Original Article

Effect of Peer Group Interaction on Academic Staff Well-being: Case of Makerere University

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ABSTRACT

Peer group interactions have been less scrutinized in terms of their contribution to the overall quality of teaching in universities. This mixed-methods study investigated the effect of peer group interaction on the well-being of academic staff at Makerere University. Quantitative data was collected using self-administered questionnaires from 382 academic staff proportionally drawn from three colleges and one school, while qualitative data was obtained from four heads, of departments, and four academic staff using a structured interview guide. Qualitative data was analysed using thematic and content analysis inductively, and later both sets were converged to generate summaries of findings. Quantitatively, results show that peer group interaction stood at ($r = .252$, $n = 286$, $p < .000$) suggesting that there was a statistically significant relationship between well-being and Peer group interaction of academic staff at the 5% of significance two-tailed. $R2 = 0.60$, which implies that it contributed 60% of the change in academic staff well-being at Makerere University. Peer group interaction (18.929, $p = 0.00$) indicated that the relationship was significant. This was in agreement with qualitative findings, participants who provided positive feedback, described their interaction with peers as positive. Such positive feedback implied participants' interaction with their peers gave them positive experiences. The conclusion is that peer group interaction is a significant predictor of academic staff well-being. Therefore, the management of the university should strengthen interpersonal relationships through social support platforms and foster a culture of open communication and feedback to contribute to overall academic staff well-being. This can be streamlined by fostering strong interpersonal relationships within the academic community, promoting networking events, creating platforms for social support, and emphasizing the importance of building positive relationships with colleagues.

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INTRODUCTION

This study delves into the effect of peer group interaction on the well-being of academic staff at Makerere University, examining how factors like information sharing, social support, openness, and humour impact their overall well-being. Well-being has recently become a very important phenomenon at places of work. It is a global issue since Goal 3 of the 17 sustainable development goals attests to this. This is about "good health and well-being" (United Nations, 2015). In recent years, there has been growing global interest in the well-being of employees, including academic staff. This is because experiencing a high level of well-being at the workplace is related to diverse positive organisational dispositions that comprise low turnover intentions, low actual turnover, less absenteeism, superior work performance, greater effort and thought put into work, and fewer work-related injuries (Keeman et al., 2017).

Historically, the issue of the ill-being of workers in the workplace is not a new event. In higher education, this issue is achieving landscape in many countries. In the UK, 90 per cent of academic staff communicate working while sick (Kinman & Wray, 2021). In Northern Ireland, the problem of mental health has accounted for about 48.2 per cent of the discrepancy in academics (Shen and Slater, 2021). Rahman et al. (2024) asserted that in higher education institutions across 16 countries in the post-pandemic era, many staff reported having experienced burnout approximately 29 per cent, 73 per cent reported encountering relative to high levels of psychological distress, and 58 per cent reported low adjustable coping. In Africa, work-specific and organisational stressors emanating from high work-related demands affect about 89.3 per cent of South African academics, 76.8 per cent of administrators, and 96.8 per cent of researchers (Jasson et al., 2022). Still, in South Africa, academic staff aged 50 or older display exceedingly high levels of burnout that can have detrimental effects on their productivity and overall well-being (Dlamini & Dlamini, 2024). In Ghana, Adom et al. (2020) extensively explain the notion of stress, the usual academic stressors, their negative effects, and stress-coping apparatuses.

In Nigeria, the findings from Oderinde et al. (2024) indicate that the lecturers from Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, in Nigeria encounter high levels of work overload, which has notable detrimental effects on their physical and mental health because of their discrepancies in psychological well-being. In Uganda, Kabunga's (2020) findings reported that above 58 per cent of the academic staff encountered moderate levels of burnout, and 38 per cent faced high levels of burnout. Atugonza et al. (2021) results indicated that 74.4 per cent of academic staff at Makerere University experience high-stress levels. Mugizi et al. (2021) acknowledged that compensation management positively and significantly contributed to employee well-being in private universities. However, none of these studies conceptually related peer group interaction and academic staff well-being.

