

Exploring the Mechanisms Behind Well-Being: Social Support and Basic Psychological Needs

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how social support and basic psychological needs influence the well-being of college students in Shandong, China. The primary objective of this research is to offer practical recommendations for improving the well-being of college students. The study involved surveys administered to 288 university students from three universities in Shandong, China. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS v22.0 and SmartPLS 4 software. Notably, the results showed that college students scored an average of (22.48 ± 5.40) for well-being. Moreover, the research correlation results indicated a strong positive relationship between social support and well-being ($r = 0.732, p < 0.01$), as well as between basic psychological needs and well-being ($r = 0.748, p < 0.01$). Furthermore, the path coefficients for social support and basic psychological needs concerning well-being were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), with values of $\beta = 0.413$ and $\beta = 0.444$. In conclusion, this study has identified significant well-being predictors among Shandong University students in China.

Keywords: Basic psychological needs, college students, social support, well-being.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Well-being is one of the important psychological pursuits in human life, playing a key role in everyone's health and quality of life. People all yearn for well-being, which can bring satisfaction, joy, and fulfillment. Nevertheless, the well-being of college students isn't looking very optimistic in China. Therefore, this research aims to survey and analyze college students in China, with the aspiration of offering valuable insights to help improve the quality of their lives and well-being.

Some believe an association exists between well-being and social support (Wilson *et al.*, 2020). Social support serves multiple functions in individuals' lives, such as mitigating stress, offering emotional security, and enhancing the ability to confront hardships and challenges. Consequently, it is widely acknowledged that social support is closely intertwined with overall well-being (Cacciatore *et al.*, 2021). Since the introduction of the self-determination theory, basic psychological needs have been regarded as critical components of human well-being. Fulfilling one's psychological needs is a fundamental requirement for attaining well-being, as Kasser and Ryan (1999) outlined. Consequently, well-being is regarded as directly influenced by these basic psychological needs, as Reis *et al.* (2000) emphasized.

Therefore, this study aims to find the impact of social support and basic psychological needs on well-being. This comprehension holds paramount significance within psychology and offers valuable insights for teachers and college leaders seeking to create nurturing social environments that elevate students' well-being and mental health. By deepening the insights into the formation of well-being, college students can more effectively guide themselves in pursuing a more meaningful and contented life.



2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Well-Being

The pursuit of well-being is a timeless endeavor for humanity, and researchers have consistently delved into ways to enrich people's experience of joy, putting forth numerous theories in the process. Well-being theories can be broadly classified into three main categories: (a) theories centered on the satisfaction of needs and goals, (b) theories that focus on processes or activities, and (c) theories that consider genetic and personality predispositions (Diener et al., 2003). Well-being is defined as people experiencing negative feelings less while they experience positive feelings often, and they get more satisfaction from their lives (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2014). Moreover, well-being as a positive mental state is characterized by high life satisfaction (Morrow-Howell, 2010).

2.2. Social Support and Well-Being

The roots of social support theory can be traced back to the early 20th century, initially introduced by Durkheim (1995). This marked the inception of research linking social relationships to well-being. Subsequently, research on social support gave rise to various theoretical frameworks. Social support, recognized as a vital societal resource, encompasses diverse forms of assistance from family, friends, communities, and social networks, including emotional support, information sharing, and practical help (Mai et al., 2021). Social support can serve as a protective factor and significantly contribute to the well-being of adolescents, as noted by Lopez-Zafra et al. (2019). Additionally, research has demonstrated that positive support perceived by family members is associated with improved well-being indicators, including increased life satisfaction (Rey et al., 2019). According to the general benefits model of social support, it is recognized that social support can enhance individuals' positive psychological states, including their overall well-being (Li et al., 2018).

2.3. Basic Psychological Needs and Well-Being

The Basic Psychological Needs Theory is formulated by Deci and Ryan (2013). SDT places significant emphasis on individuals' autonomy, competence, and connection requirements, asserting that meeting these essential psychological needs is vital for enhancing intrinsic motivation and overall well-being. Some studies explore the relationship between basic psychological needs and well-being. The basic psychological needs theory posits that optimal human functioning and development necessitate satisfying three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Fulfilling these needs is crucial for fostering and sustaining hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Sapmaz et al. (2012) conducted a multiple regression analysis on survey data from 192 college students, revealing that the satisfaction of psychological needs is a significant predictor of happiness among college students.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research objectives include the following three points. Firstly, to summarize the overall state of well-being among university students at Shandong University in China. Secondly, to investigate the relationship between social support, basic psychological needs, and well-being. Thirdly, to examine the predictor variables of well-being.

3.1. Research Design

The researcher conducted this research using a quantitative approach. Quantitative research involves tools such as surveys during the research process (Mills & Gay, 2019). This research intended to describe the relationship between basic psychological needs, social support, and well-being. This study employs two types of quantitative research methodologies: descriptive and explanatory designs.

3.2. Participants

This study comprises 288 students from three universities in Shandong of China. The result for the demographic area is explained by the table of background information of the respondents as shown in Table 1.

3.3. Research Instruments

3.3.1. Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), a seven-item self-report scale (Diener et al., 2003), would be used to measure the well-being of students. Life satisfaction is a strong predictor of the absence or presence of clinical symptoms and an efficient indicator of psychological well-being among college students (Renshaw & Cohen, 2014). The SWLS is widely used to assess the quality-of-life satisfaction,

TABLE I: DISTRIBUTION OF THE RESPONDENTS

| Variables | Levels | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------|---------------------|-----------|------------|
| Gender | Male | 141 | 49.0 |
| | Female | 147 | 51.0 |
| University | Shandong university | 91 | 31.6 |
| | University of jinan | 97 | 33.7 |
| | Heze university | 100 | 34.7 |
| Age | 18 | 52 | 18.1 |
| | 19 | 68 | 23.6 |
| | 20 | 73 | 25.3 |
| | 21 | 65 | 22.6 |
| | 22 | 26 | 9.0 |
| | 23 | 4 | 1.4 |
| Gender | Male | 141 | 49.0 |
| | Female | 147 | 51.0 |
| Total | | 288 | 100 |

and the alpha coefficient for this scale has ranged from 0.78 to 0.92 (Antaramian, 2015; Kaczmarek et al., 2015).

