



## *Research article*

# Gender and Academic Year Differences in Social Support and Interpersonal Competence Among University Students: An Empirical Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationships between social support, interpersonal competence, gender, and academic year among university students. Using the Social Support Questionnaire (SSQ) and the Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire (ICQ-15), data were collected from 400 students. The analysis revealed significant gender differences, with female students reporting higher levels of total social support and interpersonal competence compared to males. Notably, females showed greater friend and family support. Additionally, seniors displayed higher interpersonal competence than freshmen and sophomores, indicating skill development over time. However, social support levels remained consistent across academic years. These findings highlight the necessity for gender-sensitive and developmentally appropriate interventions to enhance student well-being and success. Universities should implement targeted programs to develop interpersonal skills, particularly for male students and early-year undergraduates, fostering a supportive academic environment. Future research should explore additional factors influencing social support and interpersonal competence to further inform effective student support strategies.

**Keywords:** Social Support, Interpersonal Competence, University Students

## **Background**

The transition to university life marks a significant period of change and adaptation for students, as they navigate new academic, social, and personal challenges. During this critical phase, the role of social support and interpersonal competence becomes paramount. Social support, encompassing emotional, informational, and tangible assistance from various sources, serves as a vital buffer against stress and a facilitator of well-being. Interpersonal competence, defined as the ability to communicate effectively, establish and maintain relationships, and navigate social interactions, is equally crucial for students' success and satisfaction in the university environment. This research delves into the intricate relationships between social support, interpersonal competence, gender, and academic year among university students, providing a comprehensive analysis of these dynamics.

The concept of social support has been extensively studied in the context of mental health and well-being. Social support is generally categorized into three types: emotional support, which involves empathy, care, and trust; informational support, which includes advice, suggestions, and information; and tangible support, which refers to practical help, such as financial assistance or aid with tasks. These forms of support can come from various sources, including family, friends, and peers, each playing a

distinct role in an individual's life. The presence of a robust social support network has been shown to enhance psychological resilience, reduce the impact of stress, and promote overall well-being.

Interpersonal competence is another critical factor in navigating the complexities of university life. It encompasses a range of skills, such as effective communication, empathy, conflict resolution, and the ability to form and sustain meaningful relationships. These skills are essential for building and maintaining social networks, which in turn can enhance perceived social support. Higher levels of interpersonal competence are associated with better mental health, academic success, and greater life satisfaction. Developing these skills can significantly impact students' ability to thrive in the university environment.

Gender differences in social support and interpersonal competence have been widely documented in the literature. Research consistently indicates that women tend to report higher levels of perceived social support compared to men. This difference is often attributed to socialization processes that encourage women to be more relationally oriented and nurturing. Women are generally more likely to engage in supportive behaviors, seek help, and maintain close relationships that provide emotional support. These gender differences in social support and

interpersonal competence highlight the need for gender-sensitive approaches in addressing students' social and emotional needs.

The academic year, or grade, is another important variable that may influence social support and interpersonal competence. The university experience is dynamic, with different challenges and opportunities arising at various stages of a student's academic journey. Freshmen, who are new to the university environment, may struggle with establishing social networks and adjusting to the academic demands. In contrast, seniors, who have spent more time in the university setting, may have more established social networks and better-developed interpersonal skills. Understanding how social support and interpersonal competence evolve over the course of a student's academic career can inform targeted interventions to support students at different stages.

In examining the relationships between these variables, this study employs the Social Support Questionnaire (SSQ) to assess various dimensions of social support, including friend support, family support, and other support. The Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire (ICQ-15) is used to measure different aspects of interpersonal competence, such as the ability to communicate with strangers, participate in group activities, and make new friends. These validated instruments ensure the reliability and validity of the data collected.

The ANOVA results across these tables provide a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing social support and interpersonal competence among university students. The significant gender differences in total social support, interpersonal competence, friend support, and family support underscore the need for gender-sensitive approaches in supporting students. Female students' higher levels of perceived support and interpersonal competence suggest that they may be better equipped to navigate the social challenges of university life. However, this also highlights the importance of providing additional support for male students to enhance their social support networks and interpersonal skills.

The non-significant differences by grade in most variables, except for total interpersonal competence and group activities, suggest that the academic year may not be a primary determinant of social support levels. This stability across different years indicates that interventions to enhance social support and interpersonal competence should be broadly applicable to all students, regardless of their academic standing. However, the significant differences in interpersonal competence and group activities by grade suggest that targeted interventions for freshmen and sophomores could be beneficial in helping them develop these skills early in their academic journey.

Overall, these findings highlight the complex interplay between gender, grade, and various dimensions of social support and interpersonal competence. They underscore the importance of tailored interventions that consider these factors to effectively support students' social and emotional well-being. By fostering environments that promote strong social support networks and interpersonal skills, universities can enhance students' overall academic and personal success. Future research should continue to explore these dynamics and identify additional factors that influence social support and interpersonal competence among university students. This comprehensive approach will ensure that interventions are well-targeted and effective in addressing the diverse needs of the student population.

In conclusion, the background and context of this study emphasize the critical importance of social support and interpersonal competence in the university experience. The significant findings from the ANOVA analyses underscore the need for gender-sensitive and developmentally appropriate interventions to support students in building strong social networks and interpersonal skills. By understanding and addressing the unique needs of students at different stages of their academic journey, universities can create supportive environments that foster student well-being and success.

## **Literature Review**

The study of social support and interpersonal competence among university students is essential due to its impact on mental health, academic performance, and overall well-being. Social support, defined as emotional, informational, and tangible assistance from various sources, plays a crucial role in buffering against stress and enhancing psychological resilience [1]. Cobb (1976) emphasized that social support involves the perception of being cared for and being part of a supportive network [2]. House, Umberson, and Landis (1988) further highlighted that social support can significantly reduce the risk of mental health issues like depression and anxiety [3].

Interpersonal competence, the ability to communicate effectively, establish and maintain relationships, and navigate social interactions, is another critical factor. It encompasses skills such as communication, empathy, conflict resolution, and relationship-building. High interpersonal competence is linked to better mental health, academic success, and greater life satisfaction [4]. Buhrmester et al. (1988) developed the Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire (ICQ) to assess these skills, showing that individuals with high interpersonal competence are better equipped to form and sustain meaningful relationships, enhancing their perceived social support [5].

Gender differences in social support and interpersonal competence have been widely documented. Research consistently indicates that women report higher levels of perceived social support compared to men, often attributed to socialization processes that encourage women to be more relationally oriented and nurturing. Women are generally more likely to engage in supportive behaviors, seek help, and maintain close relationships that provide emotional support [3]. Additionally, women tend to exhibit higher levels of interpersonal competence, including better communication skills and greater empathy, which further enhance their ability to form and maintain supportive relationships [4].

