

DO PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT AND HEALTH PERCEPTION FACILITATE BETTER PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING AMONG ROAD SAFETY PERSONNEL?

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Abstract

Previous research has shown that perceived social support facilitates individuals' psychological wellbeing. However, less is known about how perceived social support and health perception shape the psychological wellbeing of Federal Road Safety personnel in Nigeria. Therefore, the current research explores the influence of perceived social support and health perception on psychological wellbeing among a sample of Federal Road Safety personnel in Osun State sector command and its component units. Participants were 268 (203 (75.7%) men and 65 (24.3%) women. These participants completed measures of social support, health perception and psychological well-being, in addition to some demographic variables. Data were analyzed using multiple regression statistical analysis. Perceived social support and health perception jointly predicted psychological wellbeing $F(2, 222) = 9.435; R^2 = .08, p < .01$; by accounting for about 8% variation in psychological well-being of participants. The results further shows that perceived social support ($\beta = .26; t = 4.008, p < .01$) independently predicted psychological wellbeing of Federal Road Safety personnel. However, health perception ($\beta = .07, t = 1.060, p > .05$) did not significantly independently predict their psychological wellbeing. Conclusively, psychological well-being among Federal Road Safety personnel is a function of perception of presence of social support. It is recommended that the management of Federal Road Safety Corps should enhanced the welfare of his personnel and give appropriate support to them in order to improve their psychological wellbeing, be more efficient on the job and live a full fulfilled life.

Keywords: Psychological wellbeing, perceived social support, health perception, road safety

INTRODUCTION

Every organization needs employees who are in good psychological state in order to flourish and endure the on-going changes in the world of work (Ferreira, 2012). Employees with higher levels of psychological wellbeing tend to be more prolific and dedicated than employees with lower levels of psychological wellbeing (Wright & Cropanzano, 2004; Wright & Bonett, 2007). To tackle many challenges, organisations need to ensure that their employees are highly motivated and have a high level of wellbeing (Rathi, 2010).

Psychological wellbeing is defined by Dzuka and Dalbert (2000) as the overall satisfaction and happiness or the subjective report of one's mental state of being healthy, satisfied or prosperous and broadly to reflect quality of life and mood states. It is the combination of feeling good and functioning effectively. Psychological wellbeing is not only important to how law enforcement agents feel and function but also how they are relating well with members of public in discharging their duties.

In Nigeria, Federal Road Safety personnel work under conditions that produce stress. Working as a road safety personnel is considered highly stressful because of the negative working conditions such as long irregular hours, standing for long hours under scorching sun and in the rain as well as their regimental life which involve seeking permission for every activity of their life, and safety concerns (Berg, Hem, Lau, & Ekeberg, 2006; Ilevbare & Ogunjinmi, 2014). Also, the changing demands of the working environment increases the level of stress and this has negative consequences on their wellbeing as most Federal Road Safety personnel hardly use more than three years before redeployed to another working environment without prior notice and consideration of immediate family location.

Road safety work is as well burdened with a wide range of dangerous situations such as high-speed chases; carry out rescue activities in the midnight, highly emotional and the stress of dealing with people who are irrational due to consumption of alcohol or drugs, abduction of the staff by the aggressive motorists and the unpredictable confrontations with dangerous drivers and criminals. Lack of resources to do the job, the notion of using your discretions while in dangerous situations, attitude of obeying the last order, even if it is a wrong directive are among the factors putting the road safety officers at the risk and cause unnecessary pressure on them. These factors might impair their psychological well-being and aggravate psychological distress among the members of the Corps.

The Nigerian Federal Road Safety Commission is the foremost and the lead organisation in road traffic management, preventing and minimizing accidents on the highways (FRSC Establishment Act, 2007). Personnel of the commission have been under serious pressure both from internal and external factors. This has been linked with the increase in rate of traffic crash on the public roads and expansion of their work schedules from merely prevention and rescue of accident victims to more rigorous work of enforcement of road traffic offences, road traffic crash investigations, formulation of road safety policy and the night patrolling in some cities across the country. They are also involved in joint task force in most of the cities and participate in national assignments that include election matters, clearing of obstruction after accidents and terrorist attacks, as well as clearing of grid locks on major roads in the country.

The fact that Federal Road Safety personnel who are themselves working stressful conditions need to serve stressful individuals puts them under more difficult conditions which can compromise their psychological health. All these may lead to stress emotion which is hazardous to road safety personnel's psychological wellbeing. Challenges to their psychological wellbeing causes Federal Road Safety personnel to exhibit negative job attitudes, experience burnout, poor commitment to work, engaging in unethical work behaviours.

