

## PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT AMONG THE YOUTH IN THE FISHERMEN COMMUNITY OF KERALA – A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF FAMILY, FRIENDS AND SIGNIFICANT OTHERS

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### Abstract

Youth represents the foundation and future of every nation and community. The sustainable development of any community depends heavily on the quality of attention and social support provided to its younger generation. Social support act as the critical protective factor, enabling individuals to navigate and overcome the diverse psychosocial obstacles and challenges they encounter in their daily lives. This study aims to study the socio-demographic characteristics and analyze the pattern and level of perceived social support among youth in the fishermen community of Kerala and to determine if significant differences exist in the support received from family, friends, and significant others. A quantitative multi-dimensional descriptive research design was employed to meet the objectives of the study, utilizing a sample of 100 youth (N=100) selected via simple random sampling. Data were collected using the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) scale. Data were analyzed using Repeated Measures ANOVA and Bonferroni post-hoc tests. The study results indicated a moderate level of overall social support is getting the youth in the fishermen community. The findings based on the hypothesis testing revealed that a significant difference among support dimensions ( $p < .05$ ), among the youth in the fishermen community, which is leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. Post-hoc analysis showed that while support from family and friends was perceived as equally strong, support from 'significant others' was significantly lower. The study concludes that youth in the fishermen community rely heavily on traditional kinship and friend networks to navigate psycho-socio-economic challenges. The study findings concluded interventions should focus on strengthening these informal support systems to enhance mental health outcomes and community resilience via providing enough social support.

Keywords: youth, fishermen community, social support, family, friends

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### INTRODUCTION

The fishing community in Kerala, despite the state's high overall human development indices, even though remains one of the most marginalized and vulnerable populations (Kurien, 2018). The data of Kerala approximately 1.03 million people across 222 fishing villages, this community is characterized by high population density, precarious housing, and a significant lack of land ownership (Government of Kerala, 2021). The youth in these coastal belts are particularly susceptible to the "cycle of indebtedness," driven by the seasonal and unpredictable nature of traditional fishing (Sreeraj & Kumar, 2019). The impact of climate change and declining of marine resources and changing environmental conditions also has worsened the economic instability, leading to increased psychological distress and a dependency on strong social support networks for survival (Aswathy et al., 2011).

The future of any community depends largely on the well-being and successful development of its youth. Youth is a critical developmental stage characterized by significant biological, psychological, and social changes, during which individuals encounter numerous opportunities as well as challenges that shape their transition

into adulthood (Erikson, 1968; Arnett, 2000). Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) emphasizes that young people's development is influenced by the interactions between individuals and their immediate social environments, particularly family, peers, and the wider community. Likewise, Social Support Theory suggests that supportive interpersonal relationships serve as important protective factors that enhance psychological well-being and help individuals cope with stressful life events (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Youth belonging to the fishermen communities of Kerala experience multiple socio-economic and psychosocial challenges that may be more pronounced than those encountered by many other population groups. Their families often depend on small-scale marine fishing, an occupation characterized by seasonal fluctuations, environmental uncertainties, irregular income, and financial insecurity (FAO, 2022; CMFRI, 2023). Such economic instability frequently exposes young people to educational disruptions, employment uncertainty, financial stress, and increased family responsibilities, all of which may adversely affect their psychological well-being and social adjustment (George & Krishnakumar, 2021; Béné, 2009). Economic hardship, youth in fishing communities may experience family conflicts, emotional distress, and limited access to educational and employment opportunities. These interconnected challenges highlight the importance of understanding the availability and sources of perceived social support, particularly from family members, friends, and significant others, as these support systems can promote resilience, improve mental well-being, and facilitate positive adaptation to adverse life circumstances (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Zimet et al., 1988). Therefore, examining perceived social support among youth in Kerala's fishermen communities is essential for developing evidence-based interventions and policies aimed at strengthening their psychosocial well-being and overall quality of life.

The inability to meet communal and familial obligations due to economic instability often triggers a detrimental psychological chain reaction among youth in fishing communities. When social issues and unfulfilled commitments persist, they manifest as chronic stress, which serves as the primary catalyst for psychological distress (Pearlin, 1989). If left unaddressed, this prolonged stress state frequently evolves into clinical anxiety, as individuals experience constant apprehension regarding their uncertain futures (Selye, 1976). Ultimately, this continuum of psychological pressure often culminates in severe depression, as the persistent sense of failure and social isolation overwhelms the individual's coping mechanisms (Kessler, 1997). In resource-dependent populations like those in Kerala, this link between socio-economic failure and mental health deterioration is a critical public health concern that necessitates strong external social support.