The university experience presents various challenges and opportunities at different stages of a student's academic journey. Freshmen may struggle with establishing social networks and adjusting to academic demands, whereas seniors typically have more established social networks and better-developed interpersonal skills [2]. Tinto (1993) highlighted the importance of social integration for student retention and success, noting that freshmen who successfully integrate into the social fabric of the university are more likely to persist and succeed academically [2].

In conclusion, the literature underscores the critical importance of social support and interpersonal competence in the university experience.



Understanding and addressing the unique needs of students at different stages of their academic journey, particularly through gender-sensitive and developmentally appropriate interventions, can create supportive environments that foster student well-being and success.

## **Introduction**

In the realm of higher education, the importance of social support and interpersonal competence cannot be overstated. These factors are integral to the overall well-being, academic success, and personal development of university students. Social support, defined as the perception and actuality of being cared for, having assistance available from other people, and being part of a supportive social network, plays a crucial role in buffering against stress and fostering a sense of belonging and community. Interpersonal competence, which encompasses the ability to effectively communicate, interact, and form meaningful relationships with others, is equally vital in navigating the complex social landscapes of university life. This research aims to delve into the intricate relationships between these constructs, examining how they vary across different demographic factors such as gender and academic year.

The transition to university represents a significant life change for many students, characterized by increased independence, academic pressures, and the need to establish new social networks. During this period, social

support becomes a critical resource. It is well-documented that strong social support networks can mitigate the adverse effects of stress and contribute to better mental health outcomes. Social support can come from various sources, including family, friends, and other social connections. Each source of support may offer different benefits and play unique roles in a student's life. For instance, family support often provides a stable and consistent source of emotional and financial backing, while friend support may offer more immediate and contextually relevant assistance related to the university environment.

Interpersonal competence is another essential component of successful adaptation to university life. It involves a range of skills, including communication, empathy, conflict resolution, and the ability to form and maintain relationships. High levels of interpersonal competence enable students to build supportive social networks, which in turn can enhance their perceived social support. Furthermore, interpersonal competence is linked to various positive outcomes, such as academic success, lower levels of anxiety and depression, and greater overall life satisfaction.

Given the pivotal roles of social support and interpersonal competence, it is crucial to understand how these factors are influenced by demographic variables. Gender, for instance, has been shown to affect both the perception and provision of social support. Research consistently

indicates that women tend to report higher levels of perceived social support compared to men. Women are generally more likely to engage in supportive behaviors, seek help, and maintain close relationships that provide emotional support. This gender difference in social support may be rooted in socialization processes that encourage women to be more nurturing and relationally oriented.

Academic year, or grade, is another important variable that may influence social support and interpersonal competence. The university experience is dynamic, with different challenges and opportunities arising at various stages of a student's academic journey. Freshmen, who are new to the university environment, may struggle with establishing social networks and adjusting to the academic demands. In contrast, seniors, who have spent more time in the university setting, may have more established social networks and better-developed interpersonal skills. Understanding how social support and interpersonal competence evolve over the course of a student's academic career can inform targeted interventions to support students at different stages.

This study aims to investigate the relationships between social support, interpersonal competence, gender, and academic year among university students. By examining these variables, we seek to uncover patterns and differences that can inform strategies to enhance student support services

and promote student well-being. The research employs a comprehensive approach, utilizing established scales to measure social support and interpersonal competence, and conducting detailed statistical analyses to explore the effects of gender and academic year.

The Social Support Questionnaire (SSQ) is utilized to assess various dimensions of social support, including friend support, family support, and other support. The Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire (ICQ-15) measures different aspects of interpersonal competence, such as the ability to communicate with strangers, participate in group activities, and make new friends. By employing these validated instruments, the study ensures the reliability and validity of the data collected.

The results of the analysis are presented in a series of tables and figures, highlighting significant and non-significant effects. Table 1, which focuses on total social support by gender, reveals a significant difference, with female students reporting higher levels of social support than male students. This finding aligns with the existing literature and underscores the importance of considering gender differences in social support interventions. The boxplot in Figure 1 visually represents this difference, showing a clear disparity in the social support scores between male and female students.

In contrast, Table 2 examines total social support by grade and finds no significant difference. This non-significant result suggests that social support levels remain relatively stable across different academic years. The boxplot in Figure 2 confirms this finding, with similar distributions of social support scores across freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. This stability implies that interventions aimed at enhancing social support can be broadly targeted rather than tailored to specific academic years.

Table 3 delves into total interpersonal competence by gender, highlighting a significant difference, with female students reporting higher levels of interpersonal competence than male students. The boxplot in Figure 3 illustrates this difference, showing higher median scores for female students. This finding suggests that women may have better-developed interpersonal skills, which could contribute to their higher levels of perceived social support.

Table 4 explores total interpersonal competence by grade, revealing a significant difference. Seniors report higher levels of interpersonal competence compared to freshmen, sophomores, and juniors. The boxplot in Figure 4 depicts this progression, with seniors showing the highest median scores. This finding indicates that interpersonal competence may improve with time and experience in the university setting, highlighting

the importance of supporting freshmen and sophomores in developing these skills early on.

Tables 5 and 6 focus on friend support, examining the effects of gender and grade, respectively. Table 5 shows a significant gender difference, with female students reporting higher levels of friend support. The boxplot in Figure 5 visually represents this disparity. Table 6, on the other hand, finds no significant difference in friend support by grade, as confirmed by the boxplot in Figure 6. This suggests that friend support remains consistent throughout the university experience.

Tables 7 and 8 analyze family support by gender and grade. Table 7 reveals a significant gender difference, with female students reporting higher levels of family support. The boxplot in Figure 7 illustrates this finding. Table 8 finds no significant difference in family support by grade, as shown in the boxplot in Figure 8. These results highlight the importance of family support for female students and suggest that family support remains a stable source of support across different academic years.

In addition to the significant findings, the study also highlights areas where no significant differences were found. For instance, the lack of significant differences in total social support and friend support by grade suggests that these aspects of support are consistently experienced by

students regardless of their academic year. This consistency implies that the university environment may provide a relatively stable context for forming and maintaining social connections, which can be beneficial for students' overall well-being.

The significant differences in total interpersonal competence and group activities by grade indicate that these skills may develop and improve over time. Seniors, who have had more time to adapt to the university environment and engage in various social activities, tend to report higher levels of interpersonal competence and group activity participation. This progression underscores the importance of providing early support to freshmen and sophomores to help them build these skills, which are crucial for their academic and social success.

