



# **Social Dynamics in the Workplace: Does Social Support Enhance Thriving at Work of Newbie Employees in the Private Sector?**

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## **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Author JCO designed the study, wrote the protocol and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Author ECE performed the statistical analysis, managed the analyses of the study. Author OKI managed the literature searches. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

Newly employed workers (newbies) usually find it difficult acclimatizing with their new life at work. Although modern-day organizations acknowledge this and attempt to buffer their stress; however, it is not known if social support dimensions can help their course. The objective of this study is to ascertain which dimensions of social support will predict thriving of newbie employees. Being the background to the study, responses of 274 newly employed workers (183 males and 91 females) aged 28yrs to 52yrs with mean age of 38.50 and SD = 2.20 were drawn as sample from universities in Anambra State, Nigeria were elicited. Mult-stage sampling technique was utilize in the selection of the participants' institutions, faculties, departments and offices while a simple random sampling was used to selected actual participants from their offices. The study was anchored on Cohen and McKay's Stress Buffering theory which emphasized that without buffering, work strain and stress may ultimately reduce workers' thriving. The design of the study was

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correlational and multiple regression statistics was used to test the predictive influence of social support dimensions on thriving at work. The result of the analysis confirmed the three dimensions of social support (family support, friends' support and significant others' support) as predictors of thriving at work at  $\beta = .54$ ,  $p < .05$  for family support,  $\beta = .49$ ,  $p < .05$  for friends support and  $\beta = .37$ ,  $p < .05$  for significant others' support ( $n = 274$ ). The result accounted for 42.5% explanation of predictors of thriving at work among newbie employees. It is recommended that organizational climate be designed to provide more buffers to pressures of work especially for newly employed workers in order to boost their adaptability and effectiveness.

*Keywords: Social support; thriving at work; stress buffering; newbies; family support; significant others' support; academic staff; universities workers.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Working for a private organization can be very challenging because of the high premium placed on maximization of profit with limited resource inputs. This owner-oriented paradigm governs most management principles which sustain the existence and survival of most private sector organization. The extent to which this is true, it may also have dire consequences and outcomes for the organization as it may become the source and cause of work pressures on the workforce and may pose survival challenge especially for the new intakes [1]. Sometimes these circumstances affect the newly employed employees (newbies) psychologically considering their individual and collective goals, level playing ground and their adaptation skills. Coping with this type of workplace climate and thriving in it necessarily task the coping of employees especially newbies [2]. Coping levels of the employees as regards the challenges of adaptation for newbie employees in particular may be improved in the presence of supports either from the family, friends and significant others such as co-workers. To survive the pressures of typical private sector organization, newbie employees need to adjust to the organizational climate and this can essentially improve thriving. Their survival and adaptation to workplace pressures may well be pushed if they feel supported.

Newbie employees are newly employed employees who are yet to acclimatize with the work environment after the period of orientation. Newbie employees are employees that are within a few months their employment usually not more than a year. Generally, some organizational allow "honeymoon" period in terms of lateness, target achievement and upfront salary for newbie employees in order to support their transition and acclimatization.

Social support in the organizational perspective refers to subtle forms of assistance and cooperation shown by colleagues, peers, friends, family members and significant others to an employee which may be useful towards adapting and navigating a stressful situation (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet and Farley, 1988). It is also forms of encouragement demonstrated by giving a co-worker a helping hand to a fellow worker to help him or her steady his or her performance. Newly employed workers may significantly benefit from the supports of friends, family and co-workers which can improve their acclimatization to work demands and help them thrive unconditionally. This assertion is so because social exchanges underpin the organizational climate and positively influences job, employee an organization outcomes [3] especially among newbie employees. One of the job outcomes of interest in this kind of scenario is thriving at work.

