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## **Social Support, Religious Affiliation and Educational Attainment as Predictors of Psychological Wellbeing among Spouses of Male Prisoners in Nigeria**

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### **Authors' contributions**

*Author OVB designed the study, wrote the protocol, and wrote the first draft of the manuscript.  
Author SKB managed the draft paper, performed the statistical analysis, and perfected the  
final draft of the manuscript and Author GAA reviewed the protocol and final draft. All authors  
read and approved the final manuscript.*

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Aims:** The study was designed to examine the influence of social support, religion and education on psychological wellbeing among female partners of prisoners in Ibadan, Nigeria.

**Study Design:** The cross-sectional survey research design was utilized.

**Place and Duration:** The study was carried out at Agodi prison, Ibadan, Nigeria for about five weeks between February 2013 and March 2013

**Methodology:** Using the purposive sampling technique, a total of 109 female partners of prisoners in Ibadan participated in the study. The ages of the participants ranged between 20 years to 65 years with mean age of 39.47 years and standard deviation of 10.03 years. Questionnaire containing standardized scales that measured social support, psychological well-being and demographic characteristics were used for data collection. It was hypothesized that there will be a significant influence of social support on psychological wellbeing.

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**Results:** There was significant difference between the psychological wellbeing of partners with low ( $X = 63.62$ ) social support and High ( $X = 72.85$ ) social support,  $t(107) = 6.06$ ,  $P < .001$ . The results also showed that religion and education had significant main and interaction influence on psychological well-being,  $F(4, 99) = 2.67$ ,  $P < .01$ .

**Conclusion:** Social support and encouragement through religious counseling were consequently recommended for female partners of prisoners.

*Keywords: Social support; religion; education; psychological well-being; Prisoners' partner.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

One of the reasons for concern about the incarceration rates in Nigeria and around the world is the far reaching negative effects of imprisonment. The consequences of imprisonment are felt not only by those who are incarcerated but also by the families and loved ones that are left behind. For example, imprisonment may affect psychological wellbeing of spouses of prisoners.

Psychological well-being is a subjective term that means different things to different people. Psychological wellbeing is the state of good mental and emotional health. People who are psychologically healthy are free from mental disorder and have managed their stress so that it does not interfere with their ability to enjoy life and participate in society. Though there are times in most people's lives when they are not mentally and emotionally at their best, but if they experience a positive state of psychological wellbeing, it then means that these people are able to cope with their problems effectively. This state of being has an effect on a person's physical health. Many authors (for example, [1, 2]) have defined the concept in different ways. Psychological wellbeing represents more private and personal criteria for evaluation of one's functioning and social wellbeing. Psychological wellbeing has been found to correlate with a variety of indicators of psychological adjustment and overall wellness. Like many other psychological terms, there are certain concepts that underlie the determination of psychological wellbeing [3]. Psychological wellbeing indicators attempts to understand people's evaluations of their minds and lives. In the opinion of Ryff and Keyes [4], positive functioning consists of six dimensions of psychological wellbeing; self-acceptance, positive relation with others, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, and autonomy. For example, physical health, social adjustment, possession of strong coping skills and resiliency in times of stress and personal crisis have all being linked to higher levels of psychological wellbeing. The term psychological wellbeing is also seen as being synonymous with other terms such as quality of life, life satisfaction, overall life happiness and inner sense of security [5,6].

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), psychological wellbeing means the soundness of the mind, body and the ability to relate well with others and the community to which one belongs and more importantly to be satisfied and happy. Apart from being physically sound, a healthy individual must be mentally and spiritually stable. This suggests that it is possible for an individual to be physically fit in appearance, but may still not be healthy in terms of their psychological wellbeing [7]. When individuals are not satisfied with their present states of life, it may lead to the feeling of unfulfillment and unhappiness, which may affect both the physical and psychological well-being, which may be moderated by social support.