Social support is a multifaceted construct that plays a pivotal role in the psychological well-being and social integration of young adults (Zimet et al., 1988). Defined as the perception or reality that one is cared for, has assistance available from other people, and is part of a supportive social network, social support acts as a critical buffer against environmental stressors (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Within the developmental stage of youth, the transition toward independence is often mediated by the quality of support received from various social domains, primarily family, peers, and significant others (Siedlecki et al., 2014). In the context of traditional resource-dependent communities, such as those within the fishing sector, the dynamics of social support are uniquely shaped by socio-economic vulnerabilities and communal living patterns. Youth in these communities often face precarious economic futures and geographical isolation, which can heighten their reliance on localized social networks (Vázquez-Cano et al., 2020). While literature has extensively explored social support in urban academic settings, there remains a critical research gap concerning how youth in marginalized maritime communities prioritize different sources of support.

### **Research Gap**

Existing literature has extensively documented the socio-economic vulnerability, occupational risks, livelihood insecurity, and mental health challenges experienced by fishing communities in Kerala and other coastal regions of India. Previous studies have primarily focused on issues such as quality of work life, occupational stress, livelihood diversification, psychological well-being, and coping among fishermen and their households. Although these studies provide valuable insights into the living conditions and psychosocial challenges of fishing communities, they largely concentrate on fishermen as an occupational group rather than on youth as a distinct developmental population. Furthermore, studies examining the psychological well-being of youth in fishing communities have predominantly focused on constructs such as self-efficacy, resilience, or self-esteem, with limited attention given to perceived social support. Perceived social support is a well-established protective factor associated with better mental health, resilience, and successful adaptation during youth, and

the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) has been widely validated for measuring support received from family, friends, and significant others in the Indian context. However, empirical evidence examining these three dimensions of perceived social support among youth belonging to Kerala's fishermen communities remains scarce.

Therefore, there is a clear need for empirical research that specifically investigates the multidimensional nature of perceived social support among youth in the fishermen community. Addressing this gap will contribute to a better understanding of the relative roles of family, friends, and significant others in supporting these young people and will provide evidence for designing culturally appropriate psychosocial interventions and community-based programmes aimed at enhancing their well-being and resilience.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in Social Support Theory (Cohen & Wills, 1985) and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which together provide a comprehensive explanation of how social relationships influence the well-being of young people.

Social Support Theory proposes that supportive relationships with family, friends, and significant others play a vital role in promoting psychological well-being and helping individuals cope with stressful life events. According to the buffering hypothesis, social support reduces the negative psychological consequences of stress by providing emotional, informational, and instrumental assistance. Individuals who perceive greater social support are generally more resilient, experience lower levels of psychological distress, and demonstrate better adjustment during periods of adversity (Cohen & Wills, 1985). For youth belonging to economically and socially vulnerable communities, such as fishermen communities, perceived social support serves as an important protective factor that enhances coping capacity and overall well-being.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) further explains that human development is shaped through continuous interactions between individuals and multiple environmental systems. The microsystem, comprising family members, friends, and other close interpersonal relationships, exerts the most immediate influence on youth development. These interactions are further affected by broader social, economic, and community contexts. In fishing communities, where families frequently experience livelihood uncertainty, seasonal employment, and financial instability, the quality of support available within these social environments becomes particularly important for fostering resilience and positive psychosocial development. Based on these theoretical perspectives, this study conceptualizes perceived social support as a psychosocial resource derived from three primary sources—family, friends, and significant others. These dimensions are measured using the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) developed by Zimet et al. (1988). It is important to note that the MSPSS is employed solely as a measurement instrument to assess perceived social support, whereas Social Support Theory and Ecological Systems Theory provide the theoretical foundation for explaining how social support influences the psychological well-being of youth. Thus, the theoretical framework distinguishes between the explanatory theories guiding the study and the instrument used to operationalize the construct of perceived social support.

The Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of this current study. Guided by Social Support Theory and Ecological Systems Theory, this study conceptualizes perceived social support as a multidimensional construct comprising support received from family, friends, and significant others, as measured by the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS). The study assumes that these three sources represent the primary interpersonal environments through which youth perceive emotional, informational, and instrumental support. Differences in the perceived level of support across these dimensions are examined among youth in the fishermen community of Kerala.

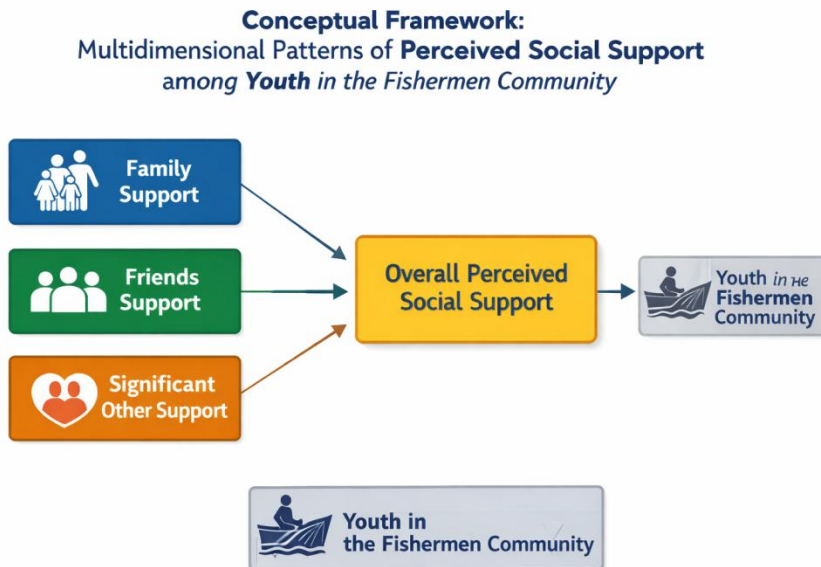


Figure 1. The Conceptual Framework

## METHODS

Figure 2 depicts the flowchart of the research design and methodology. The present multidimensional quantitative descriptive study design aims to assess the pattern and level of perceived social support among youth in the fishermen community of Alappuzha district, Kerala, by three distinguishing dimensions developed by Gregory D. Zimet in 1988. The personal data among the respondents were collected using a structured socio-demographic questionnaire and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) developed by Zimet et al., which is used to measure perceived support from three dimensions: family, friends, and significant others. The instrument consists of 12 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale.

