

## The Influence of Social Support on College Students' Subjective Well-Being: The Mediating Effect Based on Positive Mental Quality

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### Abstract

Taking the college students of some universities in Guangdong province as the subjects, this paper investigated the influence of social support and positive mental quality on subjective well-being. The research data shows that the degree of subjective support and the extent of using the support directly influence college students' subjective well-being, and indirectly affect their well-being through the influence of interpersonal relationship and behavior style, and that positive mental quality plays an intermediary role in the influence of social support on well-being. Therefore, we can guarantee that the subjective support through the establishment of multi-care support mechanism can cultivate the positive mental quality to enhance happiness perception, create a good supportive atmosphere to improve the use of social support, multi-angle and all-round improve the subjective well-being of college students.

**Key words:** Social support; Positive mental quality; Subjective well-being; Mediating effect

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### INTRODUCTION

As China's "The Belt and Road International Strategy" is steadily implemented, and the concept of "human destiny community" advocated by the Chinese government is becoming more and more popular, the internationalization of contemporary China is in the period of all-round transformation of social politics, economy, culture, education, school, family and so on. Various aspects form the reform and development is facing a big change in the life of college students living in the "ivory tower". Of course, they also have enormous pressure, faced with education, employment and self-development independently. At the same time, in order to cope with the impact of the international social environment change, their subjective well-being index would, of course, also face enormous challenges. The early founder of American psychology Hall (1904) called this the "blast" period of college students' life development. Whether college students can take on the task of internationalization of Chinese society in their future development depends on their access to social support and the ability of improving their subjective well-being. The subjective well-being is an important index which reflects the spirit of individual experience and the quality of life, which is accorded increasingly extensive attention by academic circles in today's society.

Traditional research mainly focused on the influence of moral cognition, emotion, social support, personality and parenting style on subjective well-being, and among them, the influence of the social support and positive mental quality are two very important factors. This research will break through the traditional research methods of this research theory, using empirical research methods, doing quantitative research in social support, positive mental quality and the relationship between subjective well-being and mechanism, in order to promote college students' subjective well-being, and provide academic support for

training them to become international talents with high quality and the courage to bear difficulties.<sup>1</sup>

The American psychologist Diener (1984, 2000) defines subjective well-being as “individuals according to set the standard for the quality of life of the overall evaluation”, which is one of the important comprehensive indexes to quantify the individual quality of life. Researchers believe that it variously benefits the individual’s physical and mental health (Diener & Chan, 2011), their work and pay, interpersonal relationships and many other aspects (Diener & Ryan, 2009), having direct and profound influence on the individual’s physical and mental health (Huang, 2014). Since Wilson published the “claims that the factors associated with happiness”, scholars have gradually done further researches on the problem, and gradually reached an agreement concerning the composition of subjective well-being, which includes two basic components, life satisfaction and emotional experience. The former refers to the individual overall cognitive evaluation of the life quality level; the latter refers to the spirit of the individual life experience, including positive emotional happiness, gratitude and negative emotional frustration, anxiety, etc.

Research direction also gradually shifts from the mental health to cognition, emotion, value, satisfaction, etc., and the research paradigm and method are more diversified. Meanwhile, more and more methods of psychological analysis are utilized on them, and the focus is mainly on: the description of the status (Guo & Liu, 2016; Yao, 2016), subjective and objective affecting factors (Zhang & Zheng, 2004; Yan & Zheng, 2003), and the relationship between personality and cross-cultural perspective (Miao & Yu, 2003).

There are many factors affecting college students’ subjective well-being, and social support is one of the very important predictive variables. Social support refers to “through social ties of one can relieve psychological stress reaction and the influence of mental tension, improving the ability of social adaptation” (Miao & Yu, 2003). It can stimulate positive individual emotional experience, giving a person mental comfort and courage, making her more actively cope with trouble. Stable mood and peaceful mood are advantageous to the individual’s physical and mental health. Studies have found that there are moderate significant positive correlations between social support and subjective well-being, life satisfaction, positive emotion and significant negative correlation between negative emotion (Song & Fan, 2013) and loneliness (Kong & Wang, 2012; Chu & Hafner, 2010). Positive mental quality is also an important factor that affects subjective well-being. It is a set of positive personality traits which is reflected through emotional and cognitive behavior by the individual (N. Zhang & Y. Q. Zhang, 2010) and buffering alleviates psychological pressure and the role of mental illness, at

