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Psychosocial Support and Well-Being of Adolescents: The Mediating Role of Self-Efficacy

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Abstract

Adolescent well-being emerges from a confluence of factors, encompassing social support from family, peers, and educators, a safe and supportive environment, and a strong sense of self-belief. This study investigates the mediating influence of self-efficacy in the association between adolescents' perceived psychosocial support and their well-being. Students aged 13 to 19 from different schools and colleges in Southern India, participated in the study (n= 229, Boys= 46.29%, Girls= 53.71%). Self-report scales, viz. The Psychosocial Support Scale (PSYCHOSS-22), the Indian Scale of Adolescent Well-being (ISAW), and the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE) were used to assess the study variables. The data were analysed using Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient and structural equation modelling. The study's findings revealed positive and significant correlations between psychosocial support, self-efficacy, and the well-being of participants. Self-efficacy partially mediated the relationship between psychosocial support and well-being, which suggests that adolescents' belief in themselves develops as a result of the psychological and tangible support they receive from their surroundings, contributing to enhanced well-being. Furthermore, self-efficacy facilitates adolescents' perception and pursuit of psychosocial support, highlighting the importance of recognizing and utilizing available social support for their psychological well-being. The findings underscore the importance of endorsing strategies aimed at bolstering adolescents' self-efficacy during their formative years.

Keywords: psychosocial support, self-efficacy, well-being, adolescents

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Introduction

Promoting the well-being of adolescents is one of the primary sustainable development goals on the United Nations' agenda for 2030 (United Nations, 2020). Well-being is an interplay of physical, nutritional, emotional, cognitive, and sociocultural factors that has a major impact on the developmental trajectory of adolescents (Ross et al., 2020). Hence well-being can be a state of positive feelings and effective functioning, which enables individuals to develop and thrive (Ruggeri et al., 2020). Enhancing adolescent well-being requires a supportive environment, access to education and healthcare, positive relationships, and opportunities for growth and development. Psychosocial support is the key to help the adolescent wade through this challenging period of development and gain improved mental, emotional, and physical health and overall life satisfaction. Psychosocial support implies the behaviours or actions of individuals, family members, friends, or teachers that address the psychological and social needs of adolescents (Hansen, 2009).

Adolescents may experience stress due to loss, failure, conflicts, fear, insecurity, and an unhealthy environment (Hariharan et al., 2023). When exposed to such stressors, internalizing symptoms are effectively mitigated in the presence of psychosocial support (Quinlan-Davidson et al., 2021). Emotional, psychological, and social assistance from family, friends, school, and teachers helps young individuals navigate the challenges of this critical life stage (Guevara et al., 2021). Psychosocial support nurtures the psychological strength of adolescents by offering a safe space to appraise and deal with stressful situations, express emotions, and develop healthy relationships (Lee et al., 2007). Such support also fosters a sense of belongingness, enhances self-esteem, and helps the adolescent develop a positive self-image, all of which contribute to the overall well-being of adolescents (Alshammari et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2022). In a collectivistic society like India, from time immemorial, psychosocial support has been found to empower adolescents to develop into well-adjusted, confident individuals capable of facing life's demands with greater strength and optimism (Padhy et al., 2022). Positive relations with others are mentioned as one of the six factors influencing well-being in the Six-Factor Model of Psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989), thus impinging the need for social support for improved well-being.

For a long time, researchers have shown interest in exploring the discrete factors influencing the relationship between social support and well-being among adolescents. Loneliness, hopelessness, and self-esteem were among those mediating factors (Hou et al., 2021; Norman, 1997; Poudel et al., 2020). Individuals having trust in oneself to deal with negative feelings is more likely to lead a satisfied life, and self-efficacy is one such belief in one's ability to successfully carry out behaviours required to overcome challenges, achieve goals, and handle various situations. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's confidence in their ability to carry out behaviour that can lead to certain desired outcomes (Bandura, 1986). The theory of self-efficacy also pronounces that individual's perception of their skills and the significance of that perception are crucial factors in determining successful outcomes (Sutton, 2001). Adolescents with higher levels of self-efficacy tend to exhibit

enhanced well-being as they approach obstacles confidently and proactively (Ahmad et al., 2014; Kamil & AL-Hadrawi, 2022).

