

A Review of Research on the Influencing Factors of Social Support

Xiaoling Lu^{1,2*}, Gemma Perey¹, Huaiyuan Zhao^{1,2}, Jie Tang^{1,2}

¹University of Cordilleras, Baguio 2600, Philippine

²Liupanshui Normal University, Liupanshui 553004, China

*Corresponding Author

Abstract: Social support is the assistance and support provided by individuals and organizations, which has positive impact on physical health, mental health and well-being. In this study, starting from the concept, category and influencing factors of social support, we systematically review the related researches of social support, and give a prospect to the future research in the region.

Keywords: social support, influencing factor, research outlook

1. Introduction

Since 1970s, "social support" has gradually become a hot topic in psychological research, and the social support of different groups has been paid more and more attention by researchers. Scholars at home and abroad have carried out large-scale investigation and research around social support, which proves that social support can not only help individuals to better cope with difficulties and challenges, but also have a positive impact on physical health, mental health and well-being[1,2]. In this paper, we summarize the research on social support and understand the concept, category and influencing factors of social support, which is necessary for both theoretical development and educational practice.

2. Social support and related concepts

2.1 Concept of social support

Social support is the spiritual and material help and support provided by various social organizations (including parents, relatives, friends, classmates, teachers, etc.) associated with individuals[3]. As a complex and multidimensional concept, many scholars define the connotation of "social support" from different angles. For example, according to the perception of receiving supporters, social support is an experience in which individuals feel loved, cared for, respected, and cherished[4,5], social resources and social networks that belong when they need advice, help, assistance, support or protection[6]. According to the principle of reciprocity and social exchange, social support is the exchange of resources between at least two individuals, or through social, interpersonal transactions, which providers and recipients can perceive and aim to improve the well-being of recipients[7,8]. According to the nature of social support, social support is social and psychological support that individuals receive or perceive in their environment (e. g. respect, care and help)[9]. The actual social support received is defined as the existence of the behavior that supports receiving, while the perceived social support (perceived social support) is defined as the perception and availability of support[10,11]. Marroquin etc[12]. For the individual, the actual social support and perceived social support are not the same, there is only a moderate correlation between the two, Li and so on[9]. The survey also confirmed that perceived social support is more predictive and functional than actually received social support.

2.2 Concepts of social support

2.2.1 Social Support Network

The social support network originated from the related research of social network. Social network analysis has emerged since the 1920s and has gradually become a new field of sociology. Among them, social support network is an important part of social network analysis, which refers to the social network in which individuals can obtain the support of various resources, such as money, emotion,

material and so on[13]. Social support network is a complex dynamic system in which social support is the interpersonal flow. A good social support network can help individuals better cope with stress and improve their physical and mental health and happiness index. Conversely, a bad social support network can aggravate individual physical and mental discomfort and lead to interpersonal interaction and personal life crisis[13].

2.2.2 Network social support

Network social support refers to the degree of concern, support, understanding and respect obtained by individuals through network interaction and online communication[14]. Because of the difference between the network environment and the real life situation, the network expression has anonymity, high circulation and high exposure, which can spread and popularize the information more efficiently[4,14]. This leads to the commonness and difference between network social support and real social support. Some studies have proved that online social support can positively predict the quality of friendship, increase the individual's perception of social support, improve life satisfaction and reduce depression. It is an effective tool to maintain mental health[15]. It has also been found that social support can buffer the impact of traumatic life events on individual life, which depends not only on the number of individuals receiving social support, but also on the type of communication that receives social support. The effect of face-to-face communication is better than that of computer-mediated network communication[16]. In addition, individuals with higher levels of social support do not have a significant role in obtaining support from social network media, but individuals with lower levels of social support have a significant effect in supporting social network media, which can enhance social support systems[17]. When individuals lack close contact with relatives and friends in real life, the support and attention gained from the Internet can play a better role in compensating for loneliness and self-growth[18].

2.2.3 Understanding social support

Understanding social support refers to the individual's belief in obtaining support from friends, family and others, a subjective feeling and evaluation of support perception[19]. The actual social support emphasizes the actual material, emotion, information and other resources received by the individual, more emphasizes the existence of the behavior of supporting the reception, understands that social support is not exactly equivalent to the support of reality, and emphasizes the individual's perception, interpretation and utilization of resource support[9]. A large number of studies have shown that the belief in the availability of support actually seems to have a stronger effect than the actually accepted social support, and that perceived social support is more functional and predictive[4,20].