four levels: interpersonal relationship, style, extraversion and intelligence. Interpersonal relationships include altruism and helping others, tolerance and valuing feelings, sense of belonging and team consciousness; behavior styles include self-confidence, self-discipline, calm, preciseness, boldness, ambition, tolerance, love of learning and self-management; extraversion includes optimism, humor, maturity, stability, alertness and activity; intelligence includes insight, creativity, curiosity, emotional intelligence and leadership. Positive mental quality helps the individual use supported resources to take a more effective way to deal with all kinds of pressure in life, adjusting the balance of self (Taylor, et al., 2000). The existing research shows that positive psychological qualities are associated with significant subjective well-being, and plays a significant role in subjective well-being (Chen, 2015). The values in the action plan of the research results show that the 24 positive psychological qualities associated with the physical and mental health and life satisfaction of adolescent (Ruch et al., 2010).

To sum up, the existing research has only made simple discussion about social support, positive mental quality and subjective well-being, with no in-depth analysis of the interaction mechanism among them. It has verified that positive qualities presented intermediary effect between social support and life satisfaction. Based on this, this study assumes that the positive mental quality can make an intermediary effect between social support and subjective well-being. In other words, social support has a direct impact on subjective well-being and also affects college students’ subjective well-being through the positive mental quality. In addition to verifying the above hypothesis, this paper will also put forward policy suggestions of improving the subjective well-being of university students according to the research results.

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## 1. RESEARCH METHODS

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### 1.1 Participants

College students in Guangdong province were sampled as the research objects. 880 questionnaires were issued of which, 845 questionnaires were recycled of which 720 were valid, and the sample efficiency is about 90%. Among them, 415 were boys and 305 were girls. The one-child participants amounted to 238, while not one-child children, 482. Urban students were 432, rural students, 288. Freshmen were 185, sophomores, 196, junior year students, 179, and senior year students, 150. Students of liberal arts were 389 in number, students from the science department were 193, and students from engineering, 138. The median subject age is 21.7 years old, on a range from 18.5 to 23.3 years of age.

## 1.2 Measuring Tool

### 1.2.1 Subjective Well-Being Scale

The Subjective Well-being Scale consists of two subscales, namely a life satisfaction scale and a positive negative emotions scale. The life satisfaction scale was compiled by Huebner (1991), with a total of 7 items. This scale was marked with 5 points, 1 as “completely false”, 5 is “completely accord with”, and the higher total score shows that overall life satisfaction is better. The scale has a good reliability. The other scale is positive negative sentiment, Chen (2004) revising and localizing Bradburn’s emotional balance scale with a total of 14 items, including six positive emotional questions and eight negative emotional questions. Using 4 points, 1 is “no”, 4 is “often”, doing self-assessment by the object of study for the recent emotional states. The revised scale has good reliability and validity, the scale’s total a coefficient is 0.90, and in this study, the total a coefficient was recorded at 0.87.

### 1.2.2 Social Support Scale

The Social Support Scale was compiled by Xiao. The scale is divided into ten topics covering three dimensions: subjective support, objective support, and support utilization. Since the subjects of this study are college students, some of the problems of the scale were revised accordingly. The categories for “co-worker” and “children” were deleted while the category for “neighbor” was changed to “roommate”, “colleague” was changed to “classmate”, “husband and wife or spouse” was changed

to “lovers”, and “work unit” changed to “school”. The retest reliability was found to be 0.94, while the internal consistency coefficient of each dimension of the scale was recorded at 0.88-0.93. The total a coefficient for this study was 0.88.

### 1.2.3 Positive Mental Quality Scale

Formulated by Chen Ming, the positive mental quality scale includes four aspects: the interpersonal relationships (including: altruism and helping others, tolerance and valuing feelings, sense of belonging and team consciousness), behavior styles (including self-confidence, self-discipline, calm, preciseness, boldness, ambition, tolerance, love of learning and self-management); extraversion(including optimistic, humorous, mature, stable, alert and active); intelligence(including insight, creativity, curiosity, emotional intelligence and leadership), with a total of 107 subjects. The a coefficient for the entire scale is 0.85, and the total a coefficient for the scale in this study was recorded at 0.87.

## 1.3 Statistical Analysis

The SPSS21.0 and Amos17.0 were used to conduct the data analysis and process.

