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The comparison of male and female perceptions regarding availability and effectiveness of a support system

Rosalyn Gastel
Ken Lapioli

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THE COMPARISON OF MALE AND FEMALE PERCEPTIONS REGARDING
AVAILABILITY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF A SUPPORT SYSTEM

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Rosalyn Gastel and Ken Lapioli
June 2000
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Approved by:

George Taylor, Project Advisor

Dr. Rosemary McCaslin, Chair of
Research Sequence
ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES

This was a two person project where author's collaborated throughout. However, for each phase of the project, certain authors took primary responsibility. These responsibilities were assigned in the manner listed below.

1. Data Collection:
   Assigned leader  Ken Lapioli
   Assisted by Rosalyn Gastel

2. Data Entry and Analysis:
   Assigned leader Rosalyn Gastel
   Assisted by Ken Lapioli

3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:
   a. Introduction and Literature
      Assigned leader Rosalyn Gastel
      Assisted by Ken Lapioli
   b. Methods
      Assigned leader Rosalyn Gastel
      Assisted by Ken Lapioli
   c. Results
      Assigned leader Rosalyn Gastel
      Assisted by Ken Lapioli
   d. Discussion
      Assigned leader Rosalyn Gastel
      Assisted by Ken Lapioli
   e. Editing and Formatting
      Assigned leader Ken Lapioli
      Assisted by Rosalyn Gastel
   f. Networking and Communicating with Department
      Assigned leader Ken Lapioli
      Assisted by Rosalyn Gastel
ABSTRACT

This study will examine how late adolescents perceive their support systems, based on gender and what the late adolescent perceives his/her support system to be. The post-positivist paradigm will be used. The design is descriptive with a cross-sectional survey, since gender differences will be evaluated. The Likert Scale will be used to gather data. This study will reinforce past analyses of male and female adolescents' perceived support systems and will show trends based on gender that can be applied by social workers in practice to interventions with late adolescents.
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INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

The traditional family system of the past has made remarkable transitions in the last three decades. The once nontraditional families are common today and include single-parent households, working mothers, and divorcing parents which have changed the social context of our familial system. Presently only 15% of American households are of the typical bread-winning father with the mother as an exclusive homemaker (Kagan, 1997). Due to the changing dynamics of family life, stressors often follow. Acute stressors reported by late adolescents include parental divorce, transition to and through college, or a loved one becoming seriously ill. Chronic stressors for these young adults are poverty, a disabling illness, and constant family conflict. There are everyday stressors that late adolescents deal with as well such as school exams, acceptance by peers, and arguments with siblings and parents (Maureen & Rice, 1995).

For late adolescents, change in family dynamics can be more challenging due to the natural transitions that occur during this developmental period. Late adolescence is often a stormy and stressful time when changes occur in every area of the adolescent’s life including physical, affective, social, cognitive, familial, and educational changes (Wentz-Gross & Siperstein, 1997). Adolescence can
be viewed as a journey on the road to find oneself, given the search for identity common at this point in a person's life. Erikson labels this stage as, "Identity versus Identity Confusion," indicating the focus on identity development. Along with this task, adolescents must also begin individuation from their families, which may, at times, be difficult. Even though diversity among late adolescents is great, some successfully travel through adolescence without many problems while others face adversity, struggling at every corner. The late adolescent is taking a big step from childhood to adulthood which creates a new dimension to the life of the teen adding complexity and increasing access to independence (Kaczmarek & Riva, 1996).

Independence can be a positive period of increasing competency and confidence. However, it can also be a period of challenges that are too stressful, generating depression, isolation, and other psychological difficulties (Kostelecky & Lempers, 1998). Erikson referred to this developmental time as "a period of crisis" (Kaczmarek & Riva, 1996). Presently, there are a growing number of late adolescents who are at risk of not becoming productive members of our society as respected adults or having the capabilities to sustain relationships and employment (Kagan, 1997).
If late adolescents can gain a better understanding of their strengths and access to preventive programs, they will have a better chance of developing at optimal levels. The purpose of this study is to determine where late adolescent males and females go to receive support to buffer life stressors. Furthermore, the study explores what support systems seem most accessible to late adolescents as an intervention. Often the focal point in treatment is exclusively on the individual rather than including the ecological approach, which examines the individual in context of his/her environment (Kazmarek & Riva, 1996). A support system for an individual decreases morbidity, reduces stress, decreases feelings of loss, and increases feelings of well-being (Richman & Rosenfeld, et al., 1998). A support system can be composed of many entities such as family, a peer group, and community organizations (Kazmarek & Riva, 1996).

Often late adolescents who report less emotional support from their parents become involved in delinquent peer relationships (Sabatelli & Anderson, 1991). These young adults are often depressed, increasing the likelihood of rebellion, academic problems, and sexual promiscuity (Kist, 1997). It has been found that parental rules and strict supervision have little effect on a late adolescent’s involvement in criminal activity. Conversely, it is the parents’ emotional support that reduces a young
adult's involvement in crime (Colman, 1996). Empirical evidence has shown that social support, whether it is parental or community, decreases the odds of an individual committing a criminal act (Cullen, Wright & Chamlin, 1999).

Lack of a support system not only affects criminal behavior in a late adolescent, but it also affects how a young adult views him or herself (Parish & Scanlan, 1992). Not only does support help an individual mentally and socially, but it can also increase one's immunity, which, in turn, increases one's physical well-being (Key & Marble, 1997). Unfortunately, a late adolescent under stress will not seek or know where to receive support in a crisis which exacerbates the existing stress (Kostelecky & Lempers, 1998). There is no doubt that late adolescents are at a vulnerable developmental stage as they go through the transition from childhood to young adulthood. According to Carlson and Lewis (1988), the transition holds the potential either for danger or for growth.

