

SOCIAL SUPPORT, OPTIMISM AND WELL-BEING IN YOUNG ADULTS

Yasir Farooq¹, Dr. Nasreen Akhtar^{*2}, Dr. Fatima Murtaza³

¹M.Sc. Psychology Student, Department of Psychology, Govt. College University, Kechery Road, Lahore, 54000, Pakistan

²Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, GC University, Kechery Road, Lahore, 54000, Pakistan
(Corresponding Author)

³Deputy Course Coordinator, Department of Psychology, Govt. College University, Kechery Road, Lahore, 54000, Pakistan

¹yasirgcu@gmail.com, ²nasreenakhtar@gcu.edu.pk, ³fatima.murtaza@gcu.edu.pk

³ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1190-9477>

Corresponding Author: *

Dr. Nasreen Akhtar

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ABSTRACT

The current study was conducted to determine the predictive role of social support in predicting wellbeing in young adults. It also aimed to discover the mediational role of optimism in the relationship between social support and wellbeing. The sample comprised 206 young adults, among those 87 were male students and 118 were female students within the age range 18 to 34 years ($M=23$, $SD=3.68$). The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet & Farley 1988), Life Orientation Test (Scheier, Carver & Bridges, 1994), and Flourishing Scale (Diener & Robert, 2009) were employed to gather data. Results indicated that the social support, and optimism were positively correlated with wellbeing. Furthermore, both social support and optimism predicted wellbeing. Additionally, path analysis results show that optimism plays a mediating role in understanding the link between young adults' wellbeing and social support. This study has important implications for educational and health psychologists.

Keywords: Social support, optimism, wellbeing, young adults

INTRODUCTION

In the modern age of science and technology, it is important to identify the psychosocial factors which can safeguard the well-being of young adults. During this phase of transition, young adults enter into practical life wherein they had to join a new career and make new relationships in their lives (Morrow, 2009). Sometimes they fail to meet these challenges which may impair well-being. For instance, young adults may feel depressed because of being jobless or may feel distressed due to social

isolation or a break up in a new relationship. In Pakistan, young adults meet these challenges successfully due to strong social support provided by their parents, key family members, friends and fellows. Social support served as a beneficial factor that gave people hope and helped them get through the challenging times in their life (Uchida, Kitayama, Mesquita, Reyes, & Morling, 2008). The benefits of higher level of social support extend to a number of areas including healthy

life, better relations, more economic wellbeing, psychological stability etc. (Coyne & Lazarus, 1981; Goldsmith, 2003; Mattson & Hall, 2011).

Social support encompasses knowledge, competencies, skills and attitudes that are used for providing assistance to others in terms of problem solving and decision making (Robertson, 2008). It includes the need to engage in productive social relations, sharing feelings, providing assistance during times of need and is important for a healthy life as it is an effective mechanism aimed to promote stability in interpersonal relations. Social support can be of different types ranging from emotional, instrumental and informational support. Emotional support is a non-tangible form of assistance in the form of love, care and encouraging feedback. Instrumental support on the other hand includes acts in which monetary values are involved and it includes provision of transport and money. Informational support is the help provided to a person through information (Semmer, & Meier, 2009). Social support makes us feel important and boosts our self-esteem. According to Mattson and Hall (2011) social support not only makes people feel better or helps them to overcome difficulties but it also results in better physical and psychological health and overall wellbeing of people.

Social support shapes optimism which in turn predicts well-being (Karademas, 2006). Optimism is a personality trait characterized by general optimistic prospects (Scheier & Carver, 1985). "Optimism is a generalized expectancy for positive outcomes" (McKenna, 1993, p. 39). It involves individuals' positive emotions about future (Alessandri et al., 2015). It can be differentiated into dispositional and situational optimism (Peterson, & Seligman, 2004). Dispositional optimism means possessing an essential impression of positive thinking or a commonly idealistic perspective on present and the future occasions (Scheier & Carver (1985). Situational optimism clarifies hopefulness directed towards a particular occasion or probability (Schneider, 2001). Studies had been conducted using correlational research design (Lie & Lund, 2013; Lu, Gilmour, Kao & Huang,

2006). One study in this regard had stated that there was a strong association between optimism and psychological wellbeing in working and non-working women. It was found that women who scored high on the use of optimism showed higher levels of psychological wellbeing (Moen & Yu, 2012; Okimoto & Heilman, 2012).

