



Exploring the influence of family, friends and significant other on perceived social support among adolescents

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Abstract

Background: Throughout adolescence, individuals typically experience changes in their social relationships, including interactions within their families, friendships, and romantic involvements. Managing these transitions can be challenging as teenagers aim to establish independence while maintaining meaningful connections with others. **Aim:** This study aims to analyze the levels of perceived social support among adolescents and the relationship between family, friend and significant other. **Method:** A sample of 120 higher secondary school students between the age group of 15-17 were randomly collected by using Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) and a questionnaire based on Sociodemographic characteristics. **Results:** Majority of the adolescents gets high level of support, for perceived social support (55.80%), family (67.5%), friends (60%) and significant other (46.6%). There is a significant positive relationship found between family friends and significant other with perceived social support at 0.01 level. **Conclusion:** During the period of transformation, support systems like families, friends, and significant other are play a crucial role in helping adolescents develop resilience and coping mechanisms to deal with the challenges they face.

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Introduction

Support systems play a vital role during the transition period of adolescence, as individuals undergo significant physical, psychological, and social changes. Developing an effective social support system is crucial for fostering resilience among adolescents, particularly as they steer the challenges of pubertal changes. In a study by Gracia-Carrion et al. (2019), interventions conducted in schools and communities underscored the importance of implementing various strategies to promote interactions among teachers, parents, community members, and other professionals, ultimately contributing to better mental health outcomes. Adolescents who feel well-supported by their family members typically experience better emotional health, higher self-esteem, and reduced stress levels. Sahin-Baltaci and Karatas (2015) found that perceived social support significantly predicts resilience, highlighting that students who live with their parents tend to exhibit higher levels of resilience. Strong family bonds offer a sense of security and belonging, crucial for healthy adolescent growth. When adolescents perceive support from friends, it can mitigate the negative impacts of stress, foster healthy coping mechanisms, and boost overall psychological well-being. Research indicates that among adolescents, emotional support from both friends and family has been shown to be more beneficial compared to other forms of support (Griffiths. Et al., 2011). Supportive friendships also aid in the development of social skills like communication and conflict resolution. Furthermore, research by Prabhu and Shekhar (2017) revealed that perceived social support plays a significant role in fostering resilience among adolescents. In romantic relationships, perceived support from a partner significantly influences emotional growth and relationship satisfaction among adolescents. Supportive partners offer comfort, encouragement, and validation, fostering deeper intimacy and stability.

Methods and measurements

In this study, the researcher conducted a survey among adolescents based

on a questionnaire consists of Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) developed by Zimet et al., (1988) and Sociodemographic characteristics. Multi-dimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) with 12 questions consist of three subscales having four questions each such as significant other, family and friends in three levels as low, moderate and high support. By adding each scores will get the total scores and divided by 12 (total number of questions) to get final scores. The Scores ranging from 1 – 2.9 could be considered as low support, 3 – 5 as moderate support and 5.1 – 7 as high perceived social support. Subscale scores (for Family, Friends and Significant other) will get by adding each group scores and divided by 4 (number of questions). 4) a questionnaire highlighting Sociodemographic characteristics such as age, gender and living area type. Data were collected from adolescents who are in the age group of 15-17 with the help of a questionnaire. A pre-test and pilot study were administered to 5 adolescents to test the validity of the tool and feasibility of the study. Method of data collection was simple random sampling from a higher secondary school from Ernakulam District of Kerala State. The collection of data done from 1st January 2023 to 15th January 2023. A consent form was attached in the beginning of the questionnaire to ensure the respondent's consent for participating the survey and thus the participation was made voluntarily. In this study, there were no identification details such as name of the respondent, name of the school, address, contact details etc. collected from the respondents and thus maintained confidentiality of the data and all reports were kept anonymous. Total 120 adolescents were participated in the study. The collected data were analysed with SPSS.

Analysis of data and results

Data analysis was done based on the sociodemographic characteristics in percentage. The scales used in this study were analyzed in different levels. Multi-dimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) as low social support, moderate social support and high social support with three subscales such as Significant Other, Family and Friends. The statistical measures used to analyse this study were Percentage Analysis, Mean, Standard Deviation (SD)

and ‘t’ test. Based on sociodemographic characteristics, age of respondents are from 15-17 years. Distribution of gender is 46.70% for males and 53.30% for females. Based on the living area type, 87.50% of them are from rural area, only 12.50% are from Urban area.

Table 1 shows Mean, S.D and ‘t’ value of gender and living area type based on perceived social support

Variables		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	df	t	‘p’ value
Gender	Male	56	61.58	16.07	118	-.220	.413
	Female	64	62.17	12.90			
Living Area	Rural	105	62.70	14.62	118	1.630	.106
	Urban	15	56.26	11.72			

Table 1 shows Mean, S.D and ‘t’ value of Sociodemographic Characteristics based on Perceived Social Support among adolescents. The ‘p’ value for gender and living area is above 0.05, since the ‘p’ values for these variables are above 0.05, it suggests that there is no statistically significant difference found between these variables concerning perceived social support among adolescents.