Problem Focus

This study will answer the question, "Based on gender, what resources does a late adolescent utilize and perceive to be available for social support?" The paradigm that we have chosen for our research is the "post-positivist". Since there are many studies that have looked at social support for male and female late adolescents in varied degrees, our study will be used to support existing trends.
Since this type of paradigm works well when the researcher uses a limited sample size, we have chosen to utilize it in our study. This study will provide a better perception of various social support systems for male and female late adolescents.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Adolescents make up approximately 10% of the population. The length of the period of adolescence is not well defined in the literature. However, the following three sub-stages developed by Feldman & Elliott, (1995) include early adolescence (ages 10-14), the stage of biological maturity; middle adolescence (ages 15-17), the stage in which identity and autonomy are of importance. This middle stage is often considered the endpoint of true adolescence. The last stage, late adolescence (ages 18-mid 20s), is often not regarded as adolescence but is rather considered early adulthood (Kaczmarek & Riva, 1996).

Early adolescence is a time in which change occurs in almost every realm of existence including physical, affective, social, cognitive, familial, and educational. Most adolescents manage these changes without much apprehension. But for some, this period can represent a time of measurable adjustment difficulties. For example, adjustment problems such as, low self-concept, depression, and lack of motivation in school show an increase at this time likely due to the changes associated with early adolescence (Wenz-Gross, & Siperstein, 1991). However, the nature of the stress, the availability of supportive resources, and the characteristics of the adolescent may all determine whether the adolescent achieves successful adjustment of these life changes. It is important to
identify the types of stress experienced by adolescents, since specific types of events may affect adjustment more than others, depending on what events more closely resemble the adolescent’s life. Theoretically, this is dependent upon the adolescent’s developmental level and which goals and areas of experience are threatened by the events (Wenz-Gross, & Siperstein, 1991).

When considering the social support of late adolescents, both the source of support (i.e. family, peers, adults) and the type of support (i.e. emotional and problem-solving support, companionship) must be addressed. For example, the family may be depended upon for many types of support, but can be an especially powerful source of emotional and problem-solving support. Peers can be trusted for companionship but are rarely relied upon for problem-solving support (Wenz-Gross, & Siperstein, 1991). Regard to both source and type of support is necessary to better understand the manner in which social support may affect adjustment directly, or rather, through a stress-buffering role. Just as specific types of stress may be more significant than others and may influence certain adjustment results, so too may certain sources and types of social support affect adjustment differently. For example, support from peers may influence the increase of a late adolescent’s self-concept but, may not help in decreasing feelings of depression (Wenz-Gross, & Siperstein, 1995).
Many studies have substantiated that late adolescents make accurate distinctions between the types of support they receive from the various relationships within their network and that expected developmental changes do occur, depending on whom they rely. Few studies have considered source and type of support as they relate to adjustment. Social support affects adjustment directly and may influence adaptation by absorbing the effects of stress. So, certain types of social support are essential under conditions of certain types of stress. Wenz-Gross, & Siperstein (1991) concluded that for stressors that threaten a person’s sense of competence, emotional support for certain key individuals were important but, for stressors that originate from the acquisition of new social roles, instrumental and emotional support from partners at home was important. They also found that in late adolescents, the effects of peer stress were buffered by social integration or companionship from peers.

Acute stressors reported by late adolescents include parental divorce, transition to and through college, or a loved one becoming seriously ill. Chronic stressors for these youths are poverty, a disabling illness, and constant family conflict. According to Bowlby (1973), individuals who are emotionally stable and self-reliant are likely to have parents who are available to provide support when needed, while also permitting and encouraging autonomy.
(Kaureen & Rice, 1995). There are everyday stressors that late adolescents deal with as well such as, school exams, acceptance by peers, and arguments with siblings and parents (Cole, 1992). A late adolescent will often internalize these stressors resulting in a number of physical illnesses such as depression or anxiety, or they may somatize with headaches and indigestion. These symptoms are believed to be the result of inappropriate emotional reactions. The difficulty seems to be in the means by which emotional stressors are dissipated. Furthermore, females tend to perceive stressful events more extremely than males whether it is positive or negative stress. They are more likely to report to others about problems. This gender difference is confirmed in previous research with the socialization patterns that differ between male and females (Copeland & Hess, 1995). Many late adolescents are able to reduce emotional tension through motor or cognitive activity. They talk about frustration, use appropriate anger, and are active in sports. They make full use of their social support systems (Cole, 1992). However, some late adolescents may think it is impossible for them to connect to the social support needed in order to deal with these stressors. They may think the social support is not available to them either because they do not have the skills or motivation to acquire the available support, or if the adolescent has
been a victim of violence, he/she will be less likely to seek the necessary support (Rosenfeld & Richman, 1998). Adolescents who have been victims of violence are less likely to talk about their personal problems and conflicts with parents or other adults than those who have not (Rosenfeld & Richman, 1998).

There are those who externalize stress and have conduct and behavioral problems or become actively involved in drug and alcohol abuse. According to Cole (1992), late adolescents with extreme difficulties in dealing with stressors due to a lack of social support are often associated with physiological needs created by drug addiction such as alcohol and controlled substances. These individuals felt that they experienced little or no social support. Therefore, lack of social support is related to delinquent involvement. Late adolescents with behavioral issues, substance abuse or psychiatric problems are likely to have families who are less supportive than normative families (Cullen, Wright & Chamlin, 1999).