Self-efficacy thus helps them cope with stressful and unforeseen situations and wade through difficult times (Cattelino et al., 2021). Research reveals that self-efficacy is influenced by the support extended by people around the individual (Kleppang et al., 2023). Social motivation is one of the four sources of self-efficacy explained by Bandura (1997), which implies that a person's self-efficacy is impacted by favourable and unfavourable observations and remarks about their performance or ability to perform. Words of encouragement and support from the closest people are an easily accessible and widely acknowledged source of self-belief among children and adults (Agholor, 2019). The influence of social support is of great importance in the Indian context. Indian culture is affiliation-oriented, and social support has always been an important ingredient in Indian families. The close association and open communication, which have been one of the strengths of the Indian family system, can help children and adolescents enhance self-efficacy. As proposed by Bandura (1997), the sources of self-efficacy are mastery experience which relates to information about one's success or failure; vicarious experience gained by one's observations of people and their capabilities; social or verbal persuasion, related to persuasion and encouragement by parents or significant and psychological and physical states related to signs of vulnerability, positive or negative emotions. All the above sources of self-efficacy are directly or indirectly related to support from significant family members and friends. In Indian culture, parents, grandparents, and other family members play a vital role in assisting teenagers in navigating their life goals, strengthening self-confidence, and managing emotions, improving their general well-being.

Furthermore, Narayanan & Onn (2016) state that perceived social support and self-efficacy as two major factors contributing to the resilience of young adults. Psychosocial support can enhance an adolescent's ability to bounce back from setbacks and adversities when coupled with a strong sense of self-efficacy. They perceive challenges as surmountable and will be less likely to succumb to feelings of helplessness, leading to improved overall well-being.

Current Study

Social support and self-efficacy have been found to have a direct relationship with well-being. Studies by Alshammari et al. (2021) and Singstad et al. (2021) demonstrated the positive impact of social support on adolescent well-being. Andretta & McKay (2020) and Kamil & AL-Hadrawi (2022) emphasize the significance of high self-efficacy in enhancing adolescent well-being. The successful transition to adulthood depends on the adolescent's efficacy to master skills, overcome challenges and adjust to the environment. Hence, this trait of self-efficacy needs nurturance, which can be done through positive reinforcement, life skills development, enhanced goal-setting, and supportive feedback. However, despite the exploration of various mediating factors within the context of social support and well-being, self-efficacy remains notably unaddressed

(Hou et al., 2021; Norman, 1997; Poudel et al., 2020). The current study seeks to elucidate the role of adolescent self-efficacy within the nexus of psychosocial support and well-being, aiming to enrich the body of literature on protective factors that foster adolescent well-being.

The study hypothesized that: there will be a relationship between psychosocial support, self-efficacy, and well-being among adolescents (Hypothesis 1), and self-efficacy will mediate the relationship between psychosocial support and well-being among adolescents (Hypothesis 2).

Method

Participants

To meet the objectives, 229 adolescents (Males = 106; Females = 123) aged between 13 to 19 years (Mean = 16.13, SD = 2.04) from schools and colleges in South India were recruited for the study. Data was collected using a convenient sampling technique. Adolescents without any diagnosed developmental and psychological abnormalities were included in the study.

Measures

Psychosocial support: The Psychosocial Support Scale (PSYCHOSS-22) was developed by Padhy et al. (2022) to be used across different age groups, with six dimensions, viz. Social Support Network (SSN), Family-based Psychosocial Support (FBPSS), Communicative Support (CS), Supportful Disposition (SD), Psychosocial Support Deprivation (PSSD), and Psychosocial Support Availability (PSSA). The scale has a good internal consistency ($\alpha = .84$) and has 22 items (E.g., I can go to my friends when I need advice; My parents/family members support my decisions) rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.”

Well-being: Indian Scale of Adolescent Well-being (ISAW), developed by Hariharan et al. (2020), consisting of 15 items (E.g., I feel that I live my life the way I want to; While accepting an important assignment, I feel confident and relaxed), was used to assess well-being among adolescents. The responses were marked on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from “very much unlike me” to “very much like me.” Cronbach alpha coefficient of the scale obtained from the present study is .63.

Self-efficacy: General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE) with 10 items was developed to assess self-efficacy among adults and adolescents above age 12 (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). The statements (e.g., I can always manage to solve difficult problems

if I try hard enough; If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution) can be rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from “not at all true” to “exactly true.” Cronbach alpha coefficient of the scale obtained from the present study is .72.

