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Original Article

Exploring the Interplay of Psychological Well-Being and Social Support among Adolescents: A gender Perspective

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between psychological well-being (PWB) and perceived social support among adolescent students, with a focus on gender differences and the interaction effects of gender and social support. A total of 200 students from 10th and 11th grades across four schools in Amritsar participated in the research. The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) was employed to assess perceived support from family, friends, and significant others, while PWB was measured using Ryff's 42-item scale. Descriptive analyses revealed that students reported moderate levels of social support and PWB. Correlation analyses indicated significant positive relationships between PWB and all three sources of social support, with significant other support showing the strongest correlation. ANOVA results demonstrated no significant differences in PWB based on gender, suggesting that both boys and girls experience similar levels of psychological well-being. Furthermore, no significant interaction effects between gender and social support on PWB were found. These findings underscore the importance of perceived social support in enhancing adolescent well-being, irrespective of gender. The study highlights the need for interventions that foster supportive relationships among adolescents to promote their psychological health.

Keywords: *Social Support, Psychological Well-being, Gender, Positive psychology, well-being, Family Support, Friend Support, Significant Other Support.*

Introduction

Positive psychology is becoming more and more popular since it emphasizes an individual's strengths and promotes healthy growth (Arslan & Coşkun, 2020; Masoom Ali et al., 2020). Instead of addressing the negative aspects of a person's life, positive psychology seeks to improve their quality of life in this context (Seligman, 2002; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). The discipline of positive psychology investigates human development-related conditions and experiences. Along with overcoming obstacles in life, positive psychology entails fostering positive traits and alterations within the individual. Positive psychology places greater emphasis on a person's strengths and capacities than on their flaws (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Studies on positive psychology have remarkably accelerated in recent years (Tanhan, 2020; Lucas, Diener, & Suh, 1996; Ryan & Deci, 2001). In this context, the stream of research focuses increasingly on topics like happiness (Deci & Ryan, 2001), well-being (Arslan, 2018; Meléndez, Satorres, Cujio, & Reyes, 2019; Tanhan, 2019; Yldrm & Belen, 2018). An important area of research is examining how positive psychology affects adolescents' ability to contribute significantly to their communities. On the basis of this notion, the present study design was created. The term "well-being" refers to advanced psychological experience and function. Diener, Pressman, Hunter, and Delgadillo Chase (2017) and Kansky & Diener (2017) stated that well-being encompasses a wide range of aspects, including creativity, strong work motivation, strong social ties, physical health and life expectancy, as well as efficient coping mechanisms and performance (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Here, psychological and subjective well-being are the two main pillars of well-being. While subjective well-being, which is more focused on self-well-being, is associated with functions brought rather than the size of one's own, psychological well-being primarily focuses on happiness and is defined as avoiding pain and achieving well-being (Diener, 1984; Ryan & Deci, 2001).

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In order to demonstrate one's individual equipment about the circumstances one encounters, a person must be in good psychological health (Diener, 1984). Emotional, physical, cognitive, spiritual, personal, and social processes are all connected to psychological well-being (Roothman, Kirsten, & Wissing, 2003; Srivastava, S., & Srivastava, A., 2023). The six dimensions of psychological well-being serve as its foundation. These consist of fulfilling interpersonal connections, a sense of direction and personal development, acceptance of oneself, independence, and environmental mastery (Ryff, 1989). Social support takes place in the emotional dimension (Diener, 1984; Diener & Diener, 1996).

Within the literature, researchers have vigorously examined a wide range of variables that test the importance of social support for adolescents' psychological well-being. Social support could act as a protective factor and play an important role in psychological well-being among adolescents (Poudel, A., Gurung, B., & Khanal, G.P., 2020). Several theoretical models and frameworks have been presented to understand the process, such as attachment theory and self-determination theory, whereby Social Support affects Psychological well-being.