Furthermore, if a late adolescent suffers from more than one of these stressors, he/she is more likely to suffer psychologically from it. If a late adolescent has external support from others, he/she is less likely to be affected by the compounded stressors. It is found that late adolescents who have friends and good social skills are able to rise above stressful situations (Steinberg,
Social support also has been widely studied as a variable specifically designed to promote the constructive development of late adolescents. For example, support has been indicated in research as useful for working with late adolescent depression (Rosenfeld & Richman, 1998). During early adolescence, it is believed that intimacy between teens and parents decreases and peer relationships take precedence in terms of shared feelings and discussions regarding disagreements and problems (Steinberg, 1996). It has been established that peer relationships dictate a teen's school performance, full use of achievement capabilities, development of pro or antisocial behaviors, and the experience of emotional and mental well-being. The shift from parents to peers is necessary for healthy late adolescent development. A teen can learn by individuation from family and experience alternative roles and develop intimate relationships (Sabatelli & Anderson, 1991).

Grotevant and Cooper (1986) found that, with the increase in autonomy and less need for adult supervision, late adolescents gravitate toward each other for support, advice, and comfort. Friends of teens fulfill more of their needs than their parents do thus, they hold more credence for developmental needs. It has been found that a sibling is considered an equal to a late adolescent friend and can provide intimacy, nurturing, and companionship. Young adults often find their siblings as egalitarian with
increasing age and the relationships have the same qualities as friends in power, assistance, and satisfaction (Kostelcky & Lempers, 1998). Furthermore, Herzerg (1999) found in his study that siblings could serve as an alternative support system when the parents are deceased. It was also noted that when there is a poor attachment to parents, late adolescents will often seek support from their peers, which has been shown to decrease their stress (Van Beest & Baerveldt, 1999).

In contrast, Meeus (1989) found that parental support is more important than peer support. He concludes that parental support increases a late adolescent’s well-being and cannot be compared to peer support (Van Beest & Baerveldt, 1999). Furman and Buhrmester (1992) believe that friends and peer relationships are important to the late adolescent, but the parental relationship with the young adult remains constant. Late adolescents still value relationships with their parents, especially their mothers (Kostelecky & Lempers, 1998). Young adults seek out their mothers’ support more often than that of their fathers. They perceive their mothers as being more understanding, more accepting, more willing to negotiate, less judgmental, less guarded, and less defensive. Both males and females seek support from their mothers more readily than their fathers (Steinberg, 1996). However, one study found that females often turn to their peers for support whereas males
turn to their parents (Weigal & Devereux, 1998). Based on past studies, females tend to seek and rely on social supports such as talking to and being consoled by a friend. On the other hand, research has shown that males vent their feelings in such manners as swearing, complaining or getting angry with others (Copeland & Hess, 1995).

According to Warr (1996), the more time a young adult spends with his parents, the less influential his/her peers become, and the less likely he/she will become involved with substance abuse (Kostelecky & Lempers, 1998).

However, young adults who do not receive emotional support from their parents and disengage from them readily seek support from their friends (Sabatelli & Anderson, 1991). If a late adolescent has one intimate relationship that he/she can depend on even in adverse situations such as poor family functioning, he/she is more apt to adapt and function with these stressors (R.J.C. & D.M.R., 1995). Females in one study more often reported an increase in intimacy, affection, and enhancement of self-worth through their relationships with friends than did males (Harrison & Stewart, 1995). According to Rosenfeld & Richman (1998), if a teen has a close bond with just one adult, he/she has a sufficient support system.

In a study conducted by Ennett & Bauman (1996), a model linking three perceived support variables, level of support, quality of support, and hope for future support,
to self-deceptive behavior was utilized. Both parent and peer supports were examined. The model revealed that perceived quality and level of parental support project hope about future parental support thereby predicting false self-behavior. Late adolescents' motives for engaging in self-deceptive behavior were also examined. The motives found to be the most clinically debilitating reported the most negative results. On the other hand, late adolescents reporting the developmentally normal motives of role analysis showed the most positive outcome, highest perception of self-worth, greatest hopefulness, and most awareness of true self. Some reported that they engaged in false self-behavior to please, impress, or gain the approval of parents and peers. These teens had average scores on the depression, self-worth, hope, and knowledge of true self-evaluations (Ennett & Bauman, 1996).

The definition of social support, according to Becker & Thornicroft (1998), is "...a subjective measure of the effective value of network interaction the degree to which an individual's social needs are satisfied through interactions with others." Social support theory states that supportive relationships that begin at birth are important for healthy human development. It is believed that humans thrive on mutually supportive relationships and, if this is not possible, there is an increase in pathologies and criminal tendencies. If a child does not
experience love and nurturing behavior by a caregiver, he/she tends to face emotional and cognitive deficiencies. This, in turn, creates anti-social behavior. Parental support teaches a child empathy and self-control as well as helping him/her through chronic stressful situations by increasing his/her resiliency (Cullen et al., 1999).

On the other hand, Parish (1993) found that individuals who come from intact families and receive little support do not fare as well as individuals who are products of divorce and have strong support systems. If one cannot find an operable intra- or extra-familial support system, the individual's social and emotional progress is in jeopardy (Parish & Parish, 1991). Not only does lack of a support system affect the social capabilities of a person, it can also affect his/her health and sense of well-being. Young adults who lack a support system often will isolate themselves from others as well (Rosenfeld & Richman, 1998).

