

Research Paper

The Role of Social Connectedness and Perceived Social Support in Predicting Life Satisfaction among First-Year Undergraduate Hostelers

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ABSTRACT

The sudden shift in identify from being “school going” student to “college going” student marks an important developmental phase. This transition can be tough, especially when moving into a hostel. It often comes with higher academic demands, less privacy, shared resources like bathrooms and dining areas and being away from parents. Students also face new social networks and peer support systems that can impact their mental health and wellbeing. Those living in college hostel may feel especially vulnerable during this time because of the distance from the family and the need to build new friendships. The present study examines the relationship between social connectedness, perceived social support and life satisfaction among first year undergraduate students who had resided in hostel for a minimum duration of six months. A sample of 101 undergraduate students residing in college hostels was recruited using purposive sampling. Data were collected using standardized scales, including the Social Connectedness Scale (Lee & Robbins, 1995), the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet et al., 1988), and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985). Descriptive statistics and Pearson’s correlation were employed to analyze the data. The results revealed significant positive associations between social connectedness, perceived social support, and life satisfaction. Furthermore, Multiple regression was employed to determine the unique predictive power of these social factors. The overall model was statistically significant, $F(2,98) = 21.96, p < .001$, explaining approximately 30.7% of variance in life satisfaction ($R^2 = .307$). Results showed both social connectedness and perceived social support were significant unique predictors. Social Connectedness emerged as relatively stronger predictor suggesting internal sense of belongingness is more critical for the wellbeing of hostel residents than the mere perception of external support. These finding underscore the importance of fostering deep social bonds to enhance the subjective wellbeing of students within residential academic settings to enhance student mental health and overall wellbeing.

Keywords: Subjective Wellbeing, Social Connectedness, Perceived Social Support, Subjective Wellbeing, College Students

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Conceptualization of Subjective Wellbeing

Mental health is not just absence of disease; it also includes positive functioning and overall well-being (World Health Organization, 2018). Within the domain of positive psychology, subjective well-being (SWB) is how a person evaluates his/her life based on his/her standards and experiences (Diener, 1984). SWB is usually understood through hedonic framework, which emphasizes life satisfaction and happiness.

According to Diener (1984), subjective well-being is composed of three components: life satisfaction, the presence of positive feelings, and the absence of negative feelings. Life satisfaction is a judgement about one's overall life situation and the feeling part both positive and negative relate to emotional experiences of daily life. Together, these dimensions help us in understanding how a person view or access his quality of life. In contrast, the eudaimonic framework focuses on optimal psychological functioning. This includes autonomy, personal growth, purpose in life, and positive relationships (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Although both hedonic and eudaimonic approaches have different way of looking at wellbeing, they both help us in understanding wellbeing from different angles. Modern model of flourishing combines both views by linking positive emotions with meaning and engagement (Keyes, 2002; Seligman, 2011).

For college students, life satisfaction is an important sign of wellbeing because it strongly linked to academic motivation, psychological adjustment and mental health outcomes (Diener et al., 2018). This focus becomes especially important during emerging adulthood, a period when individual is exploring one's identity and gaining more independence (Arnett, 2000). Many students move to university or hostel environment during this time, adjusting to new academic demands, searching for new friendships and dealing with changed living pattern. These changes lead to continuously access their life circumstance, making life satisfaction a crucial measure of how well they cope. Supporting this, Tay et al. (2014) found in their study across different countries that life satisfaction reflects students' overall evaluation of important aspects of life like relationships, personal growth and academics. This highlights its value as reliable indicator of wellbeing in higher education. Therefore, subjective well-being understood through life satisfaction provides solid framework for understanding psychological adjustment in university settings.

Social Connectedness and Subjective Wellbeing

Social connectedness refers to how close a person feels to another person in his/her immediate environment. It includes feeling of closeness, belongingness and an integrated feeling in strong relationships (Lee & Robbins, 1995). Unlike situational social interactions, social connectedness shows a relatively stable feeling of inclusion and acceptance. This idea comes from belongingness theory. It suggests that people have a basic need to form long lasting and positive relationships and bonds (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). From this viewpoint, feeling like you belong is not just something nice to have; it is essential for healthy functioning.

