

Korean Adolescents' Life Satisfaction

: The Effects of Social Support and Psychological Factors

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Abstract—This study aimed to investigate the effects of social support and psychological factors on life satisfaction as well as the paths among them. The results are as follows. Social support did not have direct impact on their life satisfaction. However, it positively influenced psychological factors such as self-efficacy and emotion regulation, and this in turn affected their life satisfaction.

Keywords—life satisfaction; social support; psychological factors

I. INTRODUCTION

With growing interest on human being's positive aspects and changing perspectives on adolescents, there are now many studies aimed at support for adolescents' life satisfaction [1]. Life satisfaction, is recently getting much attention in Korea as well. Still, a large-scale survey was conducted to study Korean children/adolescents wellbeing index and its international comparison, and the results reported that the level of subjective wellbeing perceived by Korean children and adolescents was the lowest among OECD countries.

A study reported that adolescents' life satisfaction is closely linked to their entire lives including psychological and behavioral matters [2], not only should factors affecting Korean adolescents' life satisfaction be identified, but paths among these factors also need to be investigated.

Adolescents' life satisfaction is an unstable status that varies depending on individual and environmental factors [3], and when measuring it, therefore, one should take into account individual and environmental factors at once [4]. [5] reported that Korean adolescents' life satisfaction depends upon relational and psychological resources. [6] reported in their literature review that Korean adolescents' life satisfaction is influenced by psychological and relational factors. Therefore, it is necessary to identify the relationships among adolescents' relational and psychological factors affecting Korean adolescents' life satisfaction and to explore the paths among these factors. The purpose of this study is to investigate the relations among relational factors and psychological resources that affect life satisfaction and to examine the influence of these factors on life satisfaction and the path among them.

A. Social Support and Life Satisfaction

Social support is important variable for adolescents' life satisfaction. It is defined as the perception and actuality that one is cared for, has assistance available from others, and that

one is part of a supportive social network. As it links to many benefits for both physical and mental health, social support is a significant factor that has direct and indirect impact on adolescents' life satisfaction [7].

[8] found that happiness of adolescents is mainly dependent upon their interpersonal relationships. These results indicated that life satisfaction of a person is better represented by his or her interpersonal relationships. Similarly, previous study suggested that adolescents' interpersonal relationships with parents, siblings, teachers, and friends, are important in promoting their life satisfaction [9].

B. Psychological Factors and Life Satisfaction

[12] introduced the concept of self-efficacy. [10] claimed that self-efficacy affects strongly influences both power a person actually has to face challenges competently and the choices a person is most likely to make. These effects are particularly apparent, and compelling, with regard to behaviors affecting mental health. For example, if one has beliefs in his/her ability to deal with difficulties and skills to do so, they would be less stressed and depressed.

Regulation of emotion [11] was defined as the process in which people modify their emotional reactions, the coping processes that increase or decrease the intensity of the moment. [12] claimed that regulation of emotion is a significant determinant of individuals' perceived wellbeing.

Social support from significant others is a main factor in emotional development. Emotion develops in social contexts, occurs most frequently in social situation, and plays a critical role in social interaction [13]. [14] argued that adolescents' friendship helps regulation of emotion and provides them with emotional support for self-expression in stable environment. [15] claimed social support to be an effective means to help adolescents who have difficulty in regulation of emotion, explaining that one of major reasons for adolescents' poor emotional regulation is lack of social support from significant others. [16] found that children's emotional problem had significantly negative correlation with support from parents and teachers.

II. METHOD

A. Participants

Subjects were students in middle school ages recruited from one school located in Korea. A total of 1,133 students provided usable surveys with 622 (54.9%) males, 511 (45.1%) females. There were 250 (22.1%) seventh graders, 297 (26.2%) eighth graders, and 586 (51.7%) ninth graders.

B. Measures

Social support. Social support was measured by using the nine items from Social and Emotional Health Survey (SEHS). All items were answered on a four-point Likert scale that ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The reliability coefficient using Cronbach's alpha coefficients for social support was .93.

Self-efficacy. Self-efficacy was measured by using the four items (e.g., I can work out my problems). All items were answered on a four-point Likert scale that ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The reliability coefficient using Cronbach's alpha coefficient for self-efficacy was .82.

Regulation of Emotion. Regulation of emotion was measured by using the three items from Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale. All items were answered on a four-point Likert scale that ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The reliability coefficient using Cronbach's alpha coefficients for regulation of emotion was .78.

Student Life Satisfaction Survey (SLSS). Life satisfaction was measured by the SLSS. All items were answered on a six-point Likert scale that ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The reliability coefficient using Cronbach's alpha coefficients for life satisfaction was .82.

C. Analysis

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to assess the hypothesized structural relationships among latent variables. SEM was selected because it represents an appropriate analytic approach for dealing with issues of specifying directionality among variables of interest and generating flexibility with which to test causal relationships. Specifically, this study conducted an evaluation of the hypothesized model of the relationship between social support factors and life satisfaction.