3. Classification of social support

According to the specific form of social support, it can be divided into information support, instrumental support and emotional support[1,3]. Information support refers to information and advice that individuals receive from others to help individuals better understand stress situations, adopt appropriate resources and coping strategies, and alleviate the potential pain or cost of stress events[4]. Instrumental support refers to assistance actually provided by others or social organizations, including social services, financial assistance or specific supplies, such as driving injured friends to emergency rooms or providing food to families who have just lost their loved ones, which fall into this category[4]. Emotional support means that others provide warmth and nourishment to the individual, showing understanding, encouragement and care, and making them feel a sense of connection and value[4,21]. Three kinds of social support can be obtained from family, friends, teachers and other objects, but there are some differences in sources. Zhang Yu, Xing Zhanjun[21]. Looking back at the relevant research, we found that family members mainly provide instrumental support, friends and teachers mainly provide information support, lovers mainly provide emotional support, and in three forms, emotional support is much more predictive of positive emotion, happiness, satisfaction and so on than instrumental support and information support[21].

According to the nature of social support, it can be divided into objective support, subjective support and support utilization. Objective support is the material assistance that the individual actually receives, or the actual participation in the social network, the group relationship; subjective support is the concern, respect and understanding experienced by the individual, and more inclined to the subjective feeling of the external support; the degree of support utilization is the objective support received by the individual, the use and degree of subjective support, for example, when some individuals obtain the support of others, they refuse to help each other[2]. In the past, it has been

suggested that objective support and subjective support are of certain significance, but compared with objective support, subjective support plays a greater role in predicting the physical and mental state, mood or behavior characteristics of individuals more effectively[21].

According to the measurement of social support, structural social support and functional social support can be distinguished. Structural social support assesses the number of all relationships and social roles of individuals, the frequency of contact with different social network members, the degree of closeness and internal connection within social network members, focusing on the number of social relationships and the degree of internal association; Functional support is often assessed through projects with specific functions (such as information, tools, emotions), mainly in response to a particular stressor context, whether a member may provide relevant support, for example, how many different kinds of support individuals can get from their own social networks in a stress situation[4,22].

According to the source of social support, it can be divided into social support from parents, teachers, friends, classmates, colleagues and superiors. Studies have found that girls report receiving more support from their peers than from their parents, while boys report receiving more support from their parents than from their peers[23]. Previous studies have shown that the level of perceived social support received from parents and friends is comparable at different ages; only for young people aged 16 to 18, friend support exceeds parental support[24]. The lack of parental and peer support can not be compensated by peer support[23]. In primary school, teacher support is associated with adaptive emotional function and higher academic achievement[23]. However, in the older group of secondary school students, the level of teacher support has decreased somewhat, and the importance of friend support has begun to emerge, which may be related to the transition from primary to secondary school[24,25]. During college, peer and group support has a key influence and even determines students' integration and overall performance on campus[10]. Family support is the most powerful protective factor among depressed adolescents, and school support and teacher support also play an important role, while the correlation between peer support is not clear, and it may be that ordinary peer groups (such as classmates) and intimate peer groups play different roles[26]. The support of family, friends and teachers is a significant protective factor for the positive psychological development of the individual[27,28]. In addition, there is some evidence that the overall school atmosphere is important because it is an important predictor of low depression, high school adaptation and high self-esteem[23]. Some scholars distinguish close friends from ordinary peer groups and find that support from ordinary peer groups is more associated with positive results than that of close friends. In addition, support from ordinary peer groups (such as support from ordinary classmates) is consistent with psychological adaptation and well-being, which can predict lower levels of depression in girls, higher levels of leadership and social skills, boys' leadership skills, and predictive validity beyond the support of close friends, parents and teachers[23]. In the field of work, support from superiors and colleagues can help individuals accomplish their daily tasks[29]. Especially in the collectivist cultural environment, the support and understanding of superiors can relieve individual psychological pressure and increase job and family satisfaction[30] and reduce employee absenteeism in daily work and increase the probability of retention[31].

