

FACTORS AFFECTING MENTAL HEALTH AMONG CHINESE COLLEGE STUDENTS*

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Abstract

This study aimed 1) to investigate the relationship between social support, academic stress, self-esteem, resilience, mental health literacy, and mental health, and 2) to examine the factors affecting mental health among college students at Yuncheng Preschool Education College. The sample consisted of 362 college students at Yuncheng Preschool Education College selected through stratified random sampling. The research instruments were questionnaires measuring mental health, social support, academic stress, self-esteem, resilience, and mental health literacy. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis.

The findings revealed that 1) social support, self-esteem, resilience, and mental health literacy were positively related to mental health, whereas academic stress was negatively related to mental health, and 2) academic stress, self-esteem, and resilience significantly affected mental health among Chinese college students. The findings suggest that reducing academic stress and

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strengthening psychological resources can effectively improve students' mental health and well-being.

Keywords: Mental Health, Social Support, Academic Stress, Self-Esteem, Resilience

Introduction

Mental health has become a major public health concern worldwide, especially among college students who face increasing academic, social, and psychological pressures. College students are in a critical stage of personal development and are particularly vulnerable to mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, and emotional distress. Previous studies have shown that mental health problems significantly affect students' academic performance, social adjustment, and overall quality of life (Pedrelli et al., 2015). Academic stress, especially in competitive educational environments, has been identified as a major contributor to psychological distress among university students (Barbayannis et al., 2022; Pascoe et al., 2020).

Among Chinese college students, mental health issues have attracted growing attention due to intense academic competition, employment pressure, and social expectations. Mental health is influenced by multiple psychological and environmental factors. Social support is considered an important protective factor that helps individuals cope with stress and maintain psychological well-being (Cohen & Wills, 1985). According to Relational Regulation Theory, supportive relationships contribute significantly to better mental health outcomes (Lakey & Orehek, 2011). In contrast, excessive academic stress may negatively affect students' mental health and increase psychological burden (Córdova Olivera et al., 2023).

In addition, self-esteem and resilience are important psychological resources associated with mental health. High self-esteem has been shown to

improve psychological well-being and reduce the risk of anxiety and depression (Orth & Robins, 2014; Rosenberg, 1965). Similarly, resilience helps individuals adapt to challenges and recover from adversity, making it a key protective factor for mental health (Connor & Davidson, 2003). Mental health literacy also plays an important role, as better understanding of mental health enables students to recognize psychological problems and seek appropriate support (O'Connor & Casey, 2015).

Although previous studies have examined individual factors related to mental health, limited research has explored the combined effects of social support, academic stress, self-esteem, resilience, and mental health literacy among Chinese college students. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the relationships among these variables and identify the factors affecting mental health among Chinese college students.

Objectives

1. To investigate the relationship between social support, academic stress, self-esteem, resilience, mental health literacy, and mental health.
2. To investigate the factors that affect the mental health of college students at Yuncheng Preschool Education College.

Conceptual Framework

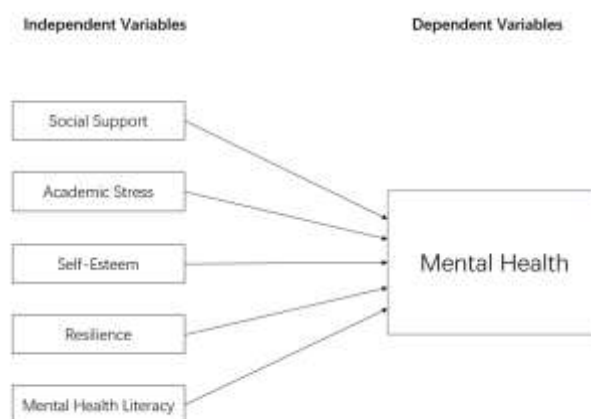


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Literature Review

1. Mental Health

Mental health has become an increasingly important issue in higher education, particularly among college students who are exposed to multiple academic, social, and personal challenges. During this stage of life, students are required to manage academic demands while adapting to interpersonal relationships and future career uncertainty. These pressures may increase the risk of psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, and emotional instability. Pedrelli et al. (2015) noted that mental health problems among college students are common and closely associated with academic performance, social adjustment, and daily functioning. Therefore, mental health has become a central concern in educational and psychological research.

