



# EXPLORING ADOLESCENTS' PERCEPTION OF SOCIAL SUPPORT AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THEIR PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING

1. *Dr.Menakshi Jindal,  
Lecturer Physics*
2. *Hunnardeep Kaur Virk, student*
3. *Johret Kaur Sodhi, student*
4. *Rehat Kaur Chandumajra, student*

## Abstract

Adolescence is a vulnerable stage of one's life marked by intense physical, emotional and psychological changes. Perception of availability of social support can help to enhance the wellbeing among adolescents. Family, friends, peers and other individuals from the society can be source of such perceived social support. When in need, this kind of support provides confidence to the adolescents to fight the adversaries. The present study aims to find the correlation of perceived social support with psychological wellbeing of adolescents. Investigators used self prepared psychological tools of perceived social support and psychological wellbeing to collect the data. A sample of 99 adolescent girls and boys were taken from various schools of tri-city of Chandigarh. The data was collected using Google form. The data was subjected to Pearson's Correlation technique to find coefficient of correlation and t-test for computing difference in means. SPSS was used to compute the data. The results of the study showed that as the perceived social support increases psychological wellbeing of adolescents also increases. Further, girls and boys have not shown any difference in their mean scores in terms of perceived social support and psychological wellbeing.

**Key words:** Perceived social support, adolescents, psychological wellbeing

## Introduction

Perceived social support refers to an individual's subjective evaluation of beliefs regarding the availability and adequacy of support from their social network including family, friends, peers and others. It encompasses the perception of both emotional support such as empathy, understanding and encouragement as well as tangible support such as practical assistance or resources. Perceived social support is subjective and may not always align with the actual support received as there are two types of social support- perceived and received.

Perceived social support means existence of support resources when they are needed. Individual difference may influence one's perception of a situation. People differ in degree to which they feel supported or unsupported in response to a given social state (Gulacti, 2010).

Perceived social support is influenced by factors such as individual interpretations, expectation and the quality of relationships. It plays a significant role in coping with stress, promoting psychological well being and enhancing resilience in the face of challenges.

Adolescence often relies on the support from family, friends and peers to navigate the challenges of adolescence. This support serves as buffer against stressors and fosters resilience during the time of adversity. The quality of perceived social support whether it is tangible support such as advice and assistance or emotional support like empathy and understanding, influences adolescence self-esteem and over all mental health. Positive perceptions of support contribute to sense of belonging and security while perceived lack of support can leads to feeling of loneliness isolation and vulnerability. The range of social support, the students receive from their families, friends and academic community is positively associated with successful experiences during their education (McLean, Gaul, & Penco, 2022).

### **Adolescence and Psychological wellbeing**

Since adolescence is a critical developmental stage, psychological wellbeing of adolescence is multifaceted concept. It encompasses various aspects of mental health and emotional resilience like self esteem, emotional regulation, coping strategies and a sense of purpose and belonging.

Adolescents with positive psychological wellbeing exhibit higher level of self-confidence, optimism and life satisfaction. They are better equipped to navigate challenges of adolescence ranging from academic pressure, peer relationships to identity formation. Opposite to it poor psychological wellbeing can manifest symptoms of depression, anxiety, low self-worth and other behavioral issues.

Furthermore, Psychological wellbeing of adolescence is intricately linked to their social environment. Supportive family, positive peer relationships and sense of community contribute significantly to enhance their psychological wellbeing. Relationship with parents and peers play a key role as protective asset in adolescent's life (Gómez-López, Viejo, & Ortega-Ruiz, 2019). When they perceive that they have social network that appreciate and respect them for who they are, they are more likely to develop positive self concept. Also perspectives and experiences of those in their social network help them to develop effective coping strategies.

Positive interaction with family peers and community is capable of generating well being among adolescents and can be considered as good indicators of positive adjustments at this crucial stage of life (Viejo, 2018).

