

Social support and social connectedness as predictors of students' resilience from a state university

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Article Info

Article history:

Received Aug 23, 2025

Revised Mar 17, 2026

Accepted May 14, 2026

Keywords:

Education

Resilience

Social connectedness

Social support

State university

ABSTRACT

Mental health issues of students are among the primordial concerns of educational institutions in the post-pandemic era. Thus, resilience as an innate trait has been in frequent discussions for its positive impact on well-being. This study aimed to analyze whether social support and social connectedness were predictors of resilience among undergraduate students. Utilizing a predictive non-experimental research design, data were gathered from 402 randomly selected students from a higher education institution in eastern Philippines through standardized scales. Statistical analyses employed descriptive and inferential statistics. Results revealed that students had high levels of social support, social connectedness, and resilience and that the three variables are significantly correlated. Moreover, results of regression analysis showed that both variables significantly predicted resilience, with social support exerting a stronger influence. In conclusion, the positive influence of social support and social connectedness on students' resilience highlights the importance of fostering supportive networks in higher education settings.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The well-being of students is affected by mental health issues caused by anxiety, stress, and depression. Consequently, identifying and promoting factors that foster well-being, especially resilience among students, has become a primary concern of educational institutions. Evidence highlights that various life and academic-related challenges have caused stress among students and have affected their mental health [1]–[3]. With this, social connectedness and social support offer a promising pathway for students' well-being. Examining how these factors relate to promoting resilience is essential to further our understanding of how external resources help foster resilience among students, thus ensuring their well-being.

Resilience pertains to the innate ability of a person or an internal defense mechanism to endure challenges and successfully overcome adversities [4], [5]. Previously conducted studies showed that resilience correlates with other internal factors such as self-esteem and optimism [6]–[10]. However, these studies focused only on internal factors that influence resilience, and limited studies have explored how external factors such as social support and social connectedness could promote resilience among individuals [11]–[13]. Social connectedness refers to the presence and extent of individuals' social relationships and their interactions with these bonds [14]. Empirical evidence shows that higher levels of social connectedness are associated with reduced loneliness [15], improved cognitive functioning [16], increased student retention [17], and lower engagement in self-injurious thoughts and behaviors (SITBs) [18]. It also contributes to

student satisfaction, academic success, and overall well-being through a sense of belonging and social integration [19], [20].

Conversely, social support is characterized as the functional aspect of relationships formed with others, encompassing the assistance received from individuals within one's social network [21]. It involves support from family, friends, and peers that helps individuals cope with physical and psychological stressors [22]. In essence, social support refers to the quality of social networks that individuals can rely on in times of difficulty. Studies have shown that higher levels of social support enhance students' emotional intelligence [23], mental well-being [24], and academic engagement [25]. Together, social connectedness and social support represent key external resources that may strengthen individuals' capacity to adapt to challenges.

Existing literature indicates that resilience, social connectedness, and social support are crucial constructs that contribute to individuals' overall well-being. Studies have also examined the interrelations among these concepts. For instance, social support from established relationships, such as those with friends and family, positively influences both resilience and well-being [22]. Social support also significantly enhances psychological resilience among youth, underscoring the importance of fostering a social support network to improve resilience and mental health [26]. This is further supported by findings identifying a positive correlation between social support and resilience, as well as overall mental wellness [27].

Moreover, research has shown that social connectedness mediates the relationship between fear and psychological well-being, emphasizing the vital role of social connections in fostering resilience and mitigating negative psychological effects [28]. Other studies concluded that social connections are pivotal in promoting resilience by buffering against adverse physical and mental health outcomes in challenging situations [29]. Similarly, strong social bonds and networks are essential for building resilience during crises, suggesting that robust social ties provide individuals with resources to cope with stressful events [30]. In summary, social support, social connectedness, and resilience play important roles in fostering positive well-being and in buffering negative psychological outcomes [22], [27], [28], [30]. These constructs are crucial for an individual's health, well-being, and overall effective functioning.

Despite these insights, important gaps remain. Although prior studies have examined the relationships among social support, social connectedness, and resilience, there remains a need to investigate how these factors interact within the Philippine context, particularly amid rising mental health concerns among youth [31]. Additionally, cultural and socioeconomic differences highlight the importance of examining how social support and social connectedness influence resilience among undergraduate students in the country. Moreover, while previous studies have analyzed the relationships between social support and resilience, and between social connectedness and resilience, limited studies have examined how these factors interact when analyzed together. Given the aforementioned gaps, the present study contributes to the body of literature by providing a novel perspective on how external factors such as social support and social connectedness shape resilience in the current context.

