



Students' social relationships and their links to university transition



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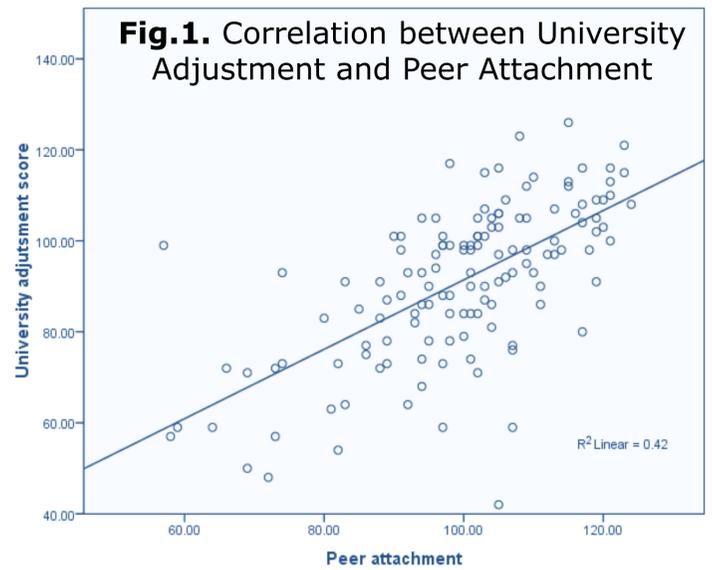
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1. Introduction

- Students can find the transition to higher education difficult (Hussey & Smith, 2010).
- Research shows that developing good relationships with peers can help students to integrate into and feel part of university life (Maunder et al, 2010; Pittman & Richmond, 2008).
- Feeling isolated, or not making effective social connections, has been found to be important in early withdrawals from university (Wilcox et al, 2005).
- We would therefore expect to find a relationship between the quality of students' relationships with their peers; their self-reported adjustment to university life; and their sense of membership to the university.

University Adjustment Score



Peer Attachment to University friends

Fig.1. Correlation between University Adjustment and Peer Attachment

2. Method

- Data was collected from 135 social science undergraduate students at the University of Northampton (Table 1)
- 72 participants were Psychology students; 34 were Joint Hons; 26 were Criminology; and 3 were Law students.

Table 1: Participant numbers

Numbers	Males	Females	Total
First year	18	69	87
Second year	8	14	22
Third year	2	24	26
Total	28	107	135

Questionnaires contained 3 scales:

- 1) Students' adjustment to university - measured using the College Adaptation Questionnaire (Crombag, as cited in Van Rooijen, 1986) (alpha reliability = .898)
 - 2) Students' membership to the university - measured using the University Attachment Scale (France et al, 2010) (alpha reliability = .849)
 - 3) Students' attachment to their university peers - measured using an adapted version of the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA - Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) (alpha reliability = .917)
- Students were also asked about experiences of problematic social relationships with university peers (i.e. occurrences of conflict, isolation and bullying)

3. Results

- Participants' scores on each scale were totalled and then correlated using Spearman's Rho.
- Peer attachment and University Adjustment: rho=.650, p<.001 (see Fig 1)
- Peer attachment and University Membership: rho=.422, p<.001
- Problematic social relationships and University Adjustment: rho=-.414, p<.001
- Problematic social relationships and University Membership: rho=-.247, p<.01
- Linear regression showed that University Adjustment could be predicted from Peer Attachment ($F(1, 132) = 97.49, p<.001$), suggesting that increasing Peer Attachment could lead to an increase in University Adjustment.

4. Conclusion

- Students who rate themselves as having good social relationships with their peers also have higher levels of membership and adjustment to university.
- Students who report occurrences of difficulties in their relationships with other students have lower levels of membership and adjustment to university.
- Therefore, universities should prioritise facilitating the developments of students' social relationships as part of the transition to university, as well as focussing on academic integration.

References

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