

## EFFECT OF PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT ON SELF ESTEEM AND LIFE SATISFACTION OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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**Abstract:** The purpose of the present study was to study the effect of perceived social support on self-esteem and life satisfaction of university students. Gender differences of perceived social support, self-esteem and life satisfaction, among the participants were also investigated. The sample for the present study consisted of total of 100 participants 50 male and 50 female undergraduate/graduate/postgraduate students from University of Karachi. Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet et al., 1988), Self - esteem Scale (Rosenberg, M. (1965), and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin (1985) were administered to the participants. Results indicated no significant differences in perceived social support from family gender 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 but self-esteem among the gender has no difference. Finally, the findings revealed that higher the level of perceived social support has higher self-esteem but lower 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, self-esteem, life satisfaction, university students

### Introduction

Positive psychology has stimulated a growing interest in the studies of well-being (Diener, 1984; Snyder & McCullough, 2000; Schimuck Sheldon, 2001). According to Diener, (1984) well-being is the combination of positive thoughts and feelings about one's life which has both emotional and cognitive aspects. Myers and Diener (1995) concluded that psychological factor such as esteem, relations and cultures are the predictors of well-being than the demographic variables i.e. age, sex, income etc. Social support plays an important role in promoting well-being (Kaufmann & Beehr, 1989; Sarason, Sarason, & Pierce, 1990) received from different sources. The individual's interactions within the family, peers and other people around him can not only motivate him positively (Warr, 1987) but, it can also create negative effects. Social support is the care, value and guidance provided from family, peer and community members (Dollete et al. 2004). Social support can be defined as the support which is taken from family, friends, neighbors and institutions which enhance the psychological

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dynamics, and help the individual in the aspects of affective, physical, cognitive contribution (Tan and Karabulut, 2005).

Social support has a significant role in the lives of adolescents (Batool & Alay 2013) that provides individuals personal competence, emotional balance, life satisfaction and psychological well-being (Sorias 1988a). Social support has three components i.e. Social integration, provided social support and perceived social support (Barrera 1986). According to Vaux (1990) perceived social support is subjective evaluation of resources received in a given situation and its felt appropriateness and satisfaction. Therefore, perceived social support is more important than received social support (Wethington & Kessler 1986). Mere perception of social support can act as a buffer for individual facing stressful life situations (Cohen & Wills 1985).

Perceived social support refers to perception and belief about the quality of social relationships is available to them as and when required (House, Umberson, and Landis 1988). These provisions are usually fulfilled by family members, friends and significant others (Armstrong, Brinie-Lefcowich, & Ungar, 2005; Hale, Hannum & Espelage, 2005). However, one's perception of social support may influence by individual differences (Stokes, 1985). Parental support for children provides much needed social support (Brehaut, et al., 2004). For the youth, family support is the most important element in their lives. Parental guidance, support and encouragement are essential part of their growth experience (Stice, Ragan, & Randall, 2004). Strong familial relationships and high social support make them happier and increase their subjective well-being (Diener & Tay, 2010).

Holahan, Valentier, and Moos (1995) reported that the students with higher levels of perceived parental support scored higher on well-being and happiness and showed less depression and anxiety than students with low perceived parental support. Social support-seeking differs by gender, women generally seek support more frequently than men (Matheny, Ashby, & Cupp 2005; Taylor et al. 2000). In a study on university students by Day and Livingstone (2003), women reported higher likelihoods of utilizing family and friend social support networks than males, similarly women report more support from parents and friends than male (Ogus, Greenglass, & Burke, 1990; Olsen & Shultz, 1994). 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.

### **Perceived Social Support and Self Esteem**

Self-esteem as one of the important concepts during adolescence is highly influenced by interaction with other people (Harter, 1993). Self-esteem is a developed attitude about one's personality (Kaya & Sa'kes, 2004) and is an important factor in directing behavior throughout the various aspects of life (Hamarta, 2004). According to Rafi (1999) self-esteem is the individual's private feelings towards self that are derived from one's perceptions and appraisals different attributes of self. Rosenberg (1965) classified self-esteem as positive

and negative views in the self-evaluation of an individual as valuable. In this respect, social support is an important factor for the formation of self-esteem during adolescence (Rosenberg, 1981). It is well known that the relationship of parents and peers with the adolescent supports the development of self-esteem (Hoffman, Ushpiz, & Levy-Shiff, 1988; Kulaks?zoglu, 2001).

