

Research Paper

Perceived Social Support, Perceived Stress and Personal Growth Initiative among Young Adults Living Away from Home

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ABSTRACT

Young adulthood is a period during which individuals go through a period of transition and major changes. Most of the young adults in today's world choose to move away to new cities, states or countries from their homes for colleges, universities or job. The purpose of the present study was to examine the relationship between Perceived Social Support, Perceived Stress and Personal Growth Initiative among young adults living away from home. A total of 240 participants (109 males and 131 females) participated in the study. Self-reported measures like the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and Personal Growth Initiative Scale-II (PGIS-II) were used. For data analysis, Pearson correlation, Regression analysis and Independent sample t test were used. The results showed a significant positive relationship between Perceived Social Support and Personal Growth Initiative and a significant negative relationship between Perceived Social Support and Perceived Stress as well as between Perceived Stress and Personal Growth Initiative. Significant gender difference was found in Perceived Social Support and Perceived Stress, with females reporting higher scores than males. The regression analysis revealed a significant influence of Perceived Social Support and Perceived Stress on Personal Growth Initiative. This shows that adequate social support from friends, family and other as well as reduced stress and belief in their ability to effectively deal with stressful situations enables individuals to work towards their personal development.

Keywords: *Young Adults living Away from Home, Perceived Social Support, Perceived Stress, Personal Growth Initiative*

The transition from adolescence to adulthood can be quite challenging and it is a period of significant developmental changes that forms the nature and quality of the future lives of young people (Lloyd, 2005). During these years the individual begins to grow from being an extremely dependent and undifferentiated person to being a more independent and responsible adult. This is the period during which we can see the most biopsychosocial growth. According to Havighurst (1972), this is frequently the time when people achieve autonomy, establish identity, build emotional stability, start careers, find love, join groups or communities, become parents, and raise children. Young adults in today's world choose to move away from their homes to colleges, universities and for their job. The act of moving out

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Received: May 01, 2023; Revision Received: July 14, 2023; Accepted: July 18, 2023

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of the family home and establishing an independent residence is regarded as a significant milestone in the process of transition to adulthood (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1993; Koc, 2007; Mulder & Clark, 2000). When these young adults move away from home for the first time, it is a major step. Whether it is a student who's entering into college or a young person who is starting their career or work, there are almost always adjustments that have to be made. This new living set-up may either help the individuals or give them a hard time. The individual who leaves home to a new place might experience new routines, new peers or classmates, new co-workers and also some new expectations. Leaving one's home is associated with ideas of independence and is thought by some to be a crucial part of the academic experience (Holdsworth, 2009). Although it is exciting, new and empowering, it can also be very intimidating, especially in the beginning.

Studies on adolescent students have demonstrated that social support from families, friends, the workplace community, or academic institutions can directly affect students' experiences and have a positive impact on both their well-being and academic accomplishment. According to Trepte and Scharkow (2016), perceived social support includes both emotional and instrumental support and refers to the belief that assistance would be available if required (Day & Livingstone, 2003). The term "perceived social support" describes how people view their friends, family members, and other people as sources of practical, emotional, and overall help when they are in need. There are three sources of social support: close relatives, close friends, and significant others. According to Diener and Seligman (2002), those who have intimate social connections typically report higher levels of flourishing and well-being. Because they have faith in the network, these individuals feel supported even when they are alone and by themselves. On the other hand, people who sense little social support from others could feel isolated even when they are with others. They might avoid going out in the public, less likely to seek help from others for something they are doubtful about, they may also feel stressed as a result. It has been discovered that having a support system helps to decrease the negative consequences of stress. The assistance of one's social network can help reduce stress in a variety of ways.

When young adults move to another place for studying or working, they are out of their homes and their comfort zone. They go through a lot of struggles and experience especially in the beginning. Perceived stress is the extent to which events in a person's life are perceived to be stressful, challenging, unanticipated, and unmanageable (Cohen et al., 1983; Phillips, 2012). It evaluates how a person feels about how difficult their life is overall and their capacity to handle stress, rather than the forms or frequency of stressful events that have happened to them. These individuals might fail to take care of themselves and to maintain their diet. They should do all the works by themselves such as cooking food, washing vessels and clothes, do dusting, etc. Some may handle it better by using a variety of strategies, while others it to be a bit exhausting. As a result of this transformation, many of these people exhibit noticeable emotions, such as homesickness, which is described as a complex cognitive-motivational-emotional condition that involves mourning for, longing for, and becoming preoccupied with memories of one's home (Fisher and Hood, 1987). These people may also experience stress related to establishing financial independence and stability, duties at work or school, dating, personal relationships, and breakups, as well as a desire for a sense of community and belonging to maintain a healthy social life. Apart from the stressful event causing the physiological and emotional responses, it is also the way we perceive and interpret them that determines the level to which we are affected by the event and how we deal with it. Lazarus and Folkman put forth the "Theory of Cognitive Appraisal" in 1984,