Thriving at work is an individual growth marked by a sense of feeling energized and enriched with competence and capacity necessary to excel on job tasks [4]. This feeling is a sense that one is continually improving and getting better at what they do (learning) and having impact on the job. Thriving is conceptualized as willingness to learn and grow, and having those opportunities (Spreitzer & Sutcliffe, 2005). Thriving subjective than objective, more of becoming than achieving [3]. Boyd [5] contended that in recognitions of the critical value of any workforce, that it is important to create a thriving environment. This is so because, when individuals are thriving, they have a sense of realizing their own potential and seeing improvement in the self and their behaviours overtime. In fact thriving at work in organization involves active intentional engagement in the process of personal growth [5].

Thriving is particularly important in today's work environment especially in the private sector

where the maximization paradigm has beclouded welfare of employees especially as regarding proving enabling environment for thriving. Thriving individuals in an organization feel passionate of what they do and produce their own energy through excitement for their work and when this is lacking negative employee outcomes may emanate. Also, when workers thrive, they believe they are getting better at what they do and thus can go beyond the normal work requirement at the same time seeing him or herself as a crucial ambassador for the organization. Thus, for an individual to thrive better in an organization, there must be a sense of a favourable atmosphere which creates belongingness inform of feelings of possessiveness and support especially when one is supported by his or her organization. However, such desired enabling environment may be elusive in most private organization in Nigerian where the struggle for organizational survival against the harsh operating third world environment has placed certain limitations on the organizational owners.

Scandura, and Pellegrini [6] using member exchange vulnerability established that there are consequences for employees who do not thrive in the workplaces. These consequences may be traced to the effects of the member-exchange for example, trust and leadership and other social dynamics. In line with this, Scandura and Pellegrini further contended that the levels of member's-exchange practically create relational vulnerability which may impact negatively on trust. Also, Zhang[3] posits that when employees do not thrive, there is a decreased competence, control, perception and performance which leads to hopelessness, decreased self-esteem decreased gratification in the workplaces, and a reactivation of early giving up memories. This situation Zhang [3] noted has dire consequences for the employees as well as the organizational owners.

Given the nature of the private sector organizations which is majorly characterized by maximization of profit in the presence of limitation of resource; it is truism that a perfect private sector organization which promote employee thriving will remain elusive much more to the disadvantage of the employees. The emphasis has shifted to the employees to personally buffer the pressures from the harsh operating environment which may inhibit the workers' potentials. To attempt to provide understanding and explanation for this, the

authors using stressing buffering theory, contend that the dimensions of social support (family, friends, and significant others) may significantly improve on the thriving of newbie employees. Using the underpinning foundations of social dynamics impacts, the authors argue that perceived social support will buffer prevailing hostile organizational climate which newbie employees face and may further facilitate employees' thriving at work. Consequently, the objectives of the study will be to ascertain whether:

- i. Family support will predict thriving at work among newbie employees in private sector organizations.
- ii. Friends' support will predict thriving at work among newbie employees in private sector organizations.
- iii. Significant others' support will predict thriving at work among newbie employees in private sector organizations.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Many studies have been carried out on stress and social support; apart from the fact that social support helps to buffer and minimize the effects on stress, it can also promote positive affect or positive psychological wellbeing which can neutralize the influence of unfavourable organizational climate and can help certain level of employees cope with different challenges in the workplace [7]. This ability to first buffer and then promote positive affect can be harvested and applied to bolster thriving at work especially among newbie employees in view of the underpinnings of the buffering model propounded by Cohen and McKay [8]. For instance, Etodike, Ezech, and Chukwura [7] found positive correlation with social support and life satisfaction whereas negative correlation was found between social support and retirement stress among public service retirees. Also, Heshizer and Knapp [9] revisiting the Buffering hypothesis found correlates of social support, work stressors, stress related symptoms and negative affectivity among public school teachers.