Contextually, this study took place at Makerere University. According to Uganda's Auditor General's Report of 2015, out of 2,774 established academic staff positions for Makerere University, only 1,333 (or 48 per cent) were filled, leaving a gap

of 1,441 (or 52 per cent). This report collaborated with the Rwendaire Report 2017, which indicated that between 2015 and 2016, over 69 people left the university. Researchers like Ssali et al. (2019) indicated that between 2009 and 2013, the university lost 50 senior academic staff for other universities, and in 2015 and 2016, over 69 were left. Ndyabahika (2019) noted that between 2013 and 2014, there were 477 lectures left. These statistics are not only perturbing but are pointers to yet bigger problems to come in the provision of quality higher education. They may prompt us to ask: Why has Makerere University consistently been failing to retain qualified academic staff? In this study, the researcher attempted to examine whether there is a relationship between the workplace environment of university academic staff and well-being in the workplace.

Problem Statement

Academic staff well-being in higher education institutions like Makerere is critical for its realisation of quality higher education (Mugizi et al., 2021). At Makerere University, strategies have been put in place to enhance the well-being opportunities for collaborative research, PhD scholarships, skill building, scientific writing, and sources of research funding schemes (Nabatte, 2019; Semeere et al., 2021). Despite these improved strategies towards improving academic staff well-being, some academic staff sponsored had exhibited high intent to quit the university soon after graduating or even before serving the university within the university in recent years (Mwesigwa et al., 2020; Ndyabahika, 2019; Ssali et al., 2019; Rwendaire, 2017). This high turnover gives an impression of being ill among the academic staff (Atugonza et al., 2021; Kabunga, 2020). Could it be that the interventions are not addressing the root causes of being ill? If so, proper well-being analysis needs to be done; otherwise, Makerere University will continue using interventions that do not address the root causes of ill well-being. Therefore, this paper presents the findings of a study that attempted to understand how the well-being of academic staff is affected by the workplace environment.

REVIEWED LITERATURE

Theoretical review

Theoretically, this study was guided by the organisational support theory (OST) propounded by Eisenberger et al. (1986). OST postulates that employees will attempt to work for those organisations wherein a pleasant work environment is provided and employees' contributions are properly valued and care for well-being (Malve-Ahlroth, 2020). The theory assumes that employees perceive their organisation as supportive when favourable rewards and job conditions are provided, and employees stimulate employee reciprocity in the form of organisational commitment and job satisfaction, communicating a positive valuation of employees' contributions to helping the organisation achieve its goals (Eisenberger et al., 2013). OST holds that interpersonal relationships, caring, approval, and respect connoted by supervisors fulfil socio-emotional needs, leading employees to incorporate organisational membership and role status into their social identity, leading to managerial effectiveness (Eisenberger et al., 2016).

Empirical review

In this study, three concepts were investigated, namely, employee well-being, workplace well-being, and workplace climate. According to Ruggeri et al. (2020), employee well-being refers to a combination of feeling good and functioning well, experiencing positive emotions such as happiness and contentment, as well as developing one's potential, having some control over one's life, having a sense of purpose, and experiencing positive relationships. Meanwhile, Bennett et al. (2017) defined well-being at work as reflecting life satisfaction, the prevalence of positive emotions and moods of individuals on their job, and in particular the feelings that the work provides the opportunities to develop their potential for self-actualisation. The

second concept of workplace well-being was defined by Nielsen et al. (2017) as a state of an individual's mental, physical, and general health as well as experiences of satisfaction both at work and outside of work. It describes all aspects of an individual's working life, including the quality and safety of the working physical environment, the climate at work, and the work organisation (Burke & Richardsen, 2019).

Aryanti and Sari (2020) defined workplace well-being as a sense of accomplishment achieved from work that is associated with the feelings of workers in general and also the intrinsic and extrinsic work values. In this study, workplace well-being was looked at in terms of work satisfaction, organisational respect for employees, employer care, and intrusion of work into private life. The third concept was peer-group interaction. Eisenberger et al. (2016) defined peer group interaction as workplace social networks that enhance interpersonal relationships that offer friendship and information about how employees are to become successful interdependent group members in organisations.