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which describes the thought processes that affect the actual stressors. There are two ways in which we appraise events. Primary appraisal involves assessing whether the stressful event or situation poses a threat or not. The examination of one's own resources or coping methods for dealing with any perceived risks is known as secondary appraisal (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Young people's perceptions of stress correlate negatively with optimism, meaning that the level of optimism has an impact on how stress is perceived. According to a study conducted among postgraduate medical students, people with high levels of perceived stress also tend to have high levels of general psychopathology and burnout. The ability to meet challenges posed by environmental stimuli (e.g., coping ability) increases when a person views their situation as manageable and positively challenging. As a result, the person experiences improved life satisfaction (i.e., an indirect effect), or their positive interpretation of the current situation will directly result in improved life satisfaction (Lee et al., 2016). Individuals who feel that they experience less stress when compared to others and those who believe in their ability to manage the stressful conditions effectively will be better able to make plans and goals for their future and also work to achieve those goals. Research has shown that perceived stress negatively affects personal growth initiative of inter-regional immigrant students (Kaur, 2018).

Personal growth initiative is known as the deliberate and intentional desire to develop in those fields that are important for an individual (Robitschek, 1998). Numerous facets of human functioning, including both adaptive and maladaptive functioning, have been linked to personal growth initiative. The adaptive coping abilities, particularly a reflective coping style, are higher in those who have high levels of personal growth initiative. Individuals living away from home will be having more privacy and alone time away from parents and family. They would have more time and space to reflect on life, organize their duties independently, and think about their aspirations and dreams. They can sit quietly and reflect on topics that are important to them when they are by themselves. This can provide them the opportunity to make achievable objectives for themselves, actively try to develop themselves, and seize any opportunities for growth that present themselves. The degree to which they are interested to change, develop and improve themselves determines constructive development in the long run. This is known as Personal Growth Initiative and it forms a strong base for an individual's future life satisfaction and quality of life. The efforts that individuals take in order to build themselves promote smooth and effective functioning for the rest of their lives. There are four different aspects of personal growth initiative (Robitschek et al., 2012):

- **Readiness for Change:** It is the capacity of an individual to evaluate his own level of preparedness for the processes of personal growth.
- **Planfulness:** It is the capacity to be strategic in efforts to change oneself.
- **Using Resources:** This is known as a person's ability to identify and employ resources effectively.
- **Intentional Behavior:** It is a person's ability to have concrete, self-made plans and behaviors.

Several studies have established the link between Personal Growth Initiative and psychological health. According to one study (Robitschek & Keyes, 2009), PGI predicts emotional, psychological, and social well-being in students in college, explaining about 18% (emotional) and 51% (psychological) of the total variance. Additionally, PGI has been shown to predict posttraumatic growth positively and depression negatively in a group of students in college (Shigemoto et al., 2017). People's lives are impacted negatively when they lack PGI

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skills. Low levels of PGI have been linked to issues in adapting to new environments, resulting in higher levels of stress and anxiety and worse levels of life satisfaction for those affected (Stevic & Ward, 2008; Weigold & Robitschek, 2011; Yakunina et al., 2013).

Need and significance of the study

- Young adulthood is a period during which individuals go through a period of transition and major changes. The beginning of college life, getting a new job or starting a family can be stressful for individuals in the beginning. Finding the level of Perceived Stress among these young adults helps us to get an idea about their feelings and thoughts about the level of stress they are experiencing and their ability to deal with it.
- Due to the excessive and pathologic effects of perceived stress, it becomes crucial to understand its role in a person's personal growth initiative. Also, there are limited research done on the impact of perceived stress on personal growth initiative.
- Studies on Personal Growth Initiative (PGI) are limited and most focus on its effects on mental health, life satisfaction, etc. this study focuses on the factors that enhance or buffers it. The role of PGI in emotional well-being and mental health is established and thus assessing the level of PGI among the sample can be helpful in developing strategies for enhancing it and ultimately leading to improved quality of life.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology is highlighted in this section. The study's design, aim, and hypotheses, methods used and the statistical methods employed are also discussed.

Research design

The present study examined the relationship between Perceived Social Support, Perceived Stress and Personal Growth Initiative, the influence of Perceived Social Support and Perceived Stress on Personal Growth Initiative and the gender differences among young adults living away from home. To achieve this objective, Quantitative research design was used in the study.