Procedure

The study was initiated after obtaining permission from the Heads of the respective institutions. For participants below 16 years, consent was obtained from the parents or guardians and ascent from the students, and for participants of 16 years and above, informed consent was obtained directly. The participants were asked to fill out the self-report measures. Participants were briefed about the procedure, voluntary nature, and confidentiality of the study. The institutional ethics committee approval was taken from the University (Letter number: UH/IEC/2022/337).

Data analysis

Out of the data collected from 237 participants, 8 responses were removed due to missing and redundant responses. The remaining 229 data were evaluated to identify outliers using Mahlanobi’s distance, and all the data was retained since no p-values for Mahlanobi’s distance less than .001 were found (Hair et al., 2009). Structural equation modeling (SEM) was performed to test the hypothetical model using SPSS AMOS version 22. Confirmatory factor analysis was carried out on the measurement model before testing the structural model, following the two-step procedures of SEM by Anderson & Gerbing (1988). To evaluate the goodness of fit of the models, Chi-square test (CMIN/DF) values less than 3; Comparative fit index (CFI), goodness of fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), and Tucker Lewis index (TLI) greater than or equal to .90; and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) less than .05 were considered acceptable (Collier, 2020; Kline, 2011). The bootstrapping mediation technique was used with 5000 resamples and bias-corrected bootstrap 95% confidence intervals to test the significance of the mediating role (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

Results

The result section includes descriptive statistics and the correlation coefficients between study variables, viz. psychosocial support, self-efficacy, and well-being (Table 1), followed by a description

Tab. 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Values Between all Variables of the Study.

Variables	α	M	SD	K	S	r		
						1	2	3
Psychosocial support	.88	85.42	13.3	-.02	-.54	-		
Self-efficacy	.78	27.70	5.6	-.36	-.03	.34**	-	
Wellbeing	.66	57.25	8.6	.73	-.12	.50**	.47**	-

N = 229; M- Mean; SD- Standard Deviation; K- Kurtosis; S- Skewness; r-Correlation coefficient **p < .01

of the measurement model, structural equation modeling, and the results related to the mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between psychosocial support and well-being.

Descriptive statistics indicate the normal distribution of data for all the study variables, as the skewness and kurtosis values fall within the range of ± 2 and ± 7 , respectively (Hair et al., 2009). Correlation coefficients demonstrated a positive correlation between psychosocial support and self-efficacy ($r = .34, p < .01$), psychosocial support and well-being ($r = .50, p < .01$), as well as self-efficacy and well-being ($r = .47, p < .01$).

Measurement model

A Confirmatory factor analysis was carried out to check the model fit of the measurement model, showing the relationship between all three latent variables (psychosocial support, self-efficacy, and well-being) with their respective indicators. Initially, the model consisted of three constructs with 47 items, and model fit values were $CMIN/DF = 1.96, GFI = .88, AGFI = .84, TLI = .87, CFI = .89, RMSEA = .065$. After removing low factor loading items and applying modification indices, the model showed satisfactory fit measures ($CMIN/DF = 1.90, GFI = .90, AGFI = .86, TLI = .90, CFI = .92$ and $RMSEA = .063$).

