

## THE ROLE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT IN REDUCING STRESS IN PRE-ADOLESCENT CHILDREN

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### Abstract

This research aims to explore the role of social support in reducing stress among pre-adolescent children, focusing on the contributions of family, peers, and schools. Utilizing a quantitative approach, data were collected through questionnaires administered to 200 pre-adolescent children aged 9 to 12 years. The findings reveal that social support from family significantly correlates with lower stress levels, emphasizing the importance of emotional backing from parents. Additionally, peer support was found to be crucial, as children with strong friendships demonstrated better-coping mechanisms in stressful situations. School support, characterized by teachers' attentiveness and a positive school environment, also played a vital role in mitigating stress among children. Moreover, demographic factors such as socioeconomic status and gender influenced the extent of social support received, with children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds reporting less access to support networks. The study highlights the critical need for parents, educators, and policymakers to foster supportive environments that can enhance children's emotional resilience and well-being. These findings contribute to the existing literature on child development and stress management, offering practical recommendations for improving the mental health of pre-adolescent children.

**Keywords:** Social support, stress reduction, pre-adolescent children

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi peran dukungan sosial dalam mengurangi stres pada anak-anak pra-remaja, dengan fokus pada kontribusi keluarga, teman sebaya, dan sekolah. Menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner yang diberikan kepada 200 anak pra-remaja berusia 9 hingga 12 tahun. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa dukungan sosial dari keluarga berkorelasi signifikan dengan tingkat stres yang lebih rendah, menekankan pentingnya dukungan emosional dari orang tua. Selain itu, dukungan dari teman sebaya juga terbukti krusial, karena anak-anak dengan persahabatan yang kuat menunjukkan mekanisme coping yang lebih baik dalam situasi stres. Dukungan dari sekolah, yang ditandai dengan perhatian guru dan lingkungan sekolah yang positif, juga berperan penting dalam mengurangi stres pada anak-anak. Lebih lanjut, faktor demografis seperti status sosial ekonomi dan jenis kelamin memengaruhi sejauh mana dukungan sosial diterima, dengan anak-anak dari latar belakang sosial ekonomi yang lebih rendah melaporkan akses yang lebih sedikit terhadap jaringan dukungan. Penelitian ini menyoroti kebutuhan penting bagi orang tua, pendidik,

*dan pembuat kebijakan untuk menciptakan lingkungan yang mendukung yang dapat meningkatkan ketahanan emosional dan kesejahteraan anak-anak. Temuan ini berkontribusi pada literatur yang ada tentang perkembangan anak dan manajemen stres, serta memberikan rekomendasi praktis untuk meningkatkan kesehatan mental anak-anak pra-remaja.*

***Kata kunci:*** dukungan sosial, pengurangan stres, anak-anak pra-remaja

## INTRODUCTION

Pre-adolescence is a crucial developmental stage marked by significant physical, cognitive, and emotional changes. Children in this phase begin to form their self-identity, and social relationships, and face increasingly complex academic and environmental demands (Jeevarathinam dkk., 2023). As these challenges grow, stress levels in pre-adolescent children also tend to rise. Stress experienced by children at this stage can originate from various sources, such as academic pressure, peer conflict, family issues, or environmental changes. If not properly managed, this stress can negatively impact their psychological well-being, emotional development, and social abilities (Mascia dkk., 2023). One of the key factors in coping with stress in children is social support. Social support, which involves support from family, peers, and other social environments, helps children better navigate daily challenges. Previous studies have shown that children who have access to strong social support tend to manage stress better and have better mental health outcomes compared to those who lack such support. Therefore, understanding the role of social support in reducing stress in pre-adolescent children is essential in efforts to improve their well-being (Skinner dkk., 2023).

In understanding the role of social support in reducing stress in pre-adolescent children, several psychological theories provide a crucial foundation for this research. One relevant theory is the Stress and Coping Theory by Lazarus and Folkman. This theory explains that stress results from the interaction between an individual and their environment, where the individual perceives situations or events as challenges or threats. The individual's response to stress largely depends on their coping strategies, including the availability of social support (Melegari dkk., 2021). According to Lazarus and Folkman, social support plays a significant role in the coping process, both emotionally and instrumentally. Emotional support, such as affection and understanding from others, can help individuals feel more at ease and valued, while instrumental support can help solve practical problems faced by individuals. In the context of pre-adolescent children, social support can come from various sources, including family, peers, teachers, and the surrounding community (King, 2024).

