cross-sectioan survey dilakukan dengan 177 mahasiswa yang bersedia menjadi responden (90 lelaki, 87 perempuan), dengan rentang usia antara 18 hingga 25 tahun. Responden dipilih menggunakan convenience sampling. Instrumen valid yang digunakan Multidimensional Perceived Social Support (MPSS) dan Unconditional Self-Acceptance Questionnaire (USAQ). Analisis deskriptif dan analisis inferensi menggunakan korelasi Pearson dan uji-t bebas digunakan untuk menganalisis data. Hasil menunjukkan hubungan yang tidak signifikan antara dukungan yang dirasai dari keluarga dan penerimaan diri. Sebaliknya, terdapat hubungan positif yang signifikan antara dukungan yang dirasai dari teman dan penerimaan diri, serta antara dukungan yang dirasai dari orang-orang yang signifikan dan penerimaan diri. Selain itu, tiada perbedaan yang signifikan ditemui antara mahasiswa politeknik laki-laki dan perempuan mengenai dukungan sosial yang dirasai, termasuk keluarga, teman, dan orang-orang yang signifikan. Meksipun demikian, terdapat perbedaan yang signifikan pada gender dan penerimaan diri, dengan skor mean penerimaan diri laki-laki lebih rendah daripada skor perempuan. Penemuan ini menyumbang kepada literatur sedia ada dan menekankan kepentingan dukungan sosial dan penerimaan diri dalam kesejahteraan pelajar politeknik. Penemuan ini menyumbang kepada kajian yang telah ada dan menekankan kepentingan dukungan sosial dan penerimaan diri dalam kesejahteraan mahasiswa politeknik.

Kata kunci: *Persepsi Dukungan Sosial, Penerimaan Diri, Mahasiswa*

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INTRODUCTION

The stage of emerging adulthood is called a critical period of self-discovery that introduces a host of psychological challenges to students (Wängqvist & Frisén, 2011). This is especially true for college students in Malaysia, where national surveys have revealed that nearly a third (29.2%) of individuals aged 16 and above, roughly 4.2 million people, experience mental disturbances (Hassan et al., 2018).

When teenagers enter college, they encounter a multitude of difficulties in their attempt to balance studying, socializing, and living their lives. In this competitive culture, there is often a strong desire to be perfect and fear that any imperfections will reveal personal flaws. This emotional conviction can lead to feelings of worthlessness and harsh self-criticism when they fall short of their expectations. As a result, their adjustment suffers, and they experience negative emotions (Fernández-García et al., 2022). To prevent feeling embarrassed, students may even try to avoid participating in class, asking questions, seeking help, or interacting with their teachers (Long & Neff, 2018). The unrealistic family demands and pressures put on the mental health of college youths contribute to an increase in depression and stress levels (Khallad & Jabr, 2016).

Building upon previous research that has established the connection between patterns of social support and various aspects of mental health, health behaviors, and demographic factors in early adulthood (Schiff et al., 2010; Holden et al., 2015; Li et al., 2018), it is crucial to emphasize the role of perceived social support in predicting psychological well-being, encompassing environmental mastery, positive relations with others, personal growth, purpose in life, and self-acceptance, particularly in the face of challenging life events (Secor et al., 2017). Xu et al.'s (2018) study reinforces the idea that perceived support from the social environment contributes to the formation of a positive self-concept among college students, aiding in their resilience and effective coping with mental health risk factors. This aligns with Lim et al.'s (2023) findings on unconditional self-acceptance and perceived social support among Malaysian college students, emphasizing the importance of social inclusion.

However, as indicated by Matud et al. (2003), there exists a notable gap in comprehending the gender-specific intricacies of receiving social support. This is crucial because men and women tend to display distinct behaviors in relationships due to societal influences and gender roles. Recognizing these distinctions is essential for understanding the dynamics of social support. This insight, as highlighted by Ikiz and Cakar (2010), Bhambhu et al. (2019), and Quynh (2021), emphasizes the necessity for tailored interventions and support systems that recognize and address gender-specific needs, thereby promoting the well-being and self-acceptance of students.

Therefore, this study aims to build upon these observations by delving into the psychosocial factors crucial among diploma college students. Furthermore, it seeks to investigate potential differences in the perceptions of social support and self-acceptance between male and female students, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and experiences encountered by each gender in relation to these vital aspects.