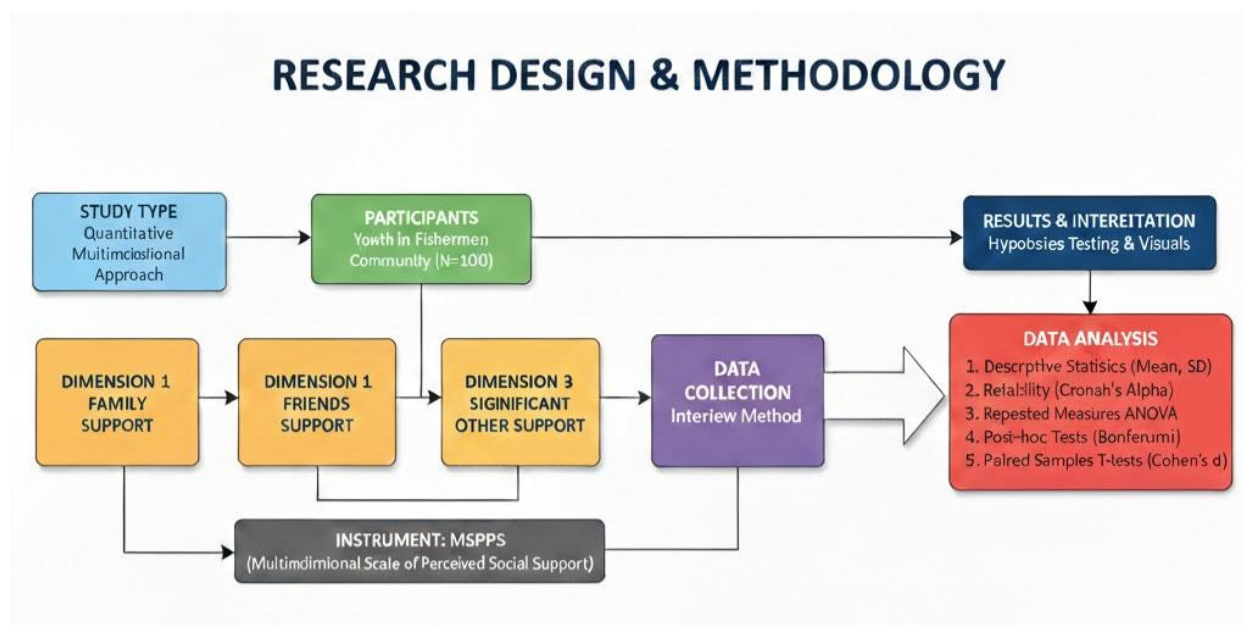


Figure 2. The flowchart of the Research Design and Methodology

### **Objectives of the study**

The objectives of this study are to examine the socio-demographic profile of youth in the fishermen community of Kerala, to measure their overall level of social support, and to analyze the patterns and perceived levels of social support across three dimensions, namely family support, friends support, and significant other support among youth in the fishermen community of Alappuzha. In addition, the study aims to compare and assess the relative strength of family support, friends support, and significant other support among the respondents.

### **Hypotheses**

This study is guided by hypotheses related to the different dimensions of perceived social support among youth in the fishermen community. The first null hypothesis (H01) states that there is no statistically significant difference among perceived family support, friends support, and significant other support, while the alternative hypothesis (H1.1) states that there is a statistically significant difference among these dimensions. The second null hypothesis (H02) posits that perceived family support does not significantly differ from perceived friends support, whereas the alternative hypothesis (H1.2) suggests that perceived family support significantly differs from perceived friends support. The third null hypothesis (H03) states that perceived significant other support does not significantly differ from the other dimensions of perceived social support, while the alternative hypothesis (H1.3) indicates that significant other support does differ from the other dimensions of perceived social support among the youth in the fishermen community of Kerala.

### **Sample Size and Sampling Procedure**

The target population for this study comprised youth aged 18–29 years residing in the 20 coastal wards of Alappuzha Municipality, Kerala. According to the Alappuzha Municipality Census (2011), the total youth population in the study area was 22,320, which constituted the sampling frame.

A sample of 100 respondents was selected using proportionate simple random sampling. The sample was proportionately allocated across the 20 coastal wards based on the size of the youth population in each ward to ensure adequate geographical representation. Within each ward, eligible respondents were selected using a simple random sampling technique, whereby each youth meeting the inclusion criteria had an equal probability of selection. This procedure minimized sampling bias and enhanced the representativeness of the sample. The sample size of 100 was considered adequate for this study because its primary objective was to examine the pattern of perceived social support among youth in the fishermen community rather than to estimate population parameters with a predetermined margin of error. Previous methodological studies have indicated that a sample of around 100 participants is sufficient for preliminary quantitative analyses involving descriptive statistics, reliability assessment, and repeated-measures analysis of variance when the study is exploratory in nature (Hair et al., 2019; Field, 2018).

### **Analysis of the Data**

The collected data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26.0). The dataset comprised two sections: the first contained the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, while the second included responses to the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS). Prior to hypothesis testing, preliminary analyses were conducted to examine the assumptions of parametric statistics, including normality and homogeneity of variance. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, standard deviations, and score ranges, were computed to describe the level of perceived social support across the three dimensions of the MSPSS: Family, Friends, and Significant Others.

The internal consistency of the MSPSS was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The overall scale demonstrated good internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.848$ ), indicating that the instrument was reliable for measuring perceived social support among youth in the fishermen community. Subsequently, repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed to compare the mean perceived social support scores across the three dimensions of the MSPSS.

A one-way repeated measures ANOVA was applied to analyze the differences among the three dimensions of perceived social support. In the results significant main effects were found, Bonferroni-adjusted post hoc comparisons were utilized to identify specific differences between dimensions while controlling for Type I error. To analyze the research hypotheses regarding differences between paired dimensions (e.g., family vs.

friends) the researcher paired samples t-tests were performed. Cohen's d was calculated to these comparisons and determine the magnitude of the effect size. Statistical significance for all tests was set at  $p < .05$ .