Objectives

- To identify the relationship between Perceived Social Support and Perceived Stress among young adults living away from home.
- To identify the relationship between Perceived Social Support and Personal Growth Initiative among young adults living away from home.
- To identify the relationship between Perceived Stress and Personal Growth Initiative among young adults living away from home.
- To identify the influence of Perceived Social Support on Personal Growth Initiative among young adults living away from home.
- To identify the influence of Perceived Stress on Personal Growth Initiative among young adults living away from home.
- To find the gender differences in Perceived Social Support, Perceived Stress and Personal Growth Initiative among young adults living away from home.

Hypotheses

- Ho1: There is no significant relationship between Perceived Social Support and Perceived Stress among young adults living away from home.

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- Ho2: There is no significant relationship between Perceived Social Support and Personal Growth Initiative among young adults living away from home.
- Ho3: There is no significant relationship between Perceived Stress and Personal Growth Initiative among young adults living away from home.
- Ho4: There is no significant influence of Perceived Social Support on Personal Growth Initiative among young adults living away from home.
- Ho5: There is no significant influence of Perceived Stress on Personal Growth Initiative among young adults living away from home.
- Ho6: There is no significant gender difference in Perceived Social Support among young adults living away from home.
- Ho7: There is no significant gender difference in Perceived Stress among young adults living away from home.
- Ho8: There is no significant gender difference in Personal Growth Initiative among young adults living away from home.

Sample and sampling technique

The sample consisted of 240 young adults living away from home (109 males and 131 females) within the age range of 18-25 years. The Convenience Sampling Method was employed to select the participants.

Tools used

- **The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS):** The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) (Zimet et al., 1988) is a self-report scale, which evaluates perceived social support from three sources, family, friends and significant other, in which higher scores indicate greater perceived social support. The scale consists of 12 total statements, and participants rate these on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 7 (very strongly agree). The MSPSS has good reliability and validity with alpha values for the subscales as well as the scale between .85 and .91 and also has high internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .87, .85, and .91 respectively for family, friends and significant others subscales).
- **Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10):** The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) (Cohen et al., 1983) is a self-report scale that measures the level of perceived stress during the course of previous one month. The scale consists of 10 items with a 5-point response scale ranging from 0 (never) to 4 (very often). The total score of the PSS is obtained by adding all the items, and a higher score indicates a higher level of perceived stress. Cronbach's alpha value is 0.86. Individual scores on the PSS can range from 0 to 40 and the scores can be categorized as low (0–13), moderate (14–26) and high (27–40) stress.
- **Personal Growth Initiative Scale- II:** The PGIS-II is developed by Robitschek et al (2012) which is a revised multidimensional measure of the personal growth initiative and it consists of 16 items. The Personal Growth Initiative Scale-II (PGIS-II) involves 4 subscales: 1. Readiness for Change 2. Planfulness 3. Using Resources and 4. Intentional Behavior. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the scale is 0.90. Therefore, the scale had good reliability. This is a 6-point Likert type scale ranging from 0 to 5 where 0 is disagree strongly and 5 is agree strongly.

Statistical analysis

Data from the questionnaires (MSPSS, PSS-10 and PGIS-II) was entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Services (SPSS) data software program and analysed using descriptive

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and inferential statistics. Pearson product moment correlation was done to find the relationship between the variables. Regression analysis was used to find the influence of Perceived social support and Perceived Stress on Personal Growth Initiative. Independent sample t test was used to find the gender differences for the same.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results obtained are presented as well as discussed as follows:

Table-1: Descriptive statistics and Correlation between Perceived Social Support, Perceived Stress and Personal Growth Initiative among young adults living away from home

Variable	N	M	SD	1	2	3
Perceived Social Support	240	62.94	14.17		-0.26**	0.37**
Perceived Stress	240	18.57	5.92	-0.26**		-0.36**
Personal Growth Initiative	240	58.63	12.26	0.37**	-0.36**	

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

Table-1 shows the Descriptive statistics and Correlation between Perceived Social Support, Perceived Stress and Personal Growth Initiative. The mean score and standard deviation of the participants for Perceived Social Support was found to be 62.94 and 14.17 respectively and it can be inferred that the participants have high level of Perceived Social Support. The mean score and standard deviation for Perceived Stress was 18.57 and 5.92 respectively and it can be inferred that participants have moderate level of perceived stress. The mean score and standard deviation for Personal Growth Initiative was 58.63 and 12.26 respectively and it shows that the participants have high levels of Personal Growth Initiative. The results of Pearson Correlation yielded a weak negative correlation ($r=-0.26$) for Perceived Social Support and Perceived Stress which is significant at 0.01 level, which indicates that, as Perceived Social Support increases, Perceived Stress decreases. One possible reason for this could be that when individuals perceive adequate levels of social support from friends, families and significant others, they will be more confident in their ability to handle stressful events effectively. This finding is similar to previous studies which found a negative relationship between perceived stress and perceived social support and in the absence of social support, people's perceived stress may increase (McLean et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2022). Özer et al (2020) found negative and minimal correlation between perceived stress and dimensions of multidimensional social support.