Structural model

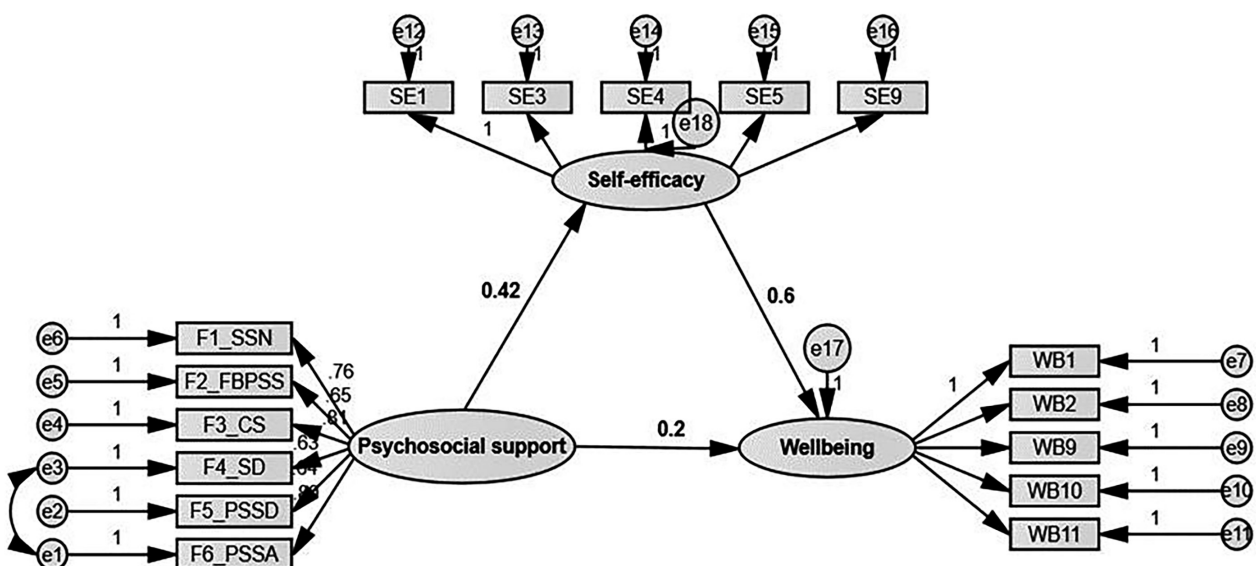
A structural equation model generated through AMOS was used to test the relationships. Concerning psychosocial support, an item parceling technique (Byrne, 2016) was used. Item parceling aimed to include multiple factors of the scale by adding the scores of items derived from the measurement model under a factor and then using their sum scores as indicators of the latent constructs. The factors of psychosocial support

were Communicative Support (CS, $\beta = .81$), Psychosocial Support Availability (PSSA, $\beta = .80$), Social Support Network (SSN, $\beta = .76$), Family-based Psychosocial Support (FBPSS, $\beta = .65$), Psychosocial Support Deprivation (PSSD, $\beta = .64$) and Supportful Disposition (SD, $\beta = .63$). Communicative Support and Psychosocial Support Availability were the most significant indicators of psychosocial support for the participants. Mediation analysis by the structural equation model (SEM) was performed to measure the effect of psychosocial support on well-being through self-efficacy. The model fit values were $CMIN/DF = 2.8, GFI = .89, AGFI = .85, TLI = .92, CFI = .93$, and $RMSEA = .050$ in the beginning. After applying the model fit procedures, acceptable fit indices were found: $CMIN/DF = 1.50, GFI = .93, AGFI = .90, TLI = .94, CFI = .95$, and $RMSEA = .047$. The structural model related to the mediation analysis with a standardized beta weighting between the variables is shown in Figure 1.

Examining the Mediating Role of Self-efficacy

The findings from bootstrap analysis to examine the significance of the direct and indirect effects of the variables in the model are shown in Table 2. The standardized regression weights, an indication of the level of significance, and mean effects in 95% confidence intervals related to study variables are included in the table. The findings demonstrated that the direct effect of psychosocial support on self-efficacy is $\beta = .42, p < .001, 95\% CI = .19; .52$; self-efficacy on well-being is $\beta = .60, p < .05, 95\% CI = .43; .76$; and psychosocial support on well-being is $\beta = .20, p < .05; 95\% CI = .02; .38$. All the direct effects and the indirect relationship between psychosocial support and well-being through self-efficacy were found to be significant ($\beta = .22, p < .001$), indicating a partial mediation.

Fig.1. Structural model showing the mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between psychosocial support and wellbeing.



Note. For the six dimensions of psychosocial support, we used item parcels.

Discussion

The study's findings revealed that self-efficacy, or the individual's belief in one's capability and competence to perform a task, partially mediated the relationship between psychosocial support and the well-being of adolescents. A supportive environment enhances the individual's capability of mastering tasks, increases the sense of commitment, and helps the individual handle stress, anxiety, and emotional instabilities, and enhances coping skills. According to Poudel et al. (2020), adolescents with higher perceived support from parents, friends, and significant others tend to better understand their strengths, weaknesses, and personal qualities, enriching their self-confidence and a more accurate self-perception, gradually boosting their psychological well-being. Self-efficacy is a fundamental psychological need that influences the individual's psychological states, such as emotions, cognitions, and decision-making, and is thus enhanced through a supportive environment. Moreover, perceived social support from significant others predicts self-efficacy among high school and university students (Adler-Constantinescu et al., 2013). Meaningful interactions, and guidance aids adolescents in facing difficult situations, setting realistic goals, and overcoming obstacles. An interesting finding from this study is the fundamental role of communicative support and support availability. Encouraging and commemorating adolescents' accomplishments by their loved ones fosters a sense of validation. Along with the communicative support through words and gestures, consistent availability of the loved ones during difficult times is also highly acknowledged by the adolescents (Camara et al, 2017).