Well-being represents a positive reflection of a person's quality of life which can be social, psychological, subjective, emotional and personal. Subjective wellbeing is a general term that encompasses an individual's general approach to life, evaluation of life and an assessment of the level of life satisfaction as well as the dedicated positive, neutral and negative emotions they experience (Diener, 1984; Diener et al., 1999). This assessment also includes the measures an individual uses for categorization of positive emotional states and responses. Many studies indicate that wellbeing is a broad term that involves many aspects (Stigiltz, 2009). It can also include different aspects like aim of life, good relation with others, self-acceptance and positive functioning. Well-being is also measured as an important element of mental health. Thus Individual wellbeing is a multi-dimensional concept which includes, subjective health, spiritual experiences, emotional comfort and collective happiness (Laplaca, 2013).

Social support positively affects subjective wellbeing. It was found that perceived social support significantly predicted psychological wellbeing (Topbay, 2016) and subjective well-being or life satisfaction (González-Carrasco, Casas, Malo, Vinãs, & Dinisman, 2016; Sarriera, Bedin, Abs, Casas, & Calza, 2015; Suldo, Friedrich, White, Farmer, Minch, & Michalowski, 2009; Topbay, 2016).

The relationship between types of social support and several aspects of subjective wellbeing were investigated in a sample of diverse ages. The findings showed that life satisfaction was predicted by enacted and perceived support and good affect was predicted by family embeddedness. In a subsequent model, personality domains were included and that generally reduced the influence of social support (Siedlecki, Salthouse, Oishi, & Jeswani, 2014).

Similar findings were reported in another research which investigated the role of perceived social support on subjective well-being in Lebanese college students. Results showed that Lebanese youth experienced perceived social support as a positive indicator of subjective prosperity. All in all, these findings reconfirm the significance of observed social help as indicator of subjective-prosperity among youth (Ammar, Nauffal, & Sbeity, 2013). Research in this area has exhibited beneficial outcomes of social support on physical and mental prosperity of individuals experiencing interminable sickness, for example, growth, coronary illness and diabetes. Individuals who received social support have demonstrated lower degrees of wretchedness and other negative states of mind caused by physical sickness (Kim, Han, Shaw, McTavish, & Gustafson, 2010). A study investigated the connection of social support and coping measures with emotional well-being in female breast cancer patients. A moderation model indicated significant interactional impact of social support and coping strategies on emotional well-being. Bandura and Waltz (1982) asserted that psychological well-being depends on emotional and instrumental support given by family, friends and others through interactions. Further, they said that all these elements in turn result in positive effects on individual's self like enhancing self-concept, high psychological and subjective well-being. Optimism was found to be helpful for both psychological and physical well-being (Carver & Scheier, 2005; Scheier & Carver, 1992). Researchers revealed that optimism had significant positive association with physical and psychological wellbeing (Carver & Scheier, 2005; Scheier & Carver, 1992). Optimism had larger impact on individual's physical and psychological wellbeing (Schweizer, Beck-Seyffer, & Schneider, 1999). Strassle, McKee and Plant (1999) cited that optimism is significantly associated with "life satisfaction, positive physical and mental health, lower frequencies of mental disorders, and self-esteem" (p. 191). Another study found that optimism and positive affect had positive influence in immune responses in students of law (Segerstrom & Sephton, 2010).

Avia (1997) proposed that healthy personality is equipped with optimism and satisfaction with life which is also necessary for wellbeing. Peterson (2000) mentioned that the level of optimism was associated with higher levels of good mood. In persuasion of the psychological, emotional or the level of mental satisfaction, optimism appeared to be a barrier in terms of dealing with problems caused to these stressors. Also, the effects are assessed on self-esteem and how they promote burnout in female managers (Fry, 1995). Applebaum, Stein, Lord-Bessen, Pessin, Rosenfeld, and Breitbart (2014) examined the role of optimism in the relationship between social support and anxiety, depression, hopelessness, and quality of life among patients with advanced cancer. Findings showed that social support and optimism negatively related to depression and anxiety. Additionally, optimism moderated the association between social support and well-being by being linked with decreased feelings of anxiety and despair. Higher levels of perceived social support were also significantly associated with better quality of life.