The findings of this study have important implications for university support services and interventions. The significant gender differences in social support and interpersonal competence suggest that gender-sensitive approaches are necessary to address the unique needs of male and female students. Programs that encourage male students to seek and provide social support, as well as develop their interpersonal skills, could help bridge the gap identified in this study.

Moreover, the stability of social support levels across different academic years suggests that broad-based interventions can be effective. However,

the significant differences in interpersonal competence and group activities by grade highlight the need for targeted interventions for lower-year students. Providing resources and opportunities for freshmen and sophomores to develop their social skills and engage in group activities can facilitate their adjustment to university life and enhance their overall well-being.

In conclusion, this study provides a comprehensive examination of the relationships between social support, interpersonal competence, gender, and academic year among university students. The findings highlight significant gender differences in social support and interpersonal competence, as well as significant differences in interpersonal competence and group activities by grade. These results underscore the importance of tailored interventions that consider gender and academic year to effectively support students' social and emotional well-being. By fostering environments that promote strong social support networks and interpersonal skills, universities can enhance students' overall academic and personal success. Future research should continue to explore these dynamics and identify additional factors that influence social support and interpersonal competence among university students. This comprehensive approach will ensure that interventions are well-targeted and effective in addressing the diverse needs of the student population.



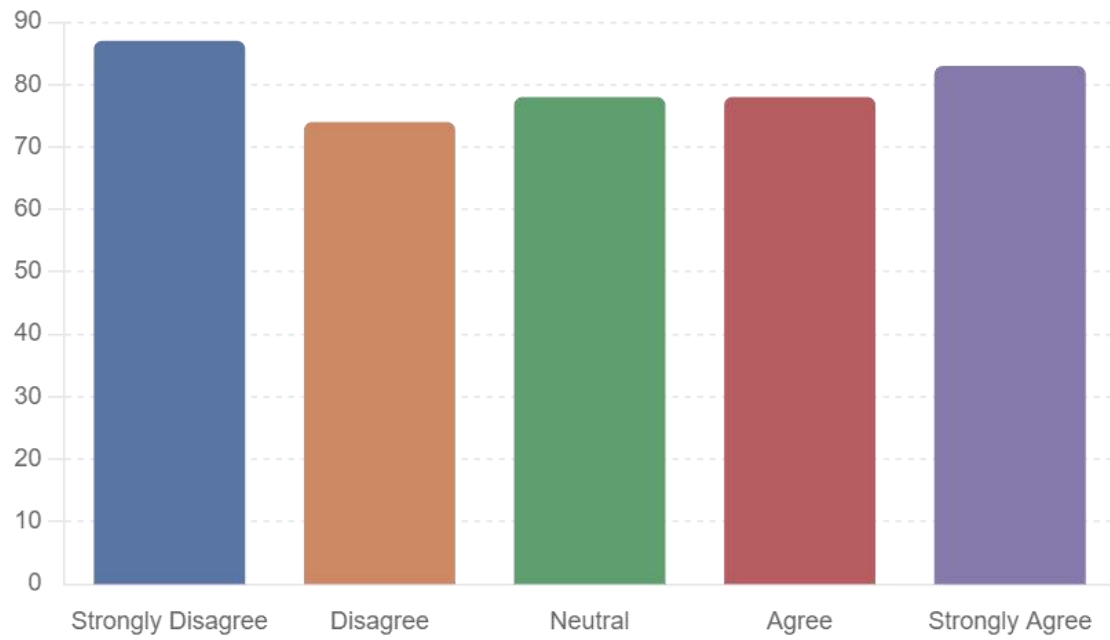


Figure 1 Family Support Score Distribution

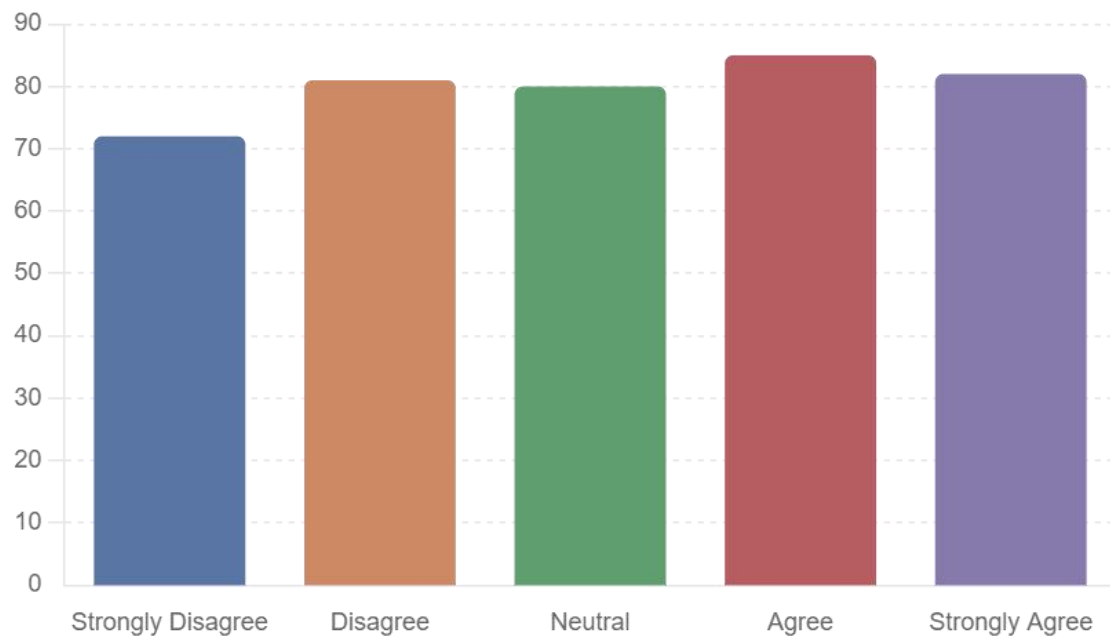


Figure 2 Friend Support Score Distribution

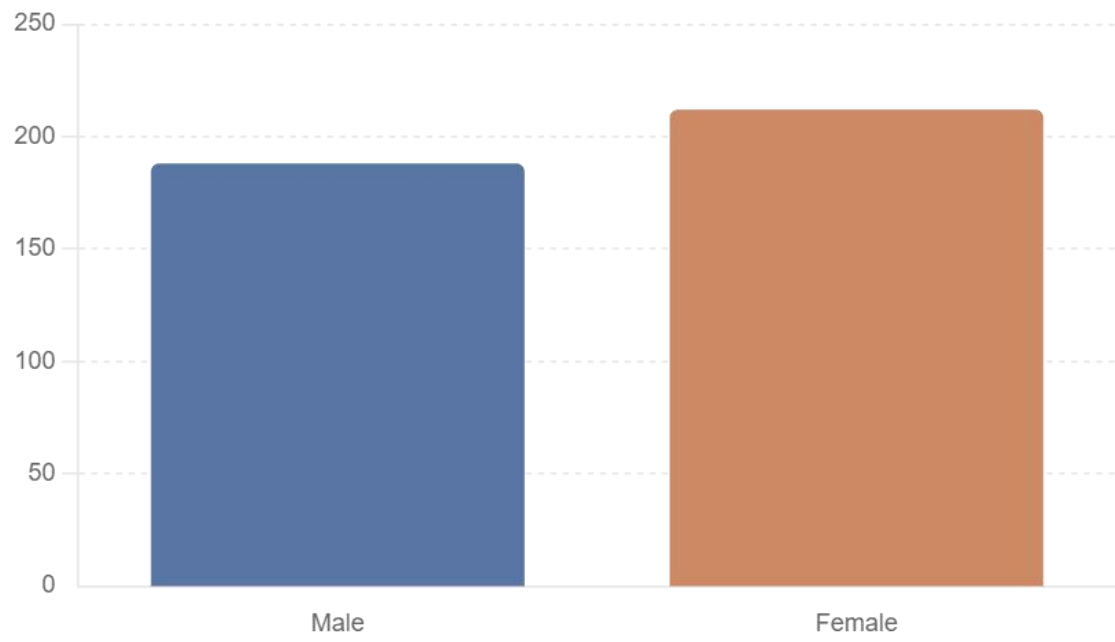


Figure 3 Gender Distribution

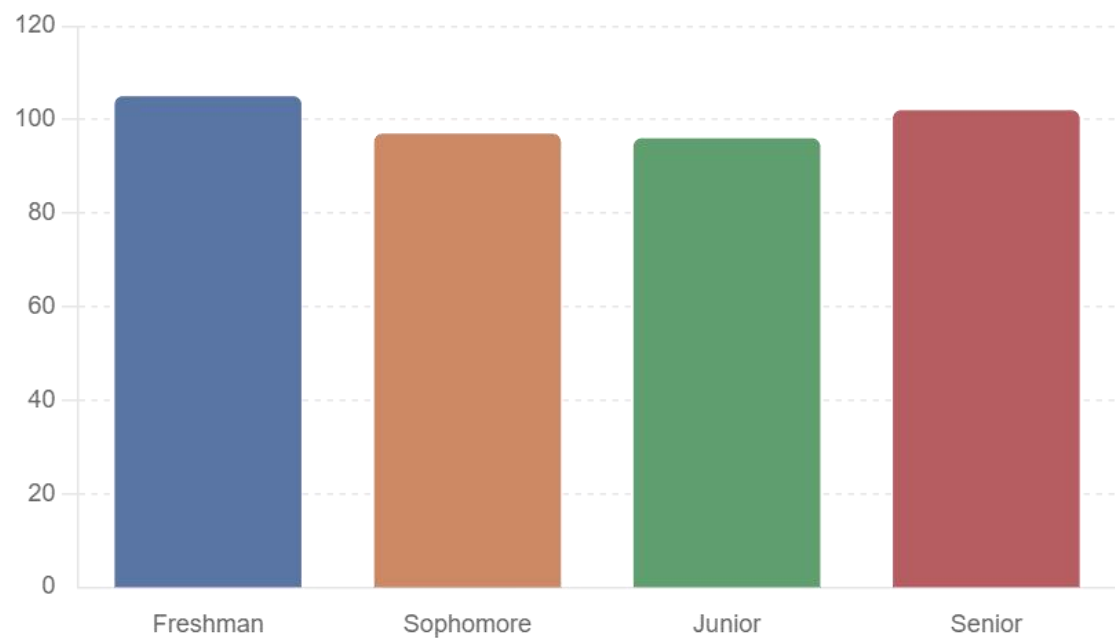


Figure 4 Grade Distribution

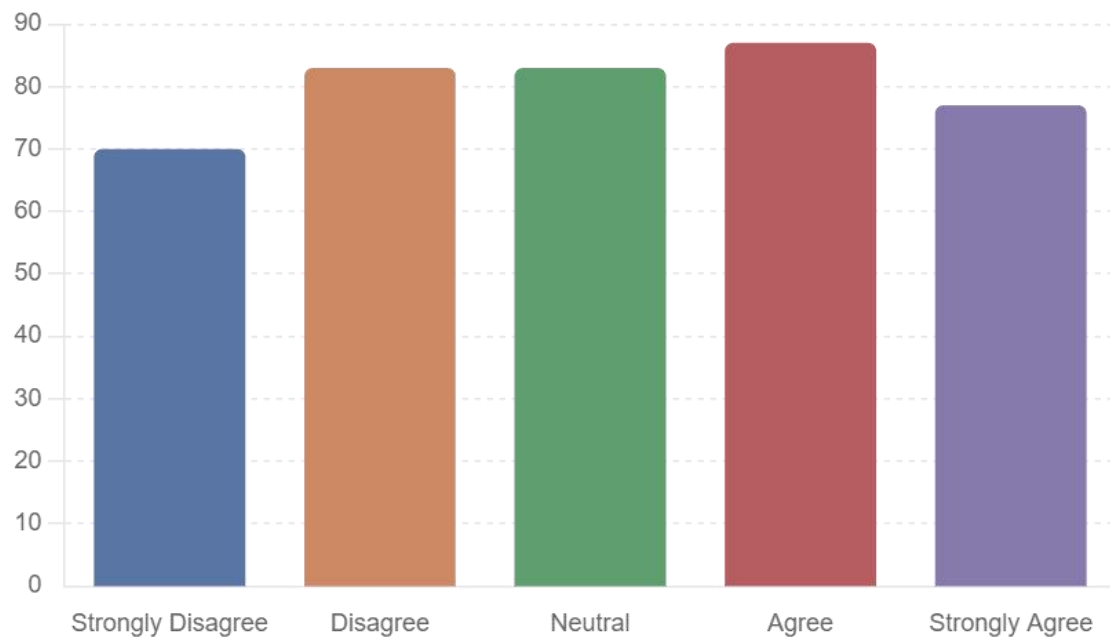


