

Friendship In The Context Of Positive Social Relationships And Subjective Wellbeing

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Abstract – The presented report examines friendships in terms of the subjective perception of satisfaction and happiness. Friendship and its impact on development are considered by conducting an analysis of emotional dynamics and their impact on social and emotional development. This study aimed to investigate the association between friendship quality and subjective wellbeing in Bulgarian young people. The goal of the study is to establish which aspects of friendship – emotional support, sharing, understanding, intimacy and trust, positive and satisfying experiences, the presence of tension, and conflicts – are most strongly connected. The main hypothesis of the study assumes that positive experiences and the presence of satisfying interactions are strongly associated with the quality of the friendship bond. The choice of a tool is motivated by its high validity and adequacy in terms of the research goal, as well as its broad application in studies related to friendships. The sample consists of 131 participants aged between 18 and 25 years. The design is cross-sectional – data are collected once from all participants at a specific point in time. This approach was chosen because it allows for quick and effective data collection from a wide group of people within a limited time frame. The conclusions emphasize the role of friendship and fulfilling close relationships for the overall sense of satisfaction and well-being.

Keywords: friendship, positive social relationships, sharing, trust, satisfaction, and well-being.

Introduction

Friendship is an extremely significant topic in the social context of contemporary society, in which social isolation and alienation are becoming increasingly common. This, in turn, requires a more in-depth and conscious reconsideration of interpersonal relationships. The ability to understand others, interpersonal sensitivity, empathy towards others, and stable friendships and fulfilling partnerships remain important resources for maintaining mental well-being. This report presents a theoretical framework of friendship, emphasizing trust, emotional closeness, and mutual support as key markers of its quality.

Friendship is distinguished from acquaintance by its emotional intensity, durability, and readiness for mutual support in difficult times. Friendships play a vital role in the social lives of young people, and their quality can significantly impact overall health and well-being (Alsarrani et al., 2023). Friendship is a relationship in which individuals are driven by the need for mutual satisfaction and success, affirmation of their own worth. Sullivan (1953) suggests that without the experience of mutual, shared friendship, the possibility of achieving effective social behavior is lost. Therefore, the affective, cognitive, and social experiences

gained through friendships may be just as essential for development as experiences within the family (Hartup, 1983).

Friendship represents a stable interpersonal relationship based on mutual attachment, trust, emotional support, and cooperation. Distinguished from superficial social contacts, friendship is characterized by deep commitment, honesty, openness, and a voluntary choice for closeness, without the presence of familial or romantic attachment (Messner & Crowley, 2020). According to Hojjat and Moyer (2016), friendship is defined by emotional closeness, reciprocity, and the voluntary maintenance of the relationship. It includes sharing personal experiences, joint activities, and mutual support, which help build trust and satisfaction within the relationship. Friendships often develop around shared interests and a desire for ongoing, reciprocal, and enriching interaction (Hojjat & Moyer, 2016). Messner & Crowley (2020) note that friendship shares psychological features with romantic love – such as intimacy, commitment, and reciprocity – but differs in the absence of a sexual component. It is essential for personality development, social adaptation, and the emotional well-being of the individual. In children and adolescents, it plays a role in

forming identity, empathy, and social skills (Bukowski, Laursen, & Rubin, 2018). Friendship is attributed with several impacts on individual development – friendship informs people of their value, fulfills a protective function, encourages exploration of the environment and the acquisition of new skills. Friends shape social culture with their own behavioral standards, goals, and expectations. Friends serve as a buffer against stress, providing emotional support, validation of feelings, and help in coping with difficulties. It is believed that quality friendships influence positively the formation of identity. They are a safe place where adolescents experiment with self-expression, autonomy, and understanding of social roles. (Camarena, Sarigiani и Petersen, 1990).

In summary of some of the theoretical concepts and research reviewed, the main goal of the present study is to establish a relationship between the different aspects of friendship and, more specifically, whether the quality of friendship is strongly related to positive experiences and well-being, as well as to examine whether and how these conceptual relationships are manifested in a specific cultural and age context.

