

Peer Protection: Social Connections and Adolescent Mental Health in Summer Youth Development Programs

Prochnow T.,¹ Patterson M.S.,¹ Jackson D.,¹ Curran L.,¹ Flores S.A.,¹
Brown A.,¹ Howell E.,¹ Massey P.,² & Blake J.¹

1 – Texas A&M University 2 – UCLA

Introduction

8.5 million

Adolescents experience depression or anxiety



Diagnosis of anxiety, depression, and psychological distress increase with age



Social connectedness is vital for adolescent psychosocial development and mental health

Objective

Determine the influence of psychological distress on adolescent social connections at a summer youth program.



Methods

Setting

- Boys & Girls Club in Texas
- May and August 2023
- Adolescents (n=47) aged 10-14 years old

Measures

- Kessler Psychological Distress Scale - K10
- Demographics

Social Network

- Who they spent the most time with while at the club

Data Analysis

- Separable Temporal Exponential Random Graph Models (STERGM)

Results

	PE	SE	p-val
Edges	-7.77	0.90	<.001*
Reciprocity	1.83	0.31	<.001*
Transitivity	1.28	0.15	<.001*
Similarity in Age	-0.27	0.08	<.001*
Similarity in Sex	0.475	0.17	<.001*
Age	0.13	0.04	<.001*
Sex (referent: Boy)	-0.04	0.07	.56
Similarity in Psychological Distress	-0.02	0.02	.17
Psychological Distress (sending)	-0.02	0.02	.12
Psychological Distress (receiving)	0.04	0.01	.01*

Note: PE – Parameter Estimate; SE- Standard Error; * - Indicates significance at p<.05



Adolescents were significantly more likely to form reciprocated and transitive relationships

Adolescents were significantly more likely to make friends with others of the same sex and similar age.

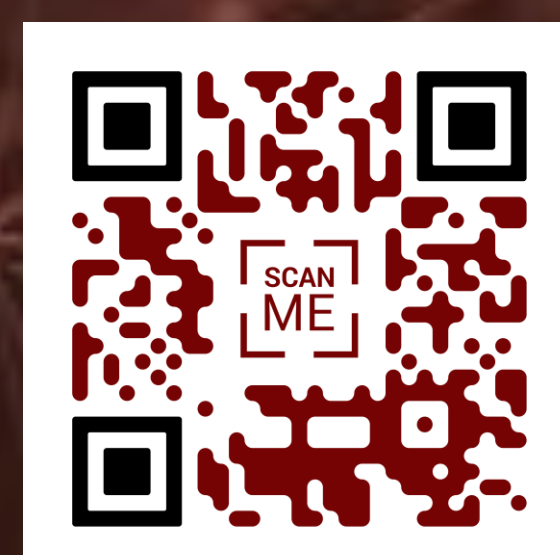


Adolescents were significantly more likely to receive friendship nominations over time if they reported greater K10 scores

Similarity in psychological distress did not increase the odds of creating new connections over time.



See the dynamic network here



Conclusions

Results suggest adolescents may be aware of those in their peer circles who experience psychological distress and may respond pro-socially.



Future research should further explore what specific qualities of relationships within peer networks serve as protective factors for adolescent mental health