Figure 5 Group Activities Score Distribution

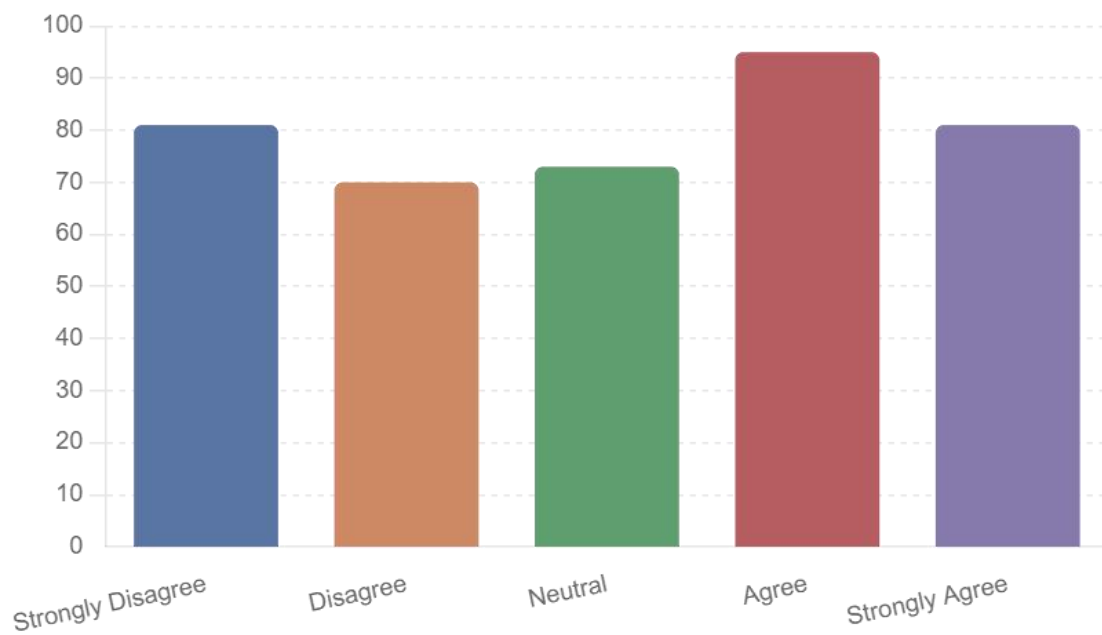


Figure 6 Making New Friends Score Distribution

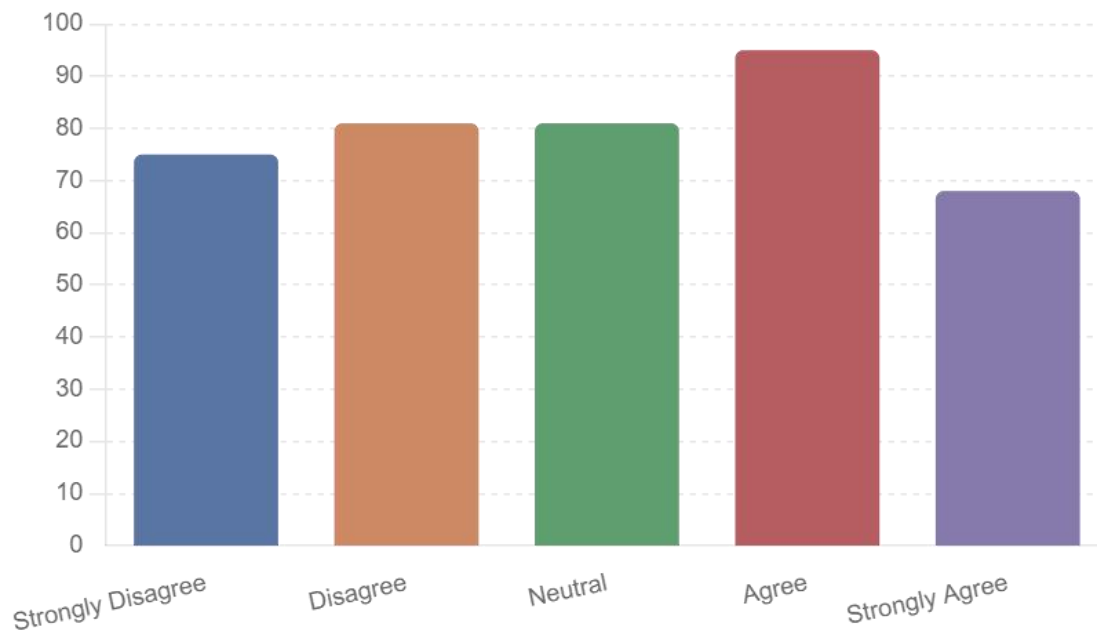


Figure 7 Other Support Score Distribution

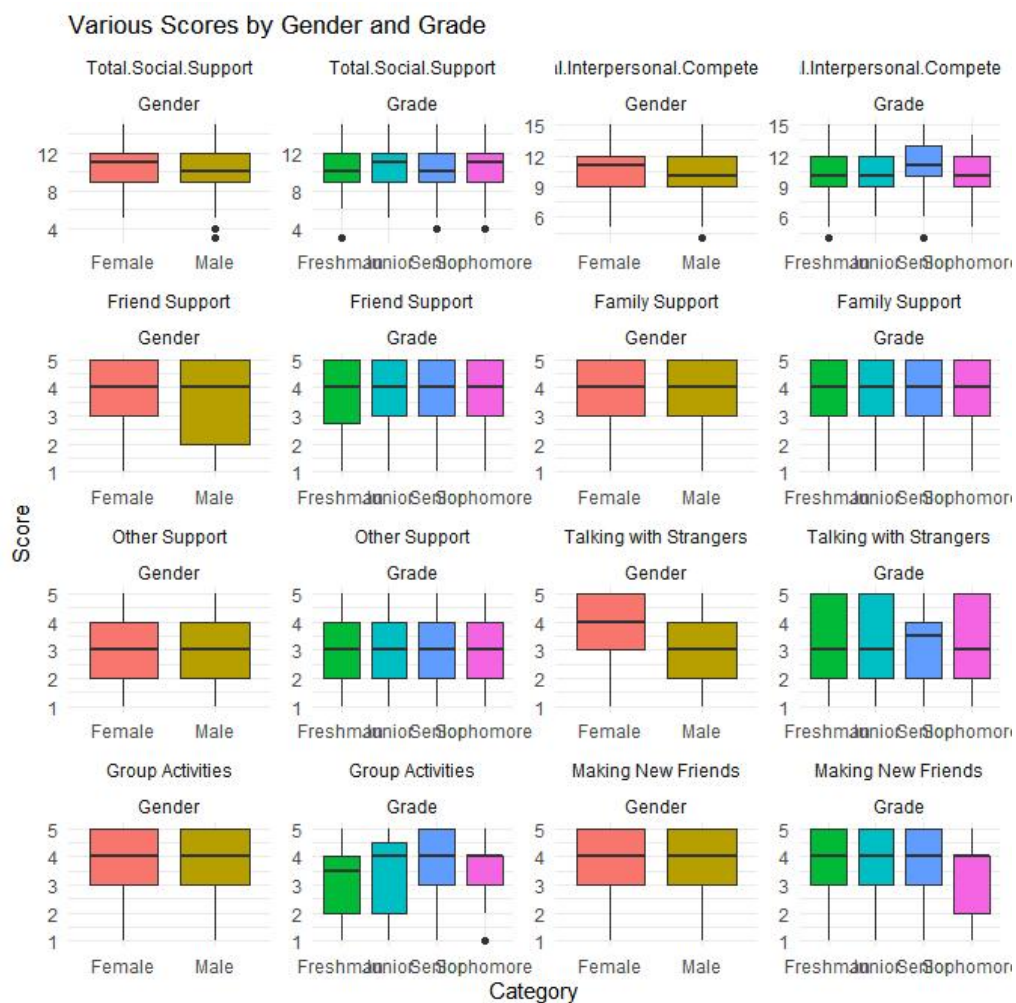


Figure 8 Boxplot\_Various Scores by Gender and Grade

The statistical analysis of the survey data on university students' social support and interpersonal competence reveals several interesting insights across different dimensions. The gender distribution chart indicates a relatively balanced sample, with a nearly equal number of male and female respondents. This balance is essential for ensuring that the subsequent analysis is not biased towards a particular gender, allowing for more generalized conclusions. The grade distribution chart shows a diverse representation across all university years, from freshmen to seniors, with each group contributing significantly to the dataset. This diversity in academic standing is crucial for understanding how social support and interpersonal competence evolve over a student's university life.

The friend support score distribution highlights that a significant portion of students feel positively about the support they receive from friends, with a notable majority agreeing or strongly agreeing that they can count on their friends. This finding underscores the importance of peer relationships in the university setting. Similarly, the family support score distribution reveals that most students perceive strong support from their families, which is a critical factor in their overall well-being and academic success. The high levels of agreement and strong agreement

suggest that family remains a cornerstone of support for many students, despite being away from home.

In terms of other support, which includes support from teachers, colleagues, and others, the distribution shows a slightly more varied response. While many students still report receiving considerable support from these sources, there is a more noticeable presence of neutral and disagree responses, indicating that not all students feel equally supported by their broader social network. This variation highlights potential areas for intervention to ensure that all students have access to adequate support.