### Scoring Procedure of the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) developed by Zimet et al. (1988) consists of 12 items rated on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Very Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Very Strongly Agree). The scale measures perceived social support from three sources: Family, Friends, and Significant Others, with each dimension comprising four items. The score for each dimension was computed by averaging the responses to the four corresponding items, resulting in subscale scores ranging from 1 to 7, where higher scores indicate greater perceived social support from that particular source. The overall perceived social support score was calculated by averaging the responses across all 12 items, with higher mean scores reflecting higher overall levels of perceived social support. The internal consistency of the MSPSS was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, and the overall scale demonstrated good reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.848$ ).

## RESULTS

### Analysis of Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Table 1 shows the socio-demographic profile of the 100 respondents among the youth in the fishermen community of Kerala whoever participated for this study. Among the total sample of 100 respondents it is composed of 66% males and 34% females. In terms of the age distribution, 15% of the respondents fall within the 18–22 age group, nearly one fourth of the respondents, 24% are aged 23–26, and the majority of the respondents 61%, are between 27 and 29 years old. The religious background of the participants shows nearly half of the respondents 44% Christian. More than one fourth of the respondents are 28% Hindu, and 28% of the respondents are Muslim. Regarding economic status, More than half of the respondents 54% of them earn a monthly income below ₹20,000, nearly one fourth of the respondents, 24% earn between ₹20,000 and ₹24,999, and less than one fourth of the respondents, 22% earn above ₹25,000. The educational profile of the respondents shows that majority of the respondents, 30% of them completed high school, More than one fourth of the respondents, 28% of them hold a diploma or ITI certification, less than fourth of the respondents, 24% completed higher secondary education and fewer majorities 18%, of the respondents are graduates. Occupationally, nearly half of the respondents, 42% are employed in welding and construction, among them more than one third of the respondents, 37% of them work in daily wage jobs, and 21% hold private sector positions.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics among the respondents

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	66	66
	Female	34	34
Age	18–22 years	15	15
	23–26 years	24	24
	27–29 years	61	61
Religion	Christian	44	44
	Hindu	28	28
	Muslim	28	28
Monthly Income	Above ₹25,000	22	22
	₹20,000 – ₹24,999	24	24
	Below ₹20,000	54	54
Education	Graduation	18	18
	Higher Secondary	24	24
	Diploma / ITI	28	28
	High School	30	30
Occupation	Welding & Construction	42	42
	Private Job	21	21
	Daily Wage Job	37	37

The descriptive analysis of the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) indicates that youth in the fishermen community perceived moderate levels of social support across all three dimensions proposed by Zimet et al. (1988). Friends Support recorded the highest mean score (M = 3.66, SD = 1.36), followed closely by Family Support (M = 3.63, SD = 1.21). The Significant Others dimension had the lowest mean score (M = 3.47, SD = 1.32), suggesting that support from significant others was perceived to be comparatively lower than support from family and friends. The overall mean perceived social support score was 3.58 (SD = 1.24), indicating a moderate level of perceived social support among youth in the fishermen community. Furthermore, the relatively wide range between the minimum and maximum scores across the three dimensions indicates considerable individual variation in perceived social support among the respondents (Table 2).

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics on Multidimensional Perceived Social Support among Youth in Fishermen Community

Dimensions	Mean Score (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Minimum	Maximum
Family Support	3.63	1.21	1.50	6.25
Friends Support	3.66	1.36	1.75	6.25
Significant Other Support	3.47	1.32	1.75	6.00
Total Perceived Social Support	3.58	1.24	1.83	5.83

Tables 2 and 3 present the results of a one-way repeated-measures ANOVA conducted to determine whether statistically significant differences existed in perceived levels of social support across the three MSPSS subscales (Significant Others, Family, and Friends) among youth in the fishermen community (N = 100). The analysis revealed a significant main effect for the source of support,  $F(2, 198) = 4.57, p = .012$ , with a partial eta squared ( $\eta^2$ ) of .044, indicating a small-to-medium effect size. This result suggests that the perception of social support is not uniform across different social domains, with the source of support accounting for approximately 4.4% of the within-subjects variance. Post-hoc pairwise comparisons with Bonferroni adjustment further clarified these differences, demonstrating that perceived support from friends (M=3.66, SD=1.36) was significantly higher than that from significant others (M=3.47, SD=1.32,  $p < .001$ ), while no significant difference was observed between family and friends ( $p = .689$ ).