Empirical evidence indicates several psychological, psychosocial, and psychophysiological factors that may influence psychological wellbeing of individuals. Ikonne (2015) argued that role ambiguity, role conflict, and work environment had strong positive relationship with psychological well-being among library employees in selected Universities libraries in South West Nigeria. Buhrmaster (2006), indicated that some policemen experience inability, feeling of ineptitude, outrage, shock and guilty, while others go through periods of disbelief, depression and self-blame, and all these leads to frustration in the police job which ultimately have significant effects on the psychological well-being. Malek, Fahrudin and Kamil (2009) looked at sources of occupational stress and their impact on job satisfaction and psychological well-being among Malaysian fire-fighters.

A significant body of research has shown that many problems are related to poor psychological well-being among personnel of law enforcement agencies in Nigeria. For instance, Mangwani (2012) reported that the police officers diagnosed of the multiple problems suffered from post-traumatic stress, depression, tension, frustration, sadness and loneliness prior to committing suicide. Though several studies were carried out among the law enforcement agencies in Nigeria such as effects of occupational stress on psychological well-being of Police employees in Ibadan Metropolis, Nigeria (Adegoke, 2014) and psycho-socio-emotional well-being of workers in a high-stress occupation (Ojedokun & Idemudia, 2014), but scanty study was carried out among road safety personnel who have similar problems like other law enforcement agencies in Nigeria as they are reportedly receive little attention and support when they are in problem during the course of their work. In other words, looking at extent of availability of social support in determining psychological well-being among personnel of Federal Road Safety Commission is timing and relevant.

Perceived social support is viewed as the subjective judgment that one is cared for, has assistance available and is supported by family members, peer groups, friends and colleagues. Social support has been extensively studied and reported to play a critical role in the lives of individuals. It is said to contribute toward well-being even in the presence of high level of stress (Smith, 2011). It generates the sense of self-worth and positive affect (Cohen & Syme, 1985).

It is assumed by a number of staff that wellbeing of road safety personnel is being affected with low support especially among the colleagues and the nature of their job which make them unstable. This is as a result of frequent transfer which distances them from their family members. Low social support at work further increases the risk for negative health consequences (Johnson & Hall, 1988). This has directly and indirectly affected not only efficiency of their workers but their general wellbeing. A staff who stays and has the support of his/ her family members is believed to stay happier and more efficient than the one who stays alone without support of his/her family members. Apart from this, the relationship with colleagues in the office and other

support from workplace go a long way to determine how happy the staff will be in performing his/ her duty.

It has been emphasized that inadequate social support is associated not only with an increase in mortality and morbidity but a decrease in psychological well-being (WHO 2002). The importance of social support cannot be underestimated among individuals especially in some part of Africa. For instance, in South Africa, there is philosophical practice of “Ubuntu” (collective personhood) where it was believed that human nature can only be realized through relationship with others. Apart from the perceived social support as a likely predicting factor to psychological well-being, how Federal Road Safety personnel perceive their physical and mental health matters is also examined.

Health perceptions are subjective ratings by the affected individual of his or her health status. Some studies have found that health perception is an important predictor of psychological well-being (Kirby, Coleman & Daley, 2004, Stone et al., 2010, Yang, 2008). It is even more important from the perspective of positive health, that very state of wellbeing is going to make it possible to achieve a greater psychological social and community development (Friedrickson, 2009). Some people perceive themselves as healthy despite suffering from one or more chronic diseases, while others perceive themselves as ill when no evidence of disease can be found. For instance, an employee who considers himself to be in poor health may be more likely to be depressed, or to have impaired function, to live less productive and fulfilling life. The question of self-perceived health is common in medical and social investigations (Pickett & Pearl, 2001; Rosén & Haglund, 2005) and it does not focus on any dimension of health but provides a succinct way of summarizing the diverse components of health. Beyond its strong correlation with mortality and objective health status, it is also associated with increased mortality and morbidity (Aleksandra, Janko, Vladimir, & Slavenka, 2011).