The higher education context constitutes an important social environment where academic staff are connected daily. In general, peer group interaction in the university context has a major influence on lecturers' well-being, academic achievement, mental and physical health, and even their lifestyle (Nurkka, 2019). Orientation to peers and friendships is one of the key features of academic staff, and through these interactions, lecturers absorb a wide range of attitudes, norms, experiences and skills (Nareeba et al., 2019). Peer group interactions in educational institutions are complex and multidimensional and can take many forms (Wong & Chapman, 2023). Peer group interaction is an element that can help individual academic staff reduce the amount of stress experienced as well as help them cope better in dealing with stressful work situations (Wessels and Wood, 2019).

Several scholars have already investigated the impact of peer group interaction in the workplace, risk behaviours, and academic performance. For instance, Berthelon et al. (2019) investigated the impact of the structure of the peer network on academic achievement, and the results indicated that peer quality improves student performance and that the breadth and cohesion of students' networks positively affect student outcomes. Cornelissen (2016) explored why social interactions in the workplace lead to productivity spillover among co-workers in the UK and revealed that social interactions lead to productivity spillover through knowledge spillover or peer pressure. Gioia (2017) investigated the role of group identity in peer effects on risk behaviour in the UK and suggested that subjects are affected by their peers' choices, and they change their decisions to assimilate their behaviour to that of their peers when they have information on the choices made by the fellow members of their group.

Some scholars have investigated the impact of peer group interaction on the well-being of employees in different organizations. For instance, Mastroianni and Storberg-Walker (2014) explored how work interactions enhanced or detracted from the perceptions of well-being and health behaviours of 19 volunteers recruited from 4 companies in the USA, and the findings revealed that feelings of well-being were enhanced by workplace interactions, which were trusting, collaborative, and positive, as well as when participants felt valued and respected. Pauksztat et al. (2022) investigated the buffering effects of four forms of support (instrumental and emotional peer support, company support, and non-work support) on three aspects of employee well-being (depression, anxiety, and exhaustion) among seafarers in Finland. The findings indicated that instrumental peer support buffered the negative impact of bullying on depression. Feng (2019) investigated the influence of socially supportive services provided by commercial senior living services on older customers' social well-being and revealed that

social connectedness moderates the relationship between interaction with peers and the social well-being of customers.

Different scholars investigated the impact of peer group interaction on the well-being of employees in educational institutions. For instance, Komp et al. (2022) examined relationships between health-promoting collaboration, well-being, and workability regarding presenteeism among academics in German universities, and indicated that health-promoting collaboration has a negative relationship with presenteeism. Saputra et al. (2017) explored the relationship between social support, peer relationships, and psychological well-being among students who were working on their thesis. The findings indicated that there is a relationship between social support and the psychological well-being of final-year students. The finding revealed that perceived social support predicted subjective well-being. Hamsan (2017) examined the relationship between academic environment, peer relationships, time management, and psychological well-being among final-year students at University Putra Malaysia, and the results found that most of the majority of students have low peer relationships, extremely severe anxiety, and normal stress.

Wessels and Wood (2019), aimed at working collaboratively with teachers to assist them in perceiving ways to progress their experiences of well-being in the education environment in South Africa, found that frequent, informal social contact with colleagues, coupled with explicit action to focus on positive emotions, could improve teachers' experiences of well-being. Mäkiniemi et al. (2021) investigated whether personal, social, and organisational-level resources can buffer against the negative effects of perceived loneliness on the stress and exhaustion of Finnish university employees. Their findings revealed that perceived loneliness was directly and positively associated with stress and exhaustion. Ditton (2009) explored how social relationships influence the health of academics at Australian universities and revealed that to remedy the burden of mental illness, employer-employee communication must be changed to integrate the social reality of the work context. Lah Lo-oh and Ayuk (2018) analysed the effect of social support on the psychological well-being of academically stressed students at the University of Buea and indicated that peer acceptance affected the psychological well-being of academically stressed students at the University of Buea.

This literature reveals the fundamental role of peer group interaction and its relationship with well-being. However, from the contextual point of view, little was studied from Makerere University, but still, even methodologically, none of the studies used the mixed approach as the current study. Still, these studies mainly looked at well-being, and few linked it to peer group interaction using the job performance theory.