Individually speaking, a support system offers a person a vehicle by which to communicate his/her feelings and thoughts and to formalize and share his/her opinions with others (Donahue, 1998). Further literature suggests that different support systems serve different functions and parental and peer relationships are important for the development of late adolescents (Sabatelli & Anderson, 1991). Support is often thought of as a uni-dimensional
notion such as emotional support (Rosenfeld & Richman, 1998).

In a conflicting study, it was found that as late adolescents sought help by way of talking to friends, family, or professionals about personal problems, improvement in psychological health did not occur. A longitudinal causal model was used and controlled for prior help-seeking behavior, previous degrees of psychological symptoms, and current life circumstances. The late adolescents' help-seeking behavior was evaluated five times over a twelve-month period. The first assessment occurred twelve weeks into the study and did not reveal a notable improvement in subsequent psychological health as the subjects sought professional or informal help. Therefore, it seems that the late adolescents' help-seeking behavior did not reduce their psychological distress. The study suggests that concentrating on problems by talking about them may intensify rather than lessen the arousal of psychological symptoms. Accordingly, seeking help by talking about one's problems may not always be an effective way of coping for adolescents (Coleman, 1996).

Cullen et. al.(1999) describes social support as a source of effective or instrumental aid. Wan & Jaccard (1996) elaborate further in their article on the definitions of each of these types of support. Instrumental aid is sometimes called tangible aid and is
considered financial and material resources. Wan & Jaccard (1996) add cognitive aid as another type of support. Cognitive support is listed as informational, advice, or appraisal assistance. They define it further as affirmation for the one in need, feedback, social comparison, suggestions, and direction. Emotional aid in this article was broken down into two components. The first is emotional support which conveys acceptance, value for the person, and develops trust and concern for the other as well as willingness to listen. This type of aid assists a person in dealing with self-esteem issues. The other component is companionship support. This form of support is a source of diversion from one’s problems. It usually involves recreational or leisure activities to help one keep relaxed during a stressful event. Richman & Rosenfeld (1998) break down the different types of support even further. In their article, they add listening support which is listening without judging or giving advice. It is also defined as an emotional challenge, which is challenging the one who is receiving support so they can evaluate their feelings, attitudes and values. Reality confirmation support is seen as validating what the supporter perceives is worthy and acceptable. Task appreciation support then is challenging the support recipient’s way of thinking about a particular task or
activity in order to motivate the individual and to seek creative alternatives.

It is important to late adolescents that their parents show them emotional support, which translates to them as love and personal value. It is also imperative that a parent use instrumental support as this teaches the late adolescent to use his/her problem-solving capabilities. Both of these support systems foster a young adult’s sense of well-being (Valery & Connor, 1997). Kostelcky & Lemper (1998) confirm this finding by stating that emotional and instrumental aid from the parents is vital to the late adolescent. Parental affection and warmth are related to how well a young adult will identify with his peers and to the building of positive social norms. Wentz-Gross & Siperstein (1997) assert that problem-solving support is often shared between the young adult’s parents and his/her peers. They further state that certain types of support are problem-specified. For instance, when someone feels incompetent, emotional support is fitting. Another example is the acquisition of a new social role at which time instrumental support is fitting.

Reciprocity is an essential feature in a supportive relationship. The social exchange theory states that exchanges are based on trust that the one who receives assistance will eventually return the favor. In families, if one provides more support than the other, the giver can
perceive that giving support to the other as less desirable over time. Furthermore, the one receiving the support may feel dependent and unable to return the assistance. It has been found in poor families that the reciprocity is often low and minimal support is offered to each other. In other circumstances, support is given to those who are obviously in need. Such as, the old, the young and the disabled.

Parental support for siblings can vary too. This is often based on who seems to need more attention and support than the others or on the perception that one individual is more reciprocal (Parrott & Bengtson, 1999).

There are four main ecological microsystems of social support. They are the neighborhood/community, the school, the peer group, and the family. The more support a young adult can depend on, the more resilient they become in the face of adversity (Rosenfeld & Richman, 1998). In other industrial nations it has been discovered that offering supportive programs for young adults reduces crime rates among that population (Cullen et al, 1999). A study done by Pittman & Cahill (1995) Revealed that programs for late adolescents can be very effective in offering an alternative or additional support. The most effective young adult programs include the ideology of a family or member atmosphere, recruit caring and responsive adults, use symbolisms that appeal to contemporary young adults, and provide an environment that offers safety. Other
beneficial components included in late adolescent programs are the availability of counseling information, the development of caring relationships with peers and other adults, and the training of late adolescents in serving others who need support.

A church is another form of support where a late adolescent may find a caring adult who can impart pro-social models and honest values. Research shows that if late adolescents help others by the equal means of support, they develop a deeper sense of well-being (R.J.C. & D.M.R., (1995). Donahue (1998) views ecological support from others in three formats. The first is personal support which include family, friends, clergy, teachers, or counselors. The second is community support groups which are geared toward a specific problem that others also share. The final type of support, often used in colleges, is psychoeducational support which helps late adolescents understand the need for a support system. This type of program helps students understand their deficiencies within the support system. Furthermore, it assists them in accessing additional support systems, thereby helping at-risk late adolescents become aware of a social network and teaching them how to utilize it (Rosenfeld & Richman, 1998).
METHODS SECTION

Study Design

The descriptive design will work best in conducting our study. This design provides existing studies to support our research. The descriptive study can inform the reader in one given area of a problem and can also be used to describe a relationship between two factors.