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PARADIGM, APPROACHES, THEORY, AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Perceived Social Support and Self-Acceptance

Perceived social support refers to an individual's belief in the availability of various sources, such as friends, family members, and others, who can offer assistance, understanding, and support during times of need. This psychological resource has been linked to improved psychological functioning, aiding individuals in their daily endeavors (Greenglass et al., 2006; Ioannou et al., 2019).

Self-acceptance plays a crucial role in how individuals respond to information about their perceived deficits, shifting their evaluation of these deficits from detrimental to benign regarding their self-worth (Kim & Gal, 2014). Self-compassion, a component of self-acceptance, involves treating oneself with kindness, taking responsibility for mistakes, and acknowledging and attending to one's own pain. Research has shown that self-compassion is instrumental in cultivating self-acceptance, as it mitigates the adverse effects of academic burnout on mental health (Cheraghian et al., 2016).

Recent studies have delved into the intricate dynamics of perceived social support, self-acceptance, and their profound implications for psychological well-being, particularly during significant life transitions. In a prospective cohort study by Jakobsen et al. (2021), the enduring impact of various sources of social support during adolescence on psychological well-being is underscored. The study highlights the pivotal roles of friendships, parental support, and teacher support in shaping positive mental health outcomes during the critical transition from adolescence to early adulthood. Notably, perceived social support from friends emerges as the most influential factor in predicting positive mental health outcomes during early adulthood. Adolescents reporting robust social support from friends during their teenage years exhibit heightened levels of overall mental well-being as they navigate the challenges of entering adulthood.

Complementing this perspective, a quantitative study by Komarudin et al. (2022) focused on undergraduate students aged 18 to 28 sheds light on the interconnectedness of self-acceptance and happiness. The findings reveal a positive and significant relationship between self-acceptance and happiness, suggesting that individuals who embrace themselves and their life conditions are more likely to experience positive emotional states and fewer negative emotions. Moreover, the study identifies social support as a protective factor, indicating that stronger social support significantly contributes to enhanced self-acceptance. This aligns with Jakobsen et al. (emphasis on the influential role of perceived social support in fostering positive mental health outcomes.

Previous Research in Gender Differences of Perceived Social Support and Self-Acceptance

The existing body of research on gender differences in perceived social support and self-acceptance reveals a nuanced interplay of various factors

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shaping individuals' experiences. From this evidence, it can be inferred that young adults' perceptions of social support significantly influence their self-acceptance during the transitional phase from adolescence to adulthood. Ikiz and Cakar (2010) explored the relationship between gender, perceived social support, and self-esteem among teenagers. While they found no gender differences in self-esteem levels, the research identified a significant gap in perceived support from peers and teachers, with girls reporting higher levels of social support from friends and teachers than boys. Additionally, the study revealed a positive correlation between adolescents' perceived social support and their self-esteem levels.

Building on this gender-centric perspective, Quynh (2021) examined university students, investigating the impact of gender socialization and identity on perceived social support. The study found that although university students generally reported high levels of social support, a notable gender gap existed, with male students reporting lower levels compared to their female counterparts. This underscores the influence of societal norms and expectations on perceptions of social support accessibility among university students. Expanding on this theme, Arsandaux et al. (2023) suggested that experiences during childhood and young adulthood have a lasting impact on students' self-esteem during their college years. Female self-esteem appears to be significantly influenced by parental support and childhood economic situations, while male self-esteem is notably impacted by sports participation and economic circumstances during young adulthood.

Based on the literature reviewed, the following hypotheses were formulated for this study:

Hypothesis 1
$H_0$1: There is no association between perceived social support and self-acceptance among college students
H_a1: There is an association between perceive social support and self-acceptance among college students.

Hypothesis 2
$H_0$2: There is no significant difference in the mean perceive social support between genders among college students.
H_a2: There is a significant difference in the mean perceive social support between genders among college students.

Hypothesis 3
$H_0$3: There is no significant difference in mean self-acceptance between genders among college students.
H_a3: There is significant difference in mean self-acceptance between genders among college students in Malaysia.

METHOD
Research Design
A quantitative research approach was employed in this study, utilizing a cross-sectional design to achieve its objectives. A cross-sectional study is an observational study that analyzes data from a population at a specific point in time, commonly used to measure health outcomes' prevalence, understand

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determinants of health, and describe population characteristics (Wang & Cheng, 2020). An online questionnaire was used to facilitate data collection, making it easier to reach participants who exhibit abnormal or covert behaviors. The online platform allowed for anonymity, which encouraged participants who are typically hard to reach to share their experiences and thoughts more freely (Van Selm & Jankowski, 2006).

