Perceived Social Support and Life Satisfaction among University Students: A Correlational Study

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Abstract

The study examines relationship between level of perception of social support on life satisfaction among college students. The sample comprised of 103 university students from Dehradun and Delhi. Data collection employs voluntary response sampling and administration of two standardized scales including Multi-Dimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support and Satisfaction with Life Scale. Inferences are drawn through using IBM SPSS (version 26.0). The results accepted the alternative hypothesis, indicating a significant moderately positive correlation between perceived social support and life satisfaction (r= 0.487, p<0.01). Among different professions, students are more vulnerable to mental health concerns including stress, depression and anxiety. The findings underscore increased role of social networks in improving overall psychological well-being, resilience and the subjective well-being. This study recommends and highlights the need for integrating mental health initiatives in educational settings to foster student well-being and holistic development.

Keywords: *Perceived social support, university students, psychological well-being and life satisfaction.*

Introduction

In present world the integral aim of education is to develop an individual as a whole in terms of physical, social, cognitive, emotional and psychological aspects so that an individual can be raised as harmonious with society and a productive as well as a sound individual. According to Maslow hierarchy of needs (1943) every individual strives for belongingness which is a basic psychological need. Thus, any kind of support system foster attachment, provides guidance, social integration, increases competence and provides reassurance of worth of an individual.

Social support refers to the network of interpersonal relationships including family, friends, peers and community members that provides when a person needs any financial, physical and psychological help' (National Cancer Institute). Social support is vital for an individual in order to feel belonged to the society. Studies consistently supported that social support is linked with

low level of stress and ambidexterity to steer through day-to-day stressors (Mishra, 2020). Increased availability of social support helps to face the challenging times and it helps people felt a sense of relatedness towards each other. Social support might come from different people and is an integration of financial, emotional, social and psychological support.

Research highlights that perceived social support entails an individual self-belief in the availability of reliable resources, significantly strengthening mental health and overall well-being (Celik, 2012). This perception is more important for university students, continuously faced with stressors including academic pressures and age related social transitions. Friends, family are good source of perceived social support including any significant other. The access to any kind of support system improves the overall psychological health of an individual. Social network is an important indicator of determining how satisfied one is in his or her life.

Satisfaction in itself is very subjective, it holds different meaning for every individual. It can be defined as complex interplay between one's adjustments, attitude of an individual towards life events and intersection of experiencing problems and interactional events. Life satisfaction is a cognitive component of subjective well-being measuring a person cognitive assessment. It can be assessed across multiple life domains such as relationships, health, and personal achievements (Diener et al., 1999).

Contentment with life or a feeling of satisfaction is an amalgamation of various domains such as work life, personal healthcare and development, economic status, relationship with friends and family and the quality of romantic relationship. It's unlikely that a person with poor health, low income and few close relationships has high life satisfaction as compared to someone with wealth, a huge social circle and a clean bill of health.

A person satisfaction with his lives with respect to these domains create overall life satisfaction. When it comes to social support, an individual if gains it from family, friend or society it result as an indicator of improved life satisfaction. Empirical research has over the years supported how perception of having a social support has led to overall improvement in life satisfaction. It provides meaning to life thus enhancing overall quality of life in struggling with difficulties.

Supporting the same another study employing 436 students found that support from family and peers significantly enhances psychosocial health and general life satisfaction (Kumcagiz and Sahin, 2017). Social support which includes informational, practical and emotional assistance received from community networks, family, colleagues and friends help in fostering resilience (Allen et al., 2002). Recognizing its significance in individuals' lives allows for more effective and meaningful assistance to those facing challenging situations. Notably, familial support is an important aspect in reducing psychological distress (Bockting et al., 2013). It has also been associated with decreased chances of irrational thoughts and tendency of self-harm ((Bauer et al., 2015).

Review of Literature

Xin and Guo (2025) pointed out that autonomous social support and with perceived effectiveness bring change in positive emotions, negative emotion and life satisfaction of the social support giver. Numerous psychological theories stated that relationships is significant for psychological well-being leading to human flourishing (Ryan and Deci, 2000)

According to Gottlieb and Bergen (2010) perceived social support self-valuation of individual perception of accessibility of resources within one's social network, differs from tangible support received.