METHODOLOGY

Sample and Procedure

For quantitative aspects, the researcher used 382 out of 569 academic staff at Makerere University, determined based on the table determining sample size from a given population (Kreijcie and Morgan 1970). These included professors, associate professors, senior lecturers, lecturers, and assistant lecturers on their perceptions of their peer group interaction and their well-being using self-report questionnaires. Regarding qualitative, four heads of departments and four academic staff were considered because they held confidential information about peer group interaction and well-being. The academic staff and heads of department were from three colleges and one school, namely, the College of Health Sciences, the College of Business and Management, the College of Education and External Studies, and the School of Laws. The sample population was chosen based on adopted sampling methods, namely stratified random sampling for quantitative aspects and purposive sampling for qualitative aspects.

Data collection

Since the researcher used a mixed-methods approach, a concurrent survey design was employed; in particular, the quantitative approach used a survey design, and the qualitative approach used a phenomenological design. Data were collected using self-administered questionnaires and interview guides. The questionnaires comprised two sections, sections A, B, and C. The questions in Section A were on the background characteristics of the respondents, Section B on the well-being of academic staff with questions on work satisfaction, organisation respect for employees, care from employer, and intrusion of work into private life. Section C covered workplace environment with questions on perceived climate, supervisory relationships, and peer group interaction. The self-administered questionnaires had a close-ended item-based nominal scale with appropriate alternatives given for section A and an ordinal scale based on the five-point Likert from a minimum of 1 through 5 for sections B and C. Closed-ended questions were selected because they are easy to administer, code analyses, and allow comparisons and quantification, producing fully completed data while avoiding irrelevant responses (Bird, 2009). An interview guide, which is a face-to-face data collection instrument, was used to collect qualitative data. The design of the interview items was a standardised open-ended interview that allowed the participants to provide detailed information because of the probing questions as a means of follow-up.

Data analysis

The analysis of data was done at different levels, namely univariate, bivariate, and multivariate. At the univariate level, data analyses were based on descriptive statistics. At the bivariate level, the researcher correlated the dependent variable (DV) well-being with peer group interaction using the Pearson correlation coefficient. At multi-viate levels, the researcher used simple linear regression and analysis of variance (ANOVA), where peer group interaction (IV) was regressed against the DV (well-being).

RESULTS

Well-Being Dimensions

The study aimed to examine the effect of peer group interaction on the well-being of the academic staff at Makerere University. The variables were well-being as the dependent variable and peer group interaction as the independent variable. *Table 1* shows the descriptive statistics of workplace well-being.

Table 1: workplace well-being dimensions

Item	Mean	Standard deviation
Work satisfaction	3.26	.82003
Organizational respect for employee	2.89	.88327
Care from employer	2.67	.93122
Intrusion of work into private life	3.52	.84098

Results from Table 1 indicate that measures of well-being perform poorly. Work satisfaction stands at the mean value of 3.26, while intrusion of work into private life is at 3.56. Organisational respect for employees is just slightly below average at a mean value of 3.89. It is only care from the employer, which is slightly good at a level of disagreement that it is not done. Accordingly, the result implies that care from employers and organisation respect for employees were dissatisfying factors among academic staff, unlike work satisfaction and intrusion of work into private life, which the respondents took to be good.

Peer Group Interaction

Peer group interaction, which was conceived as the third dimension of the workplace environment, was studied using ten items. The question items were scaled on the Five Point Likert, where 5 = strongly

agree, 4 = agree, 3 = not sure, 2 = disagree, and 1 = strongly disagree. The results of the supervisory relationship are presented in *Table 2*

