

Social Support in Relation to Academic Burnout and Positive Life Orientation Among College Students

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Abstract: This research study explores the complex relationship between social support, academic burnout, and positive life orientation among college students. The current study tries to examine the relationship between social support, academic burnout, and positive life orientation among college students. The study uses correlational research design. The participants of this study were college students aged 18-22 years. Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet & Farley, 1988), Burnout Assessment Tool Student Version (Schaufeli et al. 2020) and Scale of Positive Life Orientation. (Agarwal and Dalal, 2016) was used to achieve the objective of the study. Statistical methods such as Pearson product moment correlation were employed to investigate the relationship between variables.

Perceived social support had significant negative relationship with academic burnout, indicating that students with a high level of social support are likely to experience lower levels of academic burnout. Positive life orientation was positively correlated to social support. These assumptions are supported by researches suggesting that supportive environments promote positive cognitive appraisals and emotional resilience, thereby reducing vulnerability to burnout. Support from family increases motivation from peers a sense of belonging from teachers' academic confidence and engagement. The combined effect of social support and positive life demonstrates how external support and inner psychological strength work together to promote student well-being.

Keywords: Social Support, Academic Burnout, Positive Life Orientation, Correlation, Cognitive Appraisal, Resilience, Well-Being, College Students.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The college life is an important stage in which an adolescent, while still young, starts facing academic responsibilities, adjusting socially and growing as a person. The pressure of all these matters may lead to stress. The continuous academic demands may cause psychological issues which may lead a student towards academic burnout. A college student tries very hard to get good marks. Along with academic activities, there are personal and social issues as well as a mental pressure on a student. Stress and burnout are the result of multiple demands. While in academic life, the students need to learn the other rules in the new environment which is different from their home. The student has demands of parents, teachers, classmates and society to balance out. Academic burnout refers to losing interest and energy to pursue academic activities and feeling worn-out emotionally. We must also focus on negative and cynical attitudes.

The exhausted student does not have enough energy to learn. They feel emotionally exhausted to study academically. Academic burnout mainly leads to emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy. The social support definition can be summarized as the perceived availability of psychological and material resources individuals can use to confront a threat. Effective social support can certainly help students deal with their studies and at the same time to cope with study pressure. Family, teachers, friends etc. may provide such social support. Another psychological factor that may have effect on students' well-being is positive life orientation. A person who has been described as having a positive life orientation is one who has a general tendency to view the future positively. In the same way, such people predict more positive outcomes would happen for them. Studies show that having social support and a positive attitude in life can help limit with burnout vulnerability. With proper support, students can efficiently do well in their studies. Moreover,

they effectively manage their emotions when being overtaken by unpleasant emotions.

The concept of burnout was originally developed within occupational psychology but has since been adapted to academic settings. Schaufeli et al. (2002) introduced the Maslach Burnout Inventory–Student Survey (MBI-SS), which operationalized academic burnout through emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced academic efficacy. Ye et al. (2021) emphasized that academic burnout develops when students experience prolonged academic stress without sufficient coping resources. Burnout has been associated with reduced academic performance, decreased concentration, sleep disturbances, emotional instability, and even depressive symptoms. Qin (2025) further highlighted that burnout negatively predicts academic achievement and may influence long-term academic trajectories.

Recent review studies (Chong et al., 2025) suggest that academic workload, performance pressure, lack of autonomy, and inadequate coping skills are major contributors to burnout. These findings reinforce the need to examine protective variables—such as social support and positive orientation—that can mitigate these negative outcomes. Social support consistently emerges as a significant protective factor against academic burnout. According to Cohen and Wills' (1985) buffering model, social support reduces the harmful effects of stress by enhancing coping resources and fostering emotional stability.

In a study, Ye et al. (2021) found that social support was negatively correlated with academic burnout. Importantly, life satisfaction partially mediated this relationship, indicating that support enhances students' overall evaluation of life, which in turn reduces burnout risk. Similarly, Ma et al. (2024) found that social support positively predicted life satisfaction and moderated the negative effects of burnout on well-being among international students. Firdausi et al. (2023) also reported that students with higher perceived social support experienced lower burnout levels. Positive life orientation encompasses optimism, life satisfaction, and positive self-evaluation. Oleś (2017) proposed that positive orientation reflects a stable dispositional tendency to view life experiences constructively. Individuals high in positive orientation typically demonstrate higher levels of psychological well-being and adaptive coping.