Health is more than not being sick but it is the ability to realize hopes, satisfy needs, change or cope with life experiences and participate fully in the society. A positive perception to life and health can make it possible to readily accept symptoms of illness as a part of health. Rather than defining health as the absence of illness, it is defines as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity (World Health Organization, 1996). In addition to providing a wider definition of health and incorporating the study of positive factors associated to health and psychological wellbeing, the last decade has started to reveal that positive psychological states are not only integral part of health, but also that they can actually influence the onset of illnesses and physical problems as well as the recovering processes (Vazquiz, Hervas, Rahona, & Gomez, 2009). It plausible to posit that psychological state of members of Federal Road Safety Corps might be related to perception of their health. For instance, if an officer or marshal perceives his or her health as good even if they have diseases and symptoms of illness, this will make him or her have a positive perception of life and health.

Hypotheses

1. Perceived social support and health perception will significantly independently and jointly predict psychological wellbeing of Federal Road Safety Corps in Osun state.

METHOD

Research Design

This is a cross-sectional survey study that adopted ex-post facto research approach. The design was chosen because the independent variables were not subjected to manipulation; rather the researcher only studied the self-reported responses of the participants to the items on the questionnaire. The independent variable in the study is social support and health perception. The dependent variable is psychological wellbeing.

Participants and Setting

A total of 268 (203, 75.7% men and 65, 24.3% women) that represented 50% of 536 Federal Road Safety personnel in Osun State participated in this study. The personnel comprised Officers and Marshals from each of the seven Commands in Osun State who were on the nominal roll. The seven Commands are Osogbo, Ife, Ilesa, Ipetu, ikirun, Ila and Gbongan. The sample was selected through the use of systematic and proportionate random sampling technique. After the permission was granted by the Sector Commander, data was collected during the routine weekly parade and in-house training which usually hold on every Monday and Wednesday respectively.

The researcher distributed the questionnaires personally and assisted in clarifying any problem the participants encountered in completing them. They were selected from different commands of Federal Road Safety Corps using their nominal roll provided by the head of administration and human resources as sampling frame. Every personnel with even number on the nominal roll was selected and the questionnaire was given to him/her, in few cases where the personnel were not available or on duties outside their offices, the head of administration and human resources collected the questionnaires on their behalf and given to them after the duties. The researcher explained the purpose of the study to the personnel and with the assistance of head of administration and human resources department, the researcher administered the instrument for data collection and most of the questionnaires were collected immediately after completion but others were retrieved after a week.

The participants' ages ranged from 21 and 57 years. The analysis of sex distribution of participants indicates that male respondents were the majority in this study. Furthermore respondents' age distribution showed that 78(29.1%) of total respondents were within 21-30 years old, 124(46.3%) of them were within 31-40 years old, 39(14.6%) were within 41-50 years while only 16(6.0%) were above 50 years. The analysis indicated that majority of the respondent were within 31-40 years old. Also, the respondents' relationship status indicated that 192(71.6%) of total respondents were married while 67(25.0%) were single and only four respondents were widowed while one respondent was divorced. Finally, respondents educational qualification showed that eight respondents did not disclose their certificate, 41(15.3%) had SSCE/O'Levels certificate, 61(22.8%) were NCE/OND holders, 135(50.4%) were HND/BSC holders, 23(8.6%) were higher degree (M.SC/PH.D) holders. The analysis also state that majority of the members of Federal Road Safety Corps who participated in this study were HND/BSC holder.

Instrument

A structured questionnaire was used as a research instrument for this study. This is made up of three sections

Personal information. The personal information were sex, age, religion affiliation, marital status, highest level of education, rank, and years spent on the job.

Social support. The scale was developed by Theorell (1988). Social support (6 items) was rated on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly agree; 5 = strongly disagree). The score on social support ranged 6-30 depending on the individual respondent. Chungkham, Ingre, Karasek, Westerlund, and Theorell (2013) reported the reliability of 0.86 while Theorell (1988) also reported Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.85 for the social support.

Health Perception Questionnaire (HPQ). Health perception was measured using 27- item shortened version of the 32-item of health perception questionnaire developed by Ware and Davies (1981). The 27- items assess six sub scales of health perception and they are prior health, health outlook, current health, resistance/ susceptibility to illness, health worry/ concern, and sickness orientation. The response was scored as follows, Definitely false=1, Mostly false= 2, I don't know=3, Mostly true= 4, and Definitely true= 5. The possible obtainable score was ranged from 27-135 depending on the individual respondents. To obtain the overall score, responses to negatively scored items are reversed, scores will be summed across items, and the mean score calculated.