Social-support has been conceptualized as the perceived or actual feelings that one is cared for, has assistance available from other people, and that one is part of a supportive social network. Several types of social support have been investigated, such as instrumental (e.g. assist with a problem) tangible (e.g. donate goods) information (e.g. give advice) and emotional (e.g. give reassurance) among others [8]. This kind of support can come from many sources, such as family, friends, pets, individuals, groups or institutions that provide assistance of varying degrees and forms to help another individual combat stresses that tax their personal resources [9]. Being embedded in a positive social world might be more powerful than receiving a particular act of help. Social support refers to the experience of being valued, respected, cared about, and loved by others who are present in one's life [10]. In this study, Social support is the perceived physical and emotional comfort given to spouses of male prisoners by family, friends, co-workers and others as measured with the scale administered on the participants. Social support is an element that can help individuals to reduce the amount of stress experienced, as well as to help individual cope better in dealing with stressful situations. A study by Nahid and Sarkis [11] for example, found that social support protects people in life crisis such as bereavement, illness, and other major stress, and moderates the effect of stressors on psychological wellbeing.

Social support is an aspect that should be examined in this study since it is described as both a buffer against life stressors as well as an agent promoting health and wellness [12]. Deficits in social support have been shown to be related to many psychological problems such as depression, loneliness, and anxiety [13]. Elliot and Gramling [14] found that social support could help the patients manage and lessen their psychological problems. Research has shown that social support plays an important role in managing psychological and physical problems. Lack of social support has been found to be one of the factors that lead to many psychological wellbeing problems [15]. A growing number of literature and empirical research have indicated the relationship between social support and psychological problems among partners of prisoners. For example, according to Steinberg and Darling [16], Cutrona [17] family and friends are the individuals' first source of reference, supports from these two sources have been found to show a significant influence on psychological wellbeing. The support received by the partners of prisoners could help to ameliorate their psychological wellbeing problems.

Researchers have known for decades that religion is a vast multidimensional construct that contains a wide range of behaviours and beliefs [18]. Religiosity was defined broadly as any attitude, belief, motivation, pursuit, or behaviour involving spiritual or religious, content or process. Religious involvement may afford people opportunities for social support which has been found to protect against depressive symptoms that could be experienced as a result of the imprisonment [19, 20]. People who are involved in religious activities have substantially more informal social contacts and are more active in the civic engagement than people who are not. This has a way of affecting their wellbeing [21]. Religiously involved people may have resources for appraising negative life events that reduces the perceived stressfulness of these events [22]. To the extent that religious people believe that their lives are controlled by a higher power or that life events are opportunities for spiritual growth, they may experience life events such as the imprisonment of their husbands as less threatening-and less stressful [19]. In a study by Farkas and Miller [23], family members spoke of becoming more religious and viewing their experience as a test of faith when confronted with stressful life events.

Educational level may have a way of boosting the wellbeing, as well as people's reaction to stressful life events such as in the case of spouses of prisoners. For example, Lowstein [24]

found that a basic component of the personal resources was a wife's education, the higher the educational attainment of the wife the more she had a realistic perception of her situation and more marketable employment skills that will enhance better psychological wellbeing. Therefore, this study attempts to understand the role of social support, religious affiliation and educational attainment in managing the psychological wellbeing problems that may be faced by the spouses of male prisoners.

There is a limited body of research conducted on spouses of incarcerated men and the far-reaching effects or influence of imprisonment on these secondary victims, especially their psychological wellbeing, within the Nigerian context. Several studies on incarceration in Nigeria have been directed at issues affecting prison inmates while in custody [25, 26]. Not much is known about the implication of incarceration to the psychological wellbeing of prisoners' female partners, which is the focus of the present study. When the head of a household which is the husband goes to prison, the wife is likely to suffer certain deprivation which may affect her psychological wellbeing. Past studies failed to examine the influence or effect of incarceration on the psychological wellbeing of female partners of these prisoners. Therefore this study proposed (a) To examine the influence of social support on psychological wellbeing of the spouses of male prisoners in Ibadan, (b) To examine the influence of religious affiliation and educational attainment level on psychological wellbeing of the female partners of prisoners in Ibadan. Following from the arguments and review of literature above, the following hypotheses were derived [1]. There would be a positive significant relationship between Social support and reported psychological wellbeing of spouses of male prisoners such that spouses of male prisoners with perceived lower level of social support will report significantly lower level of psychological wellbeing than partners with higher level of social support. [2]. There will be a significant main and interaction influence of educational attainment and religious affiliation on reported psychological wellbeing of spouses of male prisoners in Ibadan.

## **2. METHODS**

### **2.1 Research Design**

This study adopted the survey method using cross-sectional, with the ex-post facto research design. The independent variables of the study are social support, religion and education (demographic variables), while psychological wellbeing is the dependent variable.