According to Coopersmith (1967), the attention an individual receives from other people and the degree of acceptance and respect s/he feels have a role in self-esteem development. High self-esteem makes an individual much more effective, happy, successful, and confident when interacting with the environment. Self-esteem research on the parent-child relationship indicates that, for children and adolescents who come from more democratic family structures where parental attitudes are perceived tolerantly, the level of self-esteem and self-acceptance is higher (Gucray, 1989; Gungor, 1989).

House, Umberson, and Landis (1988) suggested that social support is the quality of social relationships as perceived by an individual. Pinqart and S?rensen (2000) found that life satisfaction, self-esteem, and happiness showed a stronger relationship with ratings of social contact quality than with social contact quantity. Similar findings were found by Allison et al. (2009) that increase in social support will increase the self-esteem of an individual.

An individual's self-esteem will depend on either internal or external factors. Basing self-esteem on internal characteristics i.e. being loved, attractive, and competent, provides a better buffer against anxiety than if it were based on external characteristics, including achievements and conditional approval from others (Crocker et al., 2003). Kim, Sherman, and Taylor (2008) found that social support is one of the most effective methods to help cope with stressful life situations. The positive effect of relationships is derived from the sating of a need for belongingness, acceptance, and caring (Semmer et al., 2008).

Gecas (1972) discovered that adolescents' self-esteem was higher in a social context than in the classroom. Wong et al. (2002) added that students need to be provided with an environment that will maintain and increase their sense of competence. Like the self-fulfilling prophecy, when students are led to believe they can achieve, they will try harder to perform at higher levels (Wong et al., 2002). Social acceptance, social approval, and social support give individuals a sense of social identity. Social identity is strongly related to collective self-esteem (Foels & Tomcho, 2005). Robinson (1995) found that approval from parents, friends, and teachers is highly related to self-esteem than emotional support.

### **Perceived Social support and Life Satisfaction**

Life satisfaction is a general affective and reflective attitude towards life. It can be defined as a person's subjective, global evaluation of the positivity of her/his life as a whole or with specific life domains (e.g., family life, school experiences) (Diener et al. 1999). Life satisfaction is a structure that is more stable than the sensory experiences, although not as permanent as the will of life on one hand (Czapi?ski, 2004) and the quality of life (Nettle, 2005) on the other. Life-

satisfaction is often described as a three-dimensional construct comprising: the level of life satisfaction, positive affect and a lack of negative affect (Diener, Oishi, Lucas, 2003).

Contemporary research on the topic indicates that an individual's life satisfaction level (Duru 2007) is positively affected by an increased social support system. 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). 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). 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 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 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 (Ferguson & Boden 2008), and greater parent-peer attachment (Ma & Huebner 2008).

Social support, both in the structural and functional dimension appears, therefore, to be an important interpersonal relationships factor in shaping life satisfaction. One of the aspects of structural social support is the satisfaction with interpersonal relationships at different levels of kinship and intimacy. The satisfaction with the interpersonal relationships especially within married couples and relationships with friends takes the highest or nearly the highest place among the conditions for happiness (Social Diagnosis 2005; 2009) and loneliness is negatively correlated with positive emotions and life-satisfaction (Argyle, 2001).

### **Self-esteem and Life Satisfaction**

Self-esteem and Life Satisfaction are related constructs which are likely to change and vary with gender and age during adolescence based on the impact of development shift, transitions and challenges occurring in this period (Goldbeck et al. 2007). Diener and Diener (1995) showed that the link between self-esteem and life satisfaction is relatively weaker in collectivistic cultures. Contrary to that, Sylvia et al (2006) concluded self-esteem as an important and significant predictor of life satisfaction in the Chinese culture. Several studies found that self-esteem plays a definite role in influencing life satisfaction. Adolescents showed

positive correlation between self-esteem and perceived quality of life (Huebner, 1991; Dew & Huebner, 1994; Furnham & Cheng, 2000).

Determining the college/university 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 self-esteem and life satisfaction. The aim of the present research is to investigate how factors of perceived social support (family, friends) affect self-esteem and life satisfaction of the post graduate students of Karachi 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 esteem and life satisfaction among the students.

#### *Hypothesis*

1. University students perceiving positive social support are likely to have high self-esteem and life satisfaction.
2. Perceived social support from family and friends will be greater in females than in males.
3. Self-esteem of male university students will be higher than the female students
4. Female university students will have a higher life satisfaction as compared to male students.