In this context, the present study examined whether social support and social connectedness predict resilience among undergraduate students. Specifically, it aimed to: i) determine the levels of social support, social connectedness, and resilience among undergraduate students in a state university; ii) assess the relationships among these variables; and iii) examine the predictive influence of social support and social connectedness on students' resilience. By identifying social support and social connectedness as potential predictors of resilience, this study contributes to the growing body of research on external factors that influence resilience while also highlighting the critical role of social relationships in promoting student well-being. To guide the analysis, the following null hypotheses were tested:

- H₀₁: social support does not significantly predict students' resilience.
- H₀₂: social connectedness does not significantly predict students' resilience.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This study was grounded in social capital theory, which posits that the relationships individuals build function as valuable resources that enhance human capital development [32]. Strong and stable social bonds, particularly with family, peers, and mentors, enable individuals to acquire important skills and attributes such as resilience, which can itself be considered a form of human capital [33]. Complementing this, the multisystemic resilience framework views resilience not as an isolated trait but as a dynamic outcome shaped by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, and ecological systems [34]. Together, these theories emphasize that resilience develops through access to and interaction with supportive social environments, rather than through individual factors alone.

These theoretical underpinnings were explicitly reflected in the selection and analysis of variables of this study. The social capital theory served as the basis for the identification of social support and social connectedness as key external resources or independent variables, while resilience was treated as the

outcome variable representing human capital development. At the same time, the multisystemic resilience framework situates these variables within the broader social system, where social support and social connectedness act as protective factors that enhance resilience [35]–[38]. Guided by these frameworks, the study examined both the individual and combined contributions of social support and social connectedness to resilience, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of how interconnected social resources influence students' capacity to adapt and thrive.

3. METHOD

The study employed a predictive non-experimental quantitative research design, which is suitable for examining relationships among variables without manipulation. This design is particularly useful for determining whether one or more independent variables can predict the outcome of a dependent variable. Predictive research utilizes current or historical data to forecast outcomes through statistical techniques that identify patterns and correlations [39]. In this study, the aim was to analyze how social connectedness and social support, as independent variables, influence students' resilience as the dependent variable. This approach allowed for an empirical investigation of the predictive power of social factors on resilience without direct intervention.

The research was conducted at the main campus of a higher education institution in eastern Philippines offering programs in teacher education, arts and sciences, health sciences, technology and computer studies, engineering, management and entrepreneurship, criminal justice education, graduate studies, laboratory high school, and agrifisheries. The respondents were 402 undergraduate students selected through simple random sampling to ensure that all undergraduates had an equal chance of participation. The sample size was determined using a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. Probability random sampling is crucial in quantitative studies as it increases the likelihood that all population segments are represented [40]. However, only bona fide undergraduate students enrolled in any academic program of the university were included in the sampling frame study, while students from the laboratory high school were excluded. Three standardized instruments were used: the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC), a 25-item measure scored from 0 (not at all true) to 4 (true nearly all the time), which has been validated across multiple contexts [41]; the multidimensional scale of perceived social support (MSPSS), which assesses perceived support from family, friends, and significant others, demonstrates strong psychometric properties (Cronbach's $\alpha=.93$) [42], [43]; and the social connectedness scale-revised (SCS-R), a 20-item tool measuring interpersonal closeness and difficulties in establishing connections, scored from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree), with negatively worded items reverse-scored before summation [44]. To ensure applicability in the local setting, the instruments were validated by experts in social science, sociolinguistics, and psychometrics using the survey instrument validation rating scale [45], and reliability testing with 30 non-respondent students yielded Cronbach's α values of .915, .905, and .843, indicating good internal consistency.

After securing approval for the study concept and proposal, data collection proceeded with informed consent from research respondents. A Google Form link containing the survey was distributed via Facebook Messenger or email. Confidentiality and voluntary participation were observed in accordance with the Philippine Data Privacy Act. Respondents were also provided with details on the study's purpose, benefits, risks, and their rights to privacy and anonymity. All responses were securely stored and treated with strict confidentiality. Moreover, data analysis involved descriptive statistics, such as means (M) and standard deviations (SD), to summarize the respondents' characteristics and the average levels of perceived social support, social connectedness and resilience. Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to determine the strength and direction of relationships among social support, social connectedness, and resilience. Furthermore, stepwise regression analysis was employed to identify the predictive power of social support and social connectedness on resilience, explaining the extent to which each predictor contributed to the variance in resilience scores. The stepwise regression was chosen by the researchers over hierarchical regression as it allows the researchers to identify the subset of variables that best explain the dependent variable. Overall, this analytical approach not only highlighted current levels of these constructs but also clarified their interrelationships, offering nuanced insights into students' resilience.

