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# The Role of Positivity in Enhancing the Relationship Between Social Support and Subjective Well-being

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## Abstract

University students often encounter various academic and personal challenges that may affect their psychological functioning. Subjective well-being is a crucial psychological resource that helps individuals cope with these challenges. Among the key factors influencing subjective well-being are social support and positivity. This study examines the moderating role of positivity in the relationship between social support and subjective well-being. Using a quantitative correlational design, data were collected from 416 university students through three validated instruments: the Social Support Scale, the Positivity Scale, and the Subjective Well-being Scale. The data were analyzed using moderated regression analysis. Results revealed that social support and positivity were positively and significantly associated with subjective well-being. Moreover, positivity significantly moderated the relationship between social support and subjective well-being. The simple slope analysis shows that at a high positivity level (+1 SD), the estimated effect of social support on subjective well-being was 0.296 (SE = 0.0344, Z = 8.62,  $p < 0.001$ ). This shows that positivity strengthens the relationship between social support and subjective well-being.

**Keywords:** positivity, social support, subjective well-being, student

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## Introduction

College life is a time for academic development marked by numerous psychosocial challenges that may significantly affect students' well-being. Many university students experience elevated academic pressure due to assignments, examinations, and performance demands. Pursuing academic excellence amidst competitive environments often heightens stress levels (Barbayannis et al., 2022). Additionally, future career uncertainty further contributes to student anxiety, with concerns about job opportunities, professional preparedness, and long-term stability (Deng et al., 2022). Social isolation may also arise as students transition into new environments, often leaving familiar familial and social networks behind, leading to difficulties forming supportive relationships on campus (Jaud et al., 2023).

The challenge of adapting to a new environment is another aspect that can affect students (Jaud et al., 2023). The move to a new academic environment, often far from home, can create psychological and emotional stress due to changes in lifestyle, independence, and adjustment to new norms and culture (Corti et al., 2023). Those conditions can trigger stress levels potentially detrimental to students' mental and physical well-being (Asif et al., 2020).

The impact of prolonged stress on college students can permeate various aspects of well-being, creating serious challenges that can affect daily life (Alkhaldeh et al., 2023). One noticeable impact is the disruption of sleep patterns, with students often experiencing difficulty sleeping or insomnia

due to a mind constantly filled with stress and worry (Tafoya et al., [2023](#)). In addition, academic productivity can also drop dramatically due to difficulties concentrating and completing tasks efficiently (Ahmady et al., [2021](#)). Behavioral changes can also occur, where students may withdraw from social interactions, experience isolation, or even change their daily living habits (Giovenco et al., [2022](#)). Not only that, but constant stress can also be a serious trigger for mental health, with the potential for anxiety and depression problems (Asif et al., [2020](#)). Even physically, the impact of stress can result in a compromised immune system, increase the risk of heart disease, and cause other health problems (Toussaint et al., [2016](#)).

College students are often caught in a maze of stress due to several profound factors. High academic load, consisting of heavy assignments, periodic exams, and other academic responsibilities, is one of the primary triggers of stress in college students (Antonio et al., [2014](#)). The pressure to achieve high levels of achievement and maintain strict academic standards can create a significant additional burden (Pluut et al., [2015](#)). Furthermore, uncertainty about future careers also plays a crucial role in increasing stress levels (Stearé et al., [2023](#)). Students often face tricky questions, including career choices, preparation for entering the professional world, and uncertainty about available job opportunities (Ahern & Norris, [2011](#)).

Social pressure also influences students' stress levels (Pluut et al., [2015](#)). Competition among fellow students, expectations from the social environment, and the need to meet specific standards can create a stressful atmosphere, making students feel the need to try to meet the expectations of others constantly. In addition, interpersonal conflicts, both in academic and social settings, can trigger additional stress. Unhealthy relationships with peers, lecturers, or family members can create additional tension, disrupting students' emotional balance (Sun, [2023](#)). Financial issues, such as high tuition fees, daily living expenses, and other financial responsibilities, can significantly burden college students (Bøe et al., [2021](#)). Difficult financial conditions can stimulate stress and reduce focus on education.