4. Influencing factors of social support

4.1 Gender

From the two levels of actual social support and understanding of social support, the level of support felt by girls from family, friends, teachers, peers or classmates and other important others is significantly higher than that of boys[24,32]: Domestic studies have also confirmed that girls receive more objective and subjective support and that the use and perception of social support is significantly higher than that of boys[33-35]. And the difference will increase with age[36]. The proportion of girls with adequate peer support is also higher[37]. On the one hand, the society has different role expectations for men and women, the image of men is often independent, rational, competitive, the image of women is often gentle, group, good at communication, this role positioning is conducive to girls to participate in more interpersonal interaction[26,38]. On the other hand, the way boys and girls establish friendship is very different, boys tend to develop friendship in the joint task, seek instrumental support from their peers, develop friends with common interests and sports activities, while girls pay more attention to establishing emotional intimacy, seeking psychological support from their peers and paying attention to secret sharing[23,39]. In addition, in the face of stress or difficult situations, girls are more likely to seek social support as a coping strategy, while boys are more likely to use escape or

sports entertainment as coping strategies[23]Women, whether teenagers, college students or adults, have more same-sex close friends, mobilize more social support in stressful situations, and provide more frequent and effective social support to others[4]. In real life, although men usually have larger social networks, women invest more in social relationships and experience more intimate relationships[30]. There are also some gender differences in the impact of social support from different sources, and friend support received by girls can positively predict low levels of depression, while the male group does not[40]. There is a significant correlation between the overall support of girls and social adaptation, and the correlation between emotional problems and overall support is more obvious among girls, but for boys, only peer support is significantly associated with social adaptation[23]And, over time, the effects of social support on depression, adaptation and self-esteem of girls remain strong, but lower for boys[23].

4.2 Source

At present, there is no consistent conclusion on whether there are differences in social support in the source area. Studies have found that there are no significant urban-rural differences in social support and that individuals from both urban and rural areas are supported at all levels and sources[41-43]. But some studies have produced different findings. For example, Zhan Liyu et al[44]Of course In the study, college students from cities reported higher levels of social support than rural college students. Liu Lixin[45]. The social support of Uyur college students was investigated, but the opposite conclusion was reached. The subjective support score of rural students was significantly higher than that of urban students. Li Min, GE Zhaojiao[46]. It is found that the objective support level of urban students is higher, but the utilization of support is slightly inferior to that of rural students. To sum up, perhaps because of the difference between urban and rural areas, the living environment of the city has richer information, convenient communication channels, individuals are easy to obtain more abundant material assistance, and have a wider range of social networks and group relations. Individuals from rural areas, although less objective resources, have a higher degree of use of support and can more effectively receive and use the support and help of others[46].

4.3 Stages and grades

Previous studies have found that primary school students receive significantly lower levels of objective support than secondary school students[47]. There is also less subjective perception of support and insufficient use of social support[48]. However, middle school students receive more material support, have a wide range of social networks and groups, and have a high degree of support and utilization[48]. Moreover, the actual social support and perceived social support experienced by junior high school students may be significantly higher than that experienced by senior high school students due to different physical and mental development and academic stress[49,50]. Compared with high school students, college students have more confidence and more social support from their families and friends[51]. It can be seen that the level of social support that individuals actually receive and perceive is generally increasing with the growth of learning segments. Although there are consistent conclusions about the differences in social support, there are different views on the specific differences between different grades. For example, some studies have found that the subjective support, objective support and support utilization of freshmen in the four grades of university are the highest[44]. As the process of learning progresses, the social support of college students will gradually decline[38,43]From freshman to senior year, the level of perceived social support and network social support reported by individuals has gradually increased with age[52,53]. The survey also found that first- and fourth-year students received significantly higher social support than second- and third-year students[54]In terms of satisfaction with social support, third-year college students had the highest satisfaction, while fourth-year students had the lowest satisfaction[55]. He Zhen et al. of middle school students[56]. The source of social support for junior high school students was investigated, which confirmed that the first grade students received the most family support and other support, while the second grade students received the most friend support, Gu Qian and so on[57]. It is also found that the subjective support level of senior one students is significantly higher than that of senior two students.

4.4 Left-behind and mobile experience

In view of China's economic development and transition period, with a large number of rural people entering urban jobs, the number of rural left-behind children and migrant children is also increasing significantly. The social support of the two groups has also become a topic of widespread concern in

the past two decades. Overall, the objective support, subjective support and support utilization of left-behind children are low, and the overall social support level is at a significant disadvantage[58-60]. Pan Yun et al[35]Zhu Jianlei[61]. The study also reached a consistent conclusion that the perceived level of social support of left-behind children, as well as social support from families, peers and other objects, was far lower than that of non-left-behind children. Ding Fang et al[62]. CustomsNote the social support characteristics of mobile junior high school students, found that mobile junior high school students experience father support, teacher support and same-sex friends support are significantly lower than local junior high school students. Wang Weiguo, Wang Shue[63]. The social support of Uygur mobile primary and middle school students was investigated, and it was found that the social support of individuals with mobile time of more than 3 years was higher than that of individuals with mobile time of less than 3 years. Social support system is not perfect, but with the passage of time, the level of social support will gradually rise.