4. RESULTS

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and correlations among the study variables. The skewness values ranged from -1.07 to $-.575$, while kurtosis values ranged from 1.04 to 1.88 , indicating that all variables approximate a normal distribution. These values fall within the acceptable thresholds of ± 2 for skewness and ± 7 for kurtosis [46], [47], suggesting that the data met the assumptions for parametric analysis.

In addition, the mean scores showed that undergraduate students at the university experienced high levels of resilience ($M=71.7$, $SD=13.8$), social support ($M=5.26$, $SD=1.25$), and social connectedness ($M=75.7$, $SD=15.4$) during the post-pandemic period. These findings suggest that students had the ability to effectively manage challenges and stressors, demonstrating a positive outlook and adaptive functioning in the face of difficulties. The notably high mean scores for social support and social connectedness further indicated a strong sense of belonging and community among students, which is crucial for their overall psychological well-being.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and Pearson correlations of the variables

Variables	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	1	2	3
1. Social connectedness	75.7	15.4	-.575	1.39	-		
2. Social support	5.26	1.25	-1.07	1.04	.339 ***	-	
3. Resilience	71.7	13.8	-.913	1.88	.340 ***	.432 ***	-

Note: $N=402$; ***Correlation is significant at the .001 level (2-tailed)

Moreover, the two-tailed correlation analysis, demonstrated significant positive relationships between resilience and social support ($r=.432$, $p=.001$) as well as resilience and social connectedness ($r=.340$, $p=.001$). Additionally, social support and social connectedness are significantly correlated ($r=.339$, $p=.001$). These results indicated that all three variables were positively associated: higher levels of social support and social connectedness correlated with increased resilience, while greater social connectedness was also linked to higher social support.

On the other hand, a stepwise regression analysis was conducted to examine whether social support and social connectedness can predict resilience. As illustrated in Table 2, model 1 indicated that social support accounted for 18% of the variance in resilience ($R^2=.186$, $F=17.28$, $p<.001$), while model 2 showed that social connectedness explains 11% of the variance ($R^2=.116$, $F=15.02$, $p<.001$). However, when considered together in model 3, both social support and social connectedness jointly explained 22% of the variance ($R^2=.229$, $F=10.46$, $p<.001$).

Table 2. Stepwise regression of resilience, social support, and social connectedness

Model	Predictor(s)	R	R ²	F
Model 1	Social support	.432	.186	17.28
Model 2	Social connectedness	.340	.116	15.02
Model 3	Social support + social connectedness	.479	.229	10.46

Note: model 1 predictor=social support; model 2 predictor=social connectedness; model 3 predictors=social support and social connectedness.

The results indicated that individually, social support demonstrates a greater contribution to resilience ($\beta=.432$, $p<.001$) compared to social connectedness ($\beta=.340$, $p<.001$). Nevertheless, model 3 demonstrated that social support and social connectedness together ($R=.479$, $p<.001$) significantly predict students' resilience. These findings altogether rejected the null hypotheses of the study. Overall, the results demonstrated that both social support and social connectedness significantly predicted resilience, leading to the rejection of the null hypotheses.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicated that undergraduate students demonstrate relatively high levels of resilience, social support, and social connectedness. This suggests that students were generally capable of adapting to challenges and maintaining psychological well-being despite various academic and personal life demands. This could be explained by the fact that resilience is one of the outstanding traits among Filipinos [48]. Also, the high levels of social connectedness further implied a strong sense of belonging within the university, while the high social support scores suggest the presence of reliable interpersonal resources from family, peers, and significant others.

These results of this study were corroborated by existing literature emphasizing the importance of social support and social connectedness in fostering resilience. Specifically, the present findings confirmed that both social support and social connectedness were positively associated with resilience [37], [49], [50]. Also, the current findings of the also confirmed that as social connectedness levels increase, the levels of social support also increase; thus, social connectedness is a positive predictor of social support [51], [52]. Indeed, social bonds serve as protective factors, providing individuals with emotional, informational, and

instrumental resources that help buffer the effects of stress and adversity [30]. In particular, social support enables individuals to access care and assistance during difficult situations, thereby strengthening their capacity to cope effectively [53].