Method

The subject of the study is the quality of friendly relationships among a sample of 131 people aged between 18 and 25 years. The population from which it was obtained is after the exclusion of participants who did not meet the study's conditions – correctly completed questionnaire, etc. The inclusion criteria for the sample are voluntary consent to participate, having reached legal age, and having at least one friendship that the participant is willing to evaluate. The research design is cross-sectional – data are collected once from all participants at a specific point in time. This approach was chosen because it allows for quick and effective data collection from a wide group of people within a limited time frame. The study is correlational in nature. Its main purpose is to verify the presence, direction, and strength of the relationship between the different scales of the questionnaire. The “My Friendship” questionnaire was used for the purposes of the study; it is based on the research of Rose (2002), Parker and Asher (1993), Bukowski, Hoza and Boivin (1994), Camarena, Sarigiani and Peterson (1990). It contains 25 statements and

is also rated on a five-point Likert scale from 0 (“not at all true”) to 4 (“completely true”). It measures the quality of friendships through five subscales:

1. Conflict – presence of tension, conflicts, or misunderstandings in the relationship with the friend.
2. Support in conflict – tendency to provide or seek emotional support in tense situations.
3. Communication and understanding – openness in sharing, understanding of feelings, and effective dialogue.
4. Intimacy and trust – depth of the relationship, sense of security, trust, and emotional closeness.
5. Positive experiences – presence of shared joy, fun, and satisfying interactions.
6. Overall friendship score – a summarized assessment of the quality of the friendship. The test was chosen because of its conceptual basis on real experiences (Rose, 2002; Parker & Asher, 1993; Bukowski et al., 1994, 1996), rather than on hypothetical attitudes, which would be easier to manipulate. The tool was selected for the purpose of quantitative measurement of subjective socio-emotional experiences. The procedure includes several stages – tool selection, conducting a pilot study, actual survey, and data processing and analysis. All psychological research ethical principles were observed in conducting the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the nature of the questions before completing the questionnaire. In the test instructions, it was stated that each participant has the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences, that no names, emails, personal data, or other identifying information would be collected, and that all data would be used solely for scientific purposes and with respect for the rights and dignity of the participants. A pilot study was carried out with five participants before conducting the main study. Its purpose was to verify the clarity and comprehensibility of the statements and the technical functionality of the questionnaire. The main study was conducted at the beginning of 2025. The data were exported to Excel, with the reverse statements processed beforehand, and the total score from the scales was transformed in a way suitable for comparison with the other scales. The main statistical processing was carried out in the JASP statistical software. Measures of central tendencies (mean values, medians, modes), dispersion measures (standard deviations, IQR), and distribution

normality indicators (Shapiro–Wilk, skewness, kurtosis) were calculated. Spearman correlation analysis and a one-factor linear regression model were used. Interpretations of the statistical relationships and recommendations for future research and practical applications of the study are described in the discussion section of the study.

The study established that the quality of friendship has a significant relationship with mood, psychological well-being, and subjective

well-being in young people. The results highlight the value of promoting positive social relationships among adolescents, with particular emphasis on the quality of their friendships. The next stages of this research include a longitudinal analysis for a deeper testing of these relationships.

Results

Descriptive statistics –
Measures of central tendency (MCT)

Table 1

	Overall friendship score	Conflict	Support in conflict	Intimacy and trust	Positive experiences	Communication and understanding
Mode	3.080 ^a	3.333 ^a	4.000 ^a	3.500 ^a	3.200 ^a	4.000 ^a
Median	3.000	2.667	3.667	3.250	2.800	3.333
Mean	2.936	2.578	3.433	3.151	2.760	3.327
Std. Deviation	0.358	1.071	0.590	0.393	0.476	0.570

^a The mode is computed assuming that variables are discreet.

On the “My Friendship” scale, the mean overall score was $M = 2.936$, with a median of 3.000 and a mode of 3.080. Among the subscales, the highest mean score was observed for “Support in Conflict” ($M = 3.433$), while the lowest mean score was for “Conflict” ($M = 2.578$) which

indicates an overall predominantly positive perception of friendship among the participants. Measures of variability were computed to assess the degree of response dispersion within each subscale.

