

Probe into the Positive Factors of College Students' Subjective Well-being

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Abstract. "Subjective well-being" has increasingly become a hot topic of widespread concern. Researchers often use tools such as foreign scales to measure and study college students' subjective well-being. As there are many factors that affect subjective well-being, this essay has a tendentious and comprehensive summary of these research results. It summarizes the results from the following four aspects: individual abilities, psychological factors, environmental factors and demographic factors. As for the specific influence depth, it is still to be further studied. This paper aims to provide a summary of previous studies on college students' subjective well-being and give some advice about directions in the future to make contributions to improve college students' subjective well-being. This paper summarizes the positive factors that affect college students' subjective well-being from four aspects: individual ability factors, emotion, environment, and demography. However, the level of the summary is still shallow, and the systematic summary among the factors is not deep enough, which needs to be criticized and corrected and further studied by future generations.

Keywords: college students, subjective well-being, positive factors.

1. Introduction

College students provide intellectual power for a nation's development and are conducive to enhancing the comprehensive strength of the country. They also function as a great influence factor on economy, politics, culture and other aspects. In recent years, the phenomenon of involution is becoming increasingly serious for college students, and negative psychological phenomena such as depression and anxiety are becoming more and more common. College students, who are in the transition period from school to society, are increasingly affected by various aspects both from personal and external reasons. As high-quality talents, the growth of college students is of great concern. In college, which is called "the second half of society", students are not fully mature in psychological development, who often have poor tolerance ability faced with problems in academics, interpersonal relationships, dating and employment. These would in turn lead to their high mood swings, tendency to adopting negative and inappropriate ways to solve problems, and failing to establish good interpersonal relationships, etc. All these above will have an important impact on the subjective well-being of college students. Therefore, the authors aims to investigate this issue by analyzing and summarizing the positive influencing factors of college students' subjective well-being and explore feasible ways to improve college students' subjective well-being.

Subjective Well-Being (SWB) is a comprehensive assessment of the evaluator's quality of life based on self-defined criteria, and is an important indicator of an individual's quality of life. With both positive and negative aspects, an individual's subjective perception and cognitive evaluation of his or her standard of living and ability to survive according to his or her own criteria define one' life quality. In this sense, the key to determine whether people are happy or not is what kind of emotional interpretation they make towards life events and how they process these stimuli cognitively. The happiness of college students is influenced by both external objective factors and internal subjective

factors. Objective factors include family environment, economic status, stressful situations and social support, and subjective factors include personality, emotional control, and autonomous action power.

As the future backbone of the country, college students are the indispensable mainstay in the society. As college students are in the period of forming mature consciousness structure and shaping complete personality, it is worthwhile to pay attention to what influencing factors will have a positive impact on subjective well-being. Li Li pointed out that from the 1950s to the present, foreign research on subjective well-being has roughly gone through three stages: (1) the descriptive research stage (mid-1950s-early 1980s), in which researchers simply measured the well-being of different groups of people and described the corresponding levels of well-being; (2) theoretical construction stage (mid-1980s-1990s), during which many psychological theoretical models of SWB were established, and models of SWB were carefully studied, validated and explained; (3) the empirical research phase (1990s-present), where research focused on combining multiple methods to measure happiness and exploring ways to improve people's happiness[1]. Research on subjective well-being in China began in the mid-1980s, while it was not until the mid-1990s that researchers began to study college students as a group. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the literature on factors influencing subjective well-being had begun to show some diversity, all of which were analyzed in detail using specific and reliable scales.

At present, there has been a great sum of domestic and international literature on the factors influencing the subjective well-being of college students, most of which focuses on one or several attributions affecting subjective well-being. For example, Liu and Yan's research showed that personal struggle and past achievements are significantly related to subjective well-being [2]. Also, Jessie Sun concluded that personality is also an important factor influencing subjective well-being [3].