Figure 1: Shows distribution of levels of perceived social support and its subscales

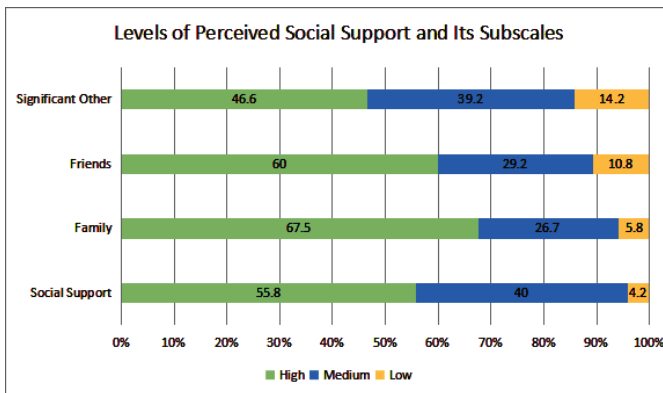


Figure 1 illustrates perceived social support levels among respondents, categorized as high, moderate, and low. The majority (55.80%) report a high level of perceived social support, while approximately 40% indicate a moderate level, and only 4.20% report a low level. Levels for perceived social support subscales are as; support from family, 67.5% are in high level, 26.7% are in moderate level, and 5.8% are in low level. Concerning support from friends, 60% are in high level, 29.2% are in moderate level, and 10.8% are in low level. Regarding support from significant others, 46.6% are in high level, 39.2% are in moderate level, and 14.2% are in low level.

Table 2. Ccorrelation between perceived social support and its subscales.

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Perceived social support</i>	<i>Family</i>	<i>Friends</i>	<i>Significant others</i>
<i>Social Support</i>	<i>1</i>			
<i>Family</i>	<i>.846**</i>	<i>1</i>		
<i>Friend</i>	<i>.789**</i>	<i>.551**</i>	<i>1</i>	
<i>Significant other</i>	<i>.777**</i>	<i>.517**</i>	<i>.344**</i>	<i>1</i>

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

Table 2 displays the distribution of the relationship between perceived social support and its subscales. Pearson correlation tests were employed to examine the association between variables. A significant positive relationship was observed between perceived social support and family (r = 0.846), friends (r = 0.789), and significant others (r = 0.777). Furthermore, a significant positive relationship was found between family and friends (r = 0.551), as well as between family and significant others (r = 0.517). Additionally, the association between friends and significant others was also significant (r = 0.344), indicating a positive relationship between these variables.

Discussion

Analysing the results of sociodemographic characteristics, there is no significant differences found between variables in terms of age, gender, religion and living area type. Girls tend to receive more support from close friends compared to classmates, parents, or teachers whereas boys perceive less support from all these sources (Aisenso et al., 2007). In a study by Mc Lean. et al., (2022), reveals both male and female students reported moderate levels of social support and perceived stress. However, those with higher levels of social support tended to report lower levels of stress. Nautiyal. et al., (2017) revealed that the girls gets more social support than boys and rural adolescent gets better social support than those are living in urban area. A significant number of adolescents report receiving minimal support when they face challenging situations. Despite having access to resources like family, friends, and counselors, they often feel unable to express their emotions (Rask. et al., 2002). In the present study, the association between variables such as family, friends and significant other are positively correlated at 0.01 level. It reveals that there is significant positive relation exist among these variables. Chentsova-Dutton. et al., (2020), conducted a study on perceived parental support across four countries and their findings suggest that parental support is crucial for the psychological well-being of adolescents across cultural contexts. According to Scardera. et al., (2020), perceived social support was significantly associated with prior mental health issues in adolescence, such as depression and anxiety. Lackovic-Grgin and Dekovic (1990) noted that the contribution of significant others becomes less important with increasing age.

Creating positive friendships and strong social support networks during adolescence is vital for promoting well-being and effectively managing stress. Fiz (2018) emphasized the importance of adolescent friendships for social and emotional growth, highlighting conflict resolution as a desirable outcome of strong friendships. As cognitive abilities develop, adolescents become better equipped to navigate the complexities of their social environments. Building social support systems comprised of friends, family, and other important figures act as a protective barrier against stress. The findings from Aziz (2023) suggest that students experiencing high levels of stress tend to perceive lower levels of

social support from significant others, family members, and friends. On the other hand students who report a high level of social support are inclined to experience lower levels of stress. Maria. et al., (2017) states that supportive relationships can buffer against the negative impacts of adverse experiences and promote resilience in adolescents, contributing to their mental health and development.

Major findings of the study

1. Female adolescents perceive more social support than males. Mean value of female adolescents is 62.17 whereas in males it is 61.58.
2. Rural adolescents perceive more social support than those are living in urban area. The mean score of rural adolescents is 62.70 while in urban it is 56.26.
3. The majority (55.80%) of the adolescents perceives high level of social support. 40% of them are getting moderate level of social support and 4.20% are reported as low level.
4. Support from family (67.5%), friends (60%) and from significant other (46.6%), majorities are belongs to high level. Whereas in low level, 5.8% support from family, 10.8% are from friends and 14.2% are from significant others.
5. There is a strong positive correlation exists between family, friends and significant other with perceived social support at 0.01 level. Perceived social support and family ($r = 0.846$), friends ($r = 0.789$), and significant others ($r = 0.777$).

Limitations and suggestions for future study

This study was conducted among adolescents those who are in the age group of 15-17 studying in higher secondary schools. The study was limited to certain sociodemographic variable and further can be extended to other related variables.

Conclusion

Positive friendships offer feelings of belonging, acceptance, and camaraderie, which are fundamental for emotional wellness. They provide avenues for socializing, shared moments, and emotional closeness, all fostering a sense of belonging and overall happiness. When adolescents feel supported and appreciated by their social circle, they gain resilience to tackle the difficulties and demands they face. Encouraging family members can provide valuable guidance on handling physical changes, managing emotions, and adopting healthy habits. Supportive friends and partners offer empathy and reassurance, aiding adolescents in managing their emotional ups and downs and strengthening their ability to bounce back. These nurturing connections create a secure environment where adolescents feel valued and accepted, irrespective of the changes they undergo.

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