

Is Geographic Location and Social Support Associated with College Students' Stress Levels?

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REBUILDetroit

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Background

- Individuals residing in urban areas report lower levels of social support in comparison to rural residents. (Romans, Cohen & Forte 2011).
- Individuals in the central region of urban areas or the borders of rural areas are more likely to report experiencing stress. (Romans, Cohen & Forte, 2011)
- Students that report low levels of satisfaction in social support during times of great stress also show lower levels of overall well being. (Chao, 2011)

Present Study

Research Question: Do levels of social support and degree of rurality correlate with higher levels of stress?

Hypothesis: Lower levels of social support and lower degree of rurality is associated with higher levels of stress.

Methods

Sample

- Participants were undergraduate students at the University Of Detroit Mercy (30.5% male and 69.5% female)
- The majority of participants grew up in suburban areas prior to attending college (n=73; 69.5%)
- Most participants were 18 or 19 years old (n=90; 85.7%)
- There was a total of 105 participants of which 13 grew up in a rural area, 73 suburban, and 19 urban

Procedure

- This study is IRB approved at the University Of Detroit Mercy
- Participants were recruited during their classes
- Some participants were awarded extra credit upon completion of the survey at the discretion of the professor
- The data was gathered from a large online survey

Measures

Multidimensional Scale Of Perceived Social Support (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet & Farley, 1988)

- Assessed participants' perceived level of social support from friends, family, and significant others on a seven-point scale
- Higher numbers indicate higher level of perceived social support
- A median split was used to categorize participants into having high (≥ 5.58) or low social support (< 5.58)

Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al., 1983; Cohen & Williamson, 1988)

- Assessed participants' perceived level of stress
- Higher numbers indicate higher level of perceived stress

Geographic Location

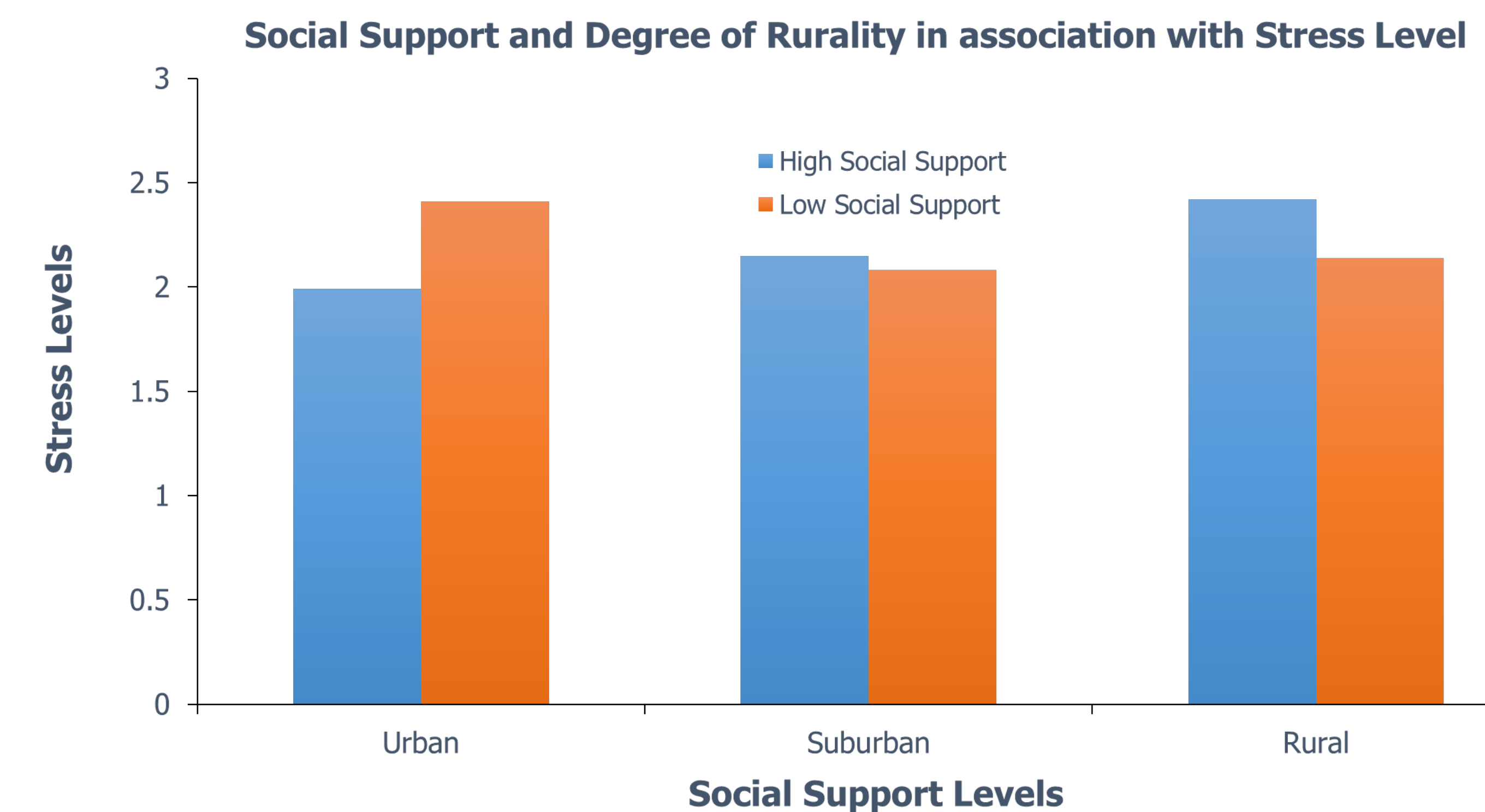
- A single-item question assessed if participants lived in urban cities, suburban or rural areas prior to attending college

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Results

- Participants that grew up in rural and suburban areas who scored lower in social support reported lower perceived stress levels than those with higher scores in social support
- Participants that grew up in urban areas who scored lower in social support reported higher perceived stress levels than those scoring higher in social support



Discussion

Results suggest that stress levels vary depending upon both geographic location and level of social support. Participants that grew up in urban areas with lower social support reported higher perceived stress levels; participants that grew up in rural or suburban areas with lower social support reported lower perceived stress levels

Limitations

- Although the research question focused on the relationship between social support and stress in urban or rural residents, the majority of participants grew up in suburban areas
- The sample may not represent the entire undergraduate population, particularly regarding gender, location and age

Implications

- In order to bridge the gap of health disparities in relation to stress levels, it may be advantageous for universities to seek ways to increase social support for students from urban areas
- Further research might be done to look into why urban residents with lower social support and rural residents with high social support experience higher stress

References

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