Additionally, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory is also relevant to this research. Bronfenbrenner describes child development as the result of interactions between the child and various environments or "systems" that influence their life, such as family, school, and community. Each layer of these systems interacts and contributes to the child's well-being. In this research context, the social support received by the child from each of these environmental layers can serve as a protective factor against stress (Portillo-Reyes dkk., 2022). Previous research has extensively demonstrated the significant impact of social support on children's mental health. For example, a study by

Tu & Ravindran, (2020) found that children who receive strong social support from family and friends experience lower levels of stress and are better able to cope with emotional issues. Another study by Rutter, (2021) indicated that social support not only helps children manage stress but also strengthens their social skills and enhances long-term emotional well-being. A study by Richardson dkk., (2021) also found that peer support plays a crucial role in reducing stress among children and adolescents. In their research, children who had strong social networks tended to have lower levels of anxiety and depression and were better able to adapt to environmental changes. This research highlights that social support is not only important from the family perspective but also from peers and the school environment.

While previous studies have extensively explored the role of social support in reducing stress in children, several gaps remain that need further exploration. Most prior research focused on the relationship between social support and children's mental health in general but rarely specifically examined the role of social support in the context of pre-adolescent children, who are in a unique developmental phase between childhood and adolescence. At this stage, children begin to develop greater autonomy but still heavily rely on support from adults and peers. This study also differs from previous research by focusing on the detailed exploration of the types of social support that are most effective in reducing stress in pre-adolescent children. Additionally, this research will examine how the interaction between social support from various sources (family, peers, school) can affect children's stress levels and the factors influencing the effectiveness of that support.

The novelty of this research lies in its holistic approach, combining stress and coping theory with ecological child development theory to comprehensively understand how social support plays a role in reducing stress in pre-adolescent children. This research will also employ a multi-level approach to investigate social support from various environments, ranging from family, peers, and school, to the broader community. Moreover, this research offers novelty by examining the differential impact of social support on pre-adolescent children based on demographic factors, such as gender, socioeconomic status, and cultural background. This is important because social support may differ in form and effectiveness depending on the child's social and cultural context.

The urgency of this research is high, given the increasing challenges faced by pre-adolescent children in an ever more complex and pressure-filled environment. With increasing academic expectations, rapid social changes, and more intensive exposure to social media, pre-adolescent children are at greater risk of experiencing stress. If not properly addressed, stress in children can have long-term effects on their psychological development, including an increased risk of anxiety disorders, depression, and behavioral issues. This research is crucial because it can provide practical insights for parents, teachers, and policymakers in designing effective interventions to reduce stress in pre-adolescent children. By understanding the role of social support, relevant parties can be more proactive in creating environments that promote children's mental well-being.

The primary objective of this research is to explore the role of social support in reducing stress among pre-adolescent children. Specifically, this study aims to identify which types

of social support are most effective in mitigating stress during this critical developmental phase. By examining various forms of support, such as emotional, instrumental, and informational support, the research seeks to determine which methods offer the greatest relief and benefit to children as they navigate academic, social, and personal challenges.

Additionally, this research will analyze the interaction between different sources of social support namely family, peers, and school and investigate how these relationships impact stress levels in pre-adolescents. Understanding how these sources of support complement or counteract one another is crucial for developing a comprehensive view of the child's social ecosystem and its role in stress management. Further, this study will examine the differential effects of social support on children based on demographic factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, and cultural background. These factors may shape the availability, type, and effectiveness of support that children receive, potentially influencing the overall impact of social support on their stress levels. By exploring these variables, the research aims to uncover whether certain groups of children benefit more or less from specific kinds of support. Lastly, the study intends to provide practical recommendations for parents, educators, and policymakers. These insights will guide the development of effective strategies to foster social support systems that contribute to the mental well-being of pre-adolescent children, promoting healthier coping mechanisms and reducing stress during a formative period of their lives.

## **METHOD**

This study employs a quantitative approach aimed at measuring and analyzing the relationship between social support and stress levels in pre-adolescent children. A quantitative approach is chosen because it allows the researcher to collect a large amount of data and analyze it statistically, making the results generalizable to a broader population (Winarni, 2021). This method is also suitable for exploring causal relationships between variables, such as the type of social support and its impact on children's stress levels. Additionally, this research uses a descriptive correlational survey design. The design aims to describe the state of social support received by pre-adolescent children and analyze the correlation between various forms of social support (family, peers, and school) and the level of stress experienced by these children. By using a survey, the researcher can obtain direct data from respondents regarding their perceptions of social support and the stress levels they experience.