For students starting their new phase of hostel or university life, feeling socially connected becomes crucial for navigating this new chapter. This developmental phase often includes physical separation from family, change in old patterns of living, lack of privacy, shared resources (bathrooms, mess), formation of new connections of peers within both academic as well as living environment. In such circumstances, the ability to fit in new social groups and build strong relationships becomes a huge task. Struggling to form meaningful social

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connections at this time can lead to feelings of isolation, less adjustment, and decreased well-being.

Empirical studies have consistently shown that increased social connections relate to higher life satisfaction and better psychological wellbeing among younger adults. Students who feel a strong sense of belongingness in their academic environments experience better emotional stability, clearer sense of purpose, and less psychological distress (Arslan, 2021). Foundational research conducted on college students by Freeman, Anderman, and Jensen (2007) shows that feeling of belonging in the classroom and on campus is closely linked to motivation and overall wellbeing. Building supportive relationships with friends and instructors or teachers is essential during this transition. Additionally, study by Haslam, Haslam, and Egghins (2008) showed that social connectedness particularly from group affiliations and a sense of social support, strongly predicts the wellbeing of university students, even during stressful times. These findings show social connectedness as a crucial factor that can affect the wellbeing of students.

Perceived Social support and Subjective wellbeing

Perceived social support is the personal feeling that someone is there to support me in my life, in my ups and downs, in my happy or sad moments. There is someone to lean upon and is always available to help or support me either emotionally or in other ways. In short, perceived support reflects the belief that help will be available when needed rather than the actually receiving that support. This difference is important, as psychological benefits often come from the belief in availability instead of from specific instances of supportive.

Researchers often use two theories to explain the link between perceived social support and subjective well-being (SWB): the main-effect model and the buffering hypothesis (Cohen & Wills, 1985). The main-effect model suggests that perceived support has a steady, positive effect on life satisfaction by helping people feel secure, confident and valued, no matter if they are under stress or not. The buffering hypothesis, on the other hand, says that social support helps people cope with the stress by making challenges feel less overwhelming and by boosting their ability to handle tough situations. Together, these theories show that perceived support can improve psychological wellbeing through both in general and difficult times.

Empirical research among university students have shown that higher perceived social support relates to greater life satisfaction and less psychological distress (Hefner & Eisenberg, 2009; Diener & Seligman, 2002). A longitudinal study further supports the role of perceived social support in adjustment of university life. For example, Brissette, Scheier, and Carver (2002) found that better psychological adjustment which includes less stress and fewer depressive symptoms, was connected to increased improvement in perceived social support during the first semester of the college. These findings show that perceived support greatly help students adjust during major life changes. This perceived social support is thus an important interpersonal factor that have the capacity to affect the well-being of students as successful adjustment closely relates to positive well-being outcomes.

Distinction between Social Connectedness and Perceived Social Support

While social support and social connectedness are related ideas, research consistently shows that they are different concepts that affect the psychological well-being in different ways. Students might report high levels of social support, meaning they can count on people

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to help them, but still feel low social connected which may involve a constant feeling of alienation or lack of belongingness to their immediate environment. Foundational research by Lee and Robbins (1998) showed that social connectedness is more closely linked to stable personality traits like self-esteem, identity integration and emotional security. In contrast, social support mainly serves as coping mechanism in specific situations. For example, a first-year student living in hostel might be feeling stressed out before upcoming exam and he/she might seek comfort from family or friends to ease short time anxiety. In this case, social support helps as a way to cope with a specific academic stressor. Therefore, having supportive relationships does not automatically guarantee a feeling of belonging.

The ways that social support affects individuals are unique. The impact of social support is often explained by the stress-buffering model. The model suggests that support protects people from negative mental effects of the stress by providing both reassurance and assistance (Cohen & Wills, 1985). This protective role is especially for college students facing academic and social challenges (Hefner & Eisenberg, 2009). In contrast, the role of social connectedness is best understood self-determination theory. This theory argues that mental health depends upon meeting the basic need of relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Social connectedness presents an ongoing sense belonging and personal integration. It helps maintain emotional stability over time, instead of just easing immediate stress.

