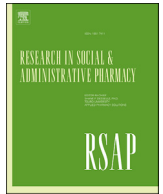




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Antecedents of basic psychological need satisfaction of pharmacy students: The role of peers, family, lecturers and workload

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ABSTRACT

Background: Self-determination theory (SDT) provides a model to improve pharmacy students' well-being or functioning in their study context. According to SDT, students need a context that satisfies their needs for autonomy, relatedness and competence in order to function optimally. Contextual factors that could have an impact on a student's functioning are lecturers, family, peers and workload.

Objectives: To investigate whether there is a difference between the contributions family, lecturers, peers and workload make towards the satisfaction of pharmacy students' basic psychological needs within a university context.

Methods: An electronic survey was administered amongst students registered with the North-West University's School of Pharmacy. Registered pharmacy students, 779, completed said electronic survey comprised of a questionnaire on demographics, BMPN (Balanced Measure of Psychological Needs) and self-developed ANPNS (Antecedents of Psychological Need-satisfaction Scale). Data derived from the afore-going was analysed with the aid of structural equation modelling (SEM).

Results: Structural equation modelling explained 46%, 25% and 30% respectively of the total group's variances in autonomy, competence and relatedness satisfaction, and 26% of the variance in psychological need frustration. Peers and family played a significant role in the satisfaction of students' need for autonomy, relatedness and competence, whilst workload seemingly hampered satisfaction with regards to relatedness and autonomy. Workload contributed towards frustration with regards to psychological need satisfaction. The role played by lecturers in satisfying pharmacy students' need for autonomy, relatedness and competence will also be highlighted.

Conclusions: This study added to the body of knowledge regarding contextual factors and the impact those factors have on pharmacy students' need satisfaction by illustrating that not all factors (family, lecturers, peers and workload) can be considered equal. Lecturers ought to recognise the important role family and peers play in the emotional and mental wellbeing of students and utilise those factors in their teaching.

Synopsis: The mechanism of basic psychological need satisfaction as described in Self-determination theory provide insight into pharmacy students' optimal functioning. Hence the influence of contextual factors, (lecturers, peers, family and workload) on the need satisfaction was investigated by means of a survey. The structural model explained 46%, 25% and 30% of the variances in autonomy, competence and relatedness satisfaction and 26% of the variance in psychological need frustration. Family and Peer support contributed the most to the variance explained of the variables. Lecturers should acknowledge this important role of family and peers and utilise this premise when they design learning encounters.

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1. Introduction

It is a given that no single teaching method can guarantee

optimal performance by all students in class, possibly because although an approach may speak to a particular group of students, it may not speak to the rest.^{1,2} This begs the question: "What can be done to enable students to function better?" Research indicates that well-functioning students (compared to those who do not function well) perform better academically,³ adjust better to their environment⁴ and are socially better adapted.⁵ Especially in areas

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such as the Health Sciences where students follow a somewhat limited curriculum towards a clearly defined profession, for example a career as a pharmacist, finding answers to the question as to what can be done to help students function optimally has become rather pressing.⁶

Self-determination theory (SDT),⁷ a universal motivation theory, describes how the functioning of a person can be enhanced by a supportive context. The context should enhance the mental and emotional state of a person. In SDT, the mental and emotional state of a person is depicted as his or her psychological need for autonomy, competence and relatedness. SDT reveals that when these three needs (i.e. the need for autonomy, relatedness and competence) are met, a person's autonomous motivation is strengthened. SDT also explains how better performance in different contexts – pharmacy education included – is equated to autonomous motivation.^{8–10} A possible answer to the question as to how pharmacy students' ability to function can be enhanced may, therefore, lie in the application of SDT.¹¹

Social contexts that allow for the satisfaction of the needs for autonomy, relatedness and competence (the basic psychological needs) facilitate autonomous motivation.¹² When a person is autonomously motivated, he or she is doing things because of a personally endorsed choice. For example, a pharmacy student would study pharmacology because the student believes the knowledge would make him or her a better pharmacist and not because the student is afraid to fail the test. Autonomous motivation,⁶ which flows from increased levels of need satisfaction, is related to better performance¹³ and well-being.¹⁴ It is therefore important to consider the social context within which students function when investigating their functioning.¹⁵ For pharmacy educators, the question is how different contextual factors (for example family, lecturers, peers and workload) in the students' study environment influence the levels of need satisfaction of students and how these factors can be managed to enhance the mental and emotional state of students.