Since there are numerous studies based on understanding adolescents and their support systems, using a descriptive design will help to reinforce and support previous studies. Through our study, we will attempt to determine the relationship of gender to what is perceived as an effective support system. Thus, we will be examining a specified area of an individual's support system.

This study will use a questionnaire with approximately thirty-five questions. This will be done in face-to-face interviews with the participants and the researchers. The data will be collected at San Bernardino Valley College, California State University San Bernardino, churches and personal acquaintances. There will be 25 male and 25 female participants used in our research. The ages of the participants will be 18 and 19 year old. The researchers will attempt to get equal proportions of diverse backgrounds in the samples and even distributions of the sampling sites. Data will be collected from those who are not attending college as well.
Sampling

The sample size for this research project will be fifty participants. There will be 25 males and 25 females selected. Since the research question is geared toward the differences associated with genders, the sample will have to be divided equally. The age of the sample will be 18 and 19 year olds. The researchers chose this period, since it appears to be the most trying time in human development. This is due to the transition towards individuation from families of origin. The researchers have attempted to acquire a mixed sample of socioeconomic classes and races. The data was collected at junior colleges, universities, churches and from personal acquaintances. Part of the sample will be of “employed only” late adolescents.

The participants will place a check mark on a line to give permission to actively participate in the study. There are no rewards or payments to the participants. The protocol for ethical treatment of the participants in this study was approved by the California State University, San Bernardino Institutional Review Board. All the participants in this study were treated in accordance with the APA’s ethical guidelines for research (APA, 1992).

The participants will be recruited in the cities of San Bernardino and Redlands. Due to time constraints we chose late adolescents exclusively for our study. This will eliminate the need of an informed consent for minors.
as well as the challenge of finding the sites for the minors in the population. Collecting the samples in the prescribed sites given in this proposal should create a diverse demographic effect in socio-economic, race, and levels of education. The researchers will be using nonprobability, quota and snowball sampling since the sample will be selected in respect to gender, age, and diversity. The snowball sampling will be specifically used for personal acquaintances.

**Data Collection and Instruments**

The independent variable for this study is gender. The dependent variables are perceived resources and the availability of social support. The dependent variables will be measured by assessing specific stressors, perceived resources and relationships with parents, siblings, and friends. The types of support will be measured in categories of assistance, such as practical, emotional, advisory, and financial. The independent variable gender will be measured and determined based on the individual categories. The intervening variables in this study are locale and availability of family and friends of the participants, individual coping skills, and socio-economic levels. These variables will be useful in determining other aspects that affect a participant's perceived availability of a support system beyond the association related to gender.
The participants will be provided with a pencil and the questionnaire at their respective sites as well as a table and chair allowing comfort as they complete the survey. The participants who are personal acquaintances will have the advantage of taking the survey to their homes and later returning it to the researchers upon completion. The questionnaire entails a cover letter that explains the topic of the study, "Late Adolescents Perception of Social Support," the approximate time to complete the survey, a statement declaring anonymity and confidentiality of the participant, in addition to the choice to stop or refuse to participate at any time, who to contact for results of the experiment and the consent agreement.

The participant will answer Likert scale questions regarding life stressors, perceived availability of support, and types of support they pursue. The first scale chosen for this study is "Life Stressors and Social Resources Inventory" (youth form, LISRES-Y), (Moos, 1990). The major descriptors of this scale are coping, life events, social support groups, and stress variables. Some of the minor descriptors that are important to this study are late adolescence, behavior patterns, emotional response, family relationships, and student relationships. This scale measures stable life stressors and social resources and how they have developed or changed over time. This survey uses a five-point Likert scale ranging from

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"often to never." The Cronbach's Alpha ranges from .66-.93 across subscales.

The next scale chosen for this study is "Social Support Appraisals," SSA: Vaux (1982). There are 23 items in this scale that use the "agree-disagree" format. The major descriptors are: variety of network resources, size of emotional and socializing networks, closeness and complexity of the relationships, and the composition of the network. The minor descriptors are, being cared for, respected, and involved in the network. The Cornbach's Alpha is .88-.90.

The third scale that will be employed in our study is "Social Support Behaviors," SSB: Vaux (1982). This scale is designed to measure the five criteria of supportive behavior including emotional, social, practical or financial assistance, and advice/guidance. The major descriptors of the previous subscales are family and friends. The 45 questions used in this scale give specific support activity. The participant answers the questions by checking one of the five supportive behaviors mentioned previously. The Cornbach's Alpha is .85.

The last scale used in our study is "Measures of Support Network Resources", SSR: Vaux (1982). This scale assesses structure, composition and the relationship quality of these networks. The major descriptors involve frequency of interaction, closeness, complexity, and
reciprocity of the relationship. The minor descriptors are family, friends as well as neighbors, workmates, and fellow members of church. Questions such as “Whom do you confide in and discuss personal feelings with?” gives the participant up to ten network members to choose from. This type of format covers the major and minor descriptors mentioned above. The Cornbach’s Alpha is .72.

Because we plan for the scale to take about 15 minutes to complete, we will down-size and choose the most relevant questions on each of these scales to be implemented in our survey. The strength of our sample will be due to gathering from numerous places. However, the weakness will be in collecting data from the most diverse backgrounds as possible, considering ethnicity and socio-economic history of the participants.

Procedure

The data should take approximately one month to collect. The researchers spent approximately 8-16 hours per week collecting data from San Bernardino Valley College, California State University San Bernardino, churches and personal acquaintances. The researchers provided pencils and a table and chair to accommodate the participants while they filled out the survey.