Overall, Social connectedness and social support play's role in everyone life as human is a social animal. He/she can't survive alone. These above constructs become more vital for a young child who is entering in new world that require lot of adjustment on his/her part. While the above studies suggests that while social support can reduce short term stress, social connectedness offers a more profound relational basis for sustained subjective well-being. Investigating, the role of these concepts in the wellbeing of college going students will present unique contribution to the field of positive psychology by promoting the subjective wellbeing of college going students. More specific focus on college hostel residents, the study offers a context specific insight into the psychosocial needs of hostel residents, a group often underrepresented in wellbeing research.

Problem Statement

While the studies recognized the role of general social connectedness and social support in wellbeing, these concepts may hold different meaning for a student who have just left school and started hostel life. Living in hostel is different from simply attending college. It involves 24/7 proximity with peers, lack of privacy, shared resources (bathrooms, mess) and lots of adjustment. A student might have high social support that is more "distal" (from parents or old friends) but less connectedness which is more "proximal" (like feeling out of the place in new hostel environment).

The primary objective of this research is to examine the role of social connectedness and social support in predicting life satisfaction among first year undergraduate students. Specifically, this study focuses on first year students who have recently (within the last six months) relocated to a hostel environment, a period marked by sudden shifts in social networks and personal identity. The study also aims to identify which of these two social factors serves as the more robust predictor of life satisfaction, thereby identifying key psychological buffers that support student wellbeing during residential adjustment.

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The following objectives have been framed:

1. To assess the levels of social connectedness, perceived social support and life satisfaction among first year undergraduate hostellers.
2. To examine the relationship between social connectedness, perceived social support and life satisfaction among first year undergraduate hostellers.
3. To determine the unique predictive contribution of social connectedness and perceived social to life satisfaction among first year undergraduate hostellers.

Hypotheses

1. **H1:** Social connectedness will be positively related to life satisfaction among first year undergraduate hostellers.
2. **H2:** Perceived social support will be positively related to life satisfaction among first year undergraduate hostellers.
3. **H3:** Social connectedness and perceived social support will significantly predict life satisfaction among first year undergraduate hostellers.

Research Design

The current study employed a quantitative, cross sectional, correlational research design to examine the relationships between social connectedness, perceived social support, and life satisfaction among college hostel students. Life satisfaction was used as an operational indicator of subjective wellbeing. The study further examined the contribution of social connectedness and perceived social support in explaining the overall life satisfaction. The data was collected at single point in time using standardized self-report measures administered through google forms.

Sample

The sample comprised college students, residing in hostels, selected using purposive sampling. A total of 101 hostel students residing in college campus were included in the study. Participants were aged between 17 and 25 years and were enrolled in undergraduate courses across various academic disciplines. Only residents who have been residing in hostel for minimum duration of 6 months in shared environment were included.

Variables

In the present study, Social Connectedness and Perceived Social was treated as independent variables while Dependent variable was Life satisfaction which was used as an operational indicator of subjective wellbeing. Subjective well-being is a multidimensional construct comprising life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect (Diener, 1984; Diener et al., 1985). Among these components life satisfaction represents cognitive evaluative dimension of subjective wellbeing and reflects wellbeing and overall judgment of their life quality.

Tools Used

1. Social Connectedness Scale-Revised (SCS-R)

To access the Social Connectedness, The Social Connectedness Scale-Revised (SCS-R), developed by Lee, Draper, and Lee (2001), was administered. It is a 20-item self-report scale, used to measure how connected people feel in their social environment. The scale measures feelings of belongingness, closeness, support, satisfaction as well as perceptions of social alienation. Participants respond on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). In terms of its scoring aspect, it consists of 10 positively worded items and 10 worded negatively (20 items). The negatively worded items were

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scored in reverse and combined with positively worded items to produce a total score that ranges from 20-120. Higher score on SCS-R indicate stronger sense of social connectedness. Previous studies reported good internal consistency for the scale, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients typically ranging from .80s to .90s; original study reported $\alpha = .91$, indicating high reliability among college student populations.

2. Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), developed by Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, and Farley (1988) was used to measure perceived social support among hostellers. MSPSS is a 12 item self-report used to assess how individuals perceive support from three sources: family, friends, and significant others with four items representing each subscale. Participants are required to rate items on a 7-point Likert scale: 1. Very Strongly Disagree 2. Strongly Disagree 3. Mildly disagree 4. Neutral 5. Mildly Agree 6. Strongly Agree 7. Very Strongly Agree. Scores were determined by either adding together or averaging the responses. Subscale scores were achieved by totaling the four items related to each type of support and overall perceived social support score was calculated by averaging (summing) all 12 items. Increase score indicates higher level of perceived social support. There is no reverse scoring. The MSPSS has shown strong internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha = .88 and subscale alphas of .91 (significant other), .87 (family), and .85 (friends) among college students. The scale showed good factorial validity and construct validity.