Academic stress may affect subjective well-being through a mediating mechanism. That is, stress can affect feelings of subjective well-being through mediating factors such as anxiety, depression, and life dissatisfaction. In addition, excessive levels of stress can reduce subjective well-being. Students who experience high pressure from academic, social, or personal demands tend to feel less happy and satisfied with their lives (Julika & Setiyawati, [2019](#)).

According to Fisher (Susilowati & Hasanat, [2011](#); Hasibuan et al., [2018](#)), students' failure to deal with various problems and differences, as well as their inability to adjust to stressful situations, can cause depression. The depression experienced by these new students can result in a decrease in their subjective well-being. Experts say subjective well-being is a cognitive and emotional evaluation of life (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, [2003](#); Hasibuan et al., [2018](#)).

#### *Social support and subjective well-being*

Satisfaction in interpersonal relationships is the second factor affecting students' subjective well-being, based on the findings of a study by Ardiansyah & Aulia ([2021](#)). This can be seen from how students interact in the campus environment, such as participating in organizational activities, meeting friends, and interacting with the academic community. This factor is a significant determinant of students' subjective well-being. This finding is consistent with the research results showing that relationships, such as support from family, friends, and special people, influence subjective well-being (Ardiansyah & Aulia, [2021](#); Saphire-bernstein & Taylor, [2013](#)). Other research also reveals that individuals with more friends and family members tend to have higher levels of subjective well-being. In contrast, those with higher well-being from the start usually have closer and more supportive social

relationships than those with low life satisfaction (Ardiansyah & Aulia, 2021; Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2009). In addition, research explains that perceived support from parents typically declines during adolescence, while support from friends increases during this period (Helsen, Vollebergh, & Meeus, 2000; Ardiansyah & Aulia, 2021). This means that social support from family, friends, and the academic environment can be a significant protective factor in reducing student stress levels, so that it can improve subjective well-being (Padmanabhanunni et al., 2023). This support includes emotional, informational, and instrumental aspects that can help students overcome life challenges.

#### *Positivity and subjective well-being*

A positive attitude or positivity is important in improving subjective well-being. Students with positive tendencies may better adapt to pressure, turning their view of challenges into opportunities. The importance of this study lies in understanding more about how positivity as a moderating factor can strengthen or weaken the relationship between social support and subjective well-being in university students. This may open the door for developing more targeted and effective interventions. A study by Li et al. (2014) indicates that social support is significantly associated with subjective well-being. However, in terms of importance, our primary finding was the involvement of positivity as an important mediator between social support and subjective well-being. Specifically, we have provided initial evidence that positivity in general may benefit an individual's subjective well-being in concert with social support.

#### *Positivity and social support*

The research by Çevik & Yıldız (2017) examined the role of perceived social support and coping styles in predicting adolescents' positivity. Research results indicated a moderate-level significant relationship between perceived social support and positivity. Also, the social support the individual perceives increases, and the level of positivity increases. Namely, perceived social support is associated with individuals' positivity. This may be based on the social network that adolescents are in through receiving social support, because adolescents in a social network may have more positive perceptions of their lives. Perceived social support may be positively associated with adolescents' development and social relationships, in emotional terms.

#### *The gap in the study*

In response to the limited exploration of psychological moderators in the well-being literature, particularly in non-Western student populations, this study aims to examine the moderating effect of positivity on the relationship between perceived social support and subjective well-being. By integrating both interpersonal and intrapersonal factors, this research seeks to offer a more comprehensive understanding of student psychological resilience.

Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the moderating role of positivity in the relationship between social support and subjective well-being among Indonesian university students. By integrating dispositional and environmental factors within a single predictive model, this study contributes to the theoretical understanding of student well-being. It offers practical implications for designing psychological interventions that address individual and contextual determinants.

## **Method**

### *Design*

This study uses a correlational quantitative approach to see the relationship between variables, especially in the context of the role of positivity as a moderator in social support on subjective well-being.

