Relations among Social Support, Internal Assets, and Life Satisfaction

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Abstract—Social support is widely acknowledged as having the power to exert a considerable impact on life satisfaction. This study investigated relationships among social supports, psychological factors, and satisfaction with life in a sample of 1,133 Korean adolescents. Moreover, we compared these relationships between genders. Results indicated that support from family members, teachers, or even peers did not have a direct impact on life satisfaction for male adolescents. However, these forms of social support were found to have a significant, indirect relationship with life satisfaction for male adolescents by mediating psychological factors. In contrast, family support, peer support, and teacher support had a direct relationship with life satisfaction in female adolescents. Additionally, among psychological factors, self-efficacy was found to have mediating effects on the relationship between adult social support and life satisfaction. The results and implications of the study are discussed.

Keywords— life satisfaction; social support; self-efficacy; emotion regulation

Introduction

Social support is widely acknowledged as having the power to exert a considerable impact on life satisfaction. This study investigated relationships social among psychological factors, and satisfaction with life in a sample of 1,133 Korean adolescents. Moreover, we compared these relationships between genders. Results indicated that support from family members, teachers, or even peers did not have a direct impact on life satisfaction for male adolescents. However, these forms of social support were found to have a significant, indirect relationship with life satisfaction for male adolescents by mediating psychological factors. In contrast, family support, peer support, and teacher support had a direct relationship with life satisfaction in female adolescents. Additionally, among psychological factors, self-efficacy was found to have mediating effects on the relationship between adult social support and life satisfaction. The results and implications of the study are discussed.

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Methods

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. The current study sample includes middle school students aged 14 to 16 and age was controlled in all of the analyses to prevent possible confounding due to this factor.

The model fit was assessed based on several criteria: nonnormed fit index (NNFI; Bentler & Bonett, 1980), comparative fit index (CFI; Bentler, 1990), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA; Steiger & Lind, 1980). The CFI provides a measure of fit, which assesses the improvement in fit of the hypothesized model relative to a null model. The NNFI, an incremental fit index, is relatively independent of sample size (Marsh, Balla, & McDonald, 1988). Although it is generally accepted that CFI and NNFI values equal to or greater than .90 represents a well-fitting model (McDonald & Ho, 2002), a revised cutoff value close to .95 has been recommended (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The RMSEA was also included because it is relatively independent of sample size and takes into account model complexity, which is an important property for comparing several alternative models with different degrees of complexity. On the basis of a simulation study, Hu and Bentler (1999) defined a RMSEA value that is less than .05 as good fit and a value less than .08 as acceptable fit.

Procedure

The entire survey was reviewed and approved by a professional panel of school counselors before administration. In addition, due to the sensitive nature of the study, we obtained written parental consent and emphasized the importance of student assent. Students were informed that they could choose not to take the survey or stop participating at any time. Only student surveys with parental consent and student assent were included in the study. Students were given paper and pencil surveys to be completed in homeroom classrooms under homeroom teacher supervision. Teachers read instructions, provided by the researchers, to the students. Teachers assisted with the survey completion only when students had questions relating to understanding the survey items. Answers to the



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questions were shared with the whole class to provide the same instructions to every student. Students were informed that they could choose not to take the survey if they did not want to, or to stop participating at any time. Students were told not to put their names on the survey in order to protect their anonymity. The survey took approximately 20-30 minutes to complete.

Measures

1 Social support

Social support was based on nine items from the Social and Emotional Health Survey (SEHS) to measure three dimensions of perceived social support. Specifically, there were three items each for family support (e.g., my family members really help and support one another), teacher support (e.g., at my school, there is a teacher or some other adult who always wants me to do my best), and peer support (e.g., I have a friend my age who really cares about me). This scale was rated on a four-point Likert scale (1 = not at)all true of me to 4 = very much true of me). Items were coded so that higher scores indicated a higher sense of social support. The validity and reliability of the SEHS with the Korean adolescent sample was examined and well supported in a recent study (see Lee, You, and Furlong, 2015 for more information). Specifically, using a Korean adolescent sample (686 students from Grades 7-12), Lee et al. (2015) found that results of the series of CFAs supported the theoretical structure of the SEHS, confirming 12 core positive-psychological subscales. Furthermore, the results supported the full factorial invariance for the theoretical model across two gender groups. For the current study, the reliability coefficient using Cronbach's alpha coefficients for family, teacher, and peer support were .93 (.92 for male; .93 for female), 93 (.91 for male; .93 for female), and .89(.90 for male; .89 for female), respectively.

2 Self-efficacy

General self-efficacy was measured using three items (i.e., "I can work out my problems," "I can do most things if I try," and "There are many things that I do well") from the SEHS. This scale was rated on a four-point Likert scale (1 = strongly agree to 4 = strongly disagree). Items were coded so that higher scores indicated a higher sense of self-efficacy. The reliability coefficient using Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this scale was .80 (.82 for male; .78 for female).

3 Emotion regulation

Emotion regulation was measured through three items from the SEHS. Three items were, "I can deal with being told no," "When I make a mistake, I admit it," and "I can deal with being told no." The scale was rated on a four-point Likert scale (1= *very false* to 4 = *very true*). Higher scores indicated more emotional regulation. For the overall sample, the Cronbach's alpha was .78 (.79 for male; .76 for female).

4 Life satisfaction

Life satisfaction was measured using the Student Life Satisfaction Survey (SLSS; Huebner, 1991). The SLSS is a seven-item self-report measure for assessing a student's global life satisfaction by asking him/her to respond to

various appraisal statements (e.g., "My life is going well") using a six-point response scale (1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree). The validity and reliability of the SLSS with the Korean adolescent sample was examined and well supported in a recent study, which showed acceptable psychometric properties with 716 Korean youths (Lee, You, and Furlong, 2015). For the overall sample, the Cronbach's alpha was .82 (.86 for male; .74 for female).

Conclusion/Contribution

The results of the study were as follows. All three types of social support (i.e., family, peer, and teacher support) are positively associated with male adolescents' self-efficacy. These results suggest that male students who perceived higher levels of support from their family, peers, and teachers were more likely to report feeling confident to produce and achieve designated performance/outcomes. On the other hand, among female students, family support and teacher support was significantly associated with self-efficacy, whereas peer support had no significant relationship. Gorrese and Ruggieri (2012) reported that female students typically try to have interdependent relationships with peers compared to those of males. Therefore, it can be argued that, in contrast with those of male students, female students' interdependent relationships with peers are not positively associated with their self-efficacy. Overall, results showing that higher perceived support from parents, teachers, and peers is associated with higher self-efficacy are consistent with previous research findings.

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