In addition, the impact of left-behind and mobile experiences has a certain continuity, affecting the individual's perception of social support level in adulthood[64]. A study on the social support level of college students with left-behind or mobile experience found that college students with left-behind or mobile experience reported the worst social support level, followed by college students with left-behind experience, while college students with mobile experience had the highest social support level, and there was no significant difference from ordinary college students, which proved that, compared with left-behind life, unstable left-behind and mobile life, it was a protective factor to follow parents' mobile life more regularly, so that individuals could obtain basic social support[65]. Xie Qili et al[66]. The study also found that students with left-behind experience received significantly lower family support and other support than those without left-behind experience. These studies show that the experience of following parents' mobility brings more family support than staying at home, and also has a positive impact on mental health, but the growth environment of staying alone and staying behind and floating is uncertain, which reduces the level of individual social support and has some negative effects on psychological development[65].

4.5 Culture and ethnicity

Culture and nationality are also one of the key variables affecting social support perception and acceptance. On the one hand, there are many cultural benefits of social support for mental and physical health. For example, interventions or policies that provide social support have had the same positive impact among different ethnic groups in Taiwan[67]. There are no racial or ethnic differences in the relationship between teacher support, student support and academic adaptation[39]. On the other hand, there are differences in the experience and use of social support in different cultures. People in East Asian culture regard the harmonious relationship of social groups as the primary goal, and attracting attention to others for help because of personal problems will be regarded as inappropriate demands on social groups and more willing to solve problems alone. On the contrary, people in European and American culture tend to regard interpersonal relationships as a resource, seek external support from family and friends, and use social relationships more to deal with problems and help themselves better cope with stressful events[4]. In the Italian cultural context, family relations and ties play an important role, and Italian teenagers rely more on their parents for social support[68]. Asians are more likely to use implicit forms of social support to benefit from perceived social support, but European Americans are more likely to use explicit support to benefit from advice, tool help, and emotional support[4]. There is also a certain degree of difference between Chinese and Korean college students. The former's social support mainly comes from friends, tends to material support, while the latter's social support mainly comes from family and tends to emotional support[69]. There are also differences in the impact of social support on individuals in different cultural contexts. For example, Drummond et al[30]. A study of the role of social support in collectivist and individualist countries found that the impact of family support and superior support on female employees in inland China and Hong Kong was greater than in Australia and New Zealand, reducing or cushioning the conflict between work and family life faced by individuals and significantly improving life satisfaction[30]. Other studies have confirmed similar differences, with African-American students experiencing stronger positive teacher-student relationships on their academic commitment than European and American students[39]. Family support and friend support experienced by ethnic minority elderly people have a greater impact on life satisfaction than that of Han nationality elderly people[70]. There are few studies on cultural and ethnic differences supported by domestic society, such as Jiang Hong[71]. It is found that there are significant differences in the level of social support among college students of different nationalities. The families, friends and other support levels of Uygur college students are the highest, followed by Hui college students, Kazakh and other minority college students; Gao Xiaofeng and others[72]. This paper

investigates the social support of poverty alleviation and relocation immigrants in ethnic areas of Sichuan Province, and finds that there is no difference between the objective support level of Yi residents and Han nationality residents, but the degree of subjective support and support utilization of Yi residents is significantly higher than that of Han nationality residents. The overall level of social support is also higher. Generally speaking, there are few studies on cultural and ethnic differences supported by domestic society, and no consistent conclusions have been reached. On the one hand, due to the differences in the study sampling, on the other hand, it may be due to the different living environment and national culture. Objective access to social support and subjective perception have a different impact.