Perceived social support from members correlates with higher wellbeing and better health outcomes (Possel et al., 2018). Few studies suggest that living with both the parents is associated with high life satisfaction (Brisson et al., 2024).

Supporting the same, Fusilier et al., 1987 showed a positive relationship among men who received enacted support from their loved one's including family members and peer group on domain of life satisfaction. But for women it was virtually unrelated to satisfaction with life. The same findings are applicable on sample of male and females in another study. It was found that children who are close to their father and had support from father reported high on life satisfaction (Wenk et al.,1994).

Coffman and Gilligan in 2002 among 94 university students, explored how stress and life satisfaction is impacted by self-efficacy and social support. Findings revealed high level of both correlates with stress reduction and improved life satisfaction. In a study academic achievement was studied with social support in 390 middle school students. The findings stated that social support in any form or from any sources is directly proportional to academic achievement leading to better quality of life in the students. This helps them to grow stronger relationships better class support and proper parents support help both the gender to have a stable mental health. (White, 2009)

Additionally, studies show that life satisfaction is strongly predicted by social support (Han et al., 2021). Empirical studies with students found that friends accounted more than family in increasing the life satisfaction. It was concluded that having support of friends decreasing the stress level leading to higher satisfaction in life. (Davis, 1998)

Aliasghar et al. (2014) studied relation between social support, self-worth, self-efficacy and satisfaction with life among 213 high school students, employing a cluster sampling method. The results highlighted positive correlation of life satisfaction with percieved social support, the relation was partly mediated by one's self esteem and self-efficacy.

Dwyer and Cummings (2001) conducted a study on postgraduate students to evaluate the contribution of friends, family, and social support to improving life satisfaction. Findings indicated that social support is indicative of helping individuals cope effectively with stressors, serving as a foundational resource for well-being. Specifically, support received from family members and friends was found to have a strong positive correlation with satisfaction with life, highlighting their significant influence on emotional and psychological adjustment.

A study conducted on 919 college students, assessed the on association of perceived social support with spiritual well-being and quality of life. Cross- sectional descriptive correlation design was used for assessment. College students demonstrated moderate levels of life happiness, perceived social support and spiritual well-being. Results are indicative of positive associations among these factors (Alorani & Alradaydeh, 2018).

Conley et al. (2020) found that university students experience peak stress levels during the early stages of their academic journey, making this period particularly critical for psychological adjustment and support. Further research suggests that Students with higher perceived social support generally exhibit improved psychological health. This support acts as a safeguard, promoting mental well-being and alleviating stress (Cobo-Rendón et al., 2020). Acoba et al., 2004 did a study correlating strong social support with mental health. It was found that a strong social support system lessens the impact of adverse events fostering improved mental health and lowering the risk of detrimental psychological impacts

According to Ozer et al. (2021), support from family members significantly lowers level of stress and accounts for around 11% of the variation in perceived stress. In a similar vein, Ekmen et al. (2021) found that stress was negatively mediated with both family and significant others support, with stress acting as an intervening variable to some extent between life satisfaction and social support. In recent research by McLean et al. (2023) high perceived support from loved ones is linked to less stress among college students.

Collectively based on research literature, suggests social support is effective in stress reduction. It has a indirect role in enhancing overall life satisfaction by modulating individuals' stress perceptions. These insights highlights the vital function of broaden social network in increasing mental resilience and wellbeing.

Methodology

Objectives

1. To assess the correlation between life satisfaction and perceived social support.
2. To explore influence of perceived social support and life satisfaction on university students using correlational study.

Hypothesis of the Study

Null hypothesis H_0: There is no statistically significant relationship between perceived social support and life satisfaction.

Alternate H_1: Perceived social support significantly predicts life satisfaction among university students.

Participants: The study used a voluntary response sampling method selecting 103 university students with mean age of 18.98. Majority of the university students belonged from universities of Dehradun and Delhi.

Data Collection Tools

The following standardized tools were employed to measure the variables:

1. **Multi Dimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS):** Developed by Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, and Farley (1988), the MSPSS examines individuals' perception of social support from three primary sources: family members, friends and a significant

other. With four items per source, the scale's twelve items are split equally among the three subscales. Participants were asked to score how supportive they thought each source was in their life.