Ware and Davies (1981) reported the reliability ranged from 0.50-0.92 while sickness orientation tended to be lowest but usually above 0.50 and current health reported highest above 0.90. Additionally, the researcher conducted a 2 week test-retest reliability and obtained reliability coefficient of $r = 0.71$. In term of concurrent validity of the health perception scale, the Multidimensional health locus of control was correlated with health perception scores. It is hypothesized that health perception will be positively correlated with internal health locus of control while negative relation is expected with powerful others and chance. The result shows that health perception is positively associated with internal locus of control ($r = 0.32, p < 0.05$), negatively associated with powerful others ($r = -.26, p < 0.05$) and chance ($r = -0.22, p < 0.05$).

Psychological wellbeing The Ryff's (1995) scale of Psychological Well-being was used to measure the psychological well-being in the study. It is an 18 item instrument with six dimensions of self-acceptance, personal growth, autonomy in thought and action, purpose in life, environmental mastery, and positive relations with others. Each dimension has three items. It has a 5-point Likert scale response categories that ranges from strongly disagree to strongly agree. These responses were scored as follows; strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, undecided = 3, agree = 4, and strongly agree = 5. A summation of the scores on the 18 items represents the individual score on psychological well-being. The possible obtainable score ranged from 18- 90 depending on the individual respondent. The higher the total scores the better the psychological well-being of the respondents. To obtain the overall score, it was summed across items, and the mean score calculated. Higher scores above the mean value on the scale represent higher levels of psychological well-being.

Psychological well-being scale (Ryff, 1989, 1995, 1999) has been reported to be valid and reliable. Ryff (1989) reported reliability estimates for the Psychological Well-Being's scales ranging from 0.87 to 0.93 for coefficient alphas and from 0.81 to 0.88 for 6-week test– retest reliability. Abu-Rayya (2006) reported Cronbach's alpha reliability of 0.94. Internal consistency value provided by Dierendonck (2005) for the 18 items scale was significantly higher than the values of other versions. He reported the reliability coefficients of the subscales ranging from 0.72 to .81 each. Additionally, the researcher conducted a 2 weeks test-retest reliability and obtained reliability coefficient of $r = 0.92$.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

A total of 268 respondents were selected from a population of 536 officers and marshals. This represents a proportion of 50% of the total population of the members of Federal Road Safety Corps in Osun state. This comprised officers and marshals from each of the seven Commands in the state. The sample was selected through the use of combination of two sampling techniques. Proportionate sampling technique was used to select the number of staff needed from each command based on their staff strength. The total numbers of seven Commands were used in this study and half of their populations in the state were used as respondents. Finally, systematic sampling technique (Odd-Even technique) was used to select the respondents using their nominal roll provided by the head of administration and human resources as sampling frame. The number of respondents selected from each command is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of respondents selected from each command

S/N	Command	No of respondents selected
1	Rs 11.1 Osogbo Sector	78
2	Rs 11.11 Ife Unit	34
3	Rs 11.12 Ilesa Unit	37
4	Rs 11.13 Ipetu Unit	35
5	Rs 11.14 Ikirun Unit	30
6	Rs 11.15 Ila Unit	27
7	Rs 11.16 Gbongan Unit	27
Total		268

Data Analysis

Data collected in the study were subjected to statistical analysis using SPSS package (Version 23). Demographics were analysed using descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation and percentage. The stated hypothesis was tested using multiple regression analysis. Multiple regression analysis was used to determine the prediction of social support and health perception in psychological wellbeing.

RESULTS

The study hypothesis proposed that perceived social support and health perception will have significant independent and joint influence on psychological wellbeing. This hypothesis was tested using simple linear multiple regression. The result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Multiple regression analysis showing the influence of perceived social support and health perception on psychological wellbeing

Variables	β	t	P	R	R ²	F	P
Social support	0.26	4.008	<0.01				
Health perception	0.07	1.060	>0.05	.28	.08	9.435	<0.01

The results showed that health perception and perceived social support jointly predicted psychological wellbeing among FRSC personnel $R^2 = 0.08$, $F(2, 222) = 9.435$; $p < .01$; accounting for 8% variance in FRSC personnel psychological wellbeing. The results further shows that perceived social support ($\beta = .26$; $t = 4.4008$, $p < .01$) independently predicted FRSC officers' psychological wellbeing. However, health perception ($\beta = .07$, $t = 1.060$, $p > .05$) did not significantly independently predict officers' psychological well-being. The result revealed that support from colleagues, family members and from organisation influence the psychological wellbeing of FRSC personnel while the way they perceive their health has no influence on their psychological wellbeing. Therefore, the stated hypothesis was partially confirmed in the study.

