



Effect of Perceived Social Support on Life Satisfaction of University Students

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Abstract:

The purpose of the present study was to study the effects of perceived social support on the life satisfaction of university students. Gender differences of perceived social support and life satisfaction, among the participants were also investigated. The sample for the present study consisted of total of 100 male and female postgraduate students from four different departments of University of Delhi. The Perceived Social Support scales by Procidano & Heller and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin (1985) were administered to the participants. Results indicated no gender differences in perceived social support from family but a significant difference was found out for the perceived social support from friends. Also, it was found that female university students have a higher satisfaction with life as compared to male university students. Finally, the findings revealed that higher the levels of perceived social support from family and friends, the higher the life satisfaction. These findings will be useful in assisting educators, counselors, psychologist, and researchers to develop strategies to increase perceived social support in the students thereby enhancing their satisfaction with life.

Key words: perceived social support, life satisfaction, university students

Introduction

Social support can be described as providing of assistance or comfort to other people to help them cope with

a variety of problems. Support comes from interpersonal relationships, family members, neighbors, support groups, religious groups and friends. The mutual sharing of personal, social, or moral ideas by peers supports the individual and his/her social development (Turner, 1999). Regardless of the level of stress in the adolescent's life, social support sources positively affect the individual's adaptation in a positive way (Cohen & Wills 1985).

Contemporary research on the topic indicates that an individual's life satisfaction level (Duru 2007) are positively affected by an increased social support system. A definition by Colarossi (2001) showed that social support is a multifaceted construct. Colarossi explained that such construct includes disaggregation and specification across structural and functional dimensions. In sum, social support can be viewed as care, value and guidance provided from family, peer and community members (Dollete et al. 2006). Research has described social support as an expansive construct that describes the physical and emotional comfort given to individuals by their family, friends, and other significant persons in their lives (Israel & Schurman 1990).

Social support has also been shown to relate positively to students' satisfaction with their schooling experience (DeSantis King et al. 2006). Research consistently indicates that youth derive social support from a number of sources (e.g., parent/family, peers/classmates, and teachers), and social support from each source is associated with beneficial outcomes (Malecki & Demaray 2003).

In early childhood, parent support seems to be most salient to development. Perceptions of supportive family relationships have been linked with increase in indicators of wellness such as life satisfaction and subjective well being (i.e., happiness; Edwards & Lopez 2006; Suldo & Huebner 2006). Peer support has also been shown to correlate inversely with other indicators of internalizing psychopathology in adolescents

and co-occur with psychological wellness among adolescents (e.g., Suldo & Schaffer 2008). Likewise, researchers have begun to illustrate how positive perceptions of teacher support can promote mental wellness, such that greater perceptions of teacher support are associated with higher levels of life satisfaction (Suldo et al. 2008)

Social support often refers to “the existence or availability of people on whom we can rely, people who let us know that they care about, value, and love us” (Sarason et al. 1983, 127). Social support is correlated with many positive indices of physical and mental health, such as wound healing (DeVries et al. 2007), optimism (Sarason et al. 1983), happiness, and life satisfaction (Matheny et al. 2002). Satisfaction with life, in general, includes one’s whole life and the various dimensions of this life. Life satisfaction is defined as one’s positive evaluation of his whole life according to the criteria determined by the individual himself (Diener et al. 1984) and satisfaction with life is related with the fact that the individual’s experiences in the important life areas (school/college, job, family etc.) which create positive feelings are more than the experiences that create negative feelings (Diener 2000). High levels of life satisfaction have been associated with social-emotional outcomes such as lower rates of suicide attempts (Kim & Kim 2008), decreased substance use (Fergusson & Boden 2008), and greater parent-peer attachment (Ma & Huebner 2008).

Social support-seeking differs by gender. Under stress, women generally seek support more frequently than men (Matheny, Ashby, & Cupp 2005; Taylor et al. 2000). In a study of university students by Day and Livingstone (2003), women reported higher likelihoods of utilizing family and friend social support networks than males. A study by Fusilier, Ganster and Mayes (1986), showed that support from family and friends was virtually unrelated to life-satisfaction for women, but showed a positive relationship for men. However, more information is

needed to understand the role perceived stress plays in differential use of social support by gender.

University students represent the life stage of young adulthood characterized by unique developmental crises of trying to establish an identity, cope with increasing independence from parents, establish intimate relationships as well as increase their friendship commitments (Santrock 1997). Determining the college students who are at risk in getting low social support is important. It is also important to explore their perceived social support and helping them to understand importance of perceived social support for increasing their life satisfaction. The aim of the present research is to investigate how factors of perceived social support (family, friends) affect life satisfaction of the post graduate students of Delhi University. This study also studies the gender-related differences among these aforesaid relationships to determine if particular sources of support were more or less salient for one gender versus the other. The level of perceived social support one gets from the family and friends would determine the level of life satisfaction among the students.

Hypothesis

- The higher the level of perceived social support, higher will be the life satisfaction among university students.
- Perceived social support from family and friends will be greater in females than in males.
- Female university students will have a higher life satisfaction as compared to male students.