Protection of Human Subjects

The survey was anonymous. Participants left a checkmark on a designated line of the informed consent
which is the only identifiable mark used by the participant. Some of the information requested may appear intrusive to the participant such as age, income, and race. However, the researchers gave the participants opportunity to quit taking the survey at any time. The researchers also listed the phone number for the Community Counseling Center at California State University, San Bernardino as a precaution in case the survey cause any unwarranted stress.

Data Analysis

The type of analysis used in this study is the descriptive analysis. With this type of analysis, one can see how a variable is distributed in the sample. The descriptive analysis uses unvariable statistics such as frequency distribution and central tendency (mode, median and mean). We also look at the association of the subgroups of the independent variable "gender" with inferential statistics. The Chi square and the independent t-test will be used to determine the correlation and strength of male and female perceptions of social support. Since the researchers acquired a sample of a certain age group and divided the sample in equal values of male and female, a cross-sectional design will be used.
RESULTS

The respondents for this survey (table 1) consisted of equal proportions of males and females and were predominately 18 years of age. Slightly more than half of the participants, 52%, were Caucasian, Hispanics totaled 26%, and 12% were African-American. A small percentage, 6%, was Native Americans and Asian/Pacific Islanders totaled 4% of our participants. The majority of the respondents or 72%, lived with their parents. The residual consisted of 20% living with a friend and 8% living with a significant other.

The majority of the respondents were either employed full-time or unemployed. Each of these values coincidentally met with equal results at 34%. The remainder worked part-time constituting 32% of our participants. Forty-eight percent were high school graduates. Of the remainder, 22% had not graduated and 28% experienced some college. Thirty-six percent attended school full-time, while 32% attended part-time and 32% did not attend college. The majority of the participants or 72%, earned $0-10,000 per year. Twenty-two percent of the respondents earned $11,000-20,000 while a small 2% earned $21,000-30,000. Surprisingly, 4% claimed to earn over $30,000 per year.
Chi-square and Cramer’s V were used to examine the associations between perceived life stressors for the late teens. The nominal independent variables were male and female with the dependent variables of various life stressors having occurred within the last year. The significant findings (illustrated in table 2) show that a serious accident or injury, arguments with family members, rejection, or a negative change in relationship with a boyfriend or girlfriend are the stressors the majority of the participants in our sample have experienced within the last year. These are the only stressors that were significant for both genders (table 2).

T-tests were given to ascertain the difference between the genders when judging the availability of support from the classifications of perceived support. Family was one classification of difference between male and female and a significant level was obtained in a question in each type of support. The first question with significant levels that show a difference in the mean between male and female respondents is, “Would loan me a car if I needed one.” This was a practical type of support with a value of (t = 4.72, < .04). The second significant alpha score is for the question, “Would show me that they understood how I was feeling.” This was an emotional type of support and the score was (t = 5.34, < .03). The one question that displays significance in the two variables of family and
friends is, "Would tell me about available choices and options." This was an advice type of support and the significant level for family choice ($t = 6.87, < .04$) in contrast to friends ($t = 4.73, < .04$).

There were no significant levels of differences between genders in support under the classification of "others." To summarize, t-test significance reveals in each area questioned about family, the respondents found support. However, the area of advice was the only issue for a significant difference in the level of support in the "friend" category. Lastly, in the area of "others," including pastor, counselor, or coach, no significant difference appeared in our sample.

Chi-square was used in comparison with the different supports in the Likert scale of "family," "friends," and "others." There were significant levels between male and female responses in the categories of "family," and "friends." For "family," the questions were, "Would not pass judgement on me," which was an emotional type of support and are $X^2 (4, N =50) =9.08, < .05$. The second question for "family" "Would help me move or other big chore" showed results of $X^2 (3, N =50) = 8.26, < .04$ and this was considered a social support type of question.

In the "friends" category, the level of significance was met in three questions. The first was, "Would show me that they understood how I was feeling." This was an
emotional type of support question and the alpha was $X^2 (4, N =50) =10.93, < .02$. The next question, "Would loan me money and want to forget about it," revealed significant levels of $X^2 (4, N = 50) = 12.80, < .01$. This was a category of practical type of support. The last question in friends section was, "Would tell me about available choices and options," an emotional support question, with value as $X^2 (4, N =50) =11. 06, < .02$. Just as the t-test could not show a mean difference for the category of "others," the chi-square could not show an association between genders in responding to the "others" area.
Table 1.

Characteristics of Respondents (N = 50)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eighteen</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nineteen</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live with parents</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live with friend</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live with significant other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not attending</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income level per year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$0-10,000</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$11,000-20,000</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$21,000-30,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$30,000+</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 2.

Life Stressors Over The Last Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>v</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have a serious accident</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.02*</td>
<td>.319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have arguments with your family</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.003*</td>
<td>.524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have been rejected or turned down by someone</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.04*</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05 (two-tailed)
DISCUSSION

Seventy-two percent of the respondents lived with their parents or other family members. This is probably why the significant chi-square stressors were, "arguing with one's family," "rejected or turned down by someone you liked," "relationship with boyfriend/girlfriend change for the worse," and "did you have a serious accident or injury." There was no significant level of life stressors with "parents separating", "divorce," or "death of a family member." It appears that most of the respondents have an intact home which could influence their response to the use of family as a support resource. Since most of the late adolescents live at home and appear to be working and earning money, their stressors are likely not due to living in poverty conditions. Most of the population for the study was obtained by networking through friends as well as a minimal amount procured through junior colleges. The process of networking somewhat limits the randomization of the sample. One usually socializes with his/her own socio-economic group since many friends and acquaintances are in "the neighborhood."