### **2.2 Participants**

Using purposive sampling technique, 109 female partners of prisoners in Ibadan, Nigeria who came for visitation participated in the study. They are female partners of both convicted and awaiting trial inmates (because some have stayed for more than one year, still awaiting trials. In real sense, can we actually separate the effect of being locked up under any guise from those who walk freely without the burden of uncertainty about their future/life). Seventy four (67.9%) of the participants were Christians, 35 (32.1%) were Muslims. Their age ranged from 20 years to 65 years with mean age of 39.47 years and standard deviation of 10.03 years. Thirty three (30.3%) of the participants had primary education, 43 (39.4%) had secondary education, 9 (8.3%) had B.Sc, 17 (15.6%) had M.Sc and 7 (6.4%) had no formal education. In terms of their ethnicity, 12 (11.0%) of the participants were Ibo, 93 (85.3%) were Yorubas and 4 (3.7%) were Hausas. Considering the level of their income, 64 (58.8%) were low income earners, 40 (36.7%) were medium income earners while 5(4.6%) were high

income earners. Ninety (82.6%) of the participants were into business and 19(17.4%) were civil servants. Seventy one (65.1%) had good health status, 32 (29.4%) had better health status, 1 (0.9%) had worse health status while 5 (4.6%) had others. The length of sentence of participant's partners ranged from 1- 19 months to Above 46 months. Looking at the family type of the participants, 88 (80.7%) were from monogamous family while 21 (19.3%) were from polygamous family. 80 (73.4%) of the participants lived in a rented apartment while 29 (26.6%) lived in the owned apartment. Forty (36.7) of the participants had husbands who were convicted of their crime while 69 (63.3) had husbands who were awaiting trial.

### **2.3 Research Instrument**

A well-structured questionnaire was used to collect relevant data for this study. The questionnaire comprised three (3) sections:

**Section A:** This section taps demographic characteristics of the prisoners female partners including age, religion, educational background, income, occupation, length of sentence of husband, health status, family type, ownership of house, type of crime.

**Section B** is a 22-item psychological wellbeing index developed by Goldberg [27] and revised by Revicki, Leidy and Howland [28]. It has six sub-scales, namely: anxiety, depressed mood, positive- wellbeing, self-control, general health and vitality. It is a Likert format scale with 5 response options ranging from 1= None of the time to 5= All of the time. Items are added together to determine the overall score on the scale. Minimum score derivable is 22 while maximum score is 110. The higher the score of an individual on the scale, the higher the perceived psychological wellbeing. The authors reported the following alpha levels for each subscale: anxiety (0.82), depressed mood (0.89), positive wellbeing (0.88), self-control (0.76), general health (0.61), and vitality (0.85).

**Section C** of the questionnaire is the Social support scale by Zimet, Dahlem and Farley, [29]. This is a 13 item- scale with an internal co-efficient alpha of 0.91 reported by the authors. The format is summated rating with response choices ranging from 1= very strongly disagree to 5= very strongly agree. Low score on this scale means low social support while high score means high social support. In the present study, a Crobach alpha of .80 was established for the scale. Furthermore, the respondents were divided into low or high social support if they score less than 21(low) or equal to or greater than 21 (high) on the scale.

### **2.4 Procedure**

Questionnaire administration took place at Agodi Prison in Ibadan, where the participants were purposively drawn from the partners who come for visitation. Permission was sought from the Controller of Prisons (CP) by the researchers before the administration of the questionnaires. The verbal consent of prospective participants was sought after brief explanation of the research. Those who consented were given the questionnaire with assurance of anonymity and confidentiality of responses. Participants were also informed that they were not under any obligation to participate and that they have the right to withdraw at any point they feel inclined to discontinue with the exercise. It was impressed on the participants that there were no right or wrong answers but they were encouraged to be honest in their responses. There were two versions of the questionnaire, the English version and the translated version (back and forth) for those with limited education, believing that medium of communication may be a problem. Where and whenever there was need for further explanations, the researchers were around to provide such.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows that social support had significant influence on psychological wellbeing among partners of prisoners ( $t= 6.056$ ;  $df= 107$ ;  $p<.001$ ). This means that participants with low social support ( $X= 63.62$ ;  $SD= 6.59$ ) reported lower psychological well-being than those with high social support ( $X= 72.85$ ;  $SD= 8.89$ ).