Table 2. One-way Repeated Measures ANOVA for Perceived Social Support Sources (N=100)

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares (SS)	df	Mean Square (MS)	F	Sig. (p)	Partial Eta Sq. ( $\eta^2$ )
Between Subscales	2.183	2	1.091	4.567	.012	.044
Error (Interaction)	47.317	198	0.239			
Total	49.500	200				

Table 3. Pairwise Comparisons (Post-hoc with Bonferroni Correction)

Source Pair (A vs B)	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig. (p)
Friends vs. Significant Other	0.195	0.053	< .001***
Family vs. Significant Other	0.162	0.070	.023*
Friends vs. Family	0.033	0.081	.689

Note: \*p < .05, \*\*\*p < .001

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare perceived family support and perceived friends' support among youth in the fishermen community (Table 4). There was no statistically significant difference in the scores for Family Support (M=3.63, SD=1.21) and Friends Support (M=3.66, SD=1.36);  $t(99) = -0.402, p = 0.689$ . The effect size, as measured by Cohen's d, was 0.040, which indicates a negligible difference. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H02) is accepted, suggesting that youth in this community perceive similar levels of support from both their families and their friends.

Table 4. Paired Samples t-Test Results

Variable	Mean	SD	t-value	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Cohen's d
Family Support	3.627	1.208	-0.402	99	0.689	0.040
Friends Support	3.660	1.359				

Table 5 shows the result of comparing perceived significant other support with family and friends support. Paired-samples t-tests were applied to contrast perceived support from significant others against the other two dimensions of social support (family and friends). The analysis revealed that perceived support from Significant Others (M = 3.47, SD = 1.32) was significantly lower than both Family support (M = 3.63, SD = 1.21),  $t(99) = -2.303$ ,  $p = 0.023$ , and Friends support (M = 3.66, SD = 1.36),  $t(99) = -3.678$ ,  $p < .001$ . Specifically, the difference between significant others and friends exhibited a significant effect (Cohen's  $d = 0.37$ ), while the difference with family support was statistically significant at the .05 level. These findings lead to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H03), indicating that Significant Other support is a distinct and significantly lower dimension of perceived support compared to the other pillars of the social network for youth in this community.

Table 5. Paired Samples T-Test Results

Comparison Pair	Mean Diff.	t-value	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Cohen's d
Significant Other vs. Family	-0.163	-2.303	99	0.023	0.230
Significant Other vs. Friends	-0.195	-3.678	99	0.0004	0.368

The heatmap matrix (Figure 3) provides a standardized, color-coded quantification of the mean differences between the three dimensions of the MSPSS, offering a comprehensive look at the comparative internal structure of the participants' support networks. The diagonal values (0.000) represent the identity comparison for each variable, while the off-diagonal cells display the specific mean difference values between the intersecting subscales. The color gradient—transitioning from lighter to darker shades—visually prioritizes the most substantial disparities, specifically highlighting the significant deficits between significant others and both family (MD = 0.163) and friends (MD = 0.195). By presenting the data in this triangular format, the matrix eliminates redundancy and emphasizes the 'Support Hierarchy,' where the negligible difference between Family and Friends (0.033) is clearly distinguished from the statistically significant gaps involving Significant Others.