#### *METHOD*

##### *Participants*

A total sample of 100 undergraduate/graduate/postgraduate students from the University of Karachi was selected for the present study through convenient sampling. Out of these 100 students, 50 were male and the other remaining 50 were females. The participant's age range was between 18-25 years. The criteria for participation included informed consent from the participants and enrolment in undergraduate/graduate/postgraduate courses from University of Karachi.

##### **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 Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS). The second variable is Self-esteem and third 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 (PSS): The degree of PSS was measured using the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; Zimet et al. 1988). The MSPSS has been shown to be psychometrically sound with coefficient alphas for the subscales range from .85 to .91 and test-retest correlations ranging from .75 to .85 (Dahlem, Zimet, Walker, 1991; Zimet et al. 1988). This scale has

been translated into several languages including Turkish (Eker & Arkar, 1995), Chinese (Chou, 2000) and Urdu (Rizwan & Aftab, 2009). The MSPSS consists of 12-items that measures social support from three domains: family, friends, and a significant others. Respondents used a seven-point Likert scale that ranged from one (very strongly disagree) to seven (very strongly agree). Higher scores suggest higher perceived social support.

**Self-esteem Scale:**The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, a widely used self-report instrument for evaluating individual self-esteem, was investigated using item response theory. Factor analysis identified a single common factor, contrary to some previous studies that extracted separate Self-Confidence and Self-Depreciation factors. A one-dimensional model for graded item responses was fit to the data. A model that constrained the 10 items to equal discrimination was contrasted with a model allowing the discriminations to be estimated freely. The test of significance indicated that the unconstrained model better fit the data—that is, the 10 items of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale are not equally discriminating and are differentially related to self-esteem. The pattern of functioning of the items was examined with respect to their content, and observations are offered with implications for validating and developing future personality instruments. Scoring: Items 2, 5, 6, 8, 9 are reverse scored. Give "Strongly Disagree" 1 point, "Disagree" 2 points, "Agree" 3 points, and "Strongly Agree" 4 points. Sum scores for all ten items. Keep scores on a continuous scale. Higher scores indicate higher self-esteem.

**Satisfaction with Life Scale:**SWLS was developed to measure global life satisfaction, i.e. life satisfaction as a whole no specific domains are named within the scale and items are not specific in nature, the respondent remains free to consider the life domains or affective components he or she feels make the most important contribution to their subjective experience of happiness (Diener et al. 1985, Pavot and Diener 1993, Arrindell et al. 1999). It consists of five synonymous statements. Respondents are instructed to rate each item using a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Item ratings are summed to provide a total score ranging from 5 - 35 where higher scores are indicative of greater life satisfaction. The alpha co-efficient value ( $\alpha = 0.84$ ) shows the reliability of the scale and also hashigh internally consistent of the scale ( $\alpha = 0.87$ ). The scale is short and simple to administer and score. It can easily be added to assessments using multiple measures with no significant increase in time (Pavot et al. 1991).

#### **Procedure:**

In the present study 100 participants were approached among them 50 male and 50 female between the age group of 18 to 25 years through continent sampling from the various departments of University of Karachi. All the participants of the study were informed individually about the purpose of the study and written consent of the participants were obtained. Perceived social support, self-esteem and life satisfaction scales were administered. The data collected is statistically analyzed using SPSS. For the analysis of scores statistical

methods, mean, standard deviation, Pearson Product moment correlation and t-test were computed.

**Results:**

**Table 1: Shows Perceived social support, self-esteem and satisfaction with life of participants**

	Self-Esteem	Life Satisfaction
Perceived Social Support	.577**	.370**

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Table 2:Shows difference perceived social support from family and friends among male and female participants.**

	Male		Female		T	Significance
	M	SD	M	SD		
PSS_Family	20.54	4.941	22.68	4.573	-2.247	.027*
PSS_Friends	18.48	5.246	21.78	5.358	-3.112	.002**

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Table 3: Shows difference on self-esteem among male and female participants.**

	Male		Female		T	Significance
	M	SD	M	SD		
Self-Esteem	97.92	10.930	101.18	12.836	-1.367	.175

**Table 4:Shows difference on life satisfaction among male and female participants.**

	Male		Female		T	Significance
	M	SD	M	SD		
Life Satisfaction	21.10	6.482	22.30	6.225	-.944	.347

**Discussion**

According to the results analysis obtained from this present study, we can conclude that there is a correlation amongst the three inventories used, which are Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), Self-Esteem Scale by Rosenberg and Satisfaction with Life by Diener, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin. This result is rather accurate as the significant level is quite high whereby there is only one percent chance that the results might have occurred by sampling error. The high reliability and good internal consistency of all three inventories used could also attribute to the accuracy of the results.