The findings affirm the partially mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between psychosocial support and well-being among adolescent students. Social and emotional support can empower adolescents to strengthen their belief in their abilities; this increased self-efficacy, in turn, contributes to improved mental and emotional well-being. As teenagers receive support from their loved ones, it may inspire them to develop their abilities, which can further enhance their wellness and help them attain their full potential. Leventhal et al. (2015) demonstrated the effectiveness of incorporating psychosocial asset-building for adolescent well-being. Further supporting this, Chu et al. (2010) and Låftman et al. (2023) highlighted the positive link between social support and well-being among adolescents. Adolescents with higher self-efficacy may perceive psychosocial support more positively, as they can seek and use it effectively. This positive appraisal of support further reinforces their overall well-being. Self-efficacy can act as a buffer against negative influences and stressors. Positive links have been found between self-efficacy and the well-being of adolescents in typical as well as uncertain or distressful situations (Cattellino et al., 2021; Kamil & AL-Hadrawi, 2022). Adolescents with high self-efficacy are less likely to be adversely affected by the lack of psychosocial support in certain situations, as they believe in their ability to cope and find solutions independently. Adolescents need greater support at school or college. Appreciating adolescents' small achievements, supporting their dreams, and understanding their vulnerabilities are ways to extend support.

Tab. 2. The Results of Bootstrap Analysis Examining the Statistical Significance of Direct and Indirect Effects of the Structural Equality Model.

Model Pathways		Estimate	95% CI	
Dependent variable	Predictor		LB	UB
Wellbeing	Psychosocial support	.20*	.02	.38
Self-efficacy	Psychosocial support	.42***	.19	.52
Wellbeing	Self-efficacy	.60*	.43	.76
Indirect effect	Psychosocial support → Self-efficacy → Wellbeing	.22***	.12	.35

Note. LB-Lower bound, UB-Upper bound, ***<.001, *p<.05

Limitations and Future Directions

The limited applicability of findings due to the geographically specific sample from India is one of the limitations of this study. This limitation raises questions about the generalizability of the data and underscores the need for cross-cultural studies to gain a more comprehensive understanding of these findings. Furthermore, the current research focused on how psychosocial support affects self-efficacy, however a reciprocal relationship where self-efficacy might influence the receipt of psychosocial support can be explored as a future research problem. Existing literature also indicates the impact of socio-demographic factors on the variables under study, suggesting another avenue for future research.

Conclusion

The emergence of self-efficacy as a mediator connecting psychosocial support to the well-being of adolescents implies the significance of enhancing adolescents' self-beliefs by tapping their supportive systems. A cohesive and supportive family environment can be a foundational catalyst for enhancing adolescent well-being, particularly in the Indian context where adolescents live within tightly-knit families and community structures. The research points to the foundational role of a supportive family environment in fostering adolescent well-being, suggesting that even as adolescents navigate their quest for autonomy, support from parents and siblings is crucial for decision-making, career and life goals, and overall well-being. Furthermore, the importance of extending support networks beyond the family to include friends and teachers is highlighted. And, in instances where psychosocial support is insufficient, adolescents' strong sense of self-efficacy emerges as a powerful ally. The findings further underscore the necessity of integrating psychosocial support and self-efficacy-improving strategies into interventions aimed at improving adolescent well-being.

Ethical approval

This study was approved by Institutional Ethics Committee, University of Hyderabad (Letter number: UH/IEC/2022/337).

Data availability statement

Datasets are available upon request.

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Authors' contribution

AT - Formulation of topic, literature search, data acquisition, statistical analysis, manuscript preparation and editing

UC - Formulation of topic, critical revision, final approval of the manuscript

KS - Statistical analysis, manuscript preparation, critical review

LK - Critical review

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

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