



The Impact of Social Support and Age on Happiness: A Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT

The present study examines the effect of social support and age on happiness levels among adolescents and middle-aged adults. Happiness, a key component of subjective well-being, is influenced by emotional, cognitive, and social factors. A total of 120 participants were selected, including 60 adolescents (15–18 years) and 60 middle-aged adults (30–50 years). Standardized scales were used to measure social support and happiness. Data were analyzed using a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The results revealed that social support has a significant positive effect on happiness, and adolescents reported higher levels of happiness compared to middle-aged adults. However, the interaction effect between social support and age was not significant. The findings highlight the universal importance of social support in enhancing happiness across age groups.

KEY WORDS

Social Support, Happiness, Adolescence, Middle Adulthood.

INTRODUCTION

Happiness is a central concept in psychology, reflecting an individual's overall well-being, life satisfaction, and emotional balance. It is not merely a temporary emotional state but a long-term condition influenced by multiple psychological and social factors. Diener (1984) conceptualized happiness as subjective well-being, which includes positive affect, life satisfaction, and reduced negative emotions. Similarly, Seligman (2002) proposed the PERMA model, emphasizing positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment as key components of well-being.

Happiness can be categorized into hedonic (pleasure-based) and eudaimonic (meaning-based) forms. Research suggests that happiness enhances mental health, improves decision-making, and strengthens interpersonal relationships.

Social Support and Happiness

Social support refers to the emotional, informational, and practical assistance individuals receive from their social networks. Cohen and Wills (1985) described social support as a buffering mechanism that protects individuals from stress and promotes psychological well-being.

Social support is generally classified into four types:

- Emotional support (empathy, care).
- Informational support (advice, guidance).
- Instrumental support (tangible assistance).
- Appraisal support (feedback, encouragement).

Previous studies have consistently demonstrated a positive relationship between social support and happiness. Individuals with strong social connections tend to experience higher levels of life satisfaction and emotional resilience (Lakey & Orehek, 2011).

Role of Age in Happiness

Age significantly influences emotional experiences and social priorities. Adolescents often experience higher levels of happiness due to increased social interaction, exploration, and fewer responsibilities. In contrast, middle-aged adults face greater responsibilities, including career and family obligations, which may reduce happiness levels.

Carstensen's (1992) socio-emotional selectivity theory suggests that as individuals age, they prioritize meaningful relationships, enhancing emotional well-being. Additionally, the U-shaped happiness curve (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2008) indicates that happiness tends to decline during middle age and increase again later in life.

Objectives

1. To examine the effect of Social Support on Happiness.
2. To compare happiness levels between adolescents and middle-aged adults.
3. To analyse the interaction effect of social support and age on happiness.

Aim

To examine the effect of Social Support and Age on Happiness.

Hypotheses

- H_1 : Social support will have a significant positive effect on happiness.
 H_2 : Adolescents will report higher happiness levels than middle-aged adults.
 H_3 : There will be a significant interaction effect between social support and age.

Review of Literature

The life of elderly individuals is influenced by multiple factors, among which social support holds paramount importance. Studies indicate that high levels of social support can enhance happiness among older adults. (Moeini et al., 2018) Social support plays a critical role in maintaining health and improving living conditions of the elderly. It contributes to bringing happiness into their lives. Findings emphasize the need to strengthen social support systems for older adults, as it directly contributes to higher levels of happiness in this age group. (Beygi et al., 2023)

Research has shown that increased perceived social support and feelings of happiness are associated with an enhanced sense of morality among elders. Perceived social support and happiness were identified as key correlates of morality in the elderly population. Based on this, scholars recommend implementing care and training programs focused on enhancing social support to develop morale among older adults. (Ahmed & Mohamed, 2022). In a study conducted in Taiwan, the relationship between happiness and social determinants across age cohorts was examined using data from the 2011 Taiwan Social Change Survey (aged 18+, n = 2,199). Social

determinants included socioeconomic status and social connection. Results revealed that happiness did not differ significantly across age groups. For the younger group, receiving less family support, less formal support, greater social trust, and more control over life were significant predictors. For the middle-aged group, being married and having greater social participation were significant. For the older group, receiving less family support and having higher economic status were significant determinants of happiness. (Hsu et al., 2016)

Studies in Western countries and cross-national comparisons have identified several factors contributing to individual happiness. Using the East Asian Social Survey Health Module (2010), research examined this relationship across four East Asian countries and found gender differences in the determinants of happiness. Marital status emerged as a strong indicator of happiness in East Asian countries, particularly for men but not necessarily for women. Additionally, full-time employment was positively associated with men's happiness in China but negatively associated with women's happiness in Japan. Social support was found to be positively associated with individual happiness, especially among women. (Hori & Kamo, 2017)

Method

Participants: The sample consisted of 120 participants:

60 adolescents (15–18 years) from Career Launcher Institute, Raipur.

60 middle-aged adults (30–50 years) from SBI, Raipur.

Measures

Social Support Scale (Zimet et al., 1988): 12 items rated on a 7-point scale.

Happiness Scale (Rastogi & Moorjani): 64 items rated on a 5-point scale.

Procedure

Data were collected using Google Forms. Participants voluntarily completed the questionnaires. Scoring was done according to the prescribed guidelines.

Statistical Analysis

A two-way ANOVA was conducted to examine the main effects of social support and age, as well as their interaction effect on happiness.

Results and Discussion

The results of the two-way ANOVA indicated:

- A significant main effect of social support on happiness, with higher social support associated with higher happiness levels.
- A significant main effect of age, with adolescents reporting higher happiness than middle-aged adults.
- A non-significant interaction effect, indicating that the impact of social support on happiness does not differ significantly across age groups.

Descriptive Data Table (Mean and SD)

		Adolescents	Adults
High	Mean	253	264
	SD	11.79	9.63
Low	Mean	232	246
	SD	12.91	18.49

2 way Anova Table

Source	SS	Df	MS(ss/df)	F-ratio	remark
Between two group	3802.4	1	3802.4	18.48	P<0.01
Between two Age	1562.4	1	1562.4	7.59	P<0.01
Interaction	22.4	1	22.4	0.12	NS
Within Set	7804	36	205.66		

The findings confirm that social support plays a crucial role in enhancing happiness. Individuals with strong social networks experience better emotional well-being, supporting the stress-buffering hypothesis proposed by Cohen and Wills (1985).

The higher happiness levels among adolescents may be attributed to fewer responsibilities and greater social engagement. In contrast, middle-aged adults often experience stress due to increased life responsibilities.

The non-significant interaction effect suggests that social support benefits individuals equally across age groups. This aligns with previous research indicating that social relationships are universally important for well-being (Antonucci, 2001).

CONCLUSION

The study highlights the importance of social support as a key determinant of happiness across different age groups. While adolescents exhibit higher happiness levels than middle-aged adults, social support consistently enhances well-being regardless of age. These findings emphasize the need to strengthen social connections to promote mental health and life satisfaction.

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