A Review of the Influence of Social Support on the Subjective Well-Being of College Students

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Abstract. The study of subjective well-being is becoming ever more prevalent, and as a result, more emphasis is being paid to the intimate connection that exists between social support and subjective well-being. As a result, the purpose of this work is to investigate the influence that social support has on one's sense of well-being, with college students serving as the research participants. According to the findings, the subjective well-being of college students is directly affected by both the level of subjective support and the practice of seeking assistance from others. Subjective well-being is a positive feeling in the human mind, which is a major factor reflecting the quality of human life. In this work, an effort is made to provide a complete description of the influence that social support has on the subjective well-being of college students as well as the associated process. In addition, this study discusses the current research state and future research objectives in this field and proposes new thinking methods and viewpoints for future scientific research, which endows great significance on the overall healthy development of college students.

Keywords: College students; social support; subjective well-being.

1. Introduction

With the phase development and continuous exploration of positive psychology, the research focus in the field of psychology has gradually transitioned from pathological factors to psychological factors, such as subjective well-being. As stated in the universal concept Dinner proposed in 2006, subjective well-being mainly refers to the overall emotional and cognitive judgment of individuals about their quality of life. From this perspective, human happiness is judged through the emotional understanding and cognitive treatment of individuals about the events they have experienced rather than by the amount of specific experience. For teenagers, the college experience has a great influence on subjective well-being. Bewick et al. [1] found that the level of distress experienced by students after registration at university is the highest over their lifetime, peaking during the first semester and remaining steadily higher than pre-university levels. During this same time period, Kahn and Antonucci came to the conclusion that a significant contributor to an individual's sense of well-being is their level of social support[2]. In a similar vein, the research conducted by Meehan and colleagues found that people' good feelings were positively connected with the amount of social support they received [3]. The findings of the study conducted in China are in line with those found at western academic institutions. In 1999, Lu conducted research on students ranging in age from 18 to 65 and found that the level of social support had a favorable correlation with both happiness and overall life satisfaction [4].

However, the previous studies primarily focus on the correlation between single psychological factors and subjective well-being and do not comprehensively explore the related social and internal influencing factors. In the current competitive society, college students also bear tremendous academic pressure and occupational pressure, accompanied by possible interpersonal problems, which contribute to their frequent mental health problems. This review makes an attempt to explore, from the perspective of social support, the beneficial influence that social support has on both the objective and subjective well-being of college students. Moreover, this review explores the interaction of the three functions with intermediary social functions and expects to enrich the research in this aspect, therefore making comparable social contributions to the formation of social values and the improvement of the happiness of Chinese college students.

2. Method

The used databases included in this review were Google Scholar, Web of Science, and CNKI. Keywords entered as follows: “social support,” “subjective well-being,” and “instrumental support.” Moreover, the screening annotated version was as follows: (1) refers to the main variables of social support and subjective well-being; (2) college/university students.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Definition and Theory

3.1.1 Social support

There is some evidence that college students' subjective well-being may be affected by social support, which can take several forms, including emotional, instrumental, informational, and evaluative assistance. According to Pratt [5], the kind of the social support that college students get may influence their sense of well-being in a number of different ways. To begin, receiving emotional support from others has the potential to bolster an individual's self-esteem, which is defined as the conviction that one's person and body are deserving of care and protection. This, in turn, encourages people to take responsibility for their own health by implementing various programs. Second, the availability of instrumental accompaniment may make the practice of well-being more accessible by making it easier to turn intentions into actions. Third, informational support also includes well-being education, which consists of providing recommendations for healthy behaviors, the development of information-seeking coping strategies, and the use of these in decision-making concerning an individual's subjective well-being. Fourth, evaluative assistance may sometimes take the form of behavioral coaching, which can boost an individual's drive to look out for their own health. According to the buffering hypothesis, persons who are confronted with life stresses benefit far more from having a strong social support system. The negative impacts of stress on one's wellbeing may be mitigated by the provision of social assistance..