4.6 Education, age, working years and marital status

For adults, the level of social support is also affected by their own education, age, working years, marital status and other factors. For example, Shen Yane and others[73]. This paper investigates the social support status of the new generation of employees, and finds that employees with bachelor's degree or above have higher level of information support, but there is no significant difference between them in emotional support, instrumental support and network social support. Wang Hu[74]It is found that the length of working life also has an impact on social support, the counselors who work more than 4 years have received more objective support, and the overall level of social support is also high. Wang Guiping[75]. Of course The study confirmed that the overall level of subjective and social support of middle-aged students was significantly higher than that of young people. Qiu Yue[76]In the survey of employees ,41-50-year-old employees generally felt higher social support than other age groups. Chen Xiaopu, Li Qianqian[77]It is found that the level of objective support of individuals with work experience is significantly higher than that of individuals without work experience. In marriage, previous studies have confirmed that married people perceive more social support than unmarried people[4]Tahmasbipour etc[78]Compared with the social support level of single students and married students, it was found that the average social support of married students was larger than that of single students, but the difference did not reach a significant level statistically. Wang Hu[74]Wang Guiping, et al[75]. In the survey, the overall level of subjective and social support of married individuals was significantly higher than that of unmarried individuals. Chen Xiaopu, Li Qianqian[77]A similar conclusion was reached that married masters of education experienced a higher level of objective support. To sum up, highly educated individuals may have more convenient and efficient information channels, and with the increase of age and working years, as well as the formation of marriage and family relations, individuals tend to establish more stable social relations networks and obtain more social support from sources.

4.7 Family environment

Early family environments provide the basis for the development of social skills and social support. If the family environment is warm and nourishing, children can develop mature social communication skills and skills through the internalization of positive role models, and build functional social support systems. If children grow up in indifferent, non-sultative, conflicting families, they experience more threatening events, acquire less social skills, and make it difficult for them to develop or use social support networks effectively[4]Zhang Shanshan, Zhang Ye, for example[41]It was found that the subjective and objective support of the students raised by parents was significantly higher than that of the non-parents raised students, with a higher level of social support, while the complex family relationship (such as divorce or single parent family) led to many students not receiving enough attention and care, and the lack of parental support affected their academic and psychological development level. Some studies have confirmed that attachment types and social support are also related, among the four attachment types, the security attachment individuals have the highest level of perception of social support, and the actual support is more, while the fear attachment individuals show more distrust, alienation and the lowest level of social support to others and the outside world[79]Mustafa Eskisu . 1[5]The study found that individuals with higher levels of family disorders had lower family support, teacher support and higher bullying behavior. He Hong, Yang Yang[42]The survey also confirmed that individuals with family harmony have higher subjective support and support utilization.

4.8 Personality

Many studies examined the relationship between personality traits and perceived utilization of

social support and found that extroversion, neuroticism, and openness predicted overall social support and perceived social support[80]Self-reliant personality can positively predict individual perception of social support[81]. The "inward and outward" factors in personality traits are key variables that influence social support. Extroverted individuals also expand their social networks to gain more social support[54]. Foreign studies have also shown that extroversion can positively predict the number of Facebook friends of individuals[82]. There is also a certain degree of interaction between neuroticism and gender on social support. At low levels of neuroticism, women report more overall social support than men, and when neuroticism levels increase, the gap between male and female social support gradually shrinks. At the highest levels of neuroticism, there is no gender difference in the perception of social support[83]. Lian Ling, Guo Shengzhong[84]It is found that human nature individuals have the characteristics of trust, frank communication, generosity, responsiveness, humility and compassion, and can significantly predict the level of individual understanding of social support. Du Gaoqin, Chai Xiaoyun[85]The results show that personality tenacity can positively predict the perceived social support of college students. Individuals with higher tenacity have more resilience and strength and can make better use of social resources.

5. Conclusion and outlook

After reviewing the above research, we can see that the related research of social support has received extensive attention in recent years, but according to the existing research structure and model, the following aspects should be paid attention to in the future research:

First, most of the existing studies are in cross-sectional studies, longitudinal tracking survey is relatively small, it is difficult to reveal the trend of social support over time, future research needs to increase the longitudinal study of social support, To investigate whether the impact of different variables on social support will change over time;

Second, most empirical studies are often aimed at a particular group, for example, from the perspective of college students, middle school students, the elderly, teachers or enterprise employees, but whether the results of a single group of research are popularized and universal still needs to be discussed. It is necessary to expand the scope of the survey object and take into account all kinds of social groups to verify it;

Third, individual psychology and behavior are often caused by the interaction of internal and external factors. In many studies, the influencing factors of social support start from outside or inside. There is less attention to the interaction between the two. Follow-up studies should pay more attention to the interaction of internal and external factors of social support.

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