Karademas (2006) examined the mediating role of optimism in the relationship between social support and well-being. Results obtained through structural equation modeling indicated that optimism partially mediates the relation of self-efficacy and perceived social support to well-being daily emotional support and self-efficacy predicted optimism.

The present study was based upon model presented by Badura and Waltz (1982) which connects positive psychology with health psychology that includes three elements: 1) positive expectations about future, 2) stable patterns of interaction, 3) actual support provided and the positive effects of those on the individual health. This model indicates the pivotal role of social support and optimism in determining psychological well-being of individuals. Keeping in view the collectivistic make-up of Pakistani society, the present research is a vital step towards investigating the mediational role of optimism in the relationship between social support and wellbeing in the Pakistani society.

Hypotheses

1. Social support, optimism and wellbeing would be positively correlated
2. Social support and optimism would be significant predictors of wellbeing.
3. Optimism would mediate the relationship between social support and wellbeing.

METHOD

Research Design

Correlational research design was used in this study as the study aimed to investigate the

relationship among social support, optimism and wellbeing

Sample

The sample of present research comprised 206 young adults consisting of 119 women and 87 men with the age range of 18 to 34 years ($M=23$, $SD=3.68$). The education level of the participant ranged from B.A\BSc, M.A\MSc, MPhil\MS to PhD. Data were collected from both public and private universities of Lahore by using purposive sampling technique.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Participants (N= 206)

Variable	f (%)	M (SD)
Age		23.00 (3.68)
Gender		
Men	87 (43)	
Women	119 (57)	
Education		
BA/BSc	110 (53)	
MSc	13 (6)	
M.Phil/MS	77 (37)	
PhD	8 (4)	
Marital Status		
Single	193 (93)	
Married	15 (7)	
Family System		
Nuclear	161 (77)	
Joint	47 (23)	

Instruments

Following scales were used to assess social support, optimism, and wellbeing in young adults.

1. Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support
2. Life orientation test – Revised (LOT-R)
3. Flourishing Scale.

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support was developed by Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet and Farley (1988) to measure the levels of social support in individuals. It consists of 12 items with 7 points rating ranging from “very strongly disagree (1)” to “if you very strongly agree (7)”.

The scale has a good internal reliability and the value of alpha reported by author was 0.91.

Life Orientation Test (LOT-R) designed by Scheier, Carver and Bridges (1994) was used to assess generalized optimism. It had 10 items with five point Likert type rating scale. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for this scale was .70 for optimism subscale and .74 for pessimism subscale (Scheier, Carver & Bridges, 1994). Items 1, 4, and 10 of this scale measure optimism whereas items 2, 3, 7, and 9 measure pessimism. Items 2, 5, 6, and 8 are fillers only.

Flourishing Scale by Diener and Robert Biswas-Diener (2009) was used to measure the wellbeing. It consists of 8 items with 7 points rating ranging

from “very strongly disagree” (1) to “very strongly agree” (7) to. The scale has a good internal reliability and the value of alpha reported by author was .90.

Procedure

After obtaining permission from the board of studies of the relevant institution, participants were contacted via purposive sampling. Written

consent was obtained from the participants and they were informed about their right to withdraw and the confidentiality of their data. The participants were given instruction pertaining to the scales and were requested to be honest and forthright in their responses. The data collected was then analyzed using SPSS and AMOS.

RESULTS

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Analysis of Study Variables

Variables	k	M	SD	α	Range		Skewness
					Potential	Actual	
Social Support	12	65.26	12.93	.93	1-7	1-7	-0.91
Optimism	10	36.10	5.21	.69	1-7	1-7	-0.26
Wellbeing	8	44.17	6.81	.85	1-5	1-5	-1.07

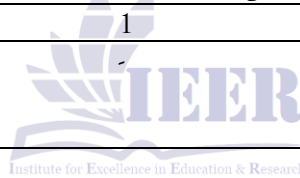
Table 2 shows that Cronbach alpha of scales used in present study was found satisfactory.

