Prospective Study on the Relationship between Social Support and Depression in Young Adults

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Abstract:

Background: Depression is a widespread mental health condition with significant implications for individuals' well-being, including social withdrawal, decreased productivity, and heightened risk of suicide. Social support has been identified as a crucial protective factor against depression, yet its relationship with depression in young adults remains underexplored. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the prospective association between social support and depression in this demographic.

Methods: Participants, recruited from the Department of Psychiatry, comprised young adults aged 18 to 25 without prior depression diagnoses. Baseline assessments, including measures of social support, depression, and demographics, were conducted. Follow-up assessments occurred at six and twelve months. Linear regression models analyzed the relationship between social support and depression, considering demographic moderators.

Results: Among 300 recruited young adults, 260 completed all assessments (mean age = 21.4 years; 65% female). Baseline depression scores indicated low symptoms, while social support scores suggested moderate levels. A significant negative relationship between social support and depression persisted over time ($\beta = -0.28$, $p < 0.001$), unaffected by demographic controls. Females exhibited a stronger negative association ($\beta = -0.36$ vs. -0.20, $p < 0.05$), as did participants from lower socioeconomic backgrounds ($\beta = -0.35$ vs. -0.22, $p < 0.05$). Mediation analysis indicated social support mediated 29% of the gender-depression relationship and 22% of the socioeconomic status-depression relationship.

Conclusion: The findings advocate for interventions promoting social support to prevent or alleviate depression among young adults. Tailoring interventions to demographic nuances may optimize outcomes. This study emphasizes the significance of social support in addressing depression in young adult populations, urging further research to corroborate these findings and elucidate underlying mechanisms.

Background:

Depression is a common mental health disorder that affects millions of people worldwide. It can have a significant impact on an individual's quality of life, leading to social isolation, loss of productivity, and even suicide [1]. Studies have shown that social support can be an effective protective factor against depression. However, few studies have investigated the relationship between social support and depression in young adults [2]. Therefore, this study aims to examine the prospective relationship between social support and depression in young adults.

Research has shown that social support can be an effective protective factor against depression. Social support refers to the assistance and care provided by family members, friends, and other social networks. However, few studies have investigated the relationship between social support and depression in young adults. Understanding this relationship is crucial as it can inform the development of targeted interventions to prevent or reduce depression in this population [3].

Therefore, this prospective study aims to examine the relationship between social support and depression in young adults. Specifically, this study will investigate whether social support is associated with lower levels of depression over time and whether this relationship varies by demographic variables such as gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status [4]. The findings of this study may have important implications for developing interventions that aim to prevent or reduce depression in young adults.

Aim:

- To examine the prospective relationship between social support and depression in young adults

Methods:

Participants: Participants were recruited from the Department of Psychiatry. The inclusion criteria were young adults aged 18 to 25 years who have not been diagnosed with depression or any other mental health disorder. Participants will be excluded if they have a history of depression or are currently receiving treatment for a mental health disorder.

Procedure: Participants who met the inclusion criteria were invited to participate in the study. After providing written informed consent, participants complete a baseline assessment that includes measures of social support, depression, and demographic variables. Social support is assessed using the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), which is a 12-item self-report questionnaire that measures the perceived availability of social support from family, friends, and significant others. Depression is assessed using the Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II), which is a 21-item self-report questionnaire that measures the severity of depressive symptoms. The demographic variables assessed include age, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

Follow-up assessments were conducted at six months and twelve months after the baseline assessment. Participants complete the same measures at each assessment point. Participants who score above a predetermined threshold on the BDI-II at any assessment point are referred to a mental health professional for evaluation and possible treatment.

Data Analysis:

The primary analysis uses linear regression models to examine the prospective relationship between social support and depression over time. We also examine the moderating effects of demographic variables such as gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status on the relationship between social support and depression. Additionally, we perform mediation analyses to examine the mediating role of social support in the relationship between demographic variables and depression.

Results:

A total of 300 young adults were recruited for the study, and 260 participants completed all three assessments. The mean age of the participants was 21.4 years (SD = 2.3), and 65% of the participants were female.

Table 1: Baseline characteristics

Description	Value
The total number of young adults recruited	300
Participants who completed all assessments	260
The mean age of the participants	21.4 years
Standard deviation (SD) of age	2.3
Percentage of female participants	65%
Percentage of male participants	35%

At the baseline assessment, the mean BDI-II score was 7.2 (SD = 4.3), indicating low levels of depressive symptoms. The mean MSPSS score was 5.8 (SD = 1.6), indicating moderate levels of perceived social support.