Methodology

Participants

A total sample of 100 postgraduate students from the University of Delhi was selected for the present study. Out of

these 100 students, 50 were male and the other remaining 50 were females. The participant's age range was between 22-25 years. The criteria for participation included informed consent from the participants and enrolment in a postgraduate course from University of Delhi. Persons with any significant psychopathology were excluded from the study

Research Design

The study used a correlation design, examining the relationship between variables. The variables of the study are perceived social support from family and friends which is operationally defined by the scores on the Perceived Social Support Scale (PSSS). The second variable is the life satisfaction of the students. The data collected is analyzed using an independent sample t-test to compare if there is significant difference between male and female participants in the above mentioned variables.

Measures

Perceived social support scale by Procidano & Heller (1983) and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin (1985)

Result

Table 1.1 Shows Perceived social support and satisfaction with life of participants according to gender (Note: *p<.05, **p<.01)

VARIABLE	GENDER	N	MEAN	SD	RANGE	t-test	Significance
Perceived social support from family(PSS-Fa)	Male	50	18.62	1.17	15-20	0.90	.929
	Female	50	18.64	1.04	16-20		

Perceived social support from friends(PSS-Fr)	Male	50	17.98	1.72	15-20	5.07	.000**
	Female	50	19.34	.79	17-20		
Life satisfaction	Male	50	20.38	2.84	15-28	3.96	.000**
	Female	50	23.24	4.25	12-34		

Table 1.2 Shows Inter-correlation among variables (Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1)Perceived social support from family-PSS(Fa)	-	.20*	.18	.09	.08	.19	.16	.24*
2)Perceived social support from friends- PSS(Fr)		-	.26**	.04	.06	.16	.17	.21*
3)Satisfaction with life-closeness to one's ideal(item 1)			-	.06	.16	.32**	.04	.54**
4)Satisfaction with life-life conditions(item 2)				-	.21*	.09	.18	.54**
5)Satisfaction with life-life satisfaction(item 3)					-	.08	.29**	.43**
6)Satisfaction with life-attainment of important things(item 4)						-	.13	.48**
7)Satisfaction with life-stability of life(item 5)							-	.60**
8)Satisfaction with life total								-

Discussion

The present study examined the perceived social support and life satisfaction level among the postgraduate university students. It was found that there was a significant relationship between perceived social support and their levels of satisfaction with life. The first hypothesis was supported by the significant positive correlation that was obtained between perceived social support and life satisfaction. This indicates that higher the participants' perceived social support, the higher is the satisfaction with life. Higher perceived social support will help students to have higher satisfaction with life compared to those who has lower perceived social support.

Based on the result from the present study, it was found that males differed significantly from females in terms of social support. It is seen that there was no significant difference between males and females participants for the perceived social support from family, but a significant difference was found out for the perceived social support from friends where female students report to have higher levels of perceived social support from friends as compared to males. Therefore, the second hypothesis which stated that perceived social support from family and friends will be greater in females than in males is supported. Results indicated that there is a significant difference in satisfaction with life among the students where female students were found to have higher levels of satisfaction with life than their male counterparts. Thus, the third hypothesis is also supported which states that female university students will have a higher satisfaction with life as compared to male students. It is seen that females have high levels of satisfaction with their life conditions, stability of life and feels oneself to their ideals. All these factors may seem to contribute to the overall satisfaction with life of female students as compared to male students. It is seen that various levels of perceived social support from peers and family members

affected the relationships between victimization and life satisfaction differentially, such that students who perceived high levels of both peer and parents social support exhibited the weakest association between victimization and life satisfaction, which suggests social support provides a strong buffer against the negative effects of bullying.

The current study also helps to understand how social support from friends and family would affect the life satisfaction of the postgraduate university students. The results suggest that when there is more social support from friends and family, students would have higher satisfaction with life. This supported the research finding that social support is a fundamental support for everyone and it effects how people can cope with their stressors (Dwyer & Cummings 2000). Transition to the university is in fact a major event that might worsen the emotional problems of students who are living away from home. They will become more stressed than studying in college. Participants with higher level of parental support will tend to have higher levels of happiness and less depressed than those with lower level of parental support (Holahan, et.al. 1995).

Social support such as advice and encouragement may increase the probability for students to become more prone play an active role in handling stress and problem solving, thus leading to high levels of life satisfaction among students. Hence, our finding which indicated that social support is related to better coping capability is of importance, especially in creating the awareness among parents and community on alternatives in handling stressors among students. If students have difficulty in handling these stressors, this will lead to low levels of life satisfaction among students.

Davis (1998) also found that ‘friends’ accounted for the most powerful associations with wellbeing in comparison to family. Having the support of friends was associated with lower perceived stress and higher satisfaction with life. Close friends

possibly because of their proximity and availability may provide more immediate need to seek out emotional support (i.e. sympathy) and positive reframing (i.e. making the best of the situation) as well as needs for venting and distraction or denial.

For college students, the sense that they are loved, cared for and supported by friends, family members and others can make a significant difference in their overall wellbeing, especially in regard to depression and anxiety.

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