A moderate positive correlation ($r=0.37$) was found between Perceived Social Support and Personal Growth Initiative which is significant at 0.01 level and indicates that as Perceived Social Support increases, Personal Growth Initiative increases. This is in line with the results of previous research that found a significant positive relationship between Personal Growth Initiative and Perceived Social Support, i.e., when individuals perceive to have high of social support, their interest to develop themselves and success increases (Pol & Chandani, 2018; Cai and Lian, 2022). Gumus et al (2019) also found a positive relationship between perceived social support and recreational activity participation among university students. They found that peers provided the greatest support for students that encouraged participation in extracurricular activities. These findings show that individuals take the effort to set goals to foster their self-growth when they feel that they are encouraged by social support from people around them.

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The results yielded a moderate negative correlation ($r=-0.36$) between Perceived Stress and Personal Growth Initiative which is significant at 0.01 level, which indicates that, as Perceived Stress increases, Personal Growth Initiative decreases. This finding is similar to a study in which they found negative relationship between personal growth initiative and psychological distress among adolescents (Ayub & Iqbal, 2012). One possible reason for this could be that individuals who feel that they experience less stress when compared to others and those who believe in their ability to manage the stressful conditions effectively will be better able to make plans and goals for their future and also work to achieve those goals. However, there are also contradictory research finding to the current study which showed an insignificant positive relationship between acculturative stress and personal growth initiative (Jain & Sharma, 2017).

Table 2: Linear Regression of Perceived Social Support and Perceived Stress on Personal Growth Initiative

Variable	B	CSE	t	p	R	R ²	df
Constant	38.07	3.35	11.36	<0.001	0.37	0.14	239
Perceived Social Support	0.32	0.05	6.28	<0.001			
Constant	72.66	2.43	29.85	<0.001	0.36	0.13	239
Perceived Stress	-0.75	0.12	-6.05	<0.001			

*Dependent variable: Personal Growth Initiative, *<0.001*

Linear Regression was used to assess how Perceived Social Support and Perceived Stress influence Personal Growth Initiative among young adults living away from home. From the p value, it can be inferred that Perceived Social Support significantly influences Personal Growth Initiative. The R² value indicates that 14% variance in Personal Growth Initiative can be explained by Perceived Social Support. The model predicts Perceived Social Support on Personal Growth Initiative by 0.32 at the significance level of <0.001. That is, by enhancing Perceived Social Support, its effect on Personal Growth Initiative can be increased. This finding is supported by a study which showed that social support significantly predicted personal growth initiative (Cai and Lian, 2022). Another study by Coşkun et al (2022) also showed similar results where they found Personal Growth Initiative of faculty members from public universities was influenced by organizational support perceptions. An explanation for this finding could be that when individuals perceive higher levels of support from their social network, they are more likely to have increased levels of motivation and the ability initiate and pursue their personal goals as well as growth opportunities, because they feel that they can reach out to others whenever they need the required resources and support.

From the p value, it can be inferred that Perceived Stress significantly influences Personal Growth Initiative. The R² value indicates that 13% variance in Personal Growth Initiative can be explained by Perceived Stress. The model predicts Perceived Stress on Personal Growth Initiative by -0.75 at the significance level of <0.001. A study by Kaur (2018) found that the dimensions of perceived stress and overall perceived stress negatively affect personal growth initiative of inter-regional migrant students studying in north Indian universities. This may be due to the reason that when individuals perceive higher levels of stress, they might feel overwhelmed, fatigued, experience anxiety which might make it difficult for them to focus on personal development and take the necessary risks, focus on immediate problems and concerns instead of working on long-term personal goals, and finally perceived stress can sometimes lead to self-doubt and self-criticism which might make it difficult for the

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individuals to develop the confidence in their ability to achieve goals. These factors can in turn negatively affect an individual's personal growth initiative.

Table 3: Significance of difference between males and females in Perceived Social Support, Perceived Stress and Personal Growth Initiative.