Two mediational models were tested to compare and derive at the best model. Model fit was assessed based on several criteria: non-normed fit index (NNFI; [17]), comparative fit index (CFI; [18]), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA; [19]). Values lower than .08 for the RMSEA and values close to .95 for the NNFI and CFI were used to determine a good-fitting model. All analyses were conducted using Amos 15.0.

III. RESULTS

A. Descriptive Statistics

Significant correlations were found among the study variables, in both male and female groups. According to the guidelines of severe non-normality (i.e., skewness > 3; kurtosis > 10) proposed by [20], the normality assumption of

all the variables was well met, where the skewness values were less than 3 and kurtosis values were less than 10.

B. Testing the Mediational Models

To assess the plausibility of the hypothesis that the relationship between social support factors and life satisfaction is mediated by students' internal assets, we tested two mediational models. The initial structural model reflecting partial mediation was specified with both direct and indirect paths from social support factors to student life satisfaction via two mediators. The second structural model represented the full mediational model, which did not include direct effects of social support factors to life satisfaction. Results indicated that both models showed a good fit for the sample. Specifically, the partial mediational model yielded an overall $\chi^2(195)$ value of 923.98, with CFI = .925, NNFI = .913, and RMSEA = .076 and the full mediational model yielded an overall $\chi^2(198)$ value of 941.57, with CFI = .924, NNFI = .911, and RMSEA = .076.

A chi-square difference test was conducted to decide the better fitting model to the data. The χ^2 difference and difference in degrees of freedom between the full mediation model and the partial mediation model determined the model selection. The χ^2 difference value was statistically significant at the .05 probability level: $\Delta\chi^2(3) = 17.59$. A chi-square difference test supported the partial mediational model. Thus we chose the partial mediational model as the final theoretical model. The fit of the final model was deemed acceptable in terms of three fit indices. The standardized parameter estimates for this model are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 showed that all three dimension of social support had exerted significant effects on self-efficacy ($\beta=.26, p < .001$) and regulation of emotion regulation ($\beta=.29, p < .001$). Social support ($\beta=.21, p < .001$) had significant direct effect on life satisfaction. Self-efficacy and regulation of emotion exerted significant effects on life satisfaction (self-efficacy $\beta=.43, p < .001$; emotion regulation $\beta=.16, p < .05$).

We tested whether there was a significant indirect effect from social support factors to life satisfaction through psychological factors. Table 2 showed the results from bootstrap. The bootstrap results indicated that social support had significant indirect effects on life satisfaction via two mediators. Specifically, there are small indirect effects of social support on life satisfaction via self-efficacy ($\beta = .119, p < .01$) and via regulation of emotion ($\beta = .066, p < .01$).

IV. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to determine how social support influences psychological factors, and life satisfaction and how it interacts with psychological factors to affect life satisfaction. Therefore, the present study examined the relations between social support and psychological factors, the effects of social support and psychological factors on life satisfaction, and the paths among these variables.

The results of the study were as follows. First, social support was revealed to have impact on their self-efficacy. This result supports previous research, which showed that higher perceived support from parents, teachers, and peers was associated with higher self-efficacy [21]. Also, this result is

same with the results from [22]'s study on high school students, which also reported that social support enhances adolescents' self-efficacy.

Second, social support positively predicted regulation of emotion. This supports outcomes of previous studies that social support contributes to children's emotion regulation [23], and that intimacy with friends provides them with emotion support

Third, social support mediated the effect of self-efficacy on life satisfaction as well as the effect of emotion regulation on life satisfaction. A previous study suggested that self-efficacy mediated between interpersonal relationship and happiness [24]. Similar results were found from [5]'s study as well. In addition to these results, the present study showed that social support from parents improves adolescents' self-efficacy, and moreover, that self-efficacy in turn enhances life satisfaction.

In conclusion, the results from this study suggest that social support does not have positive influence on life satisfaction, but instead, mediates the effect of emotion regulation and self-efficacy on life satisfaction. This implies that in order to improve their life satisfaction, their emotion regulation abilities and self-efficacy should be enhanced. Moreover, considering that social support has direct impact on female adolescents' life satisfaction, social support particularly from significant adults is needed to improve their self-efficacy, which will in turn enhance their life satisfaction.

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TABLE I. RESULTS FOR FINAL MODEL

			Unstandardize d Coefficient	Standar d Error	Standardized Coefficient	
Social support	→	Self-efficacy	.24	***	.04	.26
Social support	→	Emotion regulation	.21	***	.04	.29
Social support	→	Life satisfaction	.32	***	.08	.21
Self-efficacy	→	Life satisfaction	.73	***	.12	.43

Emotion regulation	→	Life satisfaction	.33	*	.13	.16
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Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

TABLE II. RESULTS FOR INDIRECT EFFECT IN THE MODEL

Indirect effect	Unstandardized coefficient	Standard error	Standardized coefficient	95% C.I. (bootstrap with bias correction)
Family support → Self-efficacy → Life satisfaction	0.187 **	0.056	0.119	(.072, .187)
Family support → Emotion-regulation → Life satisfaction	0.104 **	0.040	0.066	(.035, .127)

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$