**Table 1. Summary of independent t-test comparing level of social support of partners of prisoners on psychological well being**

Psychological well being	Social Support	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	Df	T	P
	Low	50	63.62	6.59	107	6.056	<.001
	High	59	72.85	8.89			

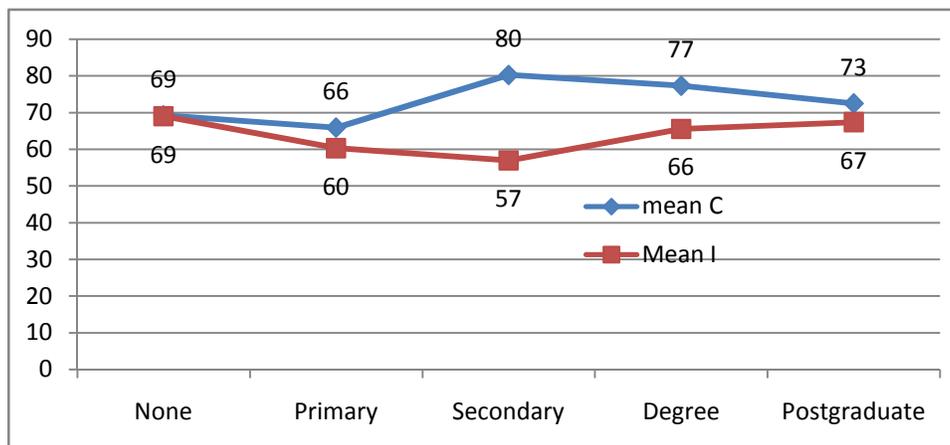
The result in Table 2 shows that there was the main and interaction influence of educational attainment and religious affiliation on psychological wellbeing of spouses of male prisoners. It was observed that those with university degrees and who are of the Christian faith reported higher psychological wellbeing (80.25), than those spouses with higher/postgraduate degree who are equally of the Christian faith (77.30) and so on (see Table 3 for details) Surprisingly, Christians with no education reported a significantly higher psychological wellbeing as compared to other combinations of education and religion apart from the two reported earlier.

**Table 2. Summary of one way ANOVA showing the effect of education and religion on psychological wellbeing among female partners of prisoners using harmonic mean**

Source	SS	Df	MS	F	P
Education	1797.53	4	449.38	6.873	P<.001
Religion	648.79	1	648.79	9.922	P<.01
Intercept	315485.37	1	315485.37	4824.99	P<.001
Error	6734.73	103	65.386		

$R^2 = .254$  ( $Adj. R^2 = .218$ )

The interaction influence of educational attainment and religious affiliation is presented in Fig. 1 below



**Fig. 1. Line graph representation of the interactive effect of educational attainment and religious affiliation of respondents on reported psychological wellbeing**

**Table 3. Summary of descriptive statistics showing the influence of educational and religion on psychological wellbeing among partners of prisoners**

Education	Religion	Interaction	Mean	SD	N	RANK
Primary school	CHRISTIANITY	PC	69.25	7.60	20	4 <sup>th</sup>
	ISLAM	PI	69.00	4.54	23	5 <sup>th</sup>
Secondary school	CHRISTIANITY	SC	65.91	5.66	34	7 <sup>th</sup>
	ISLAM	SI	60.33	6.08	9	9 <sup>th</sup>
Degree/Diploma	CHRISTIANITY	DC	80.25	8.39	8	1 <sup>st</sup>
	ISLAM	DI	57.00		1	10 <sup>th</sup>
Postgraduate	CHRISTIANITY	PGC	77.30	13-90	10	2 <sup>nd</sup>
	ISLAM	PGI	65.57	9.98	7	8 <sup>th</sup>
None	CHRISTIANITY	NC	72.50	9.19	2	3 <sup>rd</sup>
	ISLAM	NI	67.40	10.69	5	6 <sup>th</sup>

*Key: PC= Primary Christian, PI= Primary Islam, SC= Secondary Christian, SI= Secondary Islam; DC= Degree Christian, DI=Degree Islam, PGC= Postgraduate Christian, PGI= Postgraduate Islam, NC= No Education Christian, NI= No Education Islam.*