Table 2: Baseline assessment of BDI-II and MSPSS

Assessment	Mean Score	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation
Baseline BDI-II (Depressive Symptoms)	7.2	4.3	Low levels of depressive symptoms
Baseline MSPSS (Social Support)	5.8	1.6	Moderate levels of perceived social support

The primary analysis revealed a significant negative relationship between social support and depression over time (β = -0.28, SE = 0.05, $p < 0.001$), indicating that higher levels of social support were associated with lower levels of depression. This relationship remained significant

after controlling for demographic variables, including gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

Table 3: Correlation analysis

Variable Relationships	Coefficient (β)	Standard Error (SE)	Significance (p-value)	Description
Social Support vs. Depression Over Time	-0.28	0.05	< 0.001	Higher levels of social support are associated with lower levels of depression
Controlled for Demographics	-0.28	0.05	< 0.001	Relationships remain significant after controlling for demographic variables
Females	-0.36	-	< 0.05	Stronger negative relationship with depression
Males	-0.20	-	< 0.05	A weaker negative relationship with depression

We also found that the relationship between social support and depression varied by demographic variables. Specifically, the relationship between social support and depression was stronger for females than for males (β = -0.36 vs. -0.20, p < 0.05). Additionally, the relationship between social support and depression was stronger for participants from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds than for those from higher socioeconomic status backgrounds (β = -0.35 vs. -0.22, p < 0.05).

Mediation analyses revealed that social support partially mediated the relationship between demographic variables and depression. Specifically, social support mediated 29% of the relationship between gender and depression and 22% of the relationship between socioeconomic status and depression.

Table 4: Mediation analyses

Demographic Variable	Mediation by Social Support	Percentage of Mediation
Gender	Yes	29%
Socioeconomic Status	Yes	22%

Discussion:

The present study provides evidence that social support is an important protective factor against depression in young adults. The findings suggest that increasing social support may be an

effective strategy for preventing or reducing depression in this population. These results are consistent with previous research that has shown a significant negative relationship between social support and depression in various populations.

The study also found that the relationship between social support and depression varied by demographic variables. Specifically, the relationship was stronger for females and individuals from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds. These findings suggest that interventions aimed at increasing social support may need to be tailored to address the specific needs of different demographic groups. For example, interventions for females may need to focus on building supportive relationships with other females, while interventions for individuals from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds may need to focus on building supportive relationships with family members or community members.

The study's findings also suggest that social support partially mediates the relationship between demographic variables and depression. This finding suggests that social support may be an important pathway through which demographic variables influence depression. For example, the study found that social support partially mediated the relationship between gender and depression, suggesting that the gender differences in depression may be partially explained by differences in social support.

Category	This Study	Previous Studies
Recruitment & Demographics	300 young adults recruited, 260 completed, 65% female, 35% male, mean age 21.4 years	Often similar recruitment numbers and demographic distributions; age and gender ratios vary but are generally consistent with this age range and gender distribution [5].
Baseline Depression Levels (BDI-II)	Mean score: 7.2, SD: 4.3, indicating low levels of depressive symptoms	Comparable studies typically report similar low to moderate baseline BDI-II scores, reflecting a non-clinical sample [6].
Baseline Social Support (MSPSS)	Mean score: 5.8, SD: 1.6, indicating moderate social support	Previous studies usually find moderate to high levels of perceived social support in similar demographic groups [7].
Correlation Analysis	Significant negative relationship ($\beta = -0.28$), stronger negative correlation in females ($\beta = -0.36$) than males ($\beta = -0.20$), and stronger in lower SES ($\beta = -0.35$) than higher SES ($\beta = -0.22$)	Consistent with literature showing a negative correlation between social support and depression. Gender differences are commonly reported, with stronger effects often observed in females. SES impacts are also noted in the literature, aligning with these findings [8].
Mediation Analysis	Social support mediated 29% of the relationship between gender and depression, and 22% between SES and depression	Previous studies support the role of social support as a mediator, though the exact percentages can vary. The mediation effects tend to be significant, particularly in samples with demographic diversity [9, 10].

Limitations of the study include the use of self-report measures, which may be subject to bias and may not accurately reflect actual levels of social support or depressive symptoms. Additionally, the study focused on young adults in a specific urban city, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other populations. This prospective study highlights the importance of social support as a protective factor against depression in young adults. The findings suggest that interventions aimed at increasing social support may be effective in preventing or reducing depression in this population. However, interventions may need to be tailored to address the specific needs of different demographic groups. Further research is needed to replicate these findings in other populations and to examine the mechanisms underlying the relationship between social support and depression.

Conclusion:

The results of this prospective study support the idea that social support is an important protective factor against depression in young adults. The findings suggest that interventions aimed at increasing social support may be effective in preventing or reducing depression in this population. Additionally, the study's results suggest that interventions may need to be tailored to address the specific needs of different demographic groups, such as females and individuals from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds. Overall, the results of this study highlight the importance of considering social support when developing interventions to prevent or treat depression in young adults.

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