3. Satisfaction with Life Scale

In the present study, Life satisfaction was measured using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985), a standardized self-report measure widely used to evaluate the cognitive component of subjective wellbeing. The SWLS is a 5 item self-report scale rated on a 7 Point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The scale evaluated how persons think and feel about their lives. It includes their feelings of satisfaction with their current life's. Scores are added together to get the total life satisfaction score. Higher score shows higher level of subjective wellbeing. SWLS has shown high internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha ranging from .87 to .89 across studies.

Procedure

For the present study, standardized self-report questionnaire was used to assess social connectedness, perceived social support, and life satisfaction among college students residing in hostels. The Social Connectedness Scale-Revised (SCS-R), the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), and the satisfaction with life scale (SWLS) were selected due to their established reliability and validity in student populations. A demographic information sheet was also included to obtain relevant background details such as gender, year of study and duration of hostel stay. All measures were compiled into a single Google Form and was administered online. The questionnaire link was shared with college students residing in hostels. Participants were provided with information regarding purpose of the study and were assured that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous. After the data was collected, the responses were screened, coded appropriately according to scoring keys, and were made ready for statistical analysis in accordance with the objectives of the study.

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Statistical Analysis

JASP (Version 0.19.0) software is used for analyzing the collected data.

RESULTS

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variables	N	Mean	SD
Social connectedness	101	81.26	13.67
Perceived social support	101	61.59	15.31
Life satisfaction	101	22.63	6.27

The descriptive statistics shown in TABLE 1 provide a summary of data collected on social connectedness, Perceived social support and Life satisfaction among 101 college going hostel residents. Participants reported a high sense of social connectedness (M = 81.26, SD = 13.67) suggesting a strong internal bond with their circle. Similarly, the mean score for perceived support (M = 61.59, SD = 15.31) indicates residents perceive a high level of external resources available to them in times of need. Finally, the mean score on life satisfaction (M = 22.63, SD = 6.27) shows that hostel residents are satisfied with their life circumstances, with some variability in score.

Table 2: Correlational Analysis Between Social Connectedness and Perceived Social Support in Subjective Wellbeing of College hostel Residents.

Variables		Social connectedness	Perceived social support	Satisfaction with Life
Social connectedness	Pearson's r	-		
	p-value	-		
Perceived social support	Pearson's r	.494***	-	
	p-value	<.001	-	
Satisfaction with Life	Pearson's r	.496***	.459***	-
	p-value	<.001	<.001	-

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

The correlational analysis presented in Table 2 explores the relationship between social connectedness and perceived social support in life satisfaction of 101 college going students. The analysis reveals that Life satisfaction is significantly and positively associated with Social Connectedness ($r = .496$, $p < 0.01$), which is also emerging as strongest link, indicating that residents who reported stronger feelings of belongingness and interpersonal closeness within their social world also reported higher level of life satisfaction. Similarly, Perceived social support also showed significantly positive associated with Life satisfaction ($r = .456$, $p < 0.01$) suggesting that residents who believe that they have people to rely on for help or advice reports more satisfaction in life as they feel supported. Furthermore, a significant positive relationship was found between social connectedness and perceived social support ($.494$, $p < 0.01$) suggesting that life satisfaction among hostel residents is significantly shaped by both emotional belongingness and perceived availability of support.

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Table 3: Social Connectedness and Perceived Social Support as Predictors of Life Satisfaction among College Hostel residents.