Research by Jin and Dewaele (2018) found that students with greater optimism and positive orientation experienced lower anxiety and higher motivation in academic contexts. These findings suggest that positive life orientation may serve as an internal buffer that protects students from emotional exhaustion and disengagement.

In educational settings, positive orientation fosters persistence, goal clarity, and adaptive coping strategies—qualities that are directly opposed to burnout symptoms. Ye et al. (2021) demonstrated that social support increases life satisfaction, which in turn reduces burnout. This finding indicates that support enhances students' overall positive

evaluation of life, thereby strengthening their psychological resilience. Similarly, Chen et al. (2023) found that life satisfaction positively predicted academic motivation and negatively predicted learning burnout. Social support moderated the relationship between motivation and burnout, highlighting a complex interactive process. These findings suggest that social support may influence burnout both directly and indirectly through enhancing positive life orientation.

➤ *Research Gap*

The previous studies have focused on the relationship between these variables but certain gap occurs. Many studies explained their direct relationship but few taken them in a single model particularly for college students which made it difficult to learn their interaction simultaneously. There is no clarity that whether positive life acts as a support system for students.

➤ *The Current Study*

As mentioned above there are various studies and researches performed on social support academic burnout and positive life orientation. They have highlighted that association between these three psychological constructs is important for promoting well-being and provide emotional support to college students.

➤ *Objective of the Study*

The objective of the present study to explore the relationships among social support, academic burnout and positive life orientation among college students.

II. METHODOLOGY

➤ *Sample*

The sample consisted of 146 participants, all of whom were female. The majority were unmarried (95.2%) and pursuing undergraduate (69.9%) and also post graduate education (30.1). Most participants belonged to middle socioeconomic status (65.1%) and nuclear families (71.9%). In terms of birth order, a larger proportion were first-born (39.7%), followed by second-born (34.9%) and third-born or above (25.3%). The participants voluntarily agreed to participate in the research process.

➤ *Measures*

A detailed demographical detailed sheet was prepared to record necessary details of the participant by the researcher for the selection of appropriate sample which helped to control the extraneous variable and select participants of similar demographic characteristics.

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet & Farley, 1988) It is a 12- item scale designed to measure perceived social support from three sources significant others, family and friends. The questionnaire is widely used and well validated. It has a 7-point Likert Scale to evaluate how individuals perceive their social support network. The MSPSS demonstrates good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.81 to

0.98) and strong construct validity. Due to short length and simple language, it is easily used for populations with limited literacy.

Burnout Assessment Tool – Student Version (Wilmar Schaufeli and colleagues, 2020). It is a 33- item scale which is designed to measure academic burnout among college students from six dimensions namely exhaustion, mental distancing, cognitive impairment, emotional impairment, psychological distress and psychosomatic complaints. Responses were rated on a 5- point Likert scale. The burnout assessment tool and its subscales show good reliability with Cronbach’s alpha values ranging from 0.90 to 0.92 for subscales and 0.95 for the overall tool. It has a good Convergent validity.

Scale of Positive Life Orientation (Manju Agarwal, Ajit K. Dalal, 2016) It is a 11- item scale which is designed to measure positive life orientation among college students. Responses were collected on a 4-point Likert Scale. Three items (2,4,5) among the eleven items are reversed scored. This scale can be used on people of any gender, age or any socioeconomic status. The Scale of Positive Life Orientation is very good internal consistency Cronbach’s alpha value for this particular scale is 0.86 which make it a highly reliable scale.

➤ *Procedure*

Research purpose was explained to the participants and a proper rapport was established with them with comfortable environment for authentic responses. Participants were informed to not to spend much time on the responses and were also instructed about the right and wrong responses. They were encouraged to respond promptly and showcase their genuine feelings.

➤ *Research Design*

The present study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational research design to examine the relationship among social support, academic burnout, and positive life orientation among college students.

➤ *Ethical Considerations*

Prior before the study, informed consent was obtained from all the participants, and they were assured that their personal information would be kept strictly confidential.

➤ *Statistical Analysis*

The obtained data was analyzed by SPSS version 20. Descriptive statistics (Mean and SD) values were calculated for all the three variables.