DISCUSSION

The study examined the role of social support and health perception in psychological wellbeing among members of Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) in Osun state. The hypothesis was to determine the independent and joint predictive role of social support and health perception in psychological wellbeing of road safety personnel. The finding revealed that both social support and health perception contributed significantly in explaining as much as 8 per cent of psychological wellbeing of FRSC personnel. Also, the finding specifically revealed that members of FRSC who have support from colleagues, family members and from organization appear to have good psychological wellbeing than those who have little or no support from them.

This finding is similar with finding of Kalpana (2016) that the results indicated that perceived social support has a significant positive correlation with psychological wellbeing indicating that the higher the level of social support, the higher the level of Psychological wellbeing. It is also similar to the findings from Sarita (2012) who reported that perceived social support has an influence on psychological well-being of aged Kashmiri migrants. The findings also similar with Asante (2011) who reported low social support was associated with psychological problem such depression, anxiety among the HIV victims. The current finding may be attributed to the belief by most of the staff that the social support in the organization especially from the management is not

cheering and also they are working farther away from family members as a result of special assignments and transfers.

This finding also showed that health perception did not significantly predict psychological wellbeing of Federal Road Safety personnel in Osun State. In this study, how members of Federal Road Safety Corps perceive their health was found to have no influence on the psychological well-being. This is similar to the finding of McPherson, Melvin, Belew, and McGraw (2016), who reported that there is disparity between current health perception and actual measures of health and high levels of dependency on health care services. This finding is contrary to Jimmyoung, Peter, Jennifer, Maurice and Leonard (2011), who reported that subjective health was strongly associated with psychological well-being among old adults and further revealed that physical health impairments had independent direct effects on subjective health and they had an indirect association with psychological well-being among old adults.

This finding is inconsistent with Cho, Martin, Margrett, MacDonald, and Leonard (2011) who established the relationship between physical health and psychological well-being among oldest-old adults and revealed that perception of health is a critical indicator for well-being in extreme old age. It is also contrary with Vazquiz, Hervas, Rahona, and Gomez (2009) who reported that well-being is not only associated with greater psychological satisfaction but it also has important implications for physical health. More importantly, our finding might be attributed to the fear by the staff that the personnel who are not physically and psychologically fit will face the medical board of the commission who will recommend to the management on the appropriate action to take on the particular staff.

Implication of Findings

This study addressed the predictive role of social support and health perception on psychological wellbeing of members of FRSC. The finding revealed that the predictor variable contributed greatly in explaining psychological wellbeing of members of FRSC. This finding implies that factor such as social support on the part of members of FRSC is relevant in affecting psychological wellbeing. It also implies that social support could contribute to how employees fairing in the workplace. The finding also showed that health perception has no influenced on psychological wellbeing among personnel of FRSC. It implies that either they perceive themselves either healthy or otherwise has nothing to do with their psychological wellbeing.

Recommendations

It is recommended that management of FRSC should endeavour to increase the support giving to staff not only financial support but other support such as posting the staff members close to their family base and those that posted far should be adequately permitted to see their family intermittently and provide a good working condition in the office. Also, the senior staff should be friendlier to their subordinates and being there for them during the time of trouble since colleagues are the first set of people to meet and talk with during the time of needs. The personnel with low social support needs the attention of the management to know the causes of this either by refer to counselling unit or any other unit that is in charge of staff welfare.

Study limitations

In the process of carrying out this research work, researchers encountered some difficulties which may be regarded as limitations to be considered for further similar studies. First, the instrument used for data collection was a self-report questionnaire; thus, respondents might have falsified responses to some questions. Observation method of data collection would have been used along with the use of questionnaire. Measure of social support, health perception and psychological wellbeing among Federal Road Safety Corps were assessed; thus, it is difficult to establish whether this factor leads to actual good or poor psychological wellbeing. With this observation, measure of actual practice of psychological wellbeing should be considered in similar future research.

Also, the sample size for the current study is small; a larger sample size is suggested to be able to generalize findings to other members of FRSC across the country. Nevertheless, our study has been able to identify and establish the importance of social support in explaining psychological wellbeing of members of FRSC; which could serve as baseline information for intervention purpose in promoting the good psychological wellbeing in the population.

CONCLUSION

Considering the finding that social support contributed greatly in explaining psychological wellbeing of members of FRSC; thus, the factor is very relevant in how the personnel feel psychologically during and after their working schedules. The management of Federal Road Safety Corps should improve on their welfare packages and so much concern to the working environment to have the optimum performance of their personnel. Also, health perception has no influence in psychological well-being of personnel of Federal Road Safety Corps.

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