Determination of what social support entails involves a large number of diverse definitions; there is a great consensus on what the concept of social support means (Barrera, 1986). Cobb (1976) described social support as a person's perception of being cared for, loved, and appreciated, and also of being connected to a network of people in case of need. Barrera (1986) understands the perception of support as a cognitive and subjective appraisal that gives a person the confidence to depend on someone else's help under given circumstances. Social support is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct encompassing physical and instrumental assistance, attitude transmission, resource and information sharing, and emotional and psychological support (Lopez & Salas, 2006; Mawdsley, H. P., 2010). While conceptualizing social support, two main perspectives can be outlined (Cohen & Wills, 1985): the main-effect model and the buffering model. The main-effect model considers the concept as a coping strategy, and the actual use of the support (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989; Frydenberg & Lewis, 1993; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Moos, 1993). The second one stresses the perception of support and its role as a coping resource to prevent and reduce the negative effects that different adverse situations might cause on the individual (Malecki & Demaray, 2002).

When talking about social support, the focus is placed on the main model and not on the buffering-effect model (Streeter & Franklin, 1992). Accordingly, the present research enrolls the main model of social support. The main-effect theory advocates that social support has a positive benefit for all children and adolescents regardless of any specific stressors or risk circumstances (Cohen et al., 2000; Cohen & Wills, 1985). The main-effect model suggests that access to social support improves students' overall psychological well-being and therefore reduces psychological problems (Cohen et al., 2000). The beneficial effects of social support from different sources like family, friends, etc, on psychological well-being have been established over decades of research (Shin & Park, 2022). Research has consistently shown that adolescents with close and supportive friends and family have greater psychological well-being (Fritz et al., 2018; Gorrese, A., & Ruggieri, R., 2013; Helsen, M., Vollebergh, W., & Meeus, W., 2000). On the other hand lack of social support has been led to emotional disturbances i. e. depressive symptoms; led to stresses related to interpersonal relationships (eg. conflicts with parents, siblings and peers), financial pressure and school performance (eg. academic failure, low achievement) (Williamson D, et. all, 2003).

Current Study:

Specifically, the present study formulated following hypotheses:

1. There is no significant relationship between psychological well-being and social support i.e., Family support, Friend Support, and Significant other support) of adolescent students.
2. (a) There is no significant difference in the psychological well-being of adolescent students with respect to gender.

(b)There is no significant difference in the psychological well-being of adolescent students with respect to social support.

(c)There is no significant interaction effect of gender and social support on the psychological well-being of adolescent students.

Method:

Research Design: The study falls under the domain of descriptive research as it intends to study psychological well-being among adolescents in relation to their Social Support and Gender

Participants and Procedure: Based on a convenience sampling method, a total of 200 10th and 11th-class adolescent students from four private and government schools in Amritsar city were involved in the study.

Measures:

Social Support:

Items measuring Friend support, Family support, and significant other support from the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) by Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, and Farley(1988) were used to measure social support as perceived by adolescents. The scale includes 12 items, and students responded to items by providing a frequency rating on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 7 (very strongly agree). Subscale scores for Friend support, Family support, and significant other support were calculated by averaging Friend support, Family support, and significant other support items separately, with higher scores indicating higher perceived support. The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) has high reliability and good factorial validity.

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Psychological Well-being:

Developed by psychologist Carol D. Ryff, the 42-item Psychological Well-being (PWB) Scale (Ryff et al., 2007; adapted from Ryff, 1989) was used in the present study. Participants rate how strongly they agree or disagree with 42 statements using a 7-point scale (1 = strongly agree; 7 = strongly disagree).

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 showed that there was no non-normality in the data. All variables in the present study demonstrated values well below the levels (Univariate skewness of 2.0 and higher and kurtosis of 7.0 and higher is considered moderate. This coefficient suggests that the data are robust and will not create problems in analyses (Lei & Lomax, 2005; Kline, 2005; Curran et al., 1996; West et al., 1995; Chou & Bentler, 1995).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for the observed variables based on the original sample

Variable	n	M	SD	Skew	Kurt
Family support	200	4.57	1.947	-.433	-.956
Friend Support	200	3.40	1.601	0.815	0.349
Significant Other Support	200	4.23	2.327	-.190	1.565
PWB	200	4.22	2.07	-.641	1.329

PWB: Psychological well-being

HYPOTHESIS-I

There is no significant relationship between psychological well-being and social support i.e., Family support, Friend Support, and Significant other Support) of adolescent students.