III. RESULTS

Table 1 Descriptive Statistic Mean and Standard Deviation for the Variables Social Support, Academic Burnout and Positive Life Orientation. (N=146)

Measure		Mean	SD
Social support		60.38	14.79
Positive Life Orientation		30.58	4.40
Academic Burnout	Exhaustion	25.73	5.97
	Mental distance	12.83	3.82
	Cognitive impairment	14.13	3.88
	Emotional impairment	15.31	4.53
	Psychological distress	14.74	4.53
	Psychosomatic complaints	13.77	4.45
	Total	96.51	20.31

The descriptive statistics indicate that the participants (N = 146) reported a moderate level of perceived social support (M = 60.38). The mean score for Positive Life Orientation (PLO) was 30.58, suggesting that, overall, students possess a moderately optimistic outlook toward life. The lower standard deviation indicates that most participants cluster around the mean, reflecting relative consistency in levels of optimism. Regarding Academic Burnout, the total mean score (M = 96.51) indicates a moderate level of burnout among college students. The standard deviation reflects noticeable variability, suggesting that some students experience significantly higher burnout symptoms compared to others.

Table 2 Pearson Correlations Among Social- Support, Academic Burnout and Positive Life Orientation (N=146)

Measure		Social support
		r
Positive Life Orientation		.220**
Academic Burnout	Exhaustion	.043
	Mental distance	-.014
	Cognitive impairment	-.153
	Emotional impairment	.030
	Psychological distress	-.163*
	Psychosomatic complaints	-.108

	Total	-0.73
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.		
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.		

A significant positive correlation was found between Social Support and Positive Life Orientation ($r = .220$, $p < .01$).

Weak and negative correlation ($r = -.163$, $p < .05$) was reported between social support and psychological distress (domain of burnout), indicating that social support may specifically reduce distress. No significant correlation was reported between social support and other domains of burnout (Mental distance, Cognitive impairment, Emotional impairment and Psychosomatic complaints)

IV. DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between social support, academic burnout, and positive life orientation among college students. Within the sample of college students, the study sought to understand whether perceived social support and optimism serve as protective factors against academic burnout. These findings are consistent with contemporary research suggesting that college students today experience considerable academic stress while still maintaining psychological resources such as optimism and peer/family support (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Salmela-Aro & Upadhyaya, 2014). The moderate level of burnout suggests that students are experiencing emotional exhaustion, academic fatigue, and performance-related stress, but not at extreme pathological levels.

At the same time, students reported moderate to high levels of social support. The presence of support suggests that students are not completely isolated but may still face stressors that exceed their coping resources. This study found a significant positive correlation between social support and positive life orientation. This finding suggests that students who perceive greater emotional, informational, and instrumental support tend to hold a more optimistic and positive outlook toward life. This result is strongly supported by previous literature. Lakey and Cohen (2000) found that perceived social support enhances psychological well-being and positive affect. Zimet et al. (1988) demonstrated that individuals who perceive strong support systems report higher life satisfaction and optimism. Brissette et al. (2002) found that social support promotes adaptive coping and positive expectations in stressful academic transitions. From a theoretical perspective, social support strengthens self-efficacy and hope, which are core components of positive life orientation (Snyder, 2002). When students feel valued and supported, they are more likely to believe in positive future outcomes.

A significant negative correlation between social support and psychological distress was found. This indicates that social support is helpful in reducing or psychological distress. The correlation between social support and other domain of burnout was found negative but not statistically

significant. This finding was supported by previous research that suggests social support significantly reduces burnout (Jacobs & Dodd, 2003; Salmela-Aro et al., 2008).

V. CONCLUSION

The objective of the study was to assess the relationship between social support and life orientation. Peer supports and social support significantly enhanced the life satisfaction and hope of students as evident in the results obtained. A positive relationship has a huge impact on coping with stressful experiences. Social support was found positively correlated with positive orientation of life while negatively correlated with academic burnout.

➤ *Implications of the Study*

Present study underpinned the importance of social support strengthening in universities. Peer mentoring programs, faculty support initiatives, counselling services can enhance perceived social support. Interventions promoting gratitude, optimism and cognitive restructuring may cultivate positive life orientation.

➤ *Limitations*

Causal effects could not be determined in this study because of the cross-sectional research design. The research was limited to only the college students that's why the generalization of the results cannot be made on other populations, cultures, and educational settings. In the study, the personality traits, socioeconomic status and academic performance were not examined.

➤ *Funding: No*

➤ *Data Availability: The data will be available with the authors.*

➤ *Conflict of interest: There is no conflict of interest.*

➤ *Ethical Approval: This study did not include a clinical sample. Informed consent was obtained from all participants after they were briefed on the objectives of the study.*

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