The Effect of Social Support on Anxiety, Depression and Stress among Adolescents

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Abstract

This study was conducted to examine the relationship between social support and depression, anxiety and stress among adolescents. 200 undergraduate students of the University of Sindh participated in this study. It was hypothesized that (1) higher social support will negatively correlate with depression, (2) higher social support will negatively correlate with anxiety, and (3) higher social support will negatively correlate with stress. To assess hypotheses the Social Support Behavior (SSB) scale was used to measure the level of social support among students and the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS) was used to measure the level of depression, anxiety, and stress among students. Correlations coefficients were used to find out the effect of the social support and depression, anxiety and stress among Students. The findings of this study revealed significant negative relationship between social support and depression, anxiety and stress suggesting that, higher the social support, the lower is the psychological problem. The findings of the study will be useful in assisting educators, psychologist, and researchers to develop strategies to enhance mental health of adolescents.

Key Words: Social support, Depression, Anxiety, Stress

1. Introduction

Mental health problems in adolescents have a major public health challenge worldwide. It is expected that around 20 per cent of the world's adolescent's population have a mental health or behavioral problem. Among these problems depression is the worldwide largest contributor of mental health problem for people aged fifteen to nineteen years, depression is also the most important factor in suicide attempt among people aged fifteen to thirty five.

The internalizing disorders such as depression and anxiety, in youth, as well as, in adulthood lead to impairment in everyday life (Albano, et al, 2003). Research also suggested about 20% of youngsters and adolescents are affected by anxiety disorders at some time in their development, and these symptoms usually sustain in adulthood (Vasa & Pine, 2004). Environmental factors such as chronic stressors and lack of social support (Morris and March, 2004; Rapee, 1997; Wood and associate, 2003; Priel & Shamai, 1995;) increase the chances of depression and anxiety. support availability develops secure attachment that can reduce anxiety and depression and increase the environmental exploration and social interactions (Kobak & Sceery, 1988 ; Kenny & Sirin, 2006).

Social support is the perception and surety that one is cared for and has assistance in the time of help. Social support refers to the experience being valued, respected, cared about, and loved by others who are present in one's life (Gurung, 2006).These supportive resources can be in the form of emotional (e.g., care and nurturance), financial assistance, informational (e.g., guidance and advice), or companionship (e.g., sense of belonging) and intangible (e.g.

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personal advice). A number of studies have pointed out that social support and social binding or living in a caring or "connected" environment is associated with positive mental health (Resnick, 1997; Kliewer et al. 1998, Sandler et al. 1989; Hoffmann and associate 2000; Peterson and Zill 1986; Kliewer et al.2001).

A strong social support set-up made up of friends and family can be helpful in stress and tough times. Numerous studies have reported that having a network of supportive relations provide psychological well-being. Support relationships help the individual mobilize his psychological resources and master his psychological, emotional burdens .According to Caplan, (1974) support system not only help the individuals in maintaining psychological well-being but also provide the extra supplies of money, materials, tools, skills etc. to improve his handling of different situation. Supportive relationships should be described as a buffer against life stressors as well as a mediator maintains health and wellness (Dollete et al., 2004). Elliot and Gramling (1990) had research on college students' mental health and found that social support helps the college students to minimize depression, anxiety, and stress. Supportive relationships develop Sense of belonging and sense of self-worth; Supportive relationships maintain Feeling of security. Studies have shown that the increased risk of adolescent problems in the absence of parental supports or decreased levels of parental support. Parental support has buffering effects on student stress (Quomma and Greenberg, 1994). Positive relationship with support persons, such as parents, contribute to the enhancement of the adolescents' well-being (Ben-Zur, 2003)

Research has shown that social support has significant role in dealing with psychological problems .In stressful times, social support helps people reduce psychological distress (e.g., anxiety or depression).Support from family and friends have been found to reduce the impact of psychological problems between students (Calvete and Connor-Smith, 2006). These facts demonstrate that the impact of a stressful situation for example can be less when individual have good social support. social support may help individual in dealing with different life stressors in the surroundings and make easy to positive adjustment process.