Table 2: Peer Group Interaction

Peer Group Interaction	SA	A	NS	D	SD	Mean
Lectures of this department work closely together	10 (3.5%)	65 (22.7%)	32 (11.2%)	152 (53.1%)	27 (9.5%)	2.58
Lecturers in this department always have open communication about work.	14 (5.0 %)	65 (22.7%)	24 (8.4%)	114 (39.9%)	69 (24.1%)	2.44
I prefer to work in teams than alone in this workplace	14 (5.0%)	65 (22.7%)	35 (12.2%)	111 (38.8%)	61 (21.3%)	2.51
Lecturers in this department always participate in departmental work decisions	17 (6.0%)	73 (25.5%)	19 (6.6%)	136 (47.6%)	41 (14.3%)	2.61
Lectures of this department always express empathy for one another.	15 (4.9%)	89 (31.2%)	28 (9.8%)	85 (29.8%)	69 (25.2%)	2.62
I always seek to understand my fellow staff's work needs	12 (3.9%)	82 (28.8%)	41 (14.4%)	89 (31.2%)	62 (21.7%)	2.61
Lectures in this department have a sense of teamwork	9 (3.2%)	58 (20.4%)	28 (9.8%)	112 (39.3%)	78 (27.3%)	2.32
One can share job-related issues with fellow lectures in this department	10 (3.5%)	57 (19.9%)	32 (11.2%)	110 (38.5%)	77 (26.9%)	2.34
Lectures in this department can collectively influence many important job-related issues.	12 (4.2%)	44 (15.4%)	25 (8.7%)	144 (50.3%)	61 (21.4%)	2.31
Lectures in this department easily express their views about work to their closest lectures	13 (4.5%)	38 (13.3%)	33 (11.5%)	137 (47.9%)	65 (22.8%)	2.29
Key: 1= Strongly Disagree, Disagree, 3= Not Sure, 4 = Agree, and 5= Strongly Agree.						

The findings in *Table 2* on whether the lecturers of this department work closely together, cumulatively, show that the majority of the respondents (62.6%) disagreed, while 25.7%) agreed and 11.2% were not sure. The mean = 2.58, close to code 3, which on the scale used meant that the respondents were not sure. This suggested that, to a smaller extent, the lecturers of this department work closely together. As to whether the lecturers in this department always have open communication about work, the majority (64.0%) of the respondents disagreed, while 27.6% agreed and 8.4% were not sure. The mean = 2.44 implied that the respondents disagreed on the item. This suggested that the lecturers in this department, to a smaller extent, have open communication about work. As regards whether respondents prefer to work in teams than work alone at the workplace, a majority of respondents (60.1%) disagreed, while 27.7% agreed and 12.2% were not sure. The mean = 2.51, close to

code 3, which on the scale used corresponded to not sure, suggested that the respondents prefer to work in teams than work alone at the workplace.

Concerning whether the lecturers in their department always participate in departmental work decisions, the majority per cent age (61.9%) of respondents disagreed, while 31.5% agreed and 6.6% were not sure. The mean = 2.61, close to code 3, which on the scale used corresponded to not sure, suggested that, to a smaller extent, the lecturers in their department always participate in departmental work decisions. As regards whether the lecturers in their department always express empathy for one another, a majority of respondents (55.0%) disagreed, while 35.2%) agreed and 9.8% were not sure. The mean = 2.62, close to code 3, which on the scale used corresponded to not sure, suggested that the lecturers in their departments fairly express empathy for one another.

The findings in *Table 2* on whether the respondent always seeks to understand their fellow staff's work needs: cumulatively, the majority of the respondents (52.9%) disagreed, while (32.7%) agreed, and (14.4%) were not sure. The mean = 2.61, close to code 3, which on the scale used meant that the respondents were not sure. This suggested that, to a smaller extent, respondents always sought to understand their fellow staff's work needs. As to whether the lectures in the department have a sense of teamwork, the majority (66.6%) of the respondents disagreed, while 23.6% agreed and 9.8% were not sure. The mean = 2.32 implied that the respondents disagreed on the item. This suggested that the lecturers in the department did not have a sense of teamwork.

As regards whether the respondents can share job-related issues with fellow lecturers in their departments, a majority of respondents (65.4%) disagreed, while 23.4% agreed and 11.2% were not sure. The mean = 2.34 is close to code 2, which on the scale used corresponded to disagree, suggesting that the respondents cannot share job-related issues with fellow lecturers in their departments. With respect to whether lectures in their departments can collectively influence many important job-related issues, the majority per cent age (71.7%) of respondents disagreed, while 19.6% agreed and 8.7% were not sure. The mean = 2.31, close to code

2, which on the scale used corresponded to disagree, suggested that lectures in their departments did not collectively influence many important job-related issues. As regards whether the lecturers in their department easily expressed their views about work to their closest lectures, a majority of respondents (70.7%) disagreed, while 17.8% agreed and 11.5% were not sure. The mean = 2.29 is close to code 2, which on the scale used corresponded to disagree, suggesting that the lecturers in their department did not easily express their views about work to their closest lecturers.