The results of the t-test show there are differences in gender with specific questions in areas of practical, emotional, and advice types of support. Females tended to have a strong, positive response to the significant
questions of practical and emotional support whereas the males responded more positively to advice questions. This correlates with the difference various literature has suggested. The females appeared to be able to go to their families for emotional and practical support while the males tend to seek family and friends for advice (Copeland & Hess, 1995).

The chi-square showed a strong association with both male and female in the questions of emotional and social support with their families. However, it also showed their friends could support them in issues regarding emotional and practical needs. The "others" category which includes pastors, coaches, teachers, etc., had no significant levels with t-test or chi-square. There could be two reasons for the non-significant levels.

The first is that most of the respondents did not fill the designated blank area that stated what the "other" was (i.e. pastor) in the beginning of the Likert scale. Their reasoning could have been they neglected to look at the instructions thoroughly and answered all the other Likert questions in a neutral or undetermined stance. This was obvious in some of the respondents' answers to "others" as some answered with the same numerical response throughout the "other" section even though they did not specify who the other was. Another possibility could be the majority of the sample we chose is content with their family and
friends for support. After all, the respondents appear to live with their families and show evidence in their responses in life stressors that they have relational problems with family and friends.

One would have to conclude the results might differ for adolescents in a poverty-level income or one who comes from a single head-of-household (i.e. single mom or divorce). If the adolescents in our survey did not live with their parents or families as the majority does, it is possible that, with the shift of individuation and newly acquired independence, the participants might have had a higher significant level in the categories of "friends" and "others" as well. This would also depend on the geographical distance these respondents would have from their families.

In the researchers opinion, future studies need to investigate support systems of late adolescences with low social economic status in addition to those from single parent households. This could produce different results and possibly show a significance in the category of "others." The life stressors significant in the chi-square may be in the areas of "parents divorced," "personal belongings stolen," "being personally attacked," or, "family member recovering from emotional problem." This would likely hold more true if the population were chosen from a poverty-level environment. From this information,
one could surmise that teens that live with both parents are able to find support with their family and friends. Actually, in the lower socio-economic bracket of participants, one might find a positive association with "friends" as well as "others," since often late adolescents from a single parent home use their friends for support (Cullen, Wright, & Chamlin, 1999).

Implications for Social Workers

The respondents who participated in our study were using support systems that were available in the micro and mezzo level. The literature supports that social support on a macro level is beneficial for late adolescents. Lower-income teens, or those from unstable homes, do benefit from some type of support at a macro level such as, boys and girls clubs, church activities, after-school programs, and organized athletes.

Parents, siblings, friends, and significant others in the world of the late adolescent may be able to implement intervention programs and strategies that may intervene in the process of stress reduction or social support improvement. These results highlight the importance of stress intervention in the lives of the young adult. The findings from this study, as well as those from other research, may have long-lasting implications for the psychological, emotional, and behavioral well-being of late adolescents. Social support is an important aspect of
social work practice since interventions and treatment strategies are sometimes utilized by a support system. The social worker can attempt to enlist the late adolescent's adult caretakers or peer group to provide additional or more effective technical appreciation support. In addition, the social worker can work with the late adolescent to learn more effective ways to recognize and access technical evaluation from his or her adult caretaker or peer group. The social worker can then develop strategies to increase or maximize the effectiveness of adult caretakers' technical, emotional, and personal assistance. Therefore, the more informed social workers become about the options, direction and the ability to individualize a support system for a client, the more benefits will be seen on micro and macro-system levels of practice.

**Recommendations for Other Studies**

Future studies could examine the difference between perceived support of late adolescents and the mid- or early adolescents such as, a cross-analysis study of each group of adolescents (i.e. early, mid and late). This would be helpful in determining the best way to intervene with the use of support as a buffer in stressful situations. One could also conduct a different study that might produce more specific, significant results if conducted at a crisis unit for adolescents. Perceived support could be measured
after the adolescent has been stabilized from the recent stressful event in order to ascertain who they have used for support. The results could be quite different than assessing stressors that have occurred within the last year, which might cause a participant to forget or not see the situation as intensely as before.

Conclusion

The data collected from our study shows that males and females differ in their perceptions regarding the use of practical, emotional, and advice types of support from their families.

However, males and females share the same perceptions in certain types of support. Both seek family for social type of support and certain emotional needs. Males and females both feel that their friends can support them with emotional and practical needs.

To summarize, this study has found gender differences in certain types of support. Yet, it was found in only three (practical, emotional and advice) of the four types of support. In the fourth category of social support, there was not differentiation with males and females; instead only an association. This leads to the probability or the possibility that males and females socialize within their families with no difference in their expectations of this type of support.
APPENDIX A: Informed Consent

You are being asked to participate in a study to determine where male and female late adolescents go to receive support to buffer life stressors. This study explores which support systems seem most accessible to late adolescents. This study is being conducted by Roz Gastel and Ken Lapioli, Master of Social Work students attending California State University, San Bernardino. The students are working under the supervision of Mr. George Taylor, Title IV-E faculty member in Social Work Administration.

If you have any questions about the study or if you would like a report of the findings, you may contact Mr. Taylor at 909-880-5501. If you have questions about research participants' rights, please contact the Institutional Review Board at 909-880-5027.

If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to fill out a questionnaire of fifty-four questions. The topics in the questionnaire include life stressors, social support, and the types of support available to you. This will take approximately fifteen minutes to complete.