### **Significance of the study**

According to WHO (2021) 14% of a adolescents (age 10 to 19 years) are suffering from mental and psychological health issues such as anxiety, depression, panic attack etc. Adolescence is a vulnerable state of one's life marked by many physical and psychological changes. There is a concern worldwide to understand the factors and variables which can help the adolescents to sail through such changes smoothly. There are many factors which can boost their psychological wellbeing. One of which can be social support as perceived by the adolescents. The source of such support can be family, peers, friends or others, like teachers, mentors etc. Since the research on it can help to improve the understanding regarding the effect of perceived social support on psychological wellbeing, the researcher took deep interest in the study.

### **Review of previous literature**

Gulacti (2010) conducted study on 877 primary teachers in Turkey to assess whether perceived social support is a predictor of subjective well being. The regression analysis found that perceived social support predicted

43% of subjective wellbeing. The perceived social support from family impact the subjective wellbeing but perceived social support towards friends or any special person does not impact the subjective wellbeing.

Glozah (2013) took a sample of 226 senior High school students of Ghana to study effect of academic stress and perceived social support on psychological wellbeing. The researcher found that perceived social support can buffer the effect of academic stress on psychological wellbeing of the students.

Alshammari, Piko, & Fitzpatrick (2021) investigated relationship between social support and mental health of Jordanian adolescents. Data of 2741 adolescents was collected using multi stage cluster sampling. It found that social support especially the family support plays an important role in enhancing mental health especially life satisfaction in adolescents.

Bi, Stevens, et al. (2021) conducted study on adolescents from 42 European and North American countries to understand the association between perceived support from different sources (family, friends, teachers and classmates) and life satisfaction. It was found that almost across all countries there is a strong association between perceived social support from family and life satisfaction followed by teachers and classmates. There is a weak association between perceived support from friends and life satisfaction.

Karunrathne (2022) studied impact of perceived social support, from family, friends and other support on adolescent's self esteem. It also incorporated moderating effect of social skills. The study found that perceived social support significantly affect the development of self esteem but social skills moderate only the association between friend support and self esteem.

Shi (2022) conducted the study which focuses on effect of perceived social support on self esteem, school readiness and mental well being of left behind children of age group 8 to 12 years. The children, whose parents leave them behind and may migrate to other places, develop many psychological issues. The results show that the perceived social support improve the self esteem and mental well being of such children. Also psychological resilience can predict self esteem and school readiness of these children.

Peterson, Qualter, Humphrey, et al. (2023) conducted study on Danish adolescents (1114 M and 1065 females) to investigate the association of perceived social support with mental health. Four major sources of support were identified, that is, family, friends, classmates, and teachers. Three different profiles for perceived social support were considered. High support refers to perceived high support from all the sources. The results showed that different profile of social support indicate different levels of mental health. High support is associated with better mental health whereas low friend profile is associated with lowest level of well being. In females there is a higher frequency of emotional symptoms in case of low friend profile.

## Objectives

The objectives for the present study are:

- To study the perceived social support among adolescents.
- To study the relationship between perceived social support and psychological wellbeing among adolescents.
- To study the difference in perceived social support between adolescent girls and boys.
- To study the difference in psychological wellbeing between adolescent girls and boys.

## Hypotheses

Following hypotheses were designed to test the objectives of the study:

- There is no significant correlation between perceived social support and psychological wellbeing among adolescents.
- There is no significant difference in perceived social support between adolescent girls and boys.
- There is no significant difference in psychological wellbeing between adolescent girls and boys.

### **Delimitation**

The study was delimited to adolescents studying in various schools of Tri city of Chandigarh.

### **Sample**

The adolescents studying in the schools of Tri-city of Chandigarh constitute the population of the study. A sample of 126 adolescent girls and boys were taken from the said population. Due to experimental mortality data of 27 participants were discarded. The effective sample of 99 students was taken for the analysis.

### **Tools**

The tools used to collect the data regarding the present study were:

- Self-prepared perceived social support scale
- Self-prepared psychological wellbeing scale

### **Procedure and data collection**

The present study was conducted to find the relationship between perceived social support and psychological wellbeing among adolescents. The descriptive survey method was used to study the problem at hand. An effective sample of 99 adolescent girl and boy students was taken for the study. Data pertaining to perceived social support and psychological wellbeing were gathered through Google forms. The scales constructed by the investigators were used to collect the data. The data were subjected to rigorous statistical analysis leading to the derivation of insightful results and conclusions.