## 2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 2.1 Description and Statistical Analysis of Social Support, Positive Mental Quality and Subjective Well-Being

**Table 1**  
Correlation Analysis Among Social Support, Positive Mental Quality and Subjective Well-Being

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 IR										
2 BIS	0.71**									
3 E	0.64**	0.54**								
4 I	0.46**	0.58**	0.28**							
5 PQ	0.88**	0.89**	0.74**	0.71**						
6 SW	0.52**	0.41**	0.45**	0.25**	0.50**					
7 SUS	0.13**	0.10**	0.04	0.05	0.12**	0.11**				
8 OS	0.05	0.12**	0.01	0.03	0.04	0.03	0.26**			
9 DSU	0.17**	0.03	0.01	0.03	0.09*	0.12**	0.16**	0.15**		
10 SS	0.16**	0.14**	0.04	0.05	0.13**	0.13**	0.86**	0.58**	0.49**	

Note. \* $P < 0.05$ , \*\* $P < 0.01$

IR=Interpersonal Relationships BIS=Behave In Style E=Extroversion  
I=Intelligence PQ=Positive Mental Quality SW=Subjective well-being  
SUS=Subjective Support DSU=Degree of support utilization  
OS=Objective Support SS=Social support

The data analysis results in Table 1 which shows that the total score of subjective support, positive mental quality and subjective well-being has a significant positive correlation ( $r=0.12, p<0.01$ ;  $r=0.11, p<0.11$ ), and

supported the use of degrees and positive mental quality score and subjective well-being has significant positive correlation ( $r=0.09, p<0.05$ ;  $r=0.12, p<0.01$ ). The result of investigation and analysis shows that the more social

support college students gain, the more positive mental quality they can stimulate and shape, and thus enhance their perception of subjective well-being, getting strong subjective well-being experience and feelings. On the contrary, if the college students lack positive mental quality, they will have strange behavior styles, performing stiff interpersonal relationships, be introverted, and cannot display their talent, even if they can get some social support, but this support still cannot improve their subjective well-being. In addition, the positive mental quality of each dimension and subjective well-being has significant positive correlation ( $r=0.25-0.52, p < 0.01$ ), the positive mental quality score and subjective well-being has a significant positive correlation ( $r=0.50, p < 0.01$ ), suggesting that the more positively psychological college students are, the more intense their subjective well-being will be.

## 2.2 Positive Mental Quality in the Mediation of Social Support and Subjective Well-Being Influence Effect Test

### 2.2.1 The Positive Mental Quality Performs an Intermediary Function Between the Influence of Social Support and Subjective Well-Being

Related analysis results show that there exist interactions among social support, positive mental quality and subjective well-being, satisfying the requirement of intermediary function test conditions. Therefore, using a structural equation model to analyze the effect of social support on subjective well-being, and verify the mediation effect of positive mental quality. Applying the AMOS17.0 software to deal with the related data obtained positive mental quality intermediary effect of fitting index and operational model. These mainly refer to the following standards:  $X^2/df < 5$ , the fitting is better; AGFI, GFI, CF, INFI values range between 0 and 1, and the closer to 1, the more ideal of the fit of the model. When the RMSEA value is less than 0.8, the fit is better. The model of the positive mental quality intermediary effect fits the main indicators:  $X^2/df = 2.58$ , RMSEA = 0.07, GFI = 0.86, AGFI = 0.83, NFI = 0.91, CF = 0.93. Each model indexes above 0.8, which indicates that the positive mental quality of college students in social support and subjective well-being of intermediary effect fitting degree reached the ideal level.

**Table 2**  
**The Influence Path Analysis of the Mediation Model**

Influence path	Direct impact of standardization	Indirect effect of standardization
SOS → PPQ	0.213*	
PMQ → SW	0.617**	
SOS → SW	0.095*	0.134*

Note. \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$   
 SOS=Social support PPQ=positive mental quality  
 PMQ=Positive mental quality SW=subjective well - being

As the results show in Table 2, the social support ( $\beta=0.095, p < 0.05$ ) has a positive effect for the forecast of subjective well-being, suggesting that the more social support college students gain, the stronger their subjective well-being will become; the positive mental quality ( $\beta=0.617, p < 0.01$ ) also has positive prediction function to subjective well-being, saying more positive mental quality college students have, the stronger the subjective well-being of sensitivity will be, and the higher the happiness index will become. In addition, social support ( $\beta=0.213, p < 0.05$ ) also has a positive prediction function to positive mental quality, showing that the more social support university students obtain, the better the positive mental quality will inspire and cultivate. And social support besides having a direct impact on subjective well-being also affects college students' subjective well-being indirectly through the mediation effect of positive mental quality. The ratio between the mediation effect and total effect is  $0.134 / (0.095 + 0.134) \approx 58.52\%$ , which indicates that the social support for college students' subjective well-being is realized indirectly through positive mental quality.