Convenience sampling was used to obtain a homogeneous group, which facilitated the recruitment of participants who were readily available and willing to participate. The sample size, with an effect size of .38, alpha of .05, and power of .80, a minimum of 174 participants was required based on the self-acceptance scores from a prior study by Aykut Ceyhan & Ceyhan (2010). Inclusion criteria specified diploma college students, aged 18-25, Malaysian residents, owning personal gadgets, and having adequate English proficiency. Exclusion criteria included non-college students, those outside the age range, individuals with cognitive or health issues impeding questionnaire completion, lack of personal gadgets, pregnancy, and refusal to consent. These standards were set to ensure participant suitability and maintain research integrity, thereby facilitating the collection of reliable data.

A total of 177 college students comprising 90 males and 87 females responded. As indicated in Table 1, the participants were composed of 90 males (50.8%) and 87 females (49.2%) participants with 55 of them were 18 and 19 years old (31.1%), 93 participants were

20 and 23 years old (52.5%), 10 participants were 22 and 23 years old (31.1%) and 19 of them were 24 and 25 years old (52.5%). The recruited participants consisted of Malay with a total of 126 participants (71.2%), Chinese with 12 participants (6.8%), Indian with 38 participants (21.5%) and other races accounted for 1 participant (0.6%). The recruited participants consisted of four departments in which 33 (18.6%), of them from the Department of Civil Engineering 17 participants from the Department of Civil Electrical (9.6%), 36 participants were from Civil Mechanical (20.3%) and 91 of the participants from Department of Commerce (51.4%).

Table 1
Summary of demographic background

Demographic Variable		F	%
Gender	Male	90	50.8
	Female	87	49.2
Age	18-19 years old	55	31.1
	20-21 years old	93	52.5
	22-23 years old	10	5.6
	24-25 years old	19	10.7
Race	Malay	126	71.2
	Chinese	12	6.8
	Indian	38	21.5
	Others	1	0.6

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Depart ment	Civil Engineering	33	18.6
	Civil Electrical	17	9.6
	Civil Mechanical	36	20.3
	Commerce	91	51.4

Instruments

The Unconditional Self-Acceptance Questionnaire comprises 20 self-report statements developed by Chamberlain and Haaga (2001), utilizing a seven-point Likert scale. Scores range from 1, indicating "almost always untrue," to 7, representing "always true." The questionnaire includes both positively and negatively worded items. Nine positive items are framed to yield higher scores for greater levels of unconditional self-acceptance. For instance, one such item reads, "I avoid comparing myself to others to determine my self-worth." Conversely, 11 negative items are reverse-scored to reflect lower levels of unconditional self-acceptance. An example of a negatively worded item is, "I set goals for myself in the hope that they will prove my worth" (Lim et al., 2023). The reliability analysis showed acceptable internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha at .544.

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, developed by Zimet et al. (1988), comprises three subscales assessing support from friends, family, and significant others. This self-explanatory instrument consists of a total of seven items, rated on a scale from 1 (Very Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Very Strongly Agree). A positive change score indicates increased perceived social support, while a negative score suggests reduced perceived social support (de la Vega et al., 2019). The composite reliability values for the family, friends, and significant others subscales were .847, .864, and .857, respectively. These findings contribute to an overall Cronbach's alpha of .904, indicating excellent internal consistency reliability for these scales.

Data analysis

The initial step in data processing involved sorting, editing, and converting the raw data into a numeric format, with the application of reverse coding where necessary and addressing missing values. Subsequently, the processed data underwent analysis using SPSS for Windows, Version 22. The analysis consisted of two main steps. Initially, descriptive analysis was employed to provide a demographic summary, incorporating age, gender, and department enrollment, calculated through frequencies and percentages. Following this, to address the three hypotheses of the study, the collected data were subjected to analysis using an independent sample t-test. This test aimed to ascertain whether a significant gender difference existed among male and female college students concerning perceived social support and self-acceptance towards gender roles. Additionally, the relationship between perceived social support and self-acceptance was explored through Pearson's correlation analysis. Significance in all analyses was determined at a p-value less than 0.05

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Ethical Consideration

The study was conducted in accordance with the guidelines and regulations set forth by the Head of Psychology Management Unit of Polytechnic Sultan Azlan Shah.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Result
Correlation analysis between perceive social support and self-acceptance

As seen on Table 2, the Pearson correlation analysis results indicate a non-significant relationship between perceived support from family, [r (177) = - .073, p = .335] with self-acceptance. In contrast, there was a significant positive relationship between perceived support from friends with self-acceptance [r (177) = .191, p=.011] and perceived support from significant others with self-acceptance [r (177) = .177, p = .019]. To sum up, as the level of perceived support from friends and significant others increases, self-acceptance increases. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. There was association between self-acceptance and perceived support from friends and significant others. On the other hand, the null hypothesis was accepted in which there was no association between perceived family support and self-acceptance among diploma college students.