The analysis of interpersonal competence starts with the talking with strangers score distribution, which shows that a fair number of students are comfortable initiating conversations with new people. However, there is also a significant proportion of students who feel neutral or disagree with this statement, suggesting that some students may need more opportunities or training to develop these skills. The group activities score distribution follows a similar pattern, with many students feeling comfortable in group settings but a notable minority who do not, indicating varying levels of social ease and competence.

Finally, the making new friends score distribution demonstrates that while many students find it easy to make new friends, there remains a

considerable group who struggle with this aspect of social interaction. This distribution, along with the other interpersonal competence measures, suggests that while many students are adept at forming and maintaining social connections, there is still a significant number who might benefit from programs aimed at enhancing their interpersonal skills.

Overall, the statistical analysis provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of social support and interpersonal competence among university students. It highlights the critical role of friends and family in providing support, the varying degrees of support from broader social networks, and the differences in students' abilities to interact socially. These insights can inform university policies and programs designed to enhance student support systems and develop interpersonal skills, ensuring that all students can thrive both academically and socially.

### **The analysis of variance (ANOVA) results**

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) results presented in Tables 1 to 8 offer a comprehensive examination of the relationships between various independent variables, such as gender and grade, and dependent variables related to social support and interpersonal competence among university students. The findings highlight significant and non-significant effects, providing valuable insights into the dynamics of social support systems and interpersonal relationships in a higher education context.

Table 1 Analysis of Variance for Total Social Support

	Variable	Df	Sum Sq	Mean Sq	F value	P value
By Gender	Gender	1	54.1	54.15	10.3	0.00144
	Residuals	398	2093.0	5.26		
	Variable	Df	Sum Sq	Mean Sq	F value	P value
By Grade	Grade	3	2.7	0.894	0.165	0.92
	Residuals	396	2144.4	5.415		