Some of the information gathered in this survey is of a personal nature such as income, age and race. Some questions regarding life stressors and support systems may be distressing to some individuals. However, this survey could help some gather insight into what is stressful in their lives or perhaps increase awareness of the types of
support available to them. If any questions have cause you discomfort the attached debriefing statement has the name and number of agencies that you may contact to help resolve any emotional discomfort.

The results will be strictly confidential and anonymous. You may refuse to answer any questions on the survey, and may stop taking the survey at any time. The information from individual surveys will not be given to anyone. If anyone asks to see the results of the survey, we will provide the findings as statistical data, not individual scores.

Check here if you understand the nature of the study and agree to take this survey____.
APPENDIX B: Instrument

Please circle the answer that applies to you.

1. What is your gender?
   1. Male  2. Female

2. What is your current age?
   1. Eighteen  2. Nineteen

3. What is your ethnicity?
   4. Asian/Pacific Islander  5. Other ________________

4. What is your highest level of education achieved?
   1. Less than high school  2. High school graduate
   3. Some college

5. What is your income level per year?
   1. 0-10,000  2. 11,000-20,000  3. 21,000-30,000
   4. 30,000 +

6. Who do you live with?
   1. Parents  2. By yourself  3. Friend
   4. Significant other

7. Are you employed?
   1. Full-time  2. Part-time  3. Unemployed

8. Are you a student?
   1. Full-time  2. Part-time  3. Not a student
People help each other in many different ways. Suppose you have some kind of problem, such as being upset about something, needing help with a practical problem, you are broke or needing some advice or guidance. How likely would (A) members of your family, (B) your friends (C) others, (pastors, teachers, coaches, counselors etc, please specify______) be to help you out in the specific ways listed below. Try to base your answers on your past experiences with these people. Use the scale below, and circle one number under family, friends, and others, in each role.

1. No one would do this
2. Someone might do this
3. Some family member/friend/others, would probably do this.
4. Some family member/friend/others, would certainly do this.
5. Most family member/friend/others, would do this.

    Family  Friends  Others

1. Would suggest doing something just to take my mind of my problems...........12345..12345..12345
2. Would look after my belongings (house, pets, etc,.) for a while.............12345..12345..12345
3. Would loan me a car if I needed one..12345..12345..12345
4. Would listen if I needed to talk about my feelings.............................12345..12345..12345
5. Would have a good time with me......12345..12345..12345
6. Would pay for lunch if I was broke.

7. Would suggest a way I might do something to solve my problem.

8. Would give me advice on what to do.

9. Would chat with me.

10. Would show me that they understood how I was feeling.

11. Would help me decide on what to do.

12. Would give me a hug or would show me I was cared about.

13. Would call me just to see how I was doing.

14. Would help me figure out what was.

15. Would help me with some necessary purchase.

16. Would not pass judgment on me.

17. Would be sympathetic if I was upset.

18. Would help me with a move or other big chore.

19. Would visit with me or invite me over.

20. Would loan me money and want to “forget about it.”
21. Would loan me money for an indefinite period..........................12345..12345..12345
22. Would tell me about available choices and options..........................12345..12345..12345
23. Would loan me tool equipment or appliances if I needed them...........12345..12345..12345
24. Would show me something I did not know how to do...........................12345..12345..12345
25. Would talk to other people to arrange something for me.....................12345..12345..12345

Following is a list of things that may have happened to you. Please check “yes” or “no” to indicate if the events occurred within the last 12 months.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Parent separated</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Parents divorced</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Mother or female guardian died</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Father or male guardian died</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Brother or sister died</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) Father/mother remarried</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g) Were you hospitalized for any reason?</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h) Did you have a serious accident or injury?</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) Parents/sibling, recovering from an emotional problem.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j) Were your personal belongings stolen or damaged?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k) Were you personally attacked?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l) Did you get in trouble at school?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m) Were you suspended from school?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n) Were you held back a year in school?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o) Did friends at school drop you as a friend?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p) Were you rejected by someone you liked?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q) Did you break up with a boyfriend or girlfriend?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r) Did relationship with a boyfriend or girlfriend change for the worst?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following are questions that pertain to your relationships with family and friends. Please check the appropriate answer.
a) Do you have arguments with your friends?  

b) Do you have arguments with your family?  

c) Are friends critical or disapproving of you?  

d) Is your family critical or disapproving of you?  

e) Do friends expect too much from you?  

f) Does your family expect too much from you?  

g) Do your parents put too much pressure on you to do well in school, sports, or hobbies?  

How many clubs and organizations outside of school (sports teams, church, clubs, organized hobbies etc) do you belong to?  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>None</th>
<th>One</th>
<th>Two</th>
<th>Three</th>
<th>Four or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How often do you attend church services and activities?  

Never______  
Once/twice a Month___________Several times a year_______  
Once/twice a year___________Every week_______
APPENDIX C: Debriefing Statement

This research study was conducted by Ken Lapioli and Roz Gastel, graduate students at California State University, San Bernardino, to determine where male and female adolescents go to find support to buffer life stressors, and to explore which support systems are most accessible to the adolescent. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at California State University, San Bernardino.

If any of the questions asked by the survey caused you emotional stress, please contact California State University, San Bernardino Community Counseling Center, 909-880-5569. A brief summary of the findings and conclusions of the study will be available after June 1, 2000 and can be obtained by calling Mr. George Taylor at 909-880-5501. Thank you for your participation in the study.
REFERENCES


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