### **Statistical tools used**

Both descriptive and inferential techniques were employed to analyze the data. Measures such as mean, standard deviation, standard error of mean were computed. Additionally, Pearson's correlation coefficient was utilized to examine the relationship between the said variables, while differences in means were assessed through t- test.

### **Analysis of the data**

To draw the inference, the raw data was subjected to descriptive and inferential statistical analysis. The objectives of the study were tested using hypotheses framed for the objectives.

Objective 1: To study the perceived social support among adolescents.

Sample adolescent students gave their opinion regarding perceived social support statements in terms of five point rating scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The opinion is presented in the following table in the form of percentages.

**Table 1: Opinion of adolescents regarding perceived social support**

S.No.	Components	Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	<b>Family Support</b>	I get the emotional support from my family when I need it.	10.1	39.4	33.3	11.1	6.1
2.		I can share my personal problems with my family.	8.1	33.3	26.3	22.2	10.1
3.		My family gives me the liberty to take my own decisions.	21.2	40.4	22.2	13.1	3.0
4.		My family gives me independence and personal space.	16.2	45.5	26.3	9.1	3.0
		<b>Average</b>	13.9	39.65	27.03	13.86	5.55
5.	<b>Friend's Support</b>	My friends are always encouraging and supportive.	16.2	56.6	19.2	5.1	3.0
6.		I have friends with whom I can share my sorrows.	36.4	44.4	12.1	4.0	3.0
7.		I can count on my friends when things go wrong.	25.3	48.5	21.2	4.0	1.0
8.		My friends always appreciate my accomplishments.	22.2	47.5	23.2	4.0	3.0
		<b>Average</b>	25.03	49.25	18.93	4.28	2.5
9.	<b>Individual Support</b>	I have an individual in my life who supports me	45.5	32.3	11.1	6.1	5.1
10.		I have an individual in my life that is a source of comfort for me.	39.4	33.3	18.2	3.0	6.1
11.		There is a special person around when I am in need.	30.3	29.3	27.3	8.1	5.1
		<b>Average</b>	38.4	31.63	18.87	5.73	5.43

Table 1 shows opinion of adolescents regarding perceived social support in terms of five point rating scale. The scale showed the perception of adolescents for social support from family, friends and individuals. Regarding family support, around 54% (13.9+39.65) adolescents strongly agree/ agree to family support at the

time of need, whereas, around 20% (5.55+13.86) strongly disagree/ disagree for getting family support. Around 27% were undecided regarding the family support. 50% agreed for getting emotional support from the family when they are in need for it, 17% disagreed and one third of the adolescents were not sure. Again 41% agreed that they could share their personal problems with their family. 32% disagreed to it. Around 62% felt that family provides them liberty to take decisions but 16% felt against whereas 22% were not sure of the response. Also 62% agree to the statement that their family gives them independence and personal space, 26.3% were not sure.

Further, around 75% (25.03+49.25) strongly agree/ agree regarding support from their friends when in need, only around 7% ( 4.28+2.5) disagree to it.

Nearly 73% (56.6+16.2) believe that their friends are always encouraging and supportive, only 8% disagreed to it (5.1+3.0%). Majority of the adolescents (80%) believed that they could share their sorrows with their friends. Still 75% believe that they could count on their friends when things go wrong. 69% were sure that their friends always appreciate their accomplishments.

70% also perceived support from other individuals when they need it. Around 11% disagreed to it.

Going deep, 78% adolescents believe that they have an individual in their life that supports them. 73% believe that they have individual in their life that is a source of comfort for them. Around 60% agree to have a special person around when they are in need.

**Objective 2:** To study the relationship between perceived social support and psychological wellbeing among adolescents.

The relationship between perceived social support and psychological wellbeing among adolescents can be studied by testing the concerned hypothesis using Pearson's coefficient of correlation technique.