The study went further and looked at the relationship between peer group interaction and academic staff well-being. Deductively, the investigators hypothesised to conduct correlations. The hypothesis (H$_1$) stated that *peer group interaction positively or significantly* affects *academic staff well-being at Makerere University,* while the null hypothesis (*H$_0$) stated that peer group interaction does not positively or significantly affect the well-being of academic staff at Makerere University.* A Pearson correlation coefficient and simple linear regression were run to test the relationship and the effect, respectively. The results of Pearson's correlation coefficient index between peer group interaction and the well-being of academic staff at Makerere University are in Table 2.

Table 3: Pearson correlation coefficient, and PGI

		Well-being	Peer group interaction
Well being	Pearson Correlation	1	.252**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	286	286
Peer group interaction	Pearson Correlation	.252**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	286	286

According to Pearson's correlation coefficient index, the results were statistically significant, with a low positive correlation between well-being and Peer group interaction (r = .252, n = 286, p < .000). It suggested that there was a statistically

significant relationship between well-being and Peer group interaction of academic staff at the 5% of significance two-tailed. Hence H1 was supported. This shows that related supervisory relationships (information sharing, social support, openness, and

trust and humour) were significantly related to academic staff well-being. Furthermore, this hypothesis was subjected to simple linear regression analysis and the findings arising were presented are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Regression analysis on Well-being, and PGI

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.252	0.064	0.060	.51911

The simple linear regression analysis adjusted r2 = 0.60 reveals that PGI contributed 60% of the change in the well-being of academic staff at Makerere University. The remaining 40% were contributed by other factors that were not within this study. This meant that peer group interaction significantly predicted the well-being of academic staff. This implied that as staff were offered interaction in terms of information sharing, social support, openness, trust, and humour, the higher the possibility of their well-being being enhanced, and the reverse is true.

Table 4: ANOVA on PGI and well-being of academic staff at Makerere University

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5.101	1	5.101	18.929	.000
	Residual	75.183	279	.269		
	Total	80.284	280			

The regression model in *Table 4* showed F = 18.929 and a significance P value = 0.000, less than 0.05. When the observed F statistic is significant or large enough, the sig is small enough—less than 0.05 or α = 5%, in which it was deduced that the computed F statistic is large enough. Hence the research hypothesis (H1) was supported that peer group interaction positively or significantly affects academic staff at Makerere University. The null hypothesis (H0) that peer group interaction does not positively significantly affect academic staff well-being at Makerere University was rejected.

Table 5: Correlation coefficient PGI and overall well-being

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
3	(Constant)	2.690	.096		27.921	.000
	Pee Group Interaction (PGI)	. 037	.037	.252	4.351	.000

Table 5 reveals that peer group interaction had a beta value of 0.252 with a sig. Value of 0.000. The study thus accepted the HI: peer group interaction positively or significantly affects academic staff well-being.

The above statistical analysis is in line with qualitative analysis, which was done according to research questions that sought to investigate the extent to which peer group interaction effectively enhances the well-being of academic staff. In response to the question, participants provided positive feedback, describing their interaction with peers as positive. For instance, the participant emphasised that;

> *I strongly believe that peer group interaction is crucial for academic growth. Through peer collaboration, I can gain new perspectives and ideas that can help me develop my research and teaching skills* (KI13).

In my opinion, peer group interaction can enhance career development by providing opportunities for mentorship and guidance. By learning from experienced colleagues, I can develop the skills and knowledge necessary to advance my career (KII1).

In my opinion, peer group interaction can enhance academic growth by providing opportunities for constructive feedback and discussion. This can help me to identify areas where I need to improve and develop strategies for improvement (KII7).

The statement suggests that peer group interaction can contribute significantly to academic growth by providing valuable opportunities for constructive feedback and discussion. Such interactions can help identify areas of strength and areas that require improvement. The statement also asserts that peer group interaction is a vital factor for academic growth. The author emphasizes that peer collaboration can provide new and diverse perspectives and ideas that can contribute to the development of research and teaching skills. This can lead to an improvement in the quality of research and teaching outcomes, which highlights the importance of these interactions in enhancing their well-being as academic staff members.