3.3.2. Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction (BPNS)

The basic psychological needs satisfaction scale consisted of 21 items comprising three components: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The BPNS has been shown to have good predictive validity (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Internal consistency values for each subscale, namely autonomy BPNS, competence BPNS, and relatedness BPNS, were 0.767, 0.789, and 0.727, respectively. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the whole scale was 0.763.

3.3.3. The Interpersonal Support Evaluation List (ISEL)

The Interpersonal Support Evaluation List was the modified 16-item scale developed by Brookings and Bolton (1988). When Payne et al. (2012) tested the 16-item ISEL measure, it had an internal consistency of 0.83. After reverse coding, the 16 items were averaged to create a composite PSS score ($M = 4.72$, $SD = 1.23$, $\alpha = 0.91$).

3.4. Data Analysis

The data collected was analyzed using the Scientific Package for Social Science (SPSS) v22.0 and SmartPLS 4 software.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

Before embarking on inferential tests, this study reports and elaborates descriptive statistics that involve mean, standard deviation, maximum value, and minimum value (see Table II).

The findings reveal that the mean value of social support is 59.97, with a standard deviation of 12.68, indicating a relatively low level. For basic psychological needs, the mean value stands at 97.43, with a standard deviation of 16.70, classifying it as a moderate level. The mean value of well-being was 22.48, with a standard deviation of 5.40. Thus, it can be concluded that the level of well-being was categorized as relatively low.

TABLE II: RESULTS OF DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND LEVEL OF WELL-BEING

| Variables | Min | Max | Mean | Std deviation |
|---------------------------|-------|--------|-------|---------------|
| Social support | 30.00 | 84.00 | 59.97 | 12.68 |
| Basic psychological needs | 71.00 | 147.00 | 97.43 | 16.70 |
| Well-being | 8.00 | 35.00 | 22.48 | 5.40 |

TABLE III: CORRELATIONS BETWEEN ALL STUDIED VARIABLES

| Variables | Cronbach alpha | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---------------------------|----------------|---------|---------|------|
| Social support | 0.96 | 1.00 | | |
| Basic psychological needs | 0.97 | 0.766** | 1.00 | |
| Well-being | 0.92 | 0.732** | 0.748** | 1.00 |

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

TABLE IV: PATH ANALYSIS RESULTS AND COEFFICIENTS

| Path | Original sample | Sample mean | Std. dev. | t | p | Lower | Upper |
|-----------|-----------------|-------------|-----------|-------|--------|-------|-------|
| BPNS-> WB | 0.444 | 0.448 | 0.067 | 6.594 | <0.001 | 0.318 | 0.583 |
| SS-> WB | 0.413 | 0.410 | 0.068 | 6.047 | <0.001 | 0.272 | 0.539 |

Note: BPNS: Basic psychological needs; WB: Well-being; SS: social support.

4.2. Relationship of Studied Variables

In Table III, it presented the internal consistencies and zero-order correlations of the variables examined in the study. As anticipated, all the variables demonstrated statistical significance and exhibited correlations with one another.

This study employs Cronbach's Alpha (CA) to assess the reliability of measurement scales. The analysis results indicated that all CA values were below 0.9, confirming the high reliability of the studied variables or constructs.

Furthermore, the results of the correlation matrix showed that social support had a positive and strong correlation with well-being ($r = 0.732$) at the level of $p < 0.01$. Basic psychological needs positively and strongly correlated with well-being ($r = 0.748$) at $p < 0.01$.

The path coefficients and significance results of the model were evaluated. Table IV shows two correlational paths about basic psychological needs, social support, and well-being. That was because all p values were less than 0.05, and the t-statistic values were more than 1.645. At the same time, all confidence intervals did not contain zero. The evidence showed that basic psychological needs ($\beta = 0.444$) were the more important predictor of well-being, followed by social support ($\beta = 0.413$).

5. DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that the well-being level among college students at Shandong University in China is relatively low. This finding underscores the urgent need for concentrated efforts and targeted interventions to enhance these students' general well-being and psychological health. The government and universities should take measures to tackle the distinct challenges and pressures Chinese college students encounter. This can lead to an elevated level of well-being and life satisfaction within this specific demographic.

The research results also indicate a strong positive correlation between social support and basic psychological needs and well-being. Tian et al. (2016) and other researchers have found similar findings. Furthermore, the study's revelation that these variables can significantly predict well-being emphasizes the importance of interventions and support systems targeting social support and the fulfillment of basic psychological needs to enhance these students' overall happiness and well-being. This may be related to the influence of Confucian culture in Shandong, which places great importance on family, social relationships, and interpersonal interactions. This cultural emphasis likely fosters easier access to social support and fulfillment of psychological needs, resulting in increased well-being (Chung & Huang, 2021).

6. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this study has successfully identified the significant predictors of well-being among Shandong University students in China. Social support and psychological need satisfaction highlight their critical role in enhancing well-being. These measures reinforce the importance of interventions and support systems to improve the overall mental health and well-being of college students in Shandong. At the same time, it highlights the potential role of cultural factors, such as Confucian values, in influencing well-being.

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