

**AUTONOMY SUPPORT AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT:  
THE MEDIATING ROLE OF MENTAL HEALTH IN THE  
CONTEXT OF EARLY ADOLESCENCE**



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**ABSTRACT**

This descriptive-correlational study was conducted to investigate the association between autonomy support and academic achievement and the mediating role of mental health. Specifically, it sought to describe the students in terms of grade level, sex, autonomy support, mental health and academic achievement. It also looked into variation in autonomy support, mental health and achievement according to grade level and sex. Moreover, the study investigated the relationships between the major variables, namely, between autonomy support and mental health, autonomy support and academic achievement, and mental health and academic achievement. Furthermore, it sought to determine whether or not mental health has a mediating effect in the association between autonomy support and achievement.

The respondents of the study were 249 Grade 7 and 8 students of Central Philippine University High School. Data were collected using two standardized, self-report scales, namely the Learning Climate Questionnaire by Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan, and the Mental Health Inventory-5 by the RAND Corporation.

Results of the study revealed that the respondents were almost equally divided by sex and grade level, with a slightly higher proportion of Grade 8 than Grade 7 students, and slightly more female than male students. The students were divided in their perceptions of teacher autonomy support, half of them perceived their teachers as moderately autonomy-supportive, while exactly the same proportion rated their teachers as or highly autonomy-supportive. Nearly half of them had "vulnerable" mental health, while close to half had "near optimal" mental health, indicating that although junior high school students were generally happy, peaceful and calm, they were also prone to anxiety and depression. Many of the students had "proficient" academic achievement, while almost a third of them were "approaching proficiency". Thus, a typical student may likely have average grades of 80-89.

There was no significant variation in the three major variables according to grade level. In terms of gender differences, males were found to have better mental health than females whereas, female students earned significantly higher grades than their male counterparts. No evidence of gender differences in autonomy support was found.

Significant positive correlations were established between autonomy support and mental health, and autonomy support and academic achievement. However, no direct relationship was found between mental health and academic achievement.

The study also provided evidence of a mediating effect of mental health in the relationship between autonomy support and academic achievement among students with "vulnerable" mental health.