DISCUSSION

The multiple linear regression analysis adjusted r2 0.281 results in Table 3 reveal that PGI contributed 28.1% of the change in the well-being of academic staff at Makerere University. The remaining 71.9% were contributed by other factors that were other within this study. Table 5 indicates a beta value of 0.252 with a sig of 0.000. This implied that peer group interaction positively or significantly affects the well-being of academic staff at Makerere University. This indicated that when the academic staff were given peer group interaction pertaining to information sharing, social support, openness, trust, and humour, their well-being would increase, and vice versa. In congruence with the findings, Mehari

et al. (2015) asserted that the relation between the reported frequency of victimisation and well-being did not vary as a function of the interaction between adolescents' ethnicity and their schools' ethnic composition. The findings are in line with Komp et al. (2022), who indicated that health-promoting collaboration has a negative relationship with presenteeism. Hamsan (2017) found that the majority of final-year students at the University of Putra Malaysia had low peer relationships, extremely severe anxiety, and normal stress.

The results in Table 4 show a high F = 18.929 and a significant p-value (0.000), indicating that peer group positively significantly affects academic staff well-being. The findings concur with Wessels and Wood (2019), who found that frequent, informal social contact with colleagues, coupled with explicit action to focus on positive emotions, could improve teachers' experiences of well-being. Mäkiniemi et al. (2021) revealed that perceived loneliness was directly and positively associated with stress and exhaustion. Ditton (2009) revealed that employer-employee communication, when integrated with social reality, buffers the burden of mental illness for academics at Australian universities. Lah Lo-oh and Ayuk (2018) indicated that peer acceptance affected the psychological well-being of academically stressed students. This implies that where strong peer group interaction exists, there is an assurance that well-being is enhanced among workers. Mastroianni et al. (2014) are in congruence with the findings that revealed that feelings of well-being were enhanced by workplace interactions, which were trusting, collaborative, and positive, as well as when participants felt valued and respected. Saputra et al. (2017), in congruence with the findings, revealed that social support has a significant relationship with the psychological well-being of final-year students. Feng et al. (2019) also support the findings, indicating that social connectedness moderates the relationship between interaction with peers and the social well-being of customers. These findings are also in line with the work of other scholars like Pauksztat et al. (2022),

who found that instrumental peer support buffered the negative impact of bullying on depression.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings' generalizability may be limited by Makerere University's distinct organizational culture, policies, and resources, which may differ from those of other universities. Future researchers can conduct comparable studies in various contexts, such as private universities. And upcoming new public universities, to enhance the generalizability of findings. The study predominantly focuses on the perspectives of academic staff, thereby neglecting the viewpoints of other stakeholders such as students, administrators, and support staff. Future researchers must conduct studies to consider conducting their studies among students, administrators, and support staff to understand their well-being challenges.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the study underscores the critical importance of peer group interaction in shaping the well-being of academic staff at Makerere University. Special attention to positive interactions, including collaboration on research projects and participation in department meetings. The findings reveal that academic staff's well-being is significantly influenced by the quality of peer group interactions, fostering professional development and interpersonal relationships to enhance the well-being of academic staff. However, all dimensions of the peer group need improvement since the level of disagreement with statements expressed in the affirmative was high (Table 2). These findings are vital for Makerere University and similar institutions seeking to enhance the overall well-being of their academic staff, as they illuminate the relationship between peer group interaction and the quality of academic work life. The implications of this research extend to the broader context of higher education institutions, as nurturing a positive and conducive workplace environment is essential for attracting and retaining high-quality academic talent, which, in turn, contributes to the institution's ability to fulfil its educational mission and meet the dynamic needs of society. Future directions for research could delve deeper into specific interventions and strategies that can optimize peer group interaction and consequently enhance academic staff well-being, ultimately benefiting the entire academic community and the pursuit of quality higher education.

The university management should strengthen interpersonal relationships through social support platforms and foster a culture of open communication and feedback. This can be done by fostering strong interpersonal relationships within the academic community, promoting networking events, creating platforms for social support, and emphasizing the importance of building positive relationships with colleagues. The university should also facilitate staff interactions through interdisciplinary workshops, research symposiums, and networking events to provide opportunities for knowledge sharing, support, and a sense of belonging, which can contribute to their overall well-being.

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