2. Social Support and Mental Health

Social support has long been recognized as a key factor in maintaining psychological well-being. According to Cohen and Wills (1985), social support

can reduce the negative effects of stress by providing emotional, informational, and practical assistance. This buffering function becomes particularly important for college students facing academic and personal pressures. Lakey and Orehek (2011) further explained that supportive relationships contribute to mental health through positive daily interactions and emotional regulation. Students who perceive greater support from family, friends, and peers generally demonstrate better emotional adjustment and lower levels of psychological distress.

3. Academic Stress and Mental Health

Academic stress is widely considered one of the most influential factors affecting college students' mental health. Excessive workload, examination pressure, and high academic expectations often lead to psychological burden. Pascoe et al. (2020) found that prolonged academic stress negatively affects students' emotional well-being and increases the risk of anxiety and depression. Similarly, Barbayannis et al. (2022) reported a strong relationship between academic stress and reduced mental well-being among college students. Córdova Olivera et al. (2023) also confirmed that academic stress is a significant predictor of mental health problems. These findings suggest that academic stress remains a major challenge for students' psychological well-being.

4. Self-Esteem and Mental Health

Self-esteem reflects how individuals evaluate their own worth and personal value. Rosenberg (1965) described self-esteem as an important psychological resource influencing emotional and behavioral responses. Students with higher self-esteem are generally more confident and better able to cope with challenges. In contrast, low self-esteem is often associated with emotional vulnerability and psychological distress. Orth and Robins (2014) emphasized that self-esteem plays an important role in psychological development and mental health. For college students, healthy self-esteem contributes to emotional stability and positive adjustment.

5. Resilience and Mental Health

Resilience refers to the ability to adapt successfully to adversity and recover from stressful experiences. Connor and Davidson (2003) identified resilience as a critical factor in coping with life challenges and maintaining psychological well-being. In the context of higher education, resilience helps students manage academic pressure, setbacks, and uncertainty more effectively. Students with stronger resilience tend to demonstrate better emotional regulation and stronger coping abilities, which supports positive mental health outcomes.

6. Mental Health Literacy and Mental Health

Mental health literacy refers to knowledge and understanding related to mental health problems, including their recognition, management, and prevention. O'Connor and Casey (2015) highlighted that mental health literacy helps individuals recognize psychological problems and seek appropriate support when necessary. Among college students, greater mental health literacy improves awareness of mental health issues and encourages help-seeking behavior. This awareness can contribute to early intervention and better psychological well-being.

7. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

Drawing on previous studies, this research examines mental health as the dependent variable and social support, academic stress, self-esteem, resilience, and mental health literacy as independent variables. Existing literature indicates that social support, self-esteem, resilience, and mental health literacy are positively associated with mental health, whereas academic stress is negatively associated with mental health.

Based on the conceptual framework, the hypotheses are proposed as follows:

H1: Social support, academic stress, self-esteem, resilience, and mental health literacy are significantly related to mental health among college students.

H2: Social support, academic stress, self-esteem, resilience, and mental health literacy significantly affect mental health among college students.

Methodology

1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design to investigate the relationships between social support, academic stress, self-esteem, resilience, mental health literacy, and mental health among Chinese college students. The study also examined the factors affecting students' mental health.

2. Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted of full-time college students at Yuncheng Preschool Education College in Shanxi Province, China, with a total population of 6,349 students. Based on Krejcie and Morgan's sampling table, 362 students were selected as the sample. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure representative participation.

3. Research Instrument

The research instrument was a structured questionnaire consisting of six parts: mental health, social support, academic stress, self-esteem, resilience, and mental health literacy. The questionnaire used a Likert scale to measure participants' responses. The instrument was tested for validity and reliability before data collection.

4. Data Collection

Data were collected after obtaining permission from the relevant institution. The questionnaires were distributed to the selected participants, and all respondents were informed about the purpose of the study. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was assured. Completed questionnaires were collected and prepared for statistical analysis.

5. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. Pearson's correlation analysis was used to examine the relationships among variables, while multiple regression analysis was applied to identify the factors affecting mental health among college students.