Eskin (2003) reported social support is very much important for individuals in their life. Deficits in social support have been shown to be linked to many psychological problems such as depression, loneliness, and anxiety. Lack of social support is associated with higher level of depression, anxiety, attention problems, thought problems, social problems, somatic complaints, and lower self-esteem. These notions are supported by the study (Teoh and Rose (2001; Friedlander et al. (2007) Peggy also found Social relationships and social support has positive effect on physical and psychological well-being (Peggy, 2011) . Dollete and collogues,(2004) also found the same result in a research that Social support is an characteristic that should be assess since it is described as both a buffer against life stressors as well as an agent promoting health and wellness Cohen, S. (2004) found that social support wards off the effects of stress on depression, anxiety and other health problems.

In a study on students Villanova and Bownas (1984) for example found that social support might benefit students to cope with everyday life stressor and lighten the burden of academic workload. Without enough support from family and friends, they would be in trouble and are vulnerable to depression, stress and anxiety.

Two sources of social support, for example family and friends, are the predictor of individual's psychological well-being. Family and friend's support is shown by three ways that is warmth, behavioral control, and psychological autonomy-granting. This type of support facilitates the development of positive self-conceptions and social skills, responsibility and competence, and impulse control and barrier against deviance which in turn guide to low level of psychological problems. This support has also been facilitating in healthy level of development (Oswald and Suss, 1994). The combination of family and friend support with acceptance and emotional warmth has been associated with higher grades in

school and college, less misconduct, less psychological distress, and less delinquency among students of all social classes which would produce significant effects on adolescence academic achievement (Silbereisen and Todt, 1994).

Costello, Pickens & Fenton (2001) state: that social support seems to lessen – to buffer, the negative impact of a stressful event and to hasten recovery. Social support influence response to social stressors by providing a basis for positive thinking and cognitive restructuring or by encouraging people to believe they have resources to call on if they wish to distract themselves from a painful situation (Calvete and Connor-Smith, 2006).

1.2 Research Question

Thus, the present study was conducted to understand how social support could play its role in dealing with depression, anxiety, and stress.

1.3 Hypotheses

It was hypothesized
(1) Higher social support will negatively correlate with depression,
(2) Higher social support will negatively correlate with anxiety, and
(3) Higher social support will negatively correlate with stress.

2. Research Methodology

The research design for present study is quantitative research, based on survey method. Simple

Random technique was used for data collection.

2.1 Participants

The sample of the study consisted of 200 Sindh university students (100 male and 100 female) from various departments. The participants were selected from various departments of Sindh university i.e. Psychology, sociology, social work, political science, economics, Computer sciences, Mathematics, IBA. The participants were the students from BS I-IV and M.A/M.Sc. level. They were selected by using Simple random sampling technique. The age range of the participants was 19-24 years. Mean age of the participants is 21.5 (SD = 3.43).

2.2 Research Instruments

Two scales were used in the study to assess social support and psychological disturbance. Both scales are valid and reliable tools which were used cross-culturally worldwide. For the assessment of social support the Social Support Behaviors Scale (SSB; Vaux & Harrison 1985; Vaux et al. 1987) was used to measure social support. The SSB is a 45-item instrument designed to measure social support in terms of emotional, socializing, financial assistance, practical assistance, and advice/guidance. The SSB is designed to assess available supportive behaviors separately for family and friends. The scale applies 5-point likert scale. The scale options are: 1 = no one would do this, 2 = someone might do this, 3 =some family member/friend would probably do this, 4 = some family member/friend would certainly do this and 5 = most family members/friends would certainly do this. The higher scores indicate higher social support. The reliability of the test is 0.81.

To assess psychological disturbances the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS; Lovibond and Lovibond, 1995)) was used to measure depression, anxiety, and stress. The DASS is designed to assess depression, anxiety and stress in adolescents and adults. DASS is a self-report measure which has 42-item. It has three scales; Depression (D), Anxiety (A), and Stress (S) each scale has with 14 items. Every item is scored from 0 (“did not apply to me at all”) to 3 (“applied to me very much, or most of the time”) in terms of how much the item applied within the past week. The reliability of the test is 0.78.

To collect the data students of psychology department help the author .Students went to different departments to collect the data. Convenience sampling procedure was used in gathering data.

2.3 **Data Analyses**

Descriptive statistics used in this study were means, and standard deviations. Pearson product moment correlations were used to determine the strength and direction of relationship among the variables; social support and psychological problems anxiety, depression and stress.

3. Results

A. Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Background of Participants

A total of 200 students from Sindh University participated in this study .the age range of the participants is between 19-24 years old . Of these 200 participants, 100 were male and 100 were female. In terms of their age, 65 % participants were 19 years old, 15 % were 22 years old, 18% were 23 years old, and 2% participants were 24 years old. The mean age of the participants is 21.5 (SD = 3.43).