1.1. Self-determination theory (SDT)

SDT¹⁶ is a motivational theory that explains the 'what', 'why' and 'how' of behaviour. The 'why' of behaviour evolves from interplay between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation; the 'what' of behaviour is evident from the motivational influences, and both are derived from the degree of need satisfaction¹⁶ that explains the 'how' of behaviour. Contrary to other motivational theories, the motivational distinction is not external versus internal motivation but is concerned with whether the behaviour was motivated autonomously or controlled. According to SDT, motivation for behaviour lies on a continuum between autonomous and controlled (Table 1). A student whose behaviour is controlled will, for example, only

study because he/she does not want to look 'bad' in the eyes of his or her peers (introjection) or because the student does not want to lose his or her bursary (external regulation).

Behaviour cannot be fully understood if the process that energises and directs behaviour is not investigated¹⁷ – a process that involves the satisfaction of a person's need for autonomy, relatedness and competence. In this study, the need for autonomy is defined as "an inherent desire to act with a sense of volition and choice", the need for relatedness as the "propensity to feel connected to others" and the need for competence as "the desire to feel capable to master the environment and to bring about desired change".¹⁶

The degree to which an individual's basic psychological needs (namely autonomy, relatedness and competence) are being satisfied relates to his or her motivation and well-being.¹⁸ It also fuels an individual's need for growth or better functioning. Therefore, individuals are intrinsically motivated, able to fulfil their potentialities and able to seek greater challenges.¹⁹ The degree to which people can satisfy their basic needs is the most important predictor of optimal functioning.¹⁷

According to SDT, the quality of motivation is important as far as academic performance, study strategy, adjustment and well-being are concerned.²⁰ Regarding good performance in a medical context, the quality of motivation may determine good performance through good study strategy and high effort.⁶ Autonomous motivation helps individuals to achieve their goals and to feel good in the process: The more autonomous the motivation, the better the outcomes. Outcomes of autonomous motivation in the learning context can be deep learning,²¹ high academic performance,²² better academic adjustment²³ and positive well-being.²⁴

1.2. Motivation and psychological need satisfaction

Social contexts that allow for the satisfaction of basic psychological needs facilitate the maintenance of autonomous motivation.¹² Autonomous motivation in turn is associated with high-quality learning and personal adjustment. For students, psychological need satisfaction has a significantly positive impact on their intrinsic motivation, which is the most autonomous form of motivation.²⁵ A prerequisite for the natural growth tendency, which results in effective functioning, is the experience of support for the needs of autonomy and relatedness.²⁶ Need satisfaction is universally linked to autonomous motivation and well-being in various life domains.²⁷

Opportunities for choice, optimal challenges, informational feedback, acknowledged feelings and interpersonal involvement might contribute to basic psychological need satisfaction. Therefore, parents could acknowledge a student's feelings and be interpersonally involved and, in this way, address the student's

Table 1
The behavioural motivation continuum.¹⁶

	Autonomous			Controlled		
	Internal (intrinsic)	External (extrinsic)				
	Internal	Integrated regulation	Identified regulation	Introjections	External regulation	
Most autonomous	Goals stimulate actualisation of inherent potential	Activity fits individual's broader set of values and beliefs	Goal of behaviour is personally endorsed and considered important	Reason for behaviour is internally pressuring reasons	Reason for behaviour external to individual	Most controlled

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