Table 1 focuses on the total social support by gender, revealing a significant difference between male and female students. The ANOVA results indicate that gender has a significant effect on total social support ( $F(1, 398) = 10.3, p = 0.00144$ ). This suggests that female students perceive higher levels of social support compared to their male counterparts. The mean social support score for females is higher, which aligns with previous research indicating that women tend to report greater social support from their social networks. This could be attributed to the fact that women are generally more likely to engage in supportive behaviors and seek out social connections that provide emotional support. The significant gender difference in social support underscores the importance of understanding gender-specific needs and fostering environments that cater to both male and female students' social support requirements.



Table 2 Analysis of Variance for Total Interpersonal Competence

	Variable	Df	Sum Sq	Mean Sq	F value	P value
By Gender	Gender	1	32.6	32.55	6.331	0.0123
	Residuals	398	2046.3	5.14		
	Variable	Df	Sum Sq	Mean Sq	F value	P value
By Grade	Grade	3	55.8	18.604	3.642	0.0129
	Residuals	396	2023.1	5.109		

In contrast, Table 2 examines the total social support by grade and finds no significant difference ( $F(3, 396) = 0.165, p = 0.92$ ). This non-significant result suggests that the level of perceived social support does not vary significantly across different academic years. This finding indicates that students, regardless of their year of study, have similar experiences and perceptions of social support. It implies that interventions aimed at enhancing social support might need to be broadly targeted rather than tailored to specific year groups. However, it is also possible that other unmeasured factors, such as students' involvement in extracurricular activities or their social skills, might influence their perceived social support and should be explored in future research.

Table 3 Analysis of Variance for Friend Support

	Variable	Df	Sum Sq	Mean Sq	F value	P value
By Gender	Gender	1	8.6	8.623	5.413	0.0205
	Residuals	398	634.1	1.593		
	Variable	Df	Sum Sq	Mean Sq	F value	P value
By Grade	Grade	3	1.1	0.3589	0.222	0.881
	Residuals	396	641.6	1.6203		

Table 3 delves into the total interpersonal competence by gender, highlighting a significant difference ( $F(1, 398) = 6.331, p = 0.0123$ ).