The many studies in literature consistently underpin that the workplace is far from stress-free ideal and hence, coping ability may well depend on a number of work and non-work factors as highlighted in the dimensions (family, friends, and significant others) and types (emotional, information, tangible and belonging

support) of social support. Both the types and dimensions can uniquely help a newbie employees adapt to the pressures of new lifestyle at works with demands of duty when not supported. Emotional social support often go hand in hand with belonging support which bolster the affirmations of one's worth/value, concern about one's feelings, providing social leisure and belonging, spending time with friends who need support and may feel alone and the sharing of positive regard whereas informational social support seen easily in significant other dimension involves the sharing of advice or information that can help someone who is experiencing a stressor or challenge they don't know how to handle. Tangible social support includes sharing resources, either material, time, energy or financial. It can be inform of share childcare duties, helping a friend move, or even bringing a casserole to a grieving family.

Considering a host stressful factors which await newbie employees such as timely completion of tasks, meeting deadlines, personal finance to keep up to job demands and work interfering with family there is the need for such group of workers to be support to reduce their stressors. If the stressor or the stressful events are effectively controlled, there is the chance that such an employee will thrive. Murayama Bennett, Shaw, Liang, Krause, Kobayashi [10] contended that social support can also buffer the effect of financial strain which can be extended to buffering to this study as it can buffer the financial problems which new intakes including sustenance and provision finance. Furthermore, Cohen, Janicki-Deverts, Turner and Doyle [11] found human contact such as hugging can provide stress-buffering social support especially among the ill and may be applicable to people under immense pressures of work.

Thorsteinsson, Rhonda, and Brown [12] contended that the buffering effect acts a moderator variable that enables individuals to withstand the adverse impact of work stress on psychological states such as psychosomatic stress and job stress. The buffering effect of social support remains a stress research topic that is still not settled. According to Thorsteinsson et al. [12] social support is topical in correlating the relationship between work-stress, psychological stress, staff health and work outcomes. Also, Wright, King and Rosenberg [13] asserted that functions of social support and self-verification in association with loneliness, depression, and stress also have buffering effects.

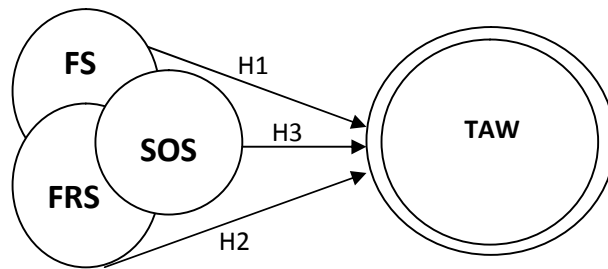
Equally, Yu, Wang, Zhai, Dai and Yang [14] also found that the effect of work stress on job burnout among teachers could be mediated through the role of self-efficacy and recommended that self-efficacy is boosted by in the presence of support. The buffering effect of social support remains a stress research topic that is still not settled. Given the fact that work stress is widespread and has serious job, health, and personal consequences, research continues on role of social support as a mechanism that buffers the negative effects of work stress [12].

## **2.1 Framework**

### **2.1.1 Stress buffering model**

The stress buffering mode propounded by Cohen and Wills [15] assumes that social supports have an effect upon the individual psychological well being only in the presence of certain social condition such as stressful life event. Social support interacts with stressors such as social support to make a greater contribution to the health and well being among those who suffer than among those who are not experiencing stressors. Stress-buffering hypothesis proposes that social support attenuates the relation between negative life event and the risk for development of depression (Wheaton, 1985). This interactive model posits that when faced will troubling life event, individual with greater support from family and friend are less likely to become depressed than individual with lower level of support. This social support presumably enhances efficacy, esteem and confidence, thereby increasing an individual's perception that he or she can cope effectively with negative life event. In addition, the tangible support provided by network member may directly facilitate the resolution of negative life event, (e.g. financial assistance). There is general consensus in both research and clinical circle that the stress-buffering model has been supported (e.g. Brown & Harris, 1978), [15].