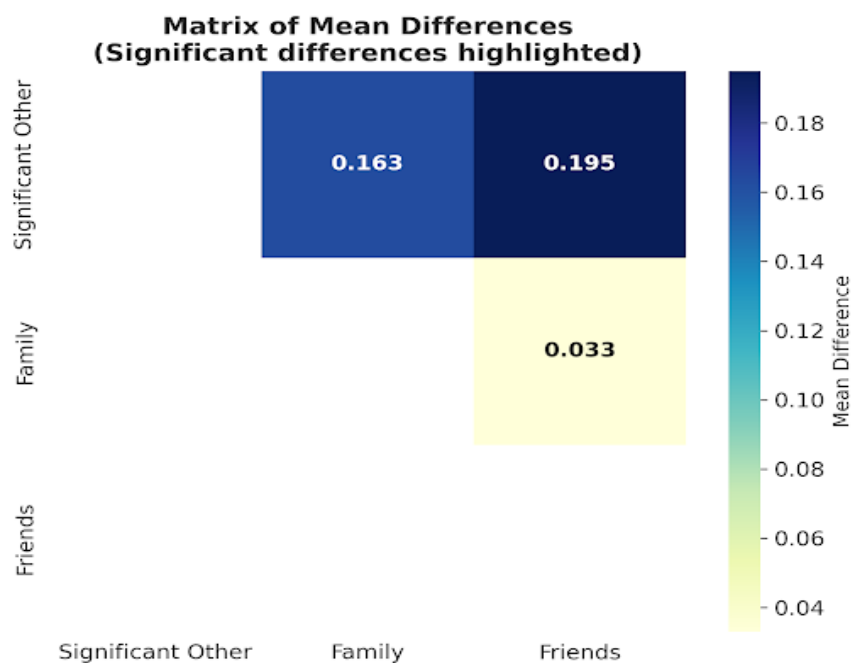


Figure 3. Matrix of Mean Differences

The bar chart (Figure 4) provides a clear visualization of the level of disparity and difference in perceived social support sources among youth in the fishermen community of Alappuzha. The level of the bars represents the mean scores for each dimension, revealing that support from Friends (M = 3.66) and Family (M = 3.63) constitutes a 'dual-pillar' system of nearly equal importance. In contrast, support from Significant Others (M = 3.47) is markedly lower, a difference that is statistically validated by the significance brackets. The presence of the triple-asterisk (\*\*\*) bracket signifies that the gap between Friends and Significant Others is highly significant ( $p < .001$ ), while the single-asterisk (\*) bracket confirms that Significant Other support also falls significantly behind Family support ( $p < .05$ ). The error bars at the top of each column indicate the standard error, demonstrating the consistency of these perceptions across the 100 participants.

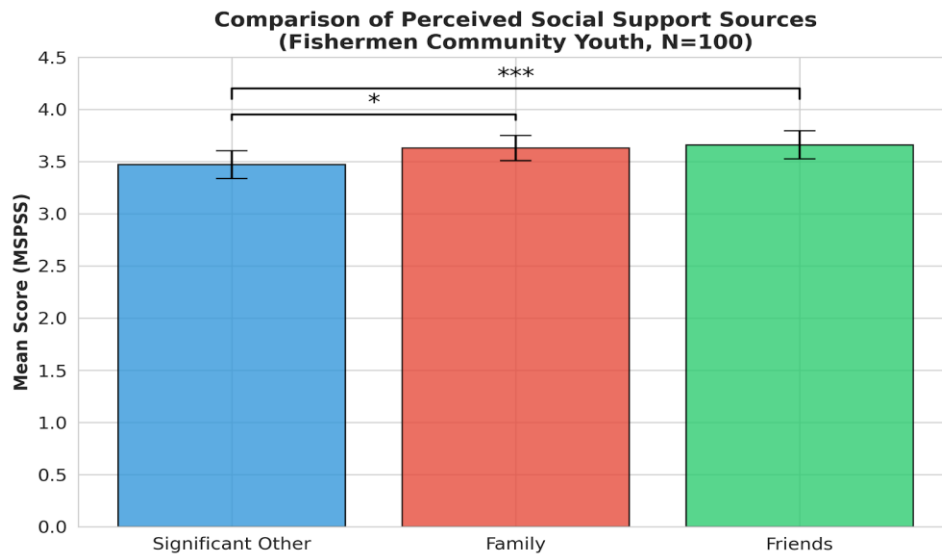


Figure 4. Comparison of Perceived Social Support

### Major Findings

The findings of this study indicate that youth in the fishermen community perceive a moderate level of social support across all dimensions, with an overall mean score of M = 3.58 on a 7-point scale. Among the three sources of support, friends support (M = 3.66) was identified as the strongest perceived source, closely followed by family support (M = 3.63). In contrast, support from a significant other was rated the lowest (M = 3.47), suggesting that this source is perceived as less available compared to peer and family networks. Furthermore, the results revealed high variability in responses, with family support scores ranging from 1.50 to 6.25, indicating diverse experiences of social isolation and perceived support within the community (Table 6).

Table 6. Findings related to the Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Test Applied	Result	Conclusion
H01: No significant difference among the three support dimensions.	Repeated Measures ANOVA	Rejected	There is a significant difference ( $p < .05$ ).
H02: Family support does not significantly differ from Friends support.	Paired Samples T-test	Accepted	No statistically significant difference was found ( $p > .05$ ).
H03: Significant Other support does not differ from other dimensions.	Bonferroni Post-hoc	Rejected	Significant Other support is significantly lower than both Family and Friends ( $p < .05$ ).