Table 3

Correlation among Social Support, Optimism and Wellbeing (N=206)

Variables	1	2	3
1 Social Support	-	.49*	.70*
2 Optimism		-	.62*
3 Wellbeing			-

* $p < .01$



Results indicated that social support had significant positive and moderate correlation with optimism ($r = .49, p < .01$) and strong correlation with wellbeing ($r = .70, p < .01$). Findings also

indicated that optimism had significant positive and moderate correlation with wellbeing ($r = .62, p < .01$).

Table 4

Psychosocial Predictors of Wellbeing in Young Adults

Predictors	ΔR^2	β
Step 1	.50*	
Social Support		.70**
Step 2	.10*	
Social Support		.53**
Optimism		.37**
Total R^2	.60*	
N	206	

* $p < .01$, ** $p < .001$

Results of stepwise multiple regression indicated that in step 1, social support was the strongest predictor of wellbeing in young adults, $F(1, 204)$

$= 198.81, p < .001$. The value of $R^2 = .50$ showed that social support explained 50% variance in wellbeing in step 1. Whereas, in step 2, the

addition of optimism added 10% variance in predicting wellbeing, $F(1, 204) = 153.34, p < .001$. Total $R^2 = .60$ indicated that both social support

and optimism accounted for 60% variance in wellbeing.

Table 5
Direct and Indirect Effects Estimated by SEM

	Optimism	Wellbeing		
	Direct Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total
Social Support	.48**	.53**	.07	.60**
Optimism	.00	.37**	.10	.47*
Wellbeing	.37**			
R^2	.23	.59		

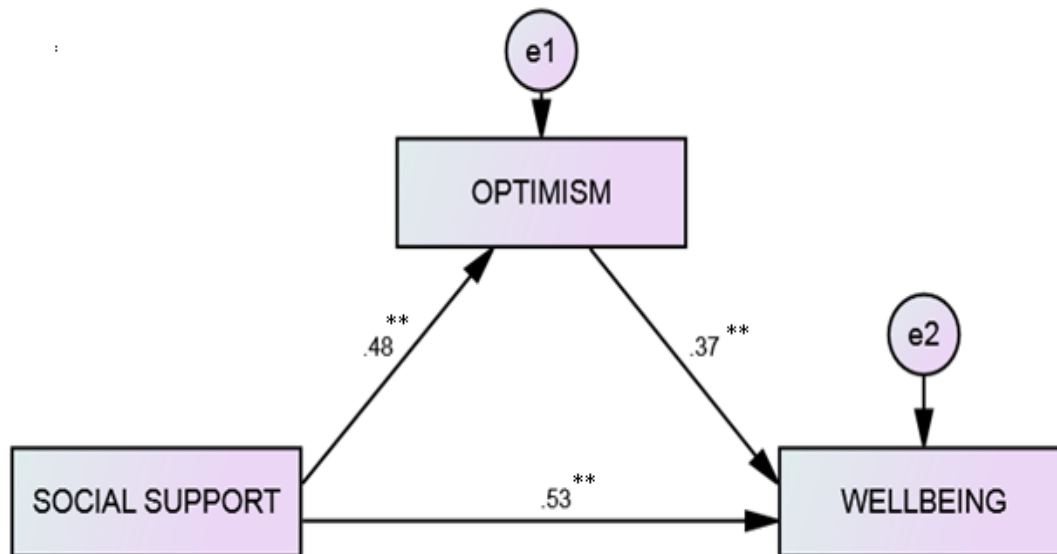


Figure 1. Standardized mediation model, depicting optimism as mediator between the relationship of social support and wellbeing N = 206.

Figure 1 shows significant paths from social support to wellbeing ($\beta = .53, p < .01$), social support to optimism ($\beta = .48, p < .01$) and optimism to wellbeing ($\beta = .37, p < .01$). Results indicate that without optimism (mediator), social support significantly predict wellbeing ($\beta = .70, p < .01$). However, in the presence of a mediator (optimism), predictive relationship between social support to wellbeing ($\beta = .53, p < .01$) was decreased near to zero (indirect effect). It means that optimism mediated the relationship between social support and well-being.