Table 2: Correlations for the observed variables (N = 200)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
Family support	_				
Friend Support	0.118	_			
Significant Other Support	0.427	0.121	_		
Social Support		0.212	0.172	0.132	_
PWB	0.259	-0.043	0.095	.361	_

PWB: Psychological well-being

** p<.01

Correlation analyses of all study variables, which are presented in Table 2, show that the relations between Psychological well-being and the predictor variables were almost positive and significant at the p<.01 level. Of the three social supports, adolescents' significant other support had the strongest correlation with psychological well-being (r = .36). Thus, null hypothesis; "There is no significant relationship between psychological well-being and social support i.e., Family support, Friend Support, and Significant other Support) of adolescent students." was rejected. It means there is a significant relationship between psychological well-being and social support of adolescent students.

Hypothesis-II

2. (a) There is no significant difference in the psychological well-being of adolescent students with respect to gender.

(b)There is no significant difference in the psychological well-being of adolescent students with respect to social support.

(c)There is no significant interaction effect of gender and social support on the psychological well-being of adolescent students.

The result of this analysis is being reported in Table 2

TABLE 3 Variables	
Social Support	**Gender**

	Boys		Girls		Total		
N		MEAN	SD	N	MEAN	SD	MEAN	SD
High Social Support	37	187.49	21.742	17	189.65	18.645	188.57	20.19
Average Social	56	182.51	23.787	37	183.46	19.944	182.98	21.86

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Support								
Low Social Support	27	175.14	25.420	26	178.77	23.585	176.95	24.5
Total	200	182.33	23.808	80	183.25	21.051	182.83	22.18

TABLE-4

Summary Of Analysis Of Variance (Type Of Family X Self Concept) On Psychological Well Being Source	**Type 111 sum of squares**	**Df**	**Mean square**	**F**	**Sig.**
Gender	221.168	1	221.168	.434	.511
Social support	3389.332	2	1694.666	3.327	.038
Gender* Social support	60.323	2	30.161	.059	.943
Error	98896.104	194	509.310		
Total	6777991.000	200			
Corrected total	102498.395	199			

Level of significance 0.05

From table 4, it can be seen that the f-value for the main effect of type of Gender (A) on psychological well-being of adolescents came out to be .434, which is insignificant at the 0.05 level of significance. It indicates that adolescents didn't differ significantly on psychological well-being across Gender. So, the hypothesis" There is no significant difference in well-being of adolescent students with respect to Gender" is accepted.

(b)There is no significant interaction effect of Gender and social support on the psychological well-being of adolescent students. The result of this analysis is reported in Table 3.

From Table 4, it can be seen that the F-value for the interaction effect of Gender and social support of adolescents came out to be .059, which is insignificant at the 0.05 level. This indicates that the interaction effect of Gender is independent of the social support. Hence, the hypothesis: "There is no significant interaction effect of Gender and social support on psychological well-being of adolescent students" is accepted.

Discussion:

The present study aimed to explore the relationship between psychological well-being (PWB) and perceived social support among adolescent students, with a focus on gender differences and the interaction effects of gender and social support. The findings revealed significant positive relationships between PWB and all three sources of social support—family, friends, and significant others—indicating that adolescents who perceive higher levels of support in these areas tend to report better psychological well-being. Among these, support from significant others exhibited the strongest correlation with PWB.

Contrary to expectations, the study found no significant differences in PWB based on gender, suggesting that both boys and girls experience similar levels of psychological well-being. Additionally, no significant interaction effects between gender and social support on PWB were observed, indicating that the relationship between social support and PWB is consistent across genders.

Conclusion

These findings align with previous research highlighting the importance of social support in enhancing adolescent well-being. For instance, studies have consistently shown that adolescents with close and supportive relationships with family, friends, and significant others report higher levels of psychological well-being. The absence of gender differences in PWB suggests that the benefits of social support are equally accessible to both boys and girls.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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