3.1.2 Subjective well-being

A person's subjective well-being may be broken down into two parts: the emotive and the cognitive components. To be more specific, affective components include both happy and negative feelings [6]. Note: Individuals' life satisfaction, or the propensity to report being satisfied with different facets of one's life, is another topic that is addressed by cognitive components. This topic is described as the tendency to report being satisfied with various elements of one's life [7-12].

3.2 Three Types of Social Support about the Subjective Well-Being of College Students

The sources of social support are variable because individuals are a social group. Moreover, the channels of community support are diverse for all social-status groups. As a result, the research and discussion on the relationship between social support and the subjective well-being of college students should focus on the various forms of social support obtained by individuals instead of the types of social support. Cheng [13] found that significant gender differences may exist in the relationship between the type of support and outcomes. Although few studies suggest that researchers should focus on the type and source of support and their relationships with outcomes when they investigate social support in college students.

3.2.1 Instrumental support

The meaning of the term "tool" dates back to medieval Latin and literally translates to "tool or implement." The term may be broken down into its component parts to reveal that its literal meaning is "to construct." In addition, the Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the term as "important in accomplishing some outcome or objective," while the Tabers Medical Dictionary describes the term as "important in achieving some result or aim." Curiously, the common theme that runs across all

definitions is that of bringing about change and indicating the process of putting that change into effect or transformation.

Instrumental assistance consists of resources such as spending time with someone, supplying them with things or money, and spending time with them in general. In 2021, Li conducted research on the connection between the subjective well-being of college students and the social support they receive, and his findings showed that the subjective well-being of today's college students is primarily influenced by three factors: their birthplace, the one-child policy in their country, and the number of friends they have, and the monthly income of parents, among which economic reasons remain the most crucial factor[14]. This study also exhibited that students from urban areas with relatively higher monthly household incomes tend to have a higher happiness index than college students from rural areas and non-only children due to their relatively better material conditions. Specific social support, such as financial help and material resources, can be highly instrumental in increasing the subjective well-being of college students.

3.2.2 Emotional Support

To be more specific, sentiments of trust and love are the components that make up emotional support. Surprisingly, it was observed from research that emotional support is the most important factor contributing to the subjective well-being of college students among all types of support. Chou conducted a survey of 475 young people in Hong Kong [15]. The results demonstrated that the evaluation of individuals about their relationship with friends could predict the relationship between their subjective well-being and its dimensions and that individuals' levels of happy mood were shown to be positively connected with the number of close friends they had. Furthermore, the same conclusion was obtained by the research of Christine and Michelle in 2003, which investigated the adjustments of students for emotion, information, assessment, and tool support [16]. As shown in this study, emotional support is the form of assistance felt from instructors that appears to be most closely associated to student achievement, and emotional support experienced from teachers is a strong and unique individual predictor of students' social skills and academic competence. In 2010, GülaçtÕ found that the social support is regarded as coming from one's family is a strong predictor of one's subjective well-being [17]. On the other hand, the social support that is perceived as coming from a unique individual or a close friend is not a predictor.

3.3 Mechanism of the Impacts of Social Support on the Subjective Well-Being of College Students

3.3.1 Internal factors

It has been shown in a number of earlier research that the association between social support and subjective well-being among college students is moderated by a variety of characteristics, including self-esteem and individual control, depression, views about fairness, and self-harmony. For instance, Yan et al. carried out a series of investigations on the impact of low self-esteem, lack of individual control, and depression on social support and individual levels of subjective well-being among college students[18]. The research results of Das et al. showed that self-esteem, individual control, and depression reduced the explanatory capacity of social support factors on the overall subjective well-being of individuals, respectively, suggesting that these three factors are the regulatory factors of social support-produced subjective well-being[19]. Additional research has shown that a combination of depressive symptoms and the ability to self-regulate also acts as a moderator in the association between social support and an individual's subjective well-being. Similarly, a belief in a fair world has an impact on how college students view the social support they get from their peers. For instance, the study done by Li et al. found that negative emotions had a strong positive correlation with community support, family satisfaction, and good emotions, but a clear inverse correlation with the conviction that the world is basically fair[20]. Belief in a just world was shown to have a partial bridge impact on the subjective well-being of college students who had social support, as was discovered by Correia, who also investigated the function of justice belief in the link between social