## DISCUSSION

The present study examined the multidimensional nature of perceived social support among youth in the fishermen community of Kerala by comparing support received from family, friends, and significant others. The findings indicate that respondents perceived a moderate level of overall social support ( $M = 3.58$ ), suggesting that although support networks are available, they may not be sufficiently strong to buffer the socio-economic and psychological challenges experienced by youth in fishing communities.

Among the three dimensions, Friends Support recorded the highest mean score, followed closely by Family Support, whereas Significant Others Support reported the lowest mean score. The relatively higher level of support received from friends may reflect the developmental characteristics of youth, during which peer relationships become increasingly important for emotional expression, identity formation, and coping with daily stressors (Arnett, 2000). Young people often rely on their friends for companionship, emotional reassurance, and practical advice, particularly when experiencing educational, occupational, or personal challenges. Similar findings have been reported in previous studies, which identified peer support as a significant contributor to psychological well-being and resilience among young adults (Chu et al., 2010; Rueger et al., 2016).

Although family support was also perceived positively, its slightly lower mean score compared with friends may reflect the socio-economic realities of fishermen households. Fishing communities frequently experience seasonal employment, fluctuating income, financial uncertainty, and occupational risks, all of which may reduce parents' capacity to provide consistent emotional and practical support. Nevertheless, family remains an important source of security, guidance, and emotional attachment, which explains its relatively high level of perceived support. This finding is consistent with Social Support Theory (Cohen & Wills, 1985), which emphasizes that close family relationships play a protective role by reducing the negative effects of stress and promoting psychological adjustment.

The comparatively lower level of support from Significant Others may be explained by the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Many participants were unmarried young adults or had not yet established stable intimate relationships. Consequently, support from significant others may not have been as readily available as support received from family members and friends. Cultural norms in Kerala's coastal communities, where family relationships are generally prioritized over romantic or other intimate relationships during early adulthood, may also contribute to this pattern.

The findings may also be interpreted within the framework of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), which proposes that youth development is influenced by interactions within their immediate social environments. Family, peers, and the wider community collectively shape young people's psychological well-being and capacity to cope with adversity. In economically vulnerable fishing communities, where livelihood insecurity and environmental uncertainty are common, supportive interpersonal relationships become essential resources that foster resilience and positive adaptation.

Overall, the findings suggest that strengthening family relationships, promoting peer-support initiatives, and creating community-based psychosocial support programmes could enhance the well-being of youth in fishermen communities. Educational institutions, local self-government bodies, and community organizations may collaborate to develop counselling services, youth clubs, and social support interventions that reinforce existing support networks and address the psychosocial needs of young people living in coastal communities.

## CONCLUSION

This present multi-dimensional descriptive study investigated the perceived social support systems among youth in the fishermen community of Alappuzha district Kerala, dimensionally examining the roles of family, friends, and significant others. The findings reveal a community in transition, where youth perceive a moderate level of overall social support. Statistical analysis led to the rejection of the null hypothesis regarding the uniformity of support, demonstrating that the sources of support are not perceived equally. Specifically, peer

and familial networks emerged as the primary pillars of support, significantly outweighing the influence of "significant others." The acceptance of the second hypothesis—that family and peer support do not significantly differ—suggests a unique socio-cultural framework where communal and kinship ties are equally integrated into the youth's coping mechanisms.

The socio-demographic data underscores the urgency of these findings. With over half the population earning below ₹20,000 monthly and a high reliance on precarious daily wage labor, the structural economic strain is evident. These environmental stressors necessitate robust informal support systems. However, the moderate scores suggest that while these networks exist, they may be stretched thin by the community's collective socio-economic challenges. This research concludes that interventions aimed at improving the mental well-being of coastal youth should not focus solely on the individual but should leverage existing peer and family networks. Strengthening these informal systems is crucial for mitigating the psychological impact of financial instability and occupational hazards. Future policies should focus on enhancing community-based support programs that align with the existing reliance on friends and family, ensuring that the "support gap" identified in this study does not widen into severe psychological distress.

### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The author(s) declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article. This study was conducted independently, and no financial support or personal relationships influenced the design, data collection, analysis, or interpretation of the results.

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