Variable		R2change	Adjusted R2	F	p
Social Connectedness	.356	.307	.293	21.69	<.001
Perceived Social Support	.283	-	-	-	.004

Table 3 depicts that Social Connectedness and Perceived social support are significant predictors of life satisfaction. Social connectedness is a significant predictor with a coefficient value of .356 ($p < .001$), while perceived social supports is a significant predictor with a coefficient value of .283 ($p = .004$). The overall regression model is statistically significant ($F = 21.69$, $p < .001$), representing that these two variables together explain 30.7% of the variance in life satisfaction ($R^2 = .307$). These results suggest a positive correlation; as levels of social connectedness and perceived social support increases, their life satisfaction also improves significantly. Specifically, Social connectedness ($\beta = .356$) emerged as slightly stronger predictor of life satisfaction. These results indicate that for undergraduate student who has completed six months into hostel life, the internal feeling of “belongingness” (relatedness) within their social world is more critical for satisfaction than external perception of “having help” for their overall wellbeing.

DISCUSSION

The aim of the present study was to examine the relationship between social connectedness, perceived social support and life satisfaction among first year undergraduate students residing in hostels for at least six months. This period represents a crucial developmental stage marked by transition from a familiar home environment to an independent and socially demanding setting of hostel. The findings of the study indicate that both social connectedness and perceived social support play an important role in shaping students life satisfaction during this adjustment period. These finding suggest that the extent to which students are able to form meaningful interpersonal bonds and perceive the availability of supportive relationships significantly influences how positively they evaluate their lives in the hostel environment.

The transition to hostel life involves multiple psychological and social challenges, including separation for, family, unfamiliar routine, increased personal responsibility and the need to form new peer networks. During the initial months, students often experience emotional discomfort, loneliness and uncertainty about their adjustment and survival in unknown environment. The present finding suggests that students who were able to form stronger social connections characterized by greater sense of relatedness and closeness experience more life satisfaction and more positive evaluation of their life circumstances. Social connectedness reduces the feelings of isolation and alienation as transition to unknown environment generally results in.

These findings can be also be understood through the Lense of belongingness theory (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). It states that individuals have an inherent drive to belong and form meaningful interpersonal relationships. And when this need is fulfilled, a person experiences positive emotional state and improved psychological functioning. In context of hostel life, students who developed connections through friendships and experienced sense of belongingness and relatedness through peer interactions were more likely to experience emotional comfort and psychological security which further helped in navigating through the feeling of isolation and uncertainty of unknown environment and thereby enhancing their

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overall life satisfaction. These findings can also be interpreted within framework of Self-determination theory of Deci and Ryan, 2000 who identifies relatedness as one of the three fundamental psychological needs essential for wellbeing.

In addition to social connectedness, Perceived social support also emerged as significant predictor of life satisfaction. This connection can be explained by stress buffering model by Cohen and Wills, 1985 which suggests that social support protects individual from harmful psychological effects of stress by providing emotional reassurance and coping resources. Perceived social support refers to persons belief that others are available to him/her to provide emotional, informational or practical assistance when needed. In context of hostel life, the perception that support is available from peers, roommates or friends significantly reduces ones feeling of vulnerability and helplessness. The belief that one is not alone in facing challenges enhance confidence, reduce stress and allows student to cope effectively with academic pressures and emotional stress which in turn contribute to greater satisfaction with life. Overall, the findings of the present study highlight that social connectedness and perceived social support are an important psychological resource that help hostel students navigate the challenges of isolation, alienation and environmental transition during the initial months of hostel life.

CONCLUSION

The present study offers strong evidence of the important role that social connectedness and perceived social support have on the life satisfaction of Indian college students living in campus hostels. However, the regression analysis shows that social connectedness ($\beta = 0.36$, $p < .001$) is slightly more powerful unique predictor of life satisfaction than external social support ($\beta = 0.28$, $p = .004$). These findings highlight that for students living away from home, having meaningful and supportive peer or family relationships along with the internal sense of belongingness or relatedness plays more vital than simply having support from others.

Despite its contributions, the study has some limitations. The sample size ($N = 101$) is small and comes from a specific hostel environment, which may limit how applicable the findings are to a larger student population. Also, the cross-sectional nature of the study makes it hard to establish clear cause and effect relationship. While it seems that connection leads to satisfaction, it may also be that more satisfied students see out connections more often.

Future research studies should focus on longitudinal research designs to understand how social bonds change throughout student's academic journey. Examining the impact of digital communication compared to face-to-face interaction in hostel settings could offer deep insights into patterns of belongingness. By actively creating inclusive environments, schools can improve the wellbeing of hostel residents and help them develop the strong social foundations they need for their future career.

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Conflict of Interest

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