Results

1. Results for Objective 1 and Hypothesis 1

Objective 1 aimed to investigate the relationship between social support, academic stress, self-esteem, resilience, mental health literacy, and mental health among college students. Hypothesis 1 proposed that these variables are significantly related to mental health.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	Level
Mental Health (Y)	3.4722	0.7011	Moderately High
Social Support (X1)	3.4152	0.7405	Moderately High
Academic Stress (X2)	2.7689	0.8402	Moderate
Self-Esteem (X3)	3.5572	0.7776	Moderately High

Variables	Mean	SD	Level
Resilience (X4)	3.3668	0.7166	Moderate
Mental Health Literacy (X5)	3.5483	0.7642	Moderately High

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of all variables. The mean score of mental health was 3.4722, indicating a moderately high level among college students. Most independent variables were at moderate to moderately high levels. Academic stress had the lowest mean score, while self-esteem had the highest.

Table 2 Correlation Analysis between Variables and Mental Health

Variables	r	Sig.
Social Support (X1)	.771**	.000
Academic Stress (X2)	-.475**	.000
Self-Esteem (X3)	.711**	.000
Resilience (X4)	.668**	.000
Mental Health Literacy (X5)	.562**	.000

Note: **p < .01

The correlation analysis revealed significant relationships between all independent variables and mental health. Social support showed the strongest positive correlation with mental health ($r = .771$, $p < .01$), followed by self-esteem ($r = .711$, $p < .01$) and resilience ($r = .668$, $p < .01$). Mental health literacy was also positively related to mental health ($r = .562$, $p < .01$). In contrast, academic stress showed a significant negative relationship with mental health ($r = -.475$, $p < .01$). These results support Hypothesis 1.

2. Results for Objective 2 and Hypothesis 2

Objective 2 aimed to investigate the factors affecting mental health among college students. Hypothesis 2 proposed that social support, academic stress, self-esteem, resilience, and mental health literacy significantly affect mental health.

Table 3 Regression Model Summary

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²
.839	.704	.702

Table 3 shows that the regression model had strong explanatory power. The independent variables explained 70.4% of the variance in mental health.

Table 4 ANOVA

F	Sig.
259.647	.000

Table 4 indicates that the regression model was statistically significant ($p < .001$), confirming that the independent variables jointly affected mental health.

Table 5 Regression Coefficients

Variables	Beta	Sig.
Social Support (X1)	.493	.000
Academic Stress (X2)	-.240	.000
Self-Esteem (X3)	.201	.000
Resilience (X4)	.154	.000
Mental Health Literacy (X5)	-.064	.107

The regression analysis showed that social support had the strongest positive effect on mental health ($\beta = .493$, $p < .001$). Academic stress had a significant negative effect ($\beta = -.240$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher academic pressure reduced mental health. Self-esteem ($\beta = .201$, $p < .001$) and resilience ($\beta = .154$, $p < .001$) also significantly affected mental health. However, mental health literacy did not significantly predict mental health ($p > .05$). Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was partially supported.

Table 6 Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Result
H1	Supported
H2	Partially Supported

The findings indicate that both external and internal factors contribute to mental health among Chinese college students. Social support emerged as the strongest predictor, while academic stress, self-esteem, and resilience also played significant roles.

Discussion

The findings for Objective 1 showed that social support, self-esteem, resilience, and mental health literacy were positively related to mental health, while academic stress was negatively related to mental health among Chinese college students. These findings are consistent with previous studies. Cohen and Wills (1985) and Lakey and Orehek (2011) found that social support improves psychological well-being. Similarly, Pascoe et al. (2020) and Barbayannis et al. (2022) reported that academic stress negatively affects students' mental health.

Regarding Objective 2, the results showed that social support, academic stress, self-esteem, and resilience significantly affected mental health, whereas

mental health literacy did not significantly predict mental health. Social support had the strongest effect, indicating the importance of external support systems. Academic stress negatively affected mental health, while self-esteem and resilience positively contributed to mental well-being. These findings suggest that both external and internal factors play important roles in students' mental health.

Recommendation

Educational institutions should strengthen support systems to promote students' mental health. Universities should provide counseling services, peer support programs, and mental health activities to enhance social support and reduce academic stress. In addition, schools should create a supportive learning environment that helps students improve self-esteem and resilience.

Future studies should expand the research scope by including students from different universities and regions in China. Additional variables such as family background, financial stress, and emotional regulation may also be considered to provide a broader understanding of factors affecting mental health among college students.

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