**Table 3**  
**Influence Path Analysis for Social Support, Dimensions of Positive Mental Quality and Subjective Well-Being**

Influence path	Impact of standardization	Indirect effect of standardization	Total
SS→IR	0.091*		0.091*
SS→OS	0.087*		0.087*
SUD→IR	0.142**	0.142**	
IR→SW	0.396**	0.396**	
BS→SW	0.073*	0.073*	
I→SW	0.277**	0.277**	
SS→SW	0.045*	0.058*	0.103
SUD→SW	0.055*	0.056*	0.111

Note. \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$   
 SS = Subjective Support IR = Interpersonal Relationship  
 OS = Operating Style SUD = Support Utilization Degree  
 SW = Subjective Well-Being BS = Behavior Style I = Intellect

### 2.2.2 Improving Support Utilization and Subjective Support Can Promote Positive Mental Quality

Further analysis is conducted on the impact path of social support, the dimensions of positive mental quality, and subjective well-being. The results are presented in Table 3. Among them, subjective support has significant influence on interpersonal Relationship ( $\beta = 0.091, p < 0.05$ ) and Operating Style ( $\beta= 0.087, p < 0.05$ ). This suggests that the more recognition college students receive from society, schools and families, respect and support, the more help they have to form a harmonious interpersonal atmosphere and shape the good personal style, and then get respect and recognition, improving personal subjective well-being. Through research, supporting the exploitation degree of interpersonal

relationships ( $\beta=0.142$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) has significant influence. Supporting exploitation degree is individual utilization degree of social support, and one possibility is that individuals perceive the existence of objective support, but he ignored or refused to use. Another possibility is that the individual for objective support resources is not clear, don't understand, and doesn't know how to seek or take advantage of these support resources. The analysis shows that both strengthen the subjective support and provide more objective support from the environment. Only when college students fully understand and use these social support resources will their positive mental quality develop and further improve subjective well-being.

### **2.2.3 Subjective Support for Relationships and Style Has the Greatest Effect on the Promotion of College Students' Subjective Well-Being**

In the effect of subjective well-being, the influence of interpersonal relationship plays the most important role ( $\beta= 0.396$ ), and the second is intelligence. ( $\beta=0.277$ ). In addition, through the analysis of the impact on the subjective well-being path, subjective support influences the subjective well-being of college students by influencing the interpersonal relationship and behavior styles, and the indirect effect is higher ( $\beta=0.058$ ) than the direct effect ( $\beta=0.045$ ), and the efficacy of the support direct effect ( $\beta=0.055$ ) is consistent with the indirect effect ( $\beta=0.056$ ). The analysis shows that strengthening relationships and talent cultivation of subjective support exerts the most significant influence on college students' subjective well-being. In other words, even college students get a lot of subjective support, but cannot necessarily enhance their subjective well-being, and the key lies in whether the subjective support increases college students' interpersonal harmony, whether to cultivate and shape a positive behavior style. Only when the family, school and society advocating and practicing positive social moral value orientation, building a harmonious social environment, and at the same time, attaching importance to the cultivation of individual moral accomplishment and good behavior styles will college students have a sense, strength, independent feeling, a feeling of being respected and supported. This will help to improve their subjective well-being.

## **CONCLUSION**

The above survey results indicate that the subjective support and support utilization degree directly affect the subjective well-being of college students, and at the same time, indirectly affect happiness by influencing the positive mental quality of interpersonal relationships and behavior styles. With the results of the analysis, we can improve the subjective well-being of college students from the following aspects:

(a) Establish a multilateral concern support mechanisms, and guarantee subjective support

Research results show that social support, especially related to positive mental quality subjective support, makes important influence on college students' subjective well-being of ascension.