2. **Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS):** The SWLS has five items developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985) to assess a person's overall cognitive assessments of life satisfaction. Using 7-point Likert scale, total scores range from 5 to 35. Extreme unhappiness is shown in lower scores (5 to 9), whereas high life satisfaction is indicated by higher values (31 to 35).

Statistical Analysis and Procedure

This research study employed correlational research followed by voluntary response sampling method to sample out 103 adolescent participants. Participants were provided with questionnaires measuring perceived social support and life satisfaction. The study used both physical (paper-pencil) and digital (Google Docs) formats. Participants were informed prior the voluntary participation. The confidentiality of the responses was maintained. Participants were made fully aware of voluntary withdrawal from the study at any given point of time during the course of the study. After data collection and analysis were finished, participants were debriefed and offered feedback regarding their individual results.

Results

The data was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 26.0) to investigate the relationship between life satisfaction and perceived social support.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for perceived social support and life satisfaction

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Perceived social support	63.59	12.77
Life Satisfaction	21.56	6.232

Table 2: The Correlations for Perceived social support (PSS) and Life Satisfaction (LS).

Variable	Correlation
Perceived Social Support and Life Satisfaction	0.487**

Note. **Significant at 0.01 level

Discussion:

The present study identified that among university students from Dehradun and Delhi, t there was a significant and moderate positive correlation of ($r = 0.487$, $p < 0.01$) between perceived social support and life satisfaction. It supports the alternative hypothesis that higher perceived

support predicts increased satisfaction with life. Research findings are consistent with earlier studies showing that robust social networks particularly from family and peers, enhance psychological well-being (Harikandei, 2017).

Further, results suggested that mean score for perceived social support (M= 63.59, SD= 12.77) was higher than the mean score for life satisfaction (M= 21.56, SD= 6.232) indicating participants reported high level of perception of social support than satisfaction with life. This disparity suggests that while students may acknowledge presence of support system network, but it does not always equate to high life satisfaction. The findings are refuted by Seidman et al. (2006) who argued that higher perceived social support doesn't necessarily lead to better mental health outcomes. It can be seen as "mixed blessing" buffering negative outcomes for some and causing psychological suffering to others (Gleason et al., 2008)

The results evaluated the significance of supportive relationships with their closest environments (including immediate family, close friends, and other interpersonal ties) in promoting overall psychological well-being. Previous research studies have consistently revealed influence of personal tendencies and close relationships positively impacting the level of life satisfaction whereas gender, race and income show no significant relationship with it (Gokalp, 2019).

The findings are consistent with existing research indicating a positive correlation between perceived social support and life satisfaction (r=0.463, p<0.01). It implies students reporting high on PSS are more likely to experience greater life satisfaction and contentment. (Omar and Mutaz, 2018). This is further supported in a study by Jenkins et al. (2013) college students perceived a moderate amount of social support for their microsystem (as defined by Urie Bronfenbrenner). Given that university life is critical development period fostering support networks through counselling services and peer mentorship program can act as a protective factors in mitigating psychological distress. Future studies can be done to explore gender differences, role of digital support systems or cultural moderators influencing perception of support.

Limitations of the study

1. The sample size (N=103) is small limiting the generalizability of the study.
2. The study did not evaluate the gender differences between the variables.
3. Data was collected online using google forms limiting effectiveness of data.

Conclusion

According to the research that follows, a moderate positive correlation was observed between perceived social support (PSS) and life satisfaction (LS) meaning that as PSS extended, life satisfaction (LS) also increased. This research not only adds to existing research but further paves the way forward to explore how social support interacts with various dimensions of mental well-being fostering psychological well-being initiatives in universities. The finding shows the need to explore how low perception of social support can contribute to emotional and psychological distress in university students. Moreover, present research is suggestive of

the augmented need for the diverse samples and focus on mediating variables such as self-efficacy, resilience, optimism. It aims to gain deeper insight into exploring association between social support networks and mental hygiene in college going students. This is a critical area of inquiry, as strong support systems are often linked with buffering emotional and psychological distress and enhancing overall psychological well-being.

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