Female students report higher levels of interpersonal competence than male students. This aligns with existing literature suggesting that women generally exhibit stronger interpersonal skills, such as communication, empathy, and relationship-building. These skills are crucial for forming and maintaining social networks, which in turn can enhance perceived social support. The higher interpersonal competence among female students may contribute to their greater levels of perceived social support, as discussed in Table 1. This finding emphasizes the need for gender-sensitive approaches in developing programs and interventions aimed at improving interpersonal skills among students.

Table 4 Analysis of Variance for Family Support

	Variable	Df	Sum Sq	Mean Sq	F value	P value
By Gender	Gender	1	19.6	19.594	11.33	0.00083
	Residuals	398	688.3	1.729		
	Variable	Df	Sum Sq	Mean Sq	F value	P value
By Grade	Grade	3	0.6	0.1911	0.107	0.956
	Residuals	396	707.3	1.7862		

Table 4 explores the total interpersonal competence by grade and reveals a significant difference ( $F(3, 396) = 3.642, p = 0.0129$ ). This indicates that interpersonal competence varies significantly across different academic years. Senior students may have higher levels of interpersonal competence due to their longer exposure to university life and more opportunities to engage in social interactions. These interactions can enhance their interpersonal skills over time. This finding suggests that

freshmen and sophomores might benefit from targeted interventions to develop their interpersonal skills early in their academic journey, potentially leading to improved social support and overall well-being.

Table 5 Analysis of Variance for Other Support

	Variable	Df	Sum Sq	Mean Sq	F value	P value
By Gender	Gender	1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.997
	Residuals	398	683.2	1.717		
	Variable	Df	Sum Sq	Mean Sq	F value	P value
By Grade	Grade	3	3.8	1.256	0.732	0.533
	Residuals	396	679.4	1.716		

In Table 5, the friend support by gender is examined, showing a significant effect ( $F(1, 398) = 5.413, p = 0.0205$ ). Female students report higher levels of friend support compared to male students. This result is consistent with previous studies that highlight women's tendency to form closer and more supportive friendships. These friendships can serve as vital sources of emotional and social support, contributing to overall well-being. The significant gender difference in friend support underscores the need for fostering environments that encourage strong, supportive friendships among all students, particularly male students who may benefit from increased friend support.

Table 6 Analysis of Variance for Talking with Strangers

	Variable	Df	Sum Sq	Mean Sq	F value	P value
By Gender	Gender	1	11.0	10.991	6.651	0.0103
	Residuals	398	657.7	1.653		
	Variable	Df	Sum Sq	Mean Sq	F value	P value
By Grade	Grade	3	1.3	0.4233	0.251	0.861

Residuals	396	667.4	1.6854
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Table 6 investigates the friend support by grade and finds no significant difference ( $F(3, 396) = 0.222, p = 0.881$ ). This suggests that friend support levels are relatively stable across different academic years. This stability implies that students maintain consistent levels of support from friends throughout their university experience. However, this finding also indicates that factors other than academic year, such as individual social skills or participation in social activities, might play a more crucial role in determining friend support. Future research could explore these factors to gain a deeper understanding of the determinants of friend support among university students.

Table 7 Analysis of Variance for Group Activities

	Variable	Df	Sum Sq	Mean Sq	F value	P value
By Gender	Gender	1	0.5	0.4876	0.292	0.589
	Residuals	398	665.4	1.6718		
	Variable	Df	Sum Sq	Mean Sq	F value	P value
By Grade	Grade	3	23.4	7.802	4.809	0.00266
	Residuals	396	642.5	1.622		

Table 7 analyzes family support by gender, revealing a highly significant difference ( $F(1, 398) = 11.33, p = 0.000837$ ). Female students report significantly higher levels of family support compared to male students. This result may reflect societal norms and expectations where women are often more involved in family dynamics and are more likely to seek and receive support from family members. The higher levels of family

support among female students can provide a strong foundation for coping with academic and social challenges. This finding highlights the importance of considering family dynamics and support systems in developing interventions aimed at enhancing students' overall support networks.

Table 8 Analysis of Variance for Making New Friends

	Variable	Df	Sum Sq	Mean Sq	F value	P value
By Gender	Gender	1	2.9	2.862	1.79	0.182
	Residuals	398	636.4	1.599		
	Variable	Df	Sum Sq	Mean Sq	F value	P value
By Grade	Grade	3	8.8	2.925	1.837	0.14
	Residuals	396	630.5	1.592		

Table 8 examines family support by grade and finds no significant difference ( $F(3, 396) = 0.107, p = 0.956$ ). This indicates that family support levels do not vary significantly across different academic years. This finding suggests that family support remains a stable source of support for students throughout their university experience. Given the critical role of family support in students' well-being, it is essential to encourage and facilitate family involvement in students' academic and personal lives, regardless of their year of study. Interventions aimed at strengthening family support networks can be broadly applied across all academic years.

The ANOVA results across these tables provide a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing social support and interpersonal competence

among university students. The significant gender differences in total social support, interpersonal competence, friend support, and family support underscore the need for gender-sensitive approaches in supporting students. Female students' higher levels of perceived support and interpersonal competence suggest that they may be better equipped to navigate the social challenges of university life. However, this also highlights the importance of providing additional support for male students to enhance their social support networks and interpersonal skills.

The non-significant differences by grade in most variables, except for total interpersonal competence and group activities, suggest that the academic year may not be a primary determinant of social support levels. This stability across different years indicates that interventions to enhance social support and interpersonal competence should be broadly applicable to all students, regardless of their academic standing. However, the significant differences in interpersonal competence and group activities by grade suggest that targeted interventions for freshmen and sophomores could be beneficial in helping them develop these skills early in their university journey.

Overall, these findings highlight the complex interplay between gender, grade, and various dimensions of social support and interpersonal competence. They underscore the importance of tailored interventions

that consider these factors to effectively support students' social and emotional well-being. By fostering environments that promote strong social support networks and interpersonal skills, universities can enhance students' overall academic and personal success. Future research should continue to explore these dynamics and identify additional factors that influence social support and interpersonal competence among university students. This comprehensive approach will ensure that interventions are well-targeted and effective in addressing the diverse needs of the student population.

## **Conclusions**

This comprehensive study has delved into the intricate relationships between social support, interpersonal competence, gender, and academic year among university students. Through detailed analysis and examination of various dimensions of social support and interpersonal competence, the research has provided valuable insights that underscore the importance of these factors in the academic and personal lives of students. The conclusions drawn from this study not only highlight significant findings but also pave the way for future research and interventions aimed at enhancing student well-being and success.