For college students, care, respect and support from society, family, and school, as well as the peer group acceptance, approval and mutual help, are the most important sources of subjective well-being that support them. Most of the current ecological status quo of family education is that parents don't respect college students' choice, in personal development, interpersonal relations, morality and customs, there is no limit to each field of feeling and sense of trust. Parents all have a look, always ask, and there are often conflicts between parents and children, leading to college students' depression, fight and struggle, "infringement" for parents habits' formation mind-set, automatically ignoring subjective support or rejecting an offer from a family. The ecological status of colleges and universities is: the teachers and students only meet during class, and during other time they make almost zero contact, not to mention learning and life guidance, and the guidance of teachers on students' subjective support resources is very limited. Therefore, society, family and school should be multi-pronged, from each according to one's ability, improving thinking, enhancing the consciousness of keeping pace with the times, guaranteeing the subjective support of college students, and enhancing their subjective well-being. First of all, the parents should do tactically. Giving adult children fully respect, trust, recognition and support not only help to form good parent-child interaction model of mutual respect and mutual love, but also help children to actively support the strong subjective perception from family. Secondly, schools should increase teachers to student's instruction and guidance through the system. For example, establishing a tutor system can promote the students' professional learning, career development guidance, undertake a world outlook as well, the outlook on life and values to guide, and strengthen students' sense of belonging, support and identity. All related departments of the school (office, psychological counseling center, youth corps committee student association, etc.) can also serve to make rich humanities "second class" activities, letting the students feel full participation, experience, and promoting the individual's subjective support capability. Again, the society should pay attention to care for the young college students' culture and atmosphere. In the period of "angry storm winds", college students have pressure on the present studies and longings for the future uncertainty, and uncertainty, especially in the current status of our country is in transition of the society, college students are high pressure groups, and gradually attention and support will make them produce identity, belonging and credibility, perceiving the existence of subjective

support from society, eliminating the current stress and worries about the future, helplessness and confusion, and improve their subjective well-being.

(b) Foster positive mental quality and promote happiness perception

Positive mental quality includes four dimensions, namely, interpersonal relationship, behavior styles, extraversion and abilities. According to the survey data of Guangzhou university students, the interpersonal relationship ( $\beta=0.396$ ) and intelligence ( $\beta=0.277$ ) dimensions are the most significant influence on college students' subjective well-being.

In the first place, school authorities can regularly invite experts at home and abroad for academic lectures, theming of interpersonal and communication, self-cognition, growth and development, and strengthen college students' sense of self, self-emotion management ability, intensify their cognition, have their positive mental quality foundation, and improve their subjective well-being perception. Second, form mechanism, regularly carry out team coach and build the mental health education practice platform, introducing teachers, related courses, and to promote university students' perception of positive mental quality, experience, and internalization. Positive mental quality is a progressive culture, experience and the process of internalization, and the study of knowledge and image propaganda can influence each other, and team coaching experience, internalization, targeted to tap potential positive mental quality, and promote happiness perception, thus to improve their subjective well-being. Third, the family and school together create a warm family atmosphere, set up good atmosphere in class, establish harmonious relationship between teachers and students, encourage students to actively participate in volunteer activities and social practice caring for vulnerable groups, give full play to the role of positive guidance, learn to be grateful, and enhance a positive experience. Finally, strengthening the career planning, professional guidance and subject education; setting up scientific evaluation system; striving to build college students' rational cognitive system and forming a good atmosphere of talent development and platforms. Meanwhile, we should attempt to develop self-confidence, self-discipline, composedness, rigor, boldness, ambition, tolerance, love of learning and self-management styles, and optimism, humor, maturity, stability, alertness and activity, and extroverted personality quality.

(c) Create a good atmosphere of support, and increase the social support

With plenty of subjective and objective support resources, but if individuals do not understand or not use these resources, their subjective well-being of the ascension would also be affected. Therefore, we should let college students fully understand and use the support resources, and improve the utilization of degrees. On

the one hand it is necessary to cultivate and improve the quality of college students' positive psychology and to enhance its sensibility to subjective and objective support, satisfaction and utilization. Only when students feel the existence of objective or subjective support they can consider using. First, Schools should increasingly build and publicize objective resources such as books, academic lectures, humanities second class activities, letting the students know, be familiar with and can actively participate, experience and feel each of them. Second, forming a good circulation of support among the society, family and school trinity, and building subjective support network. Relative to the objective support resources, subjective support can touch students' mind, consciousness and thinking directly. Only the students feel the respect, support and recognition, and experience as an independent individual growth, happiness and value, can they better recognize, seek and trust subjective support resources. So, only by giving enough space to young college students' growth up, giving them full trust, acceptance, support and encouragement can put subjective initiative into better play, actively seeking social support and making full use of resources, promoting their growth and maturity, and helping them to live with more happiness and felicity.

Above all, in order to improve the subjective well-being of college students, society, family, school and students need to work together in many ways, increasing their subjective and objective support, cultivating their positive mental quality, increasing the support degree, and then improving their well-being.

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