### Participants

The participants comprised 416 active undergraduate students aged between 18 and 25 years. Among them, 158 were identified as male and 258 as female. Participants were recruited through online distribution channels and met the eligibility criteria of being enrolled as active students at the time of the study. They were given comprehensive information on the study's goals, data gathering methods, and participants' rights to privacy. Participants were required to give their express consent before participating in the survey. The consent procedure was open and honest, guaranteeing that participants knew their participation was voluntary and that their answers would be kept private.

### Measurements

1 The research instruments were demographic data, subjective well-being scale, social support, and positivity scale. Demographic data includes basic information about research participants, such as gender and semester level. The subjective well-being scale measures individuals' subjective well-being level (Diener, 1984). Furthermore, the social support scale measures support from family, friends, and the environment through the internet (Kim & Park, 2023). The positivity scale measures the tendency to positively see oneself, life, and the future and believe in others (Layyinah & Kumalasari, 2022).

6 The Social Support Scale consists of 42 statements, such as "My parents make me feel safe and comfortable." Responses are rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 7 (Always). The scale demonstrated excellent internal reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.970, and corrected item-total correlation values ranging from 0.446 to 0.755, indicating strong internal consistency for measuring perceived social support.

The positivity scale uses the Positivity Scale Indonesian Version. The scale consists of 8 statements, for example, "I strongly believe that my future will be good". The scale's internal consistency is 0.450 - 0.664, with a reliability score of 0.861. Alternative responses are "Very appropriate, appropriate, undecided, inappropriate, and very inappropriate."

The Subjective Well-Being Scale consists of 14 statements, for example, "I am satisfied with my life." The response alternatives include: "Very suitable, suitable, undecided, unsuitable, and very unsuitable." The scale demonstrated excellent internal reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha 0.946. Additionally, the corrected item-total correlation values ranged from 0.515 to 0.806, indicating strong internal consistency

### Procedure

5 Data were collected with the scale in the form of an online form. The form was distributed through social media to target the student population. The criteria for participants in this study were active students. The sampling technique used was convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which researchers select sample elements based on easily accessible availability and proximity (Elfil & Negida, 2019). The criteria for research participants were active students.

### Data analysis

16 The data analysis involved descriptive statistics, assumption testing, and moderation analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the means and standard deviations of the study variables. Assumption testing included normality and multicollinearity checks. Moderated regression analysis was conducted using Jamovi statistical software to evaluate the interaction between social support and positivity in predicting subjective well-being (Jamovi, 2022).

## Result

The results of this study can be seen in the following data. In this study, there were 158 male respondents and 258 female respondents. This data can be seen in Table 1 below:

**Table 1**  
*Frequencies of gender*

Gender	Frequencies	% of Total	Cumulative %
Male	158	38.0 %	38.0 %
Female	258	62.0 %	100.0 %

In terms of age, it can be seen that most respondents are 21 years old. In addition, 20 and 22-year-olds are also quite dominant. The rest of the respondents are between 18 and 30 years old. The age distribution can be seen in Table 2 below:

**Table 2**  
*Frequencies of age*

Age	Frequencies	% of Total	Cumulative %
18	19	4.6 %	4.6 %
19	63	15.1 %	19.7 %
20	124	29.8 %	49.5 %
21	142	34.1 %	83.7 %
22	37	8.9 %	92.5 %
23	18	4.3 %	96.9 %
24	8	1.9 %	98.8 %
25	2	0.5 %	99.3 %
27	2	0.5 %	99.8 %
30	1	0.2 %	100.0 %

**Table 3**  
*Descriptive data*

Variables	N	Missing	Mean	Median	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Social support	416	0	142.7	146.0	22.77	25.0	175.0
Positivity	416	0	28.4	29.0	5.12	11.0	39.0
Subjective wellbeing	416	0	73.0	74.0	14.37	14.0	98.0

Descriptive analysis revealed that the mean score for social support was 142.7 (SD = 22.77), indicating a moderate degree of variability in participants' perceived social support. The observed scores ranged from 25.0 to 175.0. Positivity had a mean of 28.4 (SD = 5.12), with scores spanning from 11.0 to 39.0, suggesting relatively low variability in individual positivity levels. Subjective well-being yielded a mean

of 73.0 (SD = 14.37), reflecting a generally high level of well-being among participants, albeit with substantial variability, as indicated by the score range of 14.0 to 98.0.