One of the pivotal conclusions from this study is the significant gender differences in perceived social support and interpersonal competence.

The analysis revealed that female students consistently reported higher levels of social support and interpersonal competence compared to their male counterparts. Specifically, female students had higher mean scores in total social support, friend support, and family support. This aligns with existing literature that suggests women are generally more relationally oriented and more likely to seek and receive social support. These findings underscore the importance of gender-sensitive approaches in developing support systems within university settings. Tailored interventions that cater to the specific needs of male and female students can help bridge the gap in perceived support and competence, fostering a more inclusive and supportive academic environment.

The significant gender difference in total interpersonal competence is particularly noteworthy. Female students' higher levels of interpersonal competence, including skills such as effective communication, empathy, and relationship-building, suggest that they may be better equipped to navigate the social challenges of university life. This enhanced competence likely contributes to their higher levels of perceived social support. For male students, who reported lower levels of interpersonal competence, there is a clear need for targeted programs that focus on developing these crucial skills. Universities should consider implementing workshops and training sessions aimed at improving



interpersonal skills among male students, thereby enhancing their ability to form and maintain supportive social networks.

Another key conclusion is the non-significant difference in total social support by academic year. The analysis indicated that perceived social support remains relatively stable across different academic years. This finding suggests that the level of social support students experience does not vary significantly as they progress through their university journey. This stability is a positive indicator that social support systems in place are consistently effective across all year groups. However, it also implies that interventions aimed at enhancing social support should be broadly applicable and not necessarily tailored to specific academic years. Ensuring that all students, regardless of their year of study, have access to robust support systems is crucial for their overall well-being.

The significant difference in total interpersonal competence by academic year highlights an important developmental trajectory. Senior students reported higher levels of interpersonal competence compared to freshmen, sophomores, and juniors. This progression suggests that interpersonal skills may develop and improve with increased exposure to the university environment and more opportunities for social interactions. These findings highlight the importance of supporting students early in their academic journey, particularly freshmen and sophomores, in developing

interpersonal skills. Universities can enhance their orientation programs and provide continuous support throughout the early years to ensure students build the necessary skills for effective social interaction and relationship-building.

The analysis of friend support and family support further underscores the importance of these specific sources of social support. Female students reported higher levels of friend support, which is consistent with the literature indicating that women tend to form closer and more supportive friendships. These friendships are vital for providing emotional and social support, contributing significantly to overall well-being. The significant gender difference in family support also reflects societal norms and expectations, where women are often more involved in family dynamics. Higher levels of family support among female students can provide a strong foundation for coping with academic and social challenges. These findings suggest that universities should encourage and facilitate strong support networks among friends and family, recognizing the different roles these sources play in students' lives.

The non-significant differences in friend support and family support by academic year suggest that these sources of support remain consistent throughout the university experience. This consistency implies that students maintain stable levels of support from friends and family

regardless of their year of study. Universities should continue to foster environments that promote strong friendships and family involvement, ensuring that students have access to these critical sources of support throughout their academic journey.

The findings related to other support dimensions, such as talking with strangers, group activities, and making new friends, provide additional insights into the social dynamics of university life. The significant differences in these dimensions by gender and academic year highlight the complex interplay between individual characteristics and social interactions. Female students' higher scores in talking with strangers suggest that they may be more open to new social interactions, which can facilitate the formation of new support networks. The significant difference in group activities by academic year indicates that participation in social activities may increase as students progress through their academic journey, contributing to the development of interpersonal skills.

These findings have important implications for university support services and interventions. The significant gender differences in social support and interpersonal competence suggest that gender-sensitive approaches are necessary to address the unique needs of male and female students. Programs that encourage male students to seek and provide social support, as well as develop their interpersonal skills, could help

bridge the gap identified in this study. For female students, maintaining and enhancing existing support systems can further strengthen their well-being.

The stability of social support levels across different academic years suggests that broad-based interventions can be effective. However, the significant differences in interpersonal competence and group activities by grade highlight the need for targeted interventions for lower-year students. Providing resources and opportunities for freshmen and sophomores to develop their social skills and engage in group activities can facilitate their adjustment to university life and enhance their overall well-being. Early intervention programs that focus on building interpersonal skills and encouraging participation in social activities can help students form strong support networks, which are crucial for their success.

The study's findings also underscore the importance of a holistic approach to student support. Universities should consider the multifaceted nature of social support and interpersonal competence, recognizing that these constructs are influenced by various factors, including gender, academic year, and individual differences. By adopting a comprehensive approach that addresses these factors, universities can create supportive environments that foster student well-being and success.

This includes offering a range of support services, such as counseling, mentoring, and peer support programs, as well as promoting a campus culture that values and encourages social connections.

Future research should continue to explore the dynamics of social support and interpersonal competence among university students. Longitudinal studies that track students' experiences over time can provide deeper insights into how these factors evolve throughout their academic journey. Additionally, qualitative research that explores students' personal experiences and perspectives can complement quantitative findings, offering a richer understanding of the complexities of social support and interpersonal competence. Further research should also consider the impact of other variables, such as cultural background, socioeconomic status, and personality traits, on social support and interpersonal competence.

In conclusion, this study provides a comprehensive examination of the relationships between social support, interpersonal competence, gender, and academic year among university students. The significant findings highlight the importance of gender-sensitive and developmentally appropriate interventions to support students in building strong social networks and interpersonal skills. By understanding and addressing the unique needs of students at different stages of their academic journey,

universities can create supportive environments that foster student well-being and success. The insights gained from this study can inform the development of targeted programs and policies aimed at enhancing the social and emotional well-being of university students, ultimately contributing to their academic and personal success.

## **References**

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# Survey Questionnaire: Relationship Between Social Support and Interpersonal Competence Among University Students

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## **Basic Information**

1. Gender:

- Male
- Female

2. Grade:

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior

## **Social Support Scale (SSQ)**

Please select the option that best describes your actual situation:

1. I can get support from friends when I need help.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

2. I can get support from family members when I need help.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

3. I can get support from others (such as colleagues, teachers, etc.) when I need help.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

### **Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire (ICQ-15)**

Please select the option that best describes your actual situation:

1. I can easily talk to strangers.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

2. I feel comfortable in group activities.



- Strongly Disagree

- Disagree

- Neutral

- Agree

- Strongly Agree

3. I can quickly make new friends.

- Strongly Disagree

- Disagree

- Neutral

- Agree

- Strongly Agree