support and subjective well-being [21]. The perception that the world is fair is one of the ways in which college students' subjective well-being may be negatively impacted, not just directly but also indirectly by the presence of social support. In their study of 618 college students, Yang et al. came to the conclusion that social support has a significant positive impact on both the self-harmony and the subjective well-being of college students, and that it also has an indirect impact on the subjective well-being of college students through their self-harmony[22]. The primary and moderating impacts of self-harmony were readily apparent, although the effect that served as a moderator was not readily apparent. It was discovered that self-harmony not only impacts the subjective well-being of college students in a direct manner, but also does so in an indirect manner under particular social settings. However, it does not affect the mutual relationship and direction between social support and subjective well-being.

3.3.2 External factors

Through the research on the influence of subjective well-being, Luo noted that social support is a significant mediating factor which exerts the strongest positive effect on subjective well-being [23]. Meanwhile, he also observed that the gender difference in subjective well-being (females are significantly more than males) is all reflected through social support, which may even allow women to “receive” and “give” social support to have additive, rather than counteracting, effects on their sense of dignity, workability, and subjective well-being. Of course, this hypothesis calls for further investigation. In addition, the experimental results also revealed that educational ability could mediate the subjective well-being of students through social support. Another result from the study of Chen and his colleagues , the phenomenon “extraversion does lead to greater social support,” was also cross-tested[24]. Higher education can contribute to a satisfactory career, social control increase, and better family, and other social support, all of which can elevate the subjective well-being of individuals. Nevertheless, due to the relatively few research data in this field, this conclusion warrants to be further empirically tested. Meanwhile, the research of Wang et al. demonstrated that the mobile phone dependence behavior of college students as an input variable not only affected the happiness of subjects but also indirectly influenced the subjective well-being of college students through perceived social support (including instrumental support, affective support, and information support) [25]. Specifically, when college students are highly dependent on mobile phones, they feel less social support, which can reduce their subjective well-being, and vice versa when college students are lowly dependent on mobile phones. In conclusion, the regulating aspects of the effect of social support on the subjective well-being of college students still need to be further experimentally studied by researchers. This may be done via the use of research methods such as surveys and interviews.

4. Limitations and Implications

There is still a lack of a clear definition of the relationship among the three. Previous empirical studies have focused on a specific population. In order to illustrate the connection between social support and an individual's perception of their own well-being, the author of this essay focused specifically on college students. Therefore, it is relatively one-sided. It is crucial to take into account various social groups in future scientific studies to test and prove whether scientific research conclusions of different groups can be popularized among ordinary urban residents and whether their conclusions are universal. Finally, a more integrated model is warranted to be constructed in future research. Spending an excessive amount of time with one's family has a direct negative effect on one's subjective well-being in our nation. Additionally, having experiences with a particular person and receiving support from friends might have an indirect negative effect on one's subjective well-being. As a result, research into the enhancement of the quality of these interaction processes is something that may be done, particularly in the context of university experiences.

5. Conclusion

This review makes an attempt to analyze the influence that various forms of social support have on the subjective well-being of college students, as well as the related mechanisms, which include self-esteem, depression, self-control, and belief in a just world, as well as the internal factors such as self-harmony, age, and education levels, and the external factors such as mobile phone dependence, which contribute to the argument.

No correlation has been documented between the various forms of social support and the subjective well-being of college students, and there has also been no experimental research done to evaluate the potential for a causal relationship between these two factors. It is possible to draw the conclusion that the relationship between subjective well-being, social interaction, and social support is more complicated than was previously believed based on the findings of this study. Even though it is widely acknowledged that there is a two-way connection between one's subjective well-being and their level of social acceptance, the question of whether or not one's subjective well-being is the cause of their level of social relationship, support, and contact needs to be investigated. Alternatively, it could be that their level of social relationship, support, and contact is the cause of their level of subjective well-being.

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