Assumption testing confirmed the normal distribution of data, supported by a Shapiro-Wilk p-value of 0.898. Furthermore, multicollinearity was not a concern, as demonstrated by a Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) of 1.18 (VIF < 10) and a Tolerance value of 0.950 ( $p > 0.01$ ), both within acceptable thresholds.

**Table 4**  
Simple Slope Estimates

	Estimate	SE	Z	p
Average	0.246	0.0224	10.99	< .001
Low (-1SD)	0.195	0.0255	7.66	< .001
High (+1SD)	0.296	0.0344	8.62	< .001

Note. Shows the effect of the predictor (social support) on the dependent variable (subjective wellbeing) at different levels of the moderator (positivity)

A simple slope analysis was conducted to examine the effect of social support on subjective well-being across varying levels of positivity. The results confirmed the moderating role of positivity in the relationship between social support and subjective well-being.

At the average level of positivity, the estimated effect of social support on subjective well-being was 0.246 (SE = 0.0224, Z = 10.99,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating a significant positive association. At the low level of positivity (-1 SD), the effect remained significant but was weaker ( $\beta = 0.195$ , SE = 0.0255, Z = 7.66,  $p < 0.001$ ), suggesting that the positive impact of social support on subjective well-being diminishes among individuals with lower levels of positivity. Conversely, at the high level of positivity (+1 SD), the effect was stronger ( $\beta = 0.296$ , SE = 0.0344, Z = 8.62,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that individuals with higher levels of positivity benefit more substantially from social support in enhancing their subjective well-being. These findings suggest that positivity amplifies the beneficial impact of social support on subjective well-being.

**Table 5**  
Independent Sample T-test for gender

	t-test	df	p
Social support	1.66	414	0.097
Positivity	2.93	414	0.004
Subjective well-being	2.50	414	0.013

To examine potential gender differences in the key variables—social support, positivity, and subjective well-being—an independent samples t-test was performed. The results indicated no statistically significant difference in perceived social support between male students (M = 145.0, SD = 24.57) and female students (M = 141.2, SD = 21.52),  $t(414) = 1.66$ ,  $p = 0.097$ , suggesting comparable levels of social support across genders. However, significant gender differences emerged in both positivity and subjective well-being. Male students reported significantly higher levels of positivity (M = 29.4, SD = 5.00) compared to female students (M = 27.9, SD = 5.12),  $t(414) = 2.93$ ,  $p = 0.004$ . Similarly, male

students also demonstrated higher levels of subjective well-being ( $M = 75.3$ ,  $SD = 14.68$ ) than their female counterparts ( $M = 71.7$ ,  $SD = 14.04$ ),  $t(414) = 2.50$ ,  $p = 0.013$ . These findings suggest that while perceived social support does not differ by gender, male students tend to exhibit greater positivity and subjective well-being than female students.

## Discussion

The analysis revealed that social support exerts a significant positive effect on subjective well-being. This finding aligns with existing literature, which demonstrates that social support enhances well-being by offering emotional and instrumental resources that help individuals cope with stress and life challenges (Siedlecki et al., [2014](#)). A strong support network fosters a sense of connectedness and reduces loneliness, thereby improving subjective well-being (Zhang & Dong, [2022](#)).

Social support often mitigates the negative effects of stress (McKimmie et al., [2020](#)). Individuals who receive support from family, friends, or peer groups are more equipped to manage adversity. This support system alleviates perceived stress and contributes to greater life satisfaction. Moreover, social connectedness and acceptance enhance self-esteem and diminish feelings of isolation (Evans & Fisher, [2022](#)). Supportive interactions also increase an individual's sense of security and self-efficacy, thereby facilitating goal attainment and fostering happiness (Kasprzak, [2010](#); Mahanta & Aggarwal, [2013](#)).