Moreover, the high levels of perceived social support and social connectedness observed in this study may be partly explained by the cultural context of the respondents. The Philippines is geographically situated within the typhoon belt and the Pacific Ring of Fire, exposing its population to frequent natural disasters. As a result, resilience has become a culturally embedded trait among Filipinos, shaped by repeated experiences of adversity and recovery [54], [55]. In addition, the strong family ties, characteristic of Filipino culture, contribute significantly to individuals' sense of support, as family systems often serve as primary sources of emotional and instrumental assistance [56]. Beyond the family, communal values foster strong social networks within communities, particularly in rural areas, further enhancing social connectedness [57]. Indeed, these interconnected social structures, including both family and community networks, play a crucial role in strengthening perceived social support and, consequently, promoting resilience among individuals.

The results also revealed that social support is a stronger predictor of resilience compared to social connectedness. This suggests that while a sense of belonging is important, the actual availability of support during times of need plays a more critical role in enhancing resilience. This finding supports the argument that the quality of relationships, particularly in terms of received support, may have a more direct impact on psychological outcomes than the mere presence of social connections [21]. Previous research similarly highlighted that perceived social support, especially from family and peers, is a key determinant of students' mental well-being and resilience [24].

Nevertheless, social connectedness remains an important factor, as it contributes to reduced feelings of isolation and psychological distress [29]. A strong sense of connection within the academic community has also been associated with improved cognitive functioning, student retention, and overall well-being [16], [17]. Furthermore, social connectedness may indirectly enhance resilience by facilitating access to social support, as evidenced by the significant relationship observed between the two variables.

Overall, the findings underscored the critical role of external social resources in promoting resilience among students. Indeed, both social support and social connectedness function as essential external assets that enhance students' ability to navigate challenges. These results highlight the importance of fostering supportive and inclusive environments within higher education institutions, as strengthening students' social networks and support systems can contribute significantly to their psychological resilience and overall well-being.

6. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study underlined the positive predictive roles of social support and social connectedness in fostering resilience among undergraduate students. These insights suggest important practical implications for higher education institutions, particularly the need to integrate student well-being programs that are systematically implemented and adequately supported. In particular, the results highlight the importance of establishing effective and accessible school-based counseling initiatives, such as peer counseling and family engagement activities, as key sources of social support that can strengthen students' resilience. Furthermore, it is essential for universities to foster stronger social bonds on campus through teacher–student mentorship programs and team-building activities within student organizations.

Nevertheless, the researchers acknowledge that contextual differences arising from distinct cultural and socioeconomic conditions may limit the generalizability of the findings of this study. In particular, results may vary across universities located in urban areas or in communities with different cultures and varying degrees of social cohesion among members. Additionally, because the study employed a non-experimental quantitative research design, the findings cannot conclusively establish that only the external resources identified predict resilience, as other unidentified factors may have mediated the outcomes of this study. Moreover, the use of a cross-sectional design limits the findings, as it captures the phenomenon only at the point of data collection, thus, the study cannot account for changes over time. Furthermore, the use of a single research approach does not provide a holistic understanding of the phenomenon of resilience and how it is experienced by students. As such, future research employing qualitative methods may be conducted to triangulate the findings of the present study. Finally, other researchers may also replicate this study in an urban context to verify or compare the current findings.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors sincerely extend their gratitude to the university administrators, respondents, and technical reviewers for their help in refining this study.

FUNDING INFORMATION

Authors state there is no funding involved.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

This journal uses the Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT) to recognize individual author contributions, reduce authorship disputes, and facilitate collaboration.

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Kevin T. Lagat	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
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C : Conceptualization

M : Methodology

So : Software

Va : Validation

Fo : Formal analysis

I : Investigation

R : Resources

D : Data Curation

O : Writing - Original Draft

E : Writing - Review & Editing

Vi : Visualization

Su : Supervision

P : Project administration

Fu : Funding acquisition

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Authors declare no conflict of interest in relation to this study.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

The research involving human participants has complied with all the relevant national regulations and institutional policies in accordance with the tenets of the Helsinki Declaration and has been approved by the Biliran Province State University and was presented during the institutional in-house review.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data that supports the findings of this study can be obtained from the corresponding author [KTL], upon reasonable request. To protect the privacy and confidentiality of respondents from the university where the study was conducted, the complete dataset is not publicly available. Nevertheless, anonymized summaries or selected portions of the data may be shared upon request in compliance with data protection regulations.

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