Variable	Gender	N	M	SD	SE	df	t	p value
Perceived Social Support	Male	109	60.31	15.10	1.44	238	-2.61	0.01
	Female	131	65.12	13.01	1.13			
Perceived Stress	Male	109	17.48	5.78	0.55	238	-2.63	0.009
	Female	131	19.47	5.91	0.51			
Personal Growth Initiative	Male	109	58.47	12.36	1.18	238	-0.19	0.84
	Female	131	58.77	12.23	1.06			

Table-3 shows the gender difference in Perceived Social Support, Perceived Stress and Personal Growth Initiative among young adults living away from home. The mean value of males and females for Perceived Social Support was 60.31 and 65.12 respectively with a corresponding standard deviation of 15.10 and 13.01 respectively. The calculated “t” value for Perceived social support between the two groups was -2.61 with a corresponding p value of 0.01. This shows that there is significant gender difference in Perceived Social Support. By comparing the mean scores, females have higher levels of Perceived Social Support than males. This finding is consistent with the results of previous research which indicate that women tend to report higher levels of social support than men (Kalpana, 2016; Gupta et al., 2022; McLean et al., 2022). However, there is contradictory research which found no significant gender difference for perceived social support (Poudel et al., 2020).

The mean value of males and females for Perceived Stress was 17.48 and 19.47 respectively with a corresponding standard deviation of 5.78 and 5.91 respectively. The calculated “t” value for Perceived Stress between the two groups was -2.63 with a corresponding p value of 0.009. This shows that there is significant gender difference in Perceived Stress. By comparing the mean scores, females have higher levels of Perceived Stress than males. This finding is consistent with considerable research findings that found that females scored significantly higher on perceived stress levels than males (Joshi & Joshi, 2021; McLean et al., 2022). There are other studies that did not reveal any differences in the total perceived stress in their college populations (Decro et al., 2002; Jones et al., 2019). Another study showed more similarities that existed than differences in perceived stress with men and women (Eisenbarth, 2019).

The mean value of males and females for Personal Growth Initiative was 58.47 and 58.77 respectively with a corresponding standard deviation of 12.36 and 12.23 respectively. The calculated “t” value for Personal Growth Initiative between the two groups was -0.19 with a corresponding p value of 0.84. This shows that there is no significant gender difference in Personal Growth Initiative. One possible explanation for this might be that both males and females are exposed to similar resources for personal development and are frequently encouraged to pursue personal development and self-improvement. Hence, both genders might benefit by actively pursuing their own personal development. There are various studies that support the findings of the current research which indicates that there is no statistically significant difference between the scores of males and females in Personal Growth Initiative (Malik et al., 2013; Beri & Jain, 2016). However, this is contradictory to the study by Jain & Sharma (2017) which showed that males have higher personal growth initiative than females.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that Perceived Social Support and Perceived Stress significantly influenced Personal Growth Initiative among young adults living away from home. This shows the importance adequate social support from friends, family and other as well as reduced stress and the ability to effectively deal with stressful situations enables individuals to work towards their personal development. Therefore, it is crucial for the development of social support systems for young adults who move to new places and are living away from home in order to reduce their stresses which in turn allow them to take the efforts to set goals that enhance their self-growth. This shows that when these young adults have high Perceived Social Support and low Perceived stress, they are more likely to have high motivation and they tend to initiate and pursue their personal goals as well as growth opportunities.

Implications

Assessing the level of Perceived Stress and its relationship with Perceived Social Support and Personal Growth Initiative provides further support for the development of strategies that enhance social support to cope effectively with stress early in their academic and career life (such as developing friendships with peers for college students and developing a positive relationship with co-workers for individuals who are working) which in turn help the individuals to work towards self-development. Since young adulthood is the period during which we become autonomous and move into adult roles and responsibilities, personal growth initiative becomes important for constructive development. Thus, the results of this study can be a foundation for the development of techniques and other strategies to increase a person's level of Personal Growth Initiative by increasing social support and decreasing stress. This can help individuals who move to a new place to adapt effectively to the current setting by effectively dealing with any stress that they may face and at the same time enhancing their network of social relationships that support them in multiple ways. Therefore, interventions can be introduced in colleges, universities and work places that stimulate students' interest in learning, set challenging tasks for employees, provide them evaluative feedback that promote their confidence and initiative, thereby further enhancing their quality of life.

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Acknowledgement

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Nivetha, P.V., & Simon, S. (2023). Perceived Social Support, Perceived Stress and Personal Growth Initiative among Young Adults Living Away from Home. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, *11(3)*, 591-602. DIP:18.01.056.20231103 , DOI:10.25215/1103.056