Table 2
Pearson correlation analysis between self-acceptance and domains of perceived social support (family, friend and significant others).

	Family	Friend	Significant others
Self-acceptance	-.073	.191*	.177*

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Comparison analysis of perceived social support between genders

Summarized from Table 3, an independent t-test analysis show no significance (t(175) = .600, p < .549) in perceived support from family in which scores for male and female. Meanwhile the domain of perceived support from friends shows no significant difference (t(175) = .362 , p <.718). Lastly, in perceive support from significant others, independent t-test conducted found no significant difference (t(175) = .727, p <.468) Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted. There is no significant difference of perceived social support that include family, friends and significant others between male and female diploma college students.

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Table 3
Comparison on the perceive social support (family, friends and significant others) between male (N=90) and female (N=87) among diploma college students

	Mean (Standard deviation)		*df*	t	p
	Male	**Female**			
Family	4.8694 (1.5390)	4.7299 (1.5549)	175	.600	.549
Friends	4.0778 (1.2926)	4.9023 (1.4812)	175	.362	.718
Significant others	5.1806 (1.412)	5.3362 (1.4356)	175	.727	.468

Table 4
Comparison on the self-acceptance between male (N=90) and female (N=87) among diploma college students

	Mean (Standard deviation)		*df*	t	p
	Male	**Female**			
Self-acceptance	4.4761 (.62379)	4.8063 (.70335)	175	-3.307	.001 **

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Comparison analysis of self-acceptance between genders

Based on Table 4, there is significant difference t (175) = -3.307, p < .001) in the scores with mean score for male (M=4.4761, SD = 0.62379) was lower than female (M=4.806, SD = 0.703). Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. There is a significant difference of self-acceptance between male and female among diploma college student.

Discussion
Correlation analysis between perceived social support and self-acceptance

Perceived social support from friends and significant others has been consistently linked to higher levels of self-acceptance among students. When students feel supported by their peers and romantic partners, their self-acceptance tends to rise. This can be attributed to the transitional phase of emerging adulthood, during which students seek independence and increasingly rely on themselves and their social circle, particularly their friends. It's plausible that during this stage, students internalize the support from their peers more profoundly than from their families (Wilks & Spivey, 2009).

Moreover, strong and meaningful friendships play a pivotal role in adolescent self-development. Previous research by Narr et al. (2017) suggests that

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adolescents with robust friendships experience gradual improvements in self-worth over time. These enduring friendships during adolescence also contribute to a heightened sense of social acceptance in young adulthood. This underscores the importance of close friendships in shaping individuals' self-acceptance and sense of belonging. Overall, the support and acceptance received from friends and significant others significantly bolster self-acceptance among students, particularly during the transitional phase of emerging adulthood.

However, it's noteworthy that perceived family support did not correlate with a sense of self-acceptance in our findings. This could be explained by participants' perceptions that family members provided the least social support compared to other categories. While family relationships may undergo adjustments during the college years, it's essential to acknowledge that family support remains crucial during this period, despite not being as salient for the majority of young adults (Ioannou et al., 2019).

Comparison analysis of self-acceptance between genders

The findings indicate that there are gender differences in self-acceptance, with males tending to have lower levels of self-acceptance compared to females. However, this finding contrasts with previous research by Casale (2020), which suggests that men score higher than women on certain aspects of self-esteem related to physical appearance,

athleticism, personal identity, and self-satisfaction, while women score higher on aspects related to behavioral conduct and moral-ethics.

One possible explanation for the lower self-acceptance among males during the transition from high school to college is the pressure to prove their masculinity. Engaging in traditional masculine behaviors may have negative effects on their overall well-being, leading to erosion of self-acceptance, particularly when facing emotional vulnerability during times of distress (Kahn et al., 2011; Reilly et al., 2014). Male college students may find it difficult to accept their flaws and may be more inclined to keep their academic struggles a secret. They might believe that they should handle their problems alone or fear being judged by others, which hinders their ability to seek emotional support from others (Schwab & Dupuis, 2020).