**Table 2: Coefficient of correlation between perceived social support and psychological wellbeing among adolescents**

Variable	N	M	SD	R	Level of significance
Perceived Social Support	99	41.05	6.183	.360	.01
Psychological Wellbeing	99	35.21	5.380		

Table 2 shows correlation between perceived social support and psychological wellbeing of adolescent students. The mean and standard deviation values for a sample of 99 students are 41.05 & 35.21 and 6.183 & 5.380 respectively. The coefficient of correlation value has been found to be .525. The value is significant at .01 levels of significance. Hence the hypothesis, 'there is no significant relationship between perceived social support and psychological wellbeing among adolescents', may not be accepted. The alternative hypothesis is 'there is a significant relationship between perceived social support and psychological wellbeing among adolescents.' This means that as the perceived social support increases psychological wellbeing of adolescents also increases.

Objective 3: To study the difference in perceived social support between adolescent girls and boys.

The significant difference between mean values of perceived social support between adolescent girls and boys can be studied by testing the concerned hypothesis by calculating the t-ratio value.

**Table 3: Difference in mean values and t-ratio for perceived social support between adolescent girls and boys**

Variable	Gender	N	M	SD	SEm	df	t-value	Level of significance
Perceived Social Support	Girls	67	41.15	5.806	.709	97	.229	NS
	Boys	32	40.84	7.003	1.238			

Table 3 shows the difference in mean values of perceived social support between adolescent girls (67) and boys (32). The mean values of perceived social support between girls and boys are 41.15 & 40.84 respectively and the standard deviation values are 5.806 & 7.003 respectively. The t- value for 97 degrees of freedom has been found to be .229 which is not significant at .05 levels. Hence the hypothesis, 'There is no significant difference in perceived social support between adolescent girls and boys, may be accepted. This means that both girls and boys perceived almost similar levels of social support.

Objective 4: To study the difference in psychological wellbeing between adolescent girls and boys.

The significant difference between mean values of psychological wellbeing between adolescent girls and boys can be studied by testing the concerned hypothesis by calculating the t-ratio value.

**Table 4: Difference in mean values and t-ratio for psychological wellbeing between adolescent girls and boys**

Variable	Gender	N	M	SD	SEm	df	t-value	Level of significance
Psychological Wellbeing	Girls	67	35.07	5.073	.620	97	-.366	NS
	Boys	32	35.50	6.048	1.069			

Table 4 shows the difference in mean values of psychological wellbeing between adolescent girls (67) and boys (32). The mean values for girls and boys, are 35.07 & 35.50 and the standard deviation values are 5.073 & 6.048 respectively. The t- value for 97degrees of freedom is -.366 which is not significant at .05 levels. Hence the hypothesis, 'there is no significant difference in psychological wellbeing between adolescent girls and boys', may be accepted. This means that both girls and boys showed similar levels of psychological wellbeing.

## Discussion of the results

Adolescents perceive social support from different sources, that is, family, friends, peers and other special individuals who may be any adult, teacher, mentor, relative or even a special friend. Adolescence is a

transition period where they start drifting away from the family and get closer to their friends. It is reflected in the results of the study where the sample showed more disagreement when asked whether they could share their personal problems with their family but show strong agreement to the statements like, they can share their sorrows with their friends or depend on them when things go wrong. Most of them feel that their friends are encouraging and supportive. Adolescents share their Joys, sorrows and even their accomplishments with their friends/peers. If they get the appreciation and encouragement with their friends, they show better psychological welling. Apart from family and friends, they may get this support from someone whom they may consider special. This person can influence the perception that they are supported when in need. Also such a person can be a source of comfort for them. The study has found that perceived social support is strongly correlated to psychological wellbeing (at .01 level). The result is supported by the earlier studies conducted by Alshammari et al. (2021), Glozah (2013), Petersen et al. (2023). This result is important to make strategies to improve psychological well being of adolescents. There is no difference in perceived social support between boys and girls. They may derive support from different sources but over all how they perceive social support is same for both. Even the state or levels of psychological wellbeing is reflected in the results.

## Conclusion

In conclusion this research has illuminated the significant relationship between perceived social support and psychological well being of adolescents. The findings underscore the importance of fostering supportive environment within families, peer groups and society to enhance psychological well being of adolescents. More such researches should be conducted to explore the nuances of this association across diverse populations. Even longitudinal studies can be conducted to better understand the effect of perceived social support on adolescent development.

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