Table 2

	Overall friendship score	Conflict	Support in conflict	Intimacy and trust	Positive experiences	Communication and understanding
Std. Deviation	0.358	1.071	0.590	0.393	0.476	0.570
IQR	0.440	1.333	1.000	0.500	0.800	0.833
Range	1.760	4.000	2.667	2.000	2.200	2.333
Minimum	1.720	0.000	1.333	1.625	1.400	1.667
Maximum	3.480	4.000	4.000	3.625	3.600	4.000
25th percentile	2.760	2.000	3.000	3.000	2.400	3.000
50th percentile	3.000	2.667	3.667	3.250	2.800	3.333
75th percentile	3.200	3.333	4.000	3.500	3.200	3.833

In the “My Friendship” questionnaire, the highest variability ($SD = 1.071$, $Range = 4.000$) is observed in the “Conflict” subscale, while the

lowest ($SD = 0.393$) is the variability in the “Intimacy and Trust” subscale. The overall friendship score has relatively low dispersion

(SD = 0.358), which suggests relatively similar responses among the participants.

Distribution normality test.

Table 3

	Overall friendship score	Conflict	Support in conflict	Intimacy and trust	Positive experiences	Communication and understanding
Shapiro-Wilk	0.936	0.938	0.854	0.831	0.902	0.913
P-value of Shapiro-Wilk	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001

In the “My Friendship” scale, all variables show significant deviations from the normal distribution (all $p < .001$), including the overall score on the scale ($W = 0.936$). This indicates the necessity of using non-parametric statistical methods for the analysis of relationships and comparisons.

Deductive statistics

A Spearman correlation analysis was conducted in order to test whether there are statistically significant correlations between the measured variables. It was chosen because of the deviations from distributions normality, established through the Shapiro–Wilk test. Correlation analysis

Strong internal correlations were observed between the individual subscales in the responses to the “My Friendship” questionnaire. The overall score on the scale shows a strong positive relationship with “Communication and Understanding” ($\rho = 0.814^{***}$), with “Support in Conflict” ($\rho = 0.709^{***}$), and with “Intimacy and Trust” ($\rho = 0.677^{***}$). It is assumed that these three aspects are the most crucial for the perceived quality of friendship. “Intimacy and Trust” is moderately correlated to “Positive Experiences” ($\rho = 0.439^{**}$). The study partially confirms the assumption that there is a strong correlation between the overall quality of friendships and positive experiences and satisfaction with relationships. The results obtained showed the presence of a positive correlation between the overall scores on the two scales ($\rho = 0.467$).

Discussion and study limitations

It is assumed that the quality of friendships is determined by multiple interacting factors, including emotional regulation, personality

traits, communication styles, social skills, contextual conditions, etc. This result can be interpreted as an indication of the presence of a relationship, which, however, does not manifest with sufficient strength in the specific sample or may be impacted by other uncontrolled factors. The limitations of the study should also be considered when interpreting the results. One of the limitations is the risk of social desirability and subjective biases due to the use of a self-report instrument. Participants may unknowingly present themselves in a more favorable light or underestimate conflicts in friendships. Another limitation is the relative homogeneity of the sample in terms of age and educational status – the relationship between the quality of friendship at different ages, genders, and educational levels may differ from that established in this study.

No comparison was made between different age groups or between genders.

Conclusions

It is recommended to include control scales or assessments in future studies, in order to minimize the likelihood of systematic error caused by social desirability. It is recommended to build regression models with more variables in the future studies so they can provide a more comprehensive understanding of other psychological and social determinants of friendship. This points to the need for more complex future studies that may include variables such as gender, attachment styles, social anxiety, or conflicts in interpersonal communication, and that use multi-method approaches.

Acknowledgments

The study was conducted with the help of colleagues from Plovdiv University, who volunteered their time and dedication to collect the necessary data.

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