DISCUSSION

Psychological resources help individuals to promote wellbeing and deal with the problems of daily functioning. In this regard, the aim of present study was to find out the relationship of social support, optimism with wellbeing, Furthermore it also aimed to examine the predictive role of social support in predicting wellbeing. The first hypothesis was that social support, optimism, and wellbeing are positively correlated, and the findings of this study supported this hypothesis. Findings of this study are consistent with previous literature indicating

that social support is positively related to well-being (Topbay, 2016; Sarriera, Bedin, Abs, & Calza, 2015). Previous literature has also demonstrated that optimism had significant positive association with physical and psychological wellbeing (Carver & Scheier, 2005; Scheier & Carver, 1992).

The second hypothesis stated that social support and optimism would be significant predictors of wellbeing and results of this study supported this hypothesis. The findings demonstrated that optimism and social support were important predictors of wellbeing. This finding is similar to results of previous literature. For instance, an investigation by Topbay, (2016) indicated that perceived social support was a significant predictor of psychological well-being. This finding indicates that individuals who seek social support of their families and friends come out of stressful situations quickly and easily. Their families and friends act as a source of catharsis for them and they share their joys and sorrows with them and stand with them during hard times. They try to manage their negative emotions by showing empathy, take very good care of their emotions. They also provide a source of comfort to them by discussing their problems and providing valuable advice to them to deal with stressful situations. They help them in making better decisions and solving problems effectively. Hence it can be concluded that people who find support of their family members and friends in difficult times, they feel psychologically better. Similarly, findings also indicated that optimism was a significant predictor of wellbeing. This finding is consistent with previous literature which indicated that optimism leads to better physical and mental health (Matthews, Raikkonen, ShutonTyrrell, and Kuller, 2004; Edgar, Remmer, Rosberger, and Fourmere, 2000; Segerstrom, Taylor, Kemeny, and Fahey, 1998). Strassle, McKee, and Plant, (1999). Optimism was also found to be a significant predictor of wellbeing. The positive role of optimism had been attributed to the strategies that optimists use to cope with stress. For instance, optimists find it relatively easier to relax in stressful situations and do not get upset easily. They are usually optimistic about future

happenings and expect good outcomes. They try to recall pleasant memories of their lives and keep their spirits high. They enjoy the company of their friends and keep themselves busy.

Third hypothesis examined the mediational role of optimism in the relationship between social support and wellbeing in young adults and this hypothesis was also supported. This result is consistent with previous research which has indicated that optimism significantly mediated the relationship between social support and wellbeing (Karademas, 2006). This finding has indicated that optimism is the psychological mechanism through which social support and wellbeing were positively related in young adults. When young people find social support of their parents, siblings and peers, they tend to be more optimistic about positive outcomes in their lives thereby adding to their psychological well-being. Moreover, social support provides a hope in young adults that they are not alone during hard times of their lives and this feeling develops optimism in them. Consequently, they strive hard to deal with stressful circumstances which ultimately promote wellbeing among them.

Conclusion

On the basis of findings obtained through the present research, it can be concluded that social support and optimism positively correlate and predict wellbeing. Moreover, present study indicated the mediational role of optimism in the relationship between social support and wellbeing.

Limitations and Suggestions

The findings of the present research should be considered keeping in view the following limitations:

1. The data were exclusively collected from Lahore. Future research may potentially collect data from several Pakistani cities.
2. The sample of this study comprised of students only. Future research may also focus on workers from various companies.
3. The study was quantitative in nature. In future studies qualitative approach research could be used to explore the experiences of people

about factors which contribute towards well-being.

Implications

It is a general observation that young adults in Pakistan are experiencing high level of uncertainty in terms of personal, academic and professional domains. The present study has implications in the area of educational, positive and health psychology. As target population of this study was university students, the benefits in terms of using these findings span across the context of educational psychology. First, it is important to assess and expand university counseling services for students. Second, promotion of optimism, social support among young adults can help in stress management as these psychosocial resources had been identified as playing an important role in predicting wellbeing. In addition, this research had identified health benefits experienced due to these resources. The study has contributed to the literature in positive psychology. There is a need for developing optimism based intervention plans in order to increase the efficacy of young adults in personal and professional domains. These implications need to be understood in a holistic manner in order to gain deeper insights about how the findings of the present study can contribute towards a better psychological understanding about optimism, and social support.

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