According to the main effect, social support directly helps individuals deal with the amount and intensity of stress-related symptoms, irrespective of the degree of risk and danger to which individuals are exposed. Individuals benefit overall from social networks because they provide regular positive experiences and provide individuals with information and experience that enables them to avoid and deal more effectively with work stressors. Another school of thought



**Fig. 1. Thriving on social support-dimension model**

*Key: FS = Family Support, FRS = Friends' Support, SOS = Significant Others' Support, and TAW = Thriving At Work*

argues that social support buffers or moderates the relationship between stressors and stress symptoms [16].

**2.1.2 Conceptual model of the study**

Conceptual model for the current study assumed that the three dimensions of social support (family support, friends' support and significant others support) would both independently and jointly predict newbie employees' thriving at work. The model is depicted in Fig. 1.

In Fig. 1 illustrated the expected independent and joint predictive effects social support dimensions of each of the predictor variables (family support, friends' support and significant others support) of the study on the criterion variable, thriving at work. From the conceptual model positive and significant predictive influence were conceived for a linear relationship between each of the independent variable and dependent variable of the study. The conceptual model above is supported by Feeney and Collins' [17] study on social support as theoretical perspective on thriving through relationships. Feeney and Collins proposed two relational support functions that are fundamental to the experience of thriving in each life context, and it identifies mediators through which relational support is likely to have long-term effects on thriving. This perspective highlights the need to take a new look at social support by conceptualizing it as an interpersonal process with a focus on thriving at work. Also, Abid, Zahra and Ahmed [18] utilized a mediated mechanism of thriving at work between perceived organization support, innovative work behavior and turnover intention to illustrate that support from organization can improve the thriving of employees. The theoretical assertions emphasized how perceived organization support transforms individual's psychological states which improves thriving.

Based on this theoretical underpinnings of the framework and conceptual model, this study sought for the predictive effects of the dimensions of social support (family, friends and significant others) on thriving at work. The study aimed to establish that the buffering effects of social support will increase positive effect in the workplace as with thriving at work. Specifically, the hypotheses tested in the study were:

- i. Family support will significantly predict thriving at work among the academic staff.
- ii. Friends support will significantly predict thriving at work among the academic staff.
- iii. Significant others' support will significantly predict thriving at work among the academic staff.

**3. METHODS**

**Sample:** Sample for the study were 274 newly employed workers were sampled in universities in Anambra State, Nigeria. The demographical data indicated that one hundred and eighty-three (183) males while ninety-one (91) were females. Their ages ranged from 28 to 52 years with an average age of 38.50 years and standard deviation of 2.20. Multi-stage sampling technique was used in sampling participants' institution, their faculties, departments and offices whereas simple random sampling was used for sampling the participants individually. Marital status of the participants revealed that 194 were married whereas 80 were not married. Also, educational qualification indicated 56 had Doctorate degree (Ph.D), 195 had Masters' degree, and 23 had bachelors' degree.

**Measurement:** Multidimensional scale of perceived social support (MSPSS) developed by Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet and Farley (1988) using adult samples. It is used to measure perceived social support across culture, though all the items are worded in the positive direction, the

MSPSS has been shown to be relatively free of social desirability bias (Dahlem, Zimet & Walker, 1991). The 12-item (MSPSS) provides assessment of three sources of support: family support, friends support and significant others supports and is scored on a 5-point Likert type structure from 1 “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree”. Items 3, 4, 8 and 11 measure family supports; items 6, 7, 9 and 12 measures friend support while items 1, 2, 5, and 10 measures significant other supports. Sample items on the scale includes, “I get the emotional help and support I need from my family”, “I can count on my friends when things go wrong”, “there is a special person who is around when am in need”. The factor loading of the items were relatively high. The internal consistencies of the subscale ranged from 0.69 to 0.78 (family support = .69, friends support = .76 and significant other support = .78) while a pilot test to re-establish the internal consistence yielded a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of .71 for the entire scale.