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The research also aims to find out whether there is any gender difference for their self-esteem and life satisfaction. Results obtained from the present study have rejected the second and third hypotheses. This implied that there was no significant difference for self-esteem and life satisfaction among male and female students.

The first hypothesis was supported by the significant positive correlation between perceived social support and self-esteem. The present results are consistent with those of previous studies such as the one done by Cooper, Holman and Braithwaite (1983, cited in Dumont & Provost, 1999). They found that teenagers' self-esteem was positively related to perceived family support. Meehan, Durlak and Bryant (1993, cited in Moradi & Funderbunk, 2006) also found that perceived social support among high school adolescents to be correlated with self-esteem.

In a similar study, Van Dras et al., (1997, cited in Dumont & Provost, 1999) supported the significant positive correlation between perceived social support and self-esteem. They found that people with high self-esteem tend to be more gregarious and involved in more social activities, which lead to have a higher perceived social support.

There was no significant gender differences for perceived social support among male and female students, thus the second hypothesis was not supported. This outcome were identical to Vaux's (1982, 1985 as cited in Moradi & Funderbunk, 2006) research, where he found no gender differences in perceptions of support. He attributes some of this variation in gender differences in social support perceptions to differences in methods, particularly in relation to the samples and measures used. Both results, from this present study and Vaux's (1982, 1985, as cited in Moradi & Funderbunk, 2006) were unlike of the outcome for Colorossi's study (2001), where female adolescents perceived more supportive peers and adults, although lesser from adults. And they were satisfied with the supports they received from both peers and adults. They also reported that mothers were their most important support, as opposed to the results of this study. The possible reason for the differences in the outcomes of these studies was that it could be the different measurement scales used. Open-ended and more directive questions were asked in Colorossi's (2001) study, which may prompt more direct answers, as compared to the present study, which used the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), a measurement of 5-point Likert scales. This measurement may be a constriction as students could only answer 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree' and therefore, not being able to find out what influence or contribute to the perception of perceived social support. It could also due to the different cultural aspects as these studies were conducted in the different cultural expectation.

The present study also examined the perceived social support and life satisfaction level among the 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.

From the present results, there were also no significant gender differences found for self-esteem among male and female students, which means the third hypothesis was rejected. This is quite a great contrary to most researches which supported the hypothesis that there was a significant gender differences in self-esteem. Simmons and Rosenberg (1975, cited in Harter, 1990) reported that girls were found to have lower self-esteem than boys during their adolescence years. Gender differences in self-esteem have always shown that boys tend to exhibit higher self-esteem than girls did (O'Brien et al., 1996, cited in Quatman & Watson, 2001). Demo et al., (1987, cited in Quatman & Watson, 2001) found that male self-esteem was more strongly related to family relationships than was female self-esteem. As most of the researches were conducted in the western countries, cultural differences may play a role in contributing the insignificant difference outcome for this study.

#### **Strengths and Limitations**

The questionnaires were simple and straightforward because of the high construct validity and they have been used by previous researchers. The instruments were valid and have high reliability. However, the findings of the present study must be interpreted in light of some limitations as well. Besides, the 100 participants were selected from only limited departments of Karachi University and therefore the findings cannot be generalized to all students of University of Karachi.

#### **Recommendations for Future Research**

It would be interesting to conduct this study between urban and rural areas as students from the two different environments may lead to difference findings.

#### **Conclusion:**

The present study revealed a significant positive correlation between perceived social support and self-esteem among University students however, weak positive correlation was found between perceived social support and life satisfaction.

There were no significant differences for self-esteem and life satisfaction among male and female respondents. The development of self-esteem is essential and broad research evidences found that the pursuit of an adolescent self-esteem can be obtained through the perceived social support of their surrounding environment. The implication of having moderate/high level of self-esteem is such adolescents would have higher tendency to rectify their behavioral mistakes using constructive strategies. As pointed by research evidences avoiding low self-esteem is essential as to lead happy and productive life style. All in all, review of research evidences showed that there was significant relationship between self-esteem and perceived social support, it is worth noted that support which include care, praise and nurturing from parents are essential and should be provided since young.

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