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of participants (N = 200)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Respondent Characteristics		
• **Gender**		
Male	100	50%
Female	100	50%
• **Age**		
19 years old	70	38%
21 years old	60	27%
22 years old	34	15%
23 years old	20	18%
24 years old	12	02%

TABLE 2: Mean and s.d on social support scale and Depression Anxiety Stress Scales

Scales	Female (=100) Mean	s.d	Male (=100) Mean	s.d
Social Support Scale	56.7	3.5	58.4	3.8
Depression	12.5	4.3	10.2	5.1
Anxiety	12.9	3.1	11.6	3.6
Stress	17.5	2.5	14.4	3.7

TABLE 3: Relationship between Variables

VARIABLES	r
Social Support and Depression	-0.73
Social Support and Anxiety	-0.78
Social Support and Stress	-0.84

df=198 ,p<0.01(two tailed**)**

Descriptive analyses indicate participants perceived high social support mean (male=58.4, s.d=3.8; female=56.7, s.d=3.5) less depression mean (male=10.2, s.d=5.1; female=12.5, s.d=4.3) less stress mean (male=14.4, s.d= 3.7; female=17.5, s.d= 2.5).

Results indicate Correlation coefficient was computed between social support, anxiety, depression and stress. Social support was found to significantly and negatively correlate with depression ($r = -0.77$, $p<0.01$), social support and anxiety ($r=-0.78, p<0.01$), social support and stress ($r = -0.84$, $p<0.01$).Results indicate that the higher the social support, the lower is the depression, anxiety and stress.

4. Discussion

The present study was conducted to examine the relationship between social support and psychological disturbance among adolescence.

Analysis of the results has revealed negative relationship of the social support with depression, anxiety and stress. This suggests that higher the social support, the lower would be the stress, anxiety and depression. These findings are consistent with the previous studies (Friedlander et al., 2007; Boscarino, 1995; Brugha, et al, 2003; Aro & freinds, 2001; Baker & Taylor, 1997; Bullerdick, 2000) which also had revealed that social support correlate negatively with psychological problems such as stress, depression and other psychiatric disorders. Social support is associated positively with overall physical and emotional well-being (Burleson & MacGeorge, 2002). It works as emotional buffer against any daily life stress or trauma to individuals. Social support is the functional content of relationships where individuals provide aid, assistance, and comfort to others (Heaney & Israel, 2002). The impact of psychological problems could be reduced if the individual have good and adequate social support. Adolescence generally a hazardous period and during this time period especially social support from the significant others and other individuals in social circle help the young adolescents to manage their social problems effectively (McCaskill & Lakey, 2000). The good social support reduces the degree to which the stressors are perceived as a threat to emotional wellbeing.

Social support benefit mental health by providing psychological and material resources required to handle the stress. Stress is supposed to effect health not only by endorsing behavioral coping responses that are harmful to health (smoking, alcohol use , drug use, sleep loss) but also by activating physiological systems such as the sympathetic nervous system and the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal cortical functions . Continued or recurring stimulation of these systems could be cause of risk for the development of a variety of psychological problems such as depression and anxiety disorders. When a person has the belief that others will provide required help may reinforce one's ability to manage with stresses, consequently changing the evaluation of the situation and lowering the effect of stress. One's confidence that support is with oneself may also weaken the emotional responses to the perceived event and change the thought about the event which causes maladaptive behavioral responses.

Thus, social Support may enhance the control over stress by providing a solution to the problem.

5. Conclusion

It is concluded that good social support reduces the degree to the stressors are perceived as threat to emotional wellbeing. Stress is an unavoidable truth of daily life which gives rise to other social and adjustment problems but positive social support pacify and provide comfort against stress and anxiety. Social support ensures self-worth and perceived social acceptance which provides relief for an individual who is stressed and help in maintaining an individual's positive emotional experience to continue life successfully.

5.1 Recommendation

Social support is a necessary factor in maintaining psychological health. Adaptation of Modern human culture leave individual alone, where everybody struggle to become superior to others. They don't have time for each other, their family members, even for themselves. It is recommended that they set a family time in their homes and also they should join community based program where they sit together and share their problems with each other, these types of meetings develop a feeling of security and worth.

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