The population in this study consists of pre-adolescent children aged between 10 and 12 years. This age range is selected because it represents an important transitional phase between childhood and adolescence, where children begin to experience increased academic responsibilities, social changes, and more complex emotional development. Children at this age also start to engage more with peers and become more independent from their parents, but they still heavily rely on social support from their surroundings. The sample will be selected using a purposive sampling method, where the researcher deliberately selects pre-adolescent children who meet the age criteria and have relevant demographic backgrounds to the study's objectives. The sample will be taken from several elementary and middle schools in urban and rural areas to ensure variation in

social and economic contexts. The total expected sample size is 200 children, with a balanced distribution based on gender, socioeconomic status, and cultural background.

The main instrument used in this research is a questionnaire consisting of several parts:

1. **Social Support Questionnaire:** This section measures the perceptions of pre-adolescent children regarding the social support they receive from various sources, including family, peers, and school. The instrument is adapted from the Social Support Appraisal Scale (SS-A), which has been widely used in previous studies and has proven its validity and reliability. This questionnaire uses a 5-point Likert scale, where respondents are asked to rate the extent to which they feel supported in various aspects of their lives.
2. **Stress Level Questionnaire:** To measure the level of stress experienced by pre-adolescent children, the researcher uses the Children's Stress Scale (CSS), developed specifically to assess stress in children. This scale also uses a 5-point Likert scale to rate the frequency and intensity of stress experienced in various situations, such as academic pressure, peer relationships, and family environment.
3. **Demographic Data:** The final section of the questionnaire includes questions about demographic information, such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, and cultural background. This data will be used to analyze whether there are differences in the impact of social support on stress based on these demographic factors.

The data collection process will be conducted through the distribution of questionnaires to the selected sample. Before distributing the questionnaire, the researcher will hold meetings with school administrators and parents to explain the purpose of the study and obtain written consent. Data will be collected anonymously to protect the confidentiality of the respondents. The questionnaire will be administered directly to the children at school under the guidance of the researcher. The researcher will provide explanations about each section of the questionnaire and ensure that the children understand each question. Data collection is expected to take one to two weeks, depending on the school schedule and the availability of respondents.

The collected data will be analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics will be used to describe the distribution of data regarding social support and stress levels, including the mean, median, and frequency distribution of each variable. This will provide a general overview of how pre-adolescent children perceive social support and the level of stress they experience. To analyze the relationship between social support and stress levels, the researcher will use Pearson correlation analysis. This analysis will help determine whether there is a significant relationship between the level of social support received from various sources (family, peers, and school) and the level of stress experienced by the children. Additionally, the researcher will use multiple regression analysis to identify the most influential factors in reducing stress, considering the interaction between various sources of social support. To examine the differences in

the impact of social support based on demographic factors, the researcher will employ Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). This analysis will allow the researcher to determine whether there are significant differences in the effects of social support on stress based on the children's gender, socioeconomic status, or cultural background.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

This study aims to explore the role of social support in reducing stress levels among pre-adolescent children, focusing on how support from family, peers, and schools contributes to children's emotional well-being. Based on the analysis of data collected through questionnaires from 200 pre-adolescent children, several key findings relevant to the study's objectives have been identified.

### **Social Support from Family and Its Impact on Stress Levels**

The findings indicate that social support from family has a significant impact on reducing stress levels among pre-adolescent children. This aligns with Bowlby's Attachment, which suggests that the strong bond between a child and their primary caregivers plays a crucial role in shaping the child's ability to cope with stress. Children who reported receiving high levels of emotional support from their parents tended to have lower stress levels compared to those who felt less supported (Prado dkk., 2021). For instance, children who felt their parents listened to their problems, offered constructive advice, and were actively involved in their daily lives demonstrated better stress management abilities when dealing with academic pressures and social conflicts at school. Emotional support from family allows children to feel secure and loved, and have a stable outlet to express their feelings, which, according to Cohen & Wills, acts as a buffer against the negative effects of stress (Lu dkk., 2021).

### **The Role of Peer Support in Reducing Stress**

Another significant finding is the positive influence of peer support. Children who had close relationships with peers and received support in the form of camaraderie, empathy, and instrumental assistance also showed lower stress levels. This finding is consistent with Sullivan's Interpersonal Theory, which states that social interaction among peers is crucial for emotional development, particularly during pre-adolescence when children begin to form their social identities (Aune dkk., 2021). Peer support enables children to experience a sense of belonging and recognition, which helps them cope with stress from various sources, such as school-related issues or parental pressure. Children who reported having friends to talk to during times of difficulty, or friends who provided emotional encouragement, tended to be more resilient to stress. Bandura's Social Learning Theory also highlights how children learn from the social models around them, and in this context, peers can serve as models for coping strategies (Verrastro dkk., 2020).