Thriving at work scale - Thriving at work scale is an instrument developed by Spreitzer, Gibson & Garnett (2012) and was used to determine how workers feel about their learning, competence and development at work in their organizations. It is made up of ten (10) items which are rated using Likert format of 1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree. Some are positively worded while some negatively worded. Some of the items in the questionnaire include: “At work, I find myself learning often”, “At work, I feel alive and vital”, “At work, I see myself continually improving” and “At work, I am looking forward to each new day”. The original Cronbach’s alpha showed an internal consistency reliability of .82 but a pilot study was conducted to enhance its internal consistency and reliability and Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of .68 was obtained. For its validity and reliability – The use of the scales in the current study was possible by enhancing the reliability obtained by the original authors through a pilot study using 57 academic staff of universities in Enugu State. Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient analysis

carried out by the researcher revealed an alpha reliability coefficient of .74 and .79 respectively for social support scale and thriving at work scale.

**Design/Statistics:** This study is a cross-sectional survey research which using correlation design and multiple regression analysis as appropriate design and statistics to analyze the data obtained from the field.

**4. RESULTS**

Correlation matrix (Table 1) indicated that the three dimension of social support (family support, friends’ support and significant others’ support) had positive and significant correlation with thriving at work where as friends support did not. Correlation was reported at  $r(1, 274) = .591^*$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $r(1, 274) = .615^{**}$   $p < .05$ ; and  $r(1, 274) = .623^{**}$ ,  $p < .01$  respectively for family support and significant others’ support.

The model summary as observed in Table 2 indicated that the regression value stood at .623 whereas the R square stood at .437 while the adjusted value of R square yielded .425 which indicated 42.5% contribution in the understanding of thriving of work among newbie academic staff of selected Nigerian private universities. However, the significance of this contribution was further tested using beta weight coefficient in the multiple regression.

Table 3 confirmed the significance of each independent variable. From the reported beta weight coefficient values all dimension of social support were confirmed as predictors of thriving at work at  $\beta = .48$ ,  $p < .05$  (N=274) for family support,  $\beta = .37$ ,  $p < .05$  (N = 274) for Friends support and  $\beta = .34$ ,  $p < .05$  (N=274) for significant others’ support; thus, the confirmation of their predictive influence. From this happenstance, the three dimensions social support was confirmed as predictors of thriving at work among newbie employees.

**Table 1. Zero order correlation matrix for all of study variables: Family support, friends’ support, significant others support and thriving at work among newbie academic staff of selected Nigerian private universities**

| Variables            | M    | SD   | 1     | 2      | 3      | 4    |
|----------------------|------|------|-------|--------|--------|------|
| 1 Family support     | 15.6 | 1.08 | 1.00  |        |        |      |
| 2 Friends’ support   | 14.2 | 1.41 | .503  | 1.00   |        |      |
| 3 Significant others | 13.8 | 1.05 | .449  | .674   | 1.00   |      |
| 4 Thriving at work   | 32.0 | 2.40 | .591* | .615** | .623** | 1.00 |

\*\*Correlation is significant at  $p < 0.01$  level (2-tailed) \* correlation significant at  $p < .05$  (2-tailed) (N = 274)  
M = Mean, SD = Standard deviation

**Table 2. Model summary which shows regression contribution of the predictors variables - family support, friends' support, significant others support on thriving at work among newbie academic staff of selected Nigerian private universities**

| Model summary |                   |          |                   |                            |                   |          |     |     |               |
|---------------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|----------|-----|-----|---------------|
| Model         | R                 | R square | Adjusted R square | Std. error of the estimate | Change statistics |          |     |     |               |
|               |                   |          |                   |                            | R square change   | F change | df1 | df2 | Sig. F change |
| 1             | .623 <sup>a</sup> | .437     | .425              | 2.39629                    | .437              | 671.049  | 1   | 767 | .000          |

*a. Predictors: (Constant), family support, friends' support, significant others support*