Comparison analysis of perceived social support between gender

When comparing perceived social support between males and females, the results revealed no significant difference. This suggests that both genders perceive a similar level of social support, with a greater emphasis on support from friends and significant others rather than from family. This contradicts previous research by Siddiqui et al. (2019), challenging the notion that females generally perceive higher levels of social support from significant others, friends, and family. This also challenges the idea that differences in perceived social support are associated with lower levels of stress, anxiety, and

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depression among female students compared to their male counterparts.

Social relationships are well-documented factors contributing to gender differences (Liu et al., 2019). Feelings of loneliness typically intensify during early adolescence, reaching their peak in the mid-20s, and then gradually decreasing thereafter (von Soest et al., 2020). During this period, emotional loneliness tends to be more prevalent than social loneliness (Diehl et al., 2018). Recognizing the significance of social support, it can play a vital role in fulfilling students' fundamental psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and connectedness (Xin, 2022).

Implication

The present study represents an initial exploration into the significance of perceived social support on self-acceptance among polytechnic students. The results suggest that self-acceptance plays a pivotal role in the social adaptation of polytechnic students, and perceived social support from family members and significant others positively influences the development of self-acceptance among students. This finding is consistent with prior research, underscoring the importance of nurturing self-acceptance and inner comfort, which equips students to independently manage their emotional well-being and demonstrate greater tolerance towards others. Consequently, this could foster a more supportive and cohesive social environment among students, enhancing overall well-being and interpersonal relationships within the

academic community (Mualifah et al., 2019).

This discovery aligns with selected theoretical principles, suggesting that females, who often have stronger connections and support networks in educational settings, may experience higher well-being and adaptation. Through the lens of self-determination theory (SDT), this relationship can be understood in terms of the satisfaction of the relatedness need. SDT posits that individuals seek psychological connections with significant others, facilitating mutual support and understanding (Sheldon, 2012). In the study, students who feel a sense of belonging within their cohort or community are better equipped to cope with educational challenges, leading to overall greater well-being (Bottomley et al., 2023). The stress buffering hypothesis also comes into play, illustrating the role of social and environmental factors in supporting the need for social support when facing high stress, ultimately buffering the negative impacts of critical life events (Buchwald, 2017).

The findings hold significant practical implications, guiding the creation of support programs within institutions tailored to bolstering both social support and self-acceptance among students. Additionally, recent research underscores the advantages of perceived social support for university students' mental health (Aw, J. X., Mohamed, N. F., & Rahmatullah, B., 2023). One effective strategy involves incorporating group activities into counseling sessions. As suggested by Bernard et al. (2013),

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witnessing peers making positive changes can motivate students to do the same. The camaraderie and trust within the group also create a safe space for students to step out of their comfort zones and work on improving self-acceptance. Additionally, the study recommends increasing awareness about available resources for social support and mental health services within institutional culture. This can be achieved through various activities, such as campus tours, orientation sessions, health classes, and major events (Lee, 2020).

Limitation

This study has two notable limitations that should be addressed in future research. Firstly, its cross-sectional design and lack of information about the transitional process from high school to higher education prevent it from establishing a causal relationship between gender differences in perceived social support and self-acceptance (Levin, 2006). Secondly, the applicability of the findings is constrained by the specific context of Polytechnic Sultan Azlan Shah in Perak, Malaysia, which was the sample setting. The policies, programs, and regulations at this institution may not be representative of those at other Malaysian polytechnics. Therefore, the study's conclusions are limited to the examined student population and cannot be generalized to all Malaysian polytechnic students.

CONCLUSION

This study explored gender differences in social support perception and self-acceptance among polytechnic students, noting a particular need for more research among this population in Malaysia. The study found male students may struggle more with self-acceptance, suggesting future research could investigate how social support programs might improve males' self-perception. Such an approach could significantly enhance students' life satisfaction (Yildiz & Karadas, 2017). In addition, researcher also could consider on using both survey and interview for a more holistic and in-depth understanding, which can guide counseling programs towards fostering self-acceptance, especially between genders (Knightley and Whitelock, 2007). Ultimately, the study contributes to improving counseling practices and support services for diploma college students, thereby promoting their well-being and growth.

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