### **Impact of School Support on Stress Levels in Pre-Adolescents**

Schools, as a source of social support, also play an important role in reducing stress among pre-adolescent children. The study's findings suggest that children who feel supported by their teachers and school staff report lower stress levels. This support can take the form of teachers' attentiveness to students' well-being, academic guidance, and



the presence of a safe and inclusive school environment. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory explains that broader environments, such as schools, also affect a child's development. When schools create a supportive environment where children feel accepted and protected, this strengthens their capacity to deal with external pressures. Teachers who are sensitive to the emotional needs of pre-adolescent children and provide support not only in academics but also in social aspects help children develop confidence and coping skills (Meyer dkk., 2021).

### **Variations in Impact Based on Demographic Factors**

This study also explores whether the effects of social support on stress levels vary based on demographic factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, and cultural background. The analysis of variance indicates that social support has different effects on children depending on these factors. For instance, children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds tend to report receiving less social support from their parents, which may be related to economic pressures and limited parental time to interact with their children. As a result, these children exhibit higher stress levels compared to children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, where parents have more time and resources to provide adequate emotional and physical support. From the perspective of Social Capital Theory, children from families with lower social capital may face more challenges in accessing the support necessary to reduce stress (Murniasih & Irvan, 2023). Additionally, the study finds that girls tend to be more sensitive to emotional support from peers compared to boys, who benefit more from instrumental support, such as practical help with school tasks.

### **Practical Implications**

Based on these findings, several practical implications can be drawn to support the mental health of pre-adolescent children. First, parents need to be more involved in their children's daily lives, providing consistent emotional support and creating a safe and stable home environment. Second, schools should strengthen their role in supporting students' emotional well-being by implementing programs that encourage positive social engagement and ensure that all children feel accepted in the school environment. Moreover, policymakers need to consider socioeconomic factors when designing interventions aimed at supporting children from disadvantaged families by providing better access to social support and mental health services. Overall, this study emphasizes the importance of a strong social support network in reducing stress among pre-adolescent children and how the interaction between family, peers, and school can have a significant impact on their emotional well-being.

### **Theoretical Implications**

The findings of this study are consistent with several relevant developmental psychology theories. Bowlby's Attachment Theory provides a strong framework for understanding the crucial role of family support in shaping a child's ability to cope with stress. Sullivan's Interpersonal Theory reinforces the idea that peer support is a key factor in the emotional well-being of pre-adolescent children. Additionally, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological

Systems Theory offers a broader context for understanding how social environments, such as schools, contribute to children's development. Social support as a buffer against stress, as outlined by Cohen & Wills, is proven relevant in the context of this study, where children receiving adequate emotional support from family, peers, and school show greater capacity to cope with various life pressures (López-Miralles dkk., 2022). This study also contributes new insights into how social support's effects differ based on demographic factors, aligning with Coleman's Social Capital Theory, which highlights the inequalities in access to social support among different socioeconomic groups (Fernández-Leyva dkk., 2023).

## CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this research indicates that social support plays a crucial role in reducing stress levels among pre-adolescent children. Support from family, peers, and schools significantly contributes to the emotional well-being of children as they face various pressures, such as academic challenges, social conflicts, and family-related stressors. Family support, particularly in the form of emotional backing, has proven to be the most influential factor in helping children manage their stress. Additionally, healthy relationships with peers also have a positive impact, as social interactions with friends serve as important sources of both emotional and instrumental support.

This study also found that support from schools, whether from teachers or other staff, is essential in creating a safe and supportive environment that ultimately helps reduce stress among pre-adolescent children. Demographic factors such as socioeconomic status and gender also affect how children can access and benefit from social support. Children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds tend to face more barriers in obtaining adequate social support, while girls are more likely to gain benefits from emotional support provided by peers compared to boys. Overall, this research reinforces the understanding of the importance of social support in the emotional development of pre-adolescent children and offers valuable insights for parents, educators, and policymakers in developing more effective strategies to support children's mental health. Strong support from family, peers, and schools is a key pillar in efforts to reduce stress and enhance the emotional well-being of children.

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