Social support contributes to emotional regulation by offering individuals the opportunity to discuss their experiences and gain new perspectives (Demirtas et al., [2015](#)). In addition to emotional support, practical assistance—such as financial aid, informational resources, or help with responsibilities—can ease challenges and enhance goal achievement, thus elevating well-being (Dominguez-Fuentes & Hombrados-Mendieta, [2012](#)).

The study also found that positivity significantly influences subjective well-being, underscoring the importance of optimism and a constructive mindset. Individuals with higher levels of positivity are more resilient in facing life's challenges and report greater well-being (Catalino et al., [2014](#)). Positivity boosts self-worth and confidence, which promotes life satisfaction and psychological resilience (Winter et al., [2018](#); Lauriola & Iani, [2017](#)). Furthermore, it is associated with heightened optimism and hope, facilitating more adaptive coping and future-oriented thinking (Deuskar & Abhyankar, [2022](#)).

Positive individuals tend to be more satisfied with life by appreciating positive experiences rather than focusing on deficiencies (Datu & King, [2016](#)). Positivity serves as a buffer against stress by promoting constructive interpretations of adversity (Horiuchi et al., [2018](#)). It is also linked to better physical and mental health outcomes, which further support overall well-being (Sharma & Kumar, [2015](#)). Interpersonally, positivity fosters more supportive social interactions, enhancing the availability of emotional resources (Baker et al., [2017](#)).

The moderation analysis indicated a significant interaction between social support and positivity in predicting subjective well-being. Simple slope analyses revealed that the positive impact of social support on subjective well-being was amplified among individuals with higher levels of positivity and diminished among those with lower positivity levels. Thus, positivity enhances the beneficial effects of social support. Additionally, significant gender differences in positivity and subjective well-being suggest that male and female students may perceive and utilize psychological resources differently. This finding underscores the importance of incorporating gender-sensitive approaches in future interventions.

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This study offers valuable insights into the moderating role of positivity in the relationship between social support and subjective well-being among university students. A notable strength of this research lies in its large sample size ( $N = 416$ ) and the use of psychometrically sound instruments. Theoretically, the study contributes to the underexplored area of positivity in the Indonesian student mental health context.

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However, several limitations must be acknowledged. The reliance on self-report measures may introduce biases such as social desirability or limited self-awareness. The cross-sectional design restricts the ability to infer causality. Furthermore, although gender differences were identified, the moderation analysis did not account for gender stratification, which may obscure nuanced interactions. Convenience sampling also limits the generalizability of the findings.

Future research should consider longitudinal or experimental designs to explore causal pathways and evaluate the impact of interventions aimed at enhancing positivity. Multigroup analyses by gender or other demographics may reveal deeper insights into subgroup-specific dynamics. Despite these limitations, the current findings offer empirical grounding for the development of psychological interventions that emphasize both social and positive psychological resources to improve students' well-being.

### Conclusion

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The findings of this study underscore the pivotal roles of social support and positivity in influencing subjective well-being among university students. Specifically, positivity not only exerts a direct positive effect on subjective well-being but also moderates the relationship between social support and well-being. The simple slope analysis revealed that the beneficial impact of social support on subjective well-being is amplified in individuals with higher levels of positivity.

These results highlight the importance of fostering positive psychological traits among students as a means to enhance their well-being. Accordingly, stakeholders in the academic environment—including educators, counselors, and peer networks—are encouraged to provide supportive interactions that can bolster students' psychological resources. Furthermore, this study contributes to the limited body of literature focusing on the role of positivity as a protective factor in student mental health, particularly in the Indonesian context.

Given its implications, this research may serve as a valuable reference for future studies and interventions aimed at promoting positive behaviors and enhancing subjective well-being in university populations. Continued efforts in this area are essential for cultivating a supportive and mentally resilient academic community.

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### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

### Author Contribution

All authors have contributed according to their respective roles in this study.

### Data Availability

Data can be provided upon request to the first author.

**Declarations Ethical Statement**

The study followed the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki.

**Informed Consent Statement**

Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the study.

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