*b. Dependent variable: Thriving at work*

**Table 3. Multiple regression coefficients showing the predictive influence of the dimensions of social support (family support, friends' support, significant others' support) on thriving at work among newbie academic staff of selected Nigerian private universities**

| Model                       | Unstandardized coefficients |            | Standardized coefficients | T      | Sig. |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|------|
|                             | B                           | Std. error | Beta                      |        |      |
| (Constant)                  | 49.084                      | 1.069      |                           | 39.373 | .000 |
| Family support              | .543                        | .036       | .483                      | 24.672 | .000 |
| Friends support             | .490                        | .041       | .370                      | 3.442  | .000 |
| Significant other's support | .372                        | .032       | .346                      | 11.058 | .000 |

*a. Dependent variable: Thriving at work*

**5. DISCUSSION**

There are theoretical and empirical evidence which support that perceptions of social support among the employees do influence employee positive outcomes such as thriving at work, as suggested by the findings such as Heshizer and Knapp [9] who emphasized that using buffering model can help reduce the impacts of work stressors, stress related symptoms and negative affectivity in the workplace. Such stressors may be reduced through the provisions and support of the employee family and co-workers and confirmed by the hypothetical result of the current study. One's family and colleagues have unique way of buffering stress outside providing emotional succour; they also provide labour, time, and other resources to supplement what the organization is lacking and by so doing support the newly employed. This should be considered in line with Wolff, Lindenberger, Brose and Schmiedek's [19] finding that social support factors increase positive affection and also buffer stress whiles increasing the coping situation. Also, Etodike, Ezech and Chukwura's [7] findings confirm the buffering effects of family support in the life of workers at the verge of retirement. The buffering potency of social support has also been found in this study to be related to the lives of newbie employees providing further understanding of buffering impacts of social support in the workplace.

Furthermore, Heshizer and Knapp's [9] finding using the Buffering hypothesis also confirmed Cohen and McKay's (1984) theory which contended that social support could serve as a form of stress reducing agent to increase positive effects in the workplace. The position of the theory assumes that our environment including the workplace is perpetually under stress and strain and unless certain situation are created as buffers they may escalate to negative psychology with its attendant consequences on job, employee and organizational outcomes. For the newly employed workforce, this might represent critical challenge for thriving in their new work environment and may also affect the way they perform their jobs. The uniqueness of support offered by one's family members and those of significant others such as colleagues and supervisors may in a special way help to launch positive affects and sustenance in the midst of workplace pressures and strains of living everyday life as an employee.

**6. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Stress, strain and negative affects is not alien in the workplace because of the pressures created by resource limitations and the need to maintain organizational effectiveness; these pressure the workers too especially the newly employed. Without diminishing their effects, the organization is running a risk on multiply fronts such as

reduced effectiveness, sabotage behaviour and organizational inefficiency. To ameliorate these possible impacts, employees somehow need to reduce these pressures and thrive. Social support from family and significant others such as ones from supervisors and colleagues can significantly help to increase positive affect and psychology in the workplace and inadvertently bolster thriving at work.

## 7. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Perceptual studies through survey always deal with issues such employees' honest response rather responding in socially acceptable manner or out of bias. There was also the need to ascertain whether there were intervening variables to the contribution of the model with regard to other factors which could be worker-associated, job associated factors or organization-based. The instance of moderation by these variables may offer more explanation to the predictive effects of social support than explained in the current model.

## 8. FUTURE STUDIES

There will be need to ascertain the extent of impact which worker-variables such as personality and social economic background, job factors such as autonomy and participation or organization factors could have on the moderation of the predictive effects of social support on thriving. Whether these impacts could outweigh support factors will provide tangible insights into the understanding of thriving at work.

## 9. CONCLUSION

This study examined the predictive influence of social support dimensions on employees thriving at work among newbie employees. The study focused on the newbie employees based on the acclimatization challenges which the prospects of new jobs present. Survey study was carried out using correlation design to ascertain the predictive influence of social support dimensions in creating positive affects in the workplace such as thriving at work. The study was anchored on Stress Buffering model and multiple regressions analysis was carried out to confirm the significance of the model. The model was confirmed by only family and significant others' support reached significant proportion in the predictive influence. Although, there were possible limitations which can reduce the

generalization of the findings, recommendations were made on factors of consideration for future study.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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