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The hypothesis which stated that spouses of male prisoners with lower level of social support will report significantly lower level of psychological wellbeing than spouses with higher level of social support was supported. This means that the spouses of male prisoners who reported higher level of perceived psychological wellbeing may be as a result perceived higher level of social support they think they were getting from significant others.. Meaning that the lower the perceived support the lower their reported psychological wellbeing. Several studies have investigated the relationship between social support and psychological wellbeing. In a study by Cohen et al [30] it was found that social support affects both mental and physical health through its influence on emotions, cognitions and behaviors. Also Cohen, Underwood and Gottlieb [31] further reinforced Taylor's and Devine's [32] view on social support by describing appraisal support as shielding an individual against the effects of stress by encouraging the individual to interpret stressful situations less negatively. They went further to suggest that support reduces the effects of stressful events on one's wellbeing through supportive actions of others or one's belief that support is available. The implication of this is that people, in general especially significant others would help spouses of incarcerated individuals cope well with the confronting situation.

The second hypothesis stated that there will be a significant main and interaction influence of educational level and religious affiliation on psychological wellbeing among the spouses of male prisoners. The hypothesis was confirmed. This result implies that the educational level and religious affiliation of the spouses of prisoners, combined, will go a long way in helping them to report a good psychological wellbeing. What we are saying is that religious affiliation play a significant role in tempering the influence of separation from spouses as a result of incarceration but the direction is not fully established here as the depth of religiosity was not manipulated in the study. What was observed was that those who belonged to the Christian faith reported higher psychological wellbeing than those of who belonged to the Islamic faith. The question is could there be some teachings in the Christian faith that could

be more supportive of the stressful life event that people go through? This was not tested in the present study, and so may be difficult to conclude on such an inference. On the other hand, we equally found that educational attainment of the respondents singularly and in conjunction with their religious affiliation influenced their reported psychological wellbeing. The surprising thing is that those who were not so educated (Secondary school level) reported higher psychological wellbeing, if they are of the Christian faith, than those of the Islamic faith, but the influence tapered off by the time they (the Islamic spouses) attained higher educational status, though still below that of the spouses of the Christian faith. The current study is consistent to the findings of Lowenstein [24] who found that a basic component of the personal resources was a wife's education. The higher the education of the wife, the more she had a realistic perception of her situation and more marketable employment skills that will enhance better psychological wellbeing. Religion can be a source of stability and support for some families and faith in a higher power can provide hope and help to regain some semblance of order (well-being). In a study by Farkas and Miller [23] family members spoke of becoming more religious and viewing their experience as a test of faith. Also Farkas and Miller [23]; Westhuis, Fafara and Ouellette [33] found that in most African American families, church has been a source of strength towards experiencing good psychological wellbeing.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

This study contributes to the body of knowledge on the key factors involved in predicting psychological wellbeing among the spouses of prisoners. Based on the findings of this study, one important contribution is that level of psychological wellbeing can be predicted if the individual's level of social support is known. It means that having high or low social support during the period of husband's incarceration could play some mediating roles in explaining how poor or better their psychological wellbeing will be. The second contribution is that religion and education predicted level of psychological wellbeing reported by spouses of the male prisoners. The finding in this study suggests that religion and education have positive effect on psychological well-being.

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Given that in this study, social support, religion and education significantly influenced psychological well-being among female partners of prisoners, helping the partners of prisoners with enough social support could prove useful in enhancing their wellbeing. It is recommended that government establishments, non-governmental organization, religious organization and communities should all take part in given the partners of prisoners, especially those within the low socio-economic class the whole support and encouragement needed pending the time their husbands imprisonment.

## **7. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Results of this study should be interpreted with caution, especially on the religious affiliation of respondents and reported psychological wellbeing. We cannot say that religiosity or depth of faith accounted for the observed differences between the Christians and Muslims as this was not measured in the study. Were this to be done, a more convincing inference(s) may have been possible. We equally observed that inequality of participants' distribution in interactive cells may result in type II error from the conclusions drawn so far. Lastly, the study focused only on female partners of incarcerated male prisoners thereby limiting the

generalizability of the findings across gender and type of relationship (homosexuality, gay relationship, etc). This calls for further study in relation to this concern.

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## **CONSENT**

The questionnaire explained the need for their participation and they were informed that they can withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. No name or any form of direct identification was included in the questionnaire and participants were assured of their confidentiality. Participating in the study was taken as concession.

## **ETHICAL APPROVAL**

As the experiment was made open and conducted during visitation.

## **COMPETING INTERESTS**

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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