Although there have been some reviews summarizing the influencing factors of subjective well-being, the classification of these empirical studies is relatively simple with most of them discussing both subjective and objective aspects. Meanwhile, the literature is mostly from Chinese literature, with a lack of research on foreign literature. Also, there are few factors discussed the complexity of the influencing factors of subjective well-being, which fail to present a systematic way of how each factor specifically affects SWB. For example, since some of the reviews were written earlier, the factors analyzed and summarized are slightly insufficient. As Sun Dongxia pointed out, some more important factors, for example, emotional intelligence, self-efficacy and cognitive patterns, had been rarely mentioned, studied and analyzed [4]. Some of the literature focused mostly on family, school social support, personality, self-esteem, and self-efficacy, neglecting to outline and summarize factors such as employment pressure, self-control, autonomy, collective self-esteem, and modernity. Therefore, in order to fill the research gaps in the previous literature and target the problems of the lack of systematization and comprehensiveness, the authors analyzed and synthesized dozens of Chinese and foreign literature in recent years, with particular focus on some new research factors in the last decade, and finally summarized four different classification directions, namely, individual factors, mental factors, environment factors, and demographic factors. A series of positive influence factors of the subjective well-being of college students will be summarized and shed light for future improvements.

2. Literature review

2.1 Individual factors

2.1.1. Learning ability and academic achievement

According to the survey studied by Huihui Wang and Yang Sun, in terms of academic performance, if an individual succeeded, both learning ability and subjective well-being were positively correlated, especially in interpersonal relationships, ability and subjective well-being showed a very significant positive correlation. If an individual attributes success to his or her own ability, subjective well-being

will be enhanced [5,6]. Because competence is a stable quality within an individual, this kind of attribution is a kind of affirmation of ego, thus achieving more success and corresponding happiness.

Academic achievement attribution refers to the tendency of college students to attribute their academic progress and positive results to internal or external causes. Tingting Qiao's research showed that academic achievement attribution was negatively correlated with subjective well-being, while success internal control attribution was positively correlated with subjective well-being [7]. There is a positive correlation between SWB and the "effort" factor of academic achievement attribution, and a negative correlation between SWB and "situation", "luck" and "ability".

2.1.2. Personal efforts

Studies of attributive patterns of effort are often compared with those of ability. The research of Huihui Wang, Yang Sun and Yan Yan showed that in a successful situation, if an individual attributed success to effort, which was an internal factor that could be controlled by the individual, he or she would feel that as long as he or she had enough effort, he or she would succeed. This will increase the level of motivation of the individual and have a positive impact on one's future behavior. The person continues to work hard, thus forming a virtuous cycle. It is easier to experience happiness [5,6,8]. When an individual fails, if the failure is attributed to insufficient efforts, the individual will feel ashamed and make more efforts to increase behavioral motivation and positive emotions. Therefore, the failure will not have too much negative impact on subjective well-being.

Huifang Yang studied the relationship between college students' personal striving and subjective well-being. Personal striving is what an individual is currently trying to do and represents what an individual tries to accomplish uniquely through his or her behavior or goal, so the personal striving is composed of a set of goals [9]. Emmons's subjective well-being questionnaire was mainly divided into the emotional scale and life satisfaction scale [10]. The results show that the clearer the idea of personal success is, the more success, the less level of negative feelings and the higher level of life satisfaction the individual will achieve in trouble.

2.1.3. Self-control

D.T. de Ridder's research showed that self-control was a key factor in subjective well-being because individuals with higher levels of self-control were more likely to achieve goals and thus be more successful in all aspects of life [11]. The study of Tammie Ronan showed that although exposure to a crisis did not predict a higher level of negative effects or lower level of positive effects, there was an interaction between self-control and crisis in predicting positive effects [12]. Greater self-control is associated with higher levels of positive impact in adolescents who have experienced a crisis.

2.1.4. Self-autonomy and perceived autonomy

Self-determination theory (SDT) proposed autonomy as one of the three core requirements for self-determination (along with competence and relevance) and was necessary for healthy mental function. Previous research showed that when people felt autonomous in their choices and actions, their levels of subjective well-being were higher. Susan L. O'Donnell studied the mediating role of college students' subjective well-being, sense of autonomy and attribution tendency [13]. The research found that subjective well-being was indeed related to feelings of autonomy.

Sense of autonomy support is the extent to which people believe that others in positions of authority support autonomy. Catherine F. Ratelle investigated the relationship between the sense of autonomy support from three important sources (parents, friends and lovers) and the subjective well-being of college students: the results showed that when students receive important support for their autonomy, they would obtain a higher level of subjective well-being [14]. In addition, the results of the human-centered approach indicate that students report the highest levels of subjective well-being when all sources are considered to be highly supported by a sense of autonomy.

Susan L. O'Donnell studied the mediating role of college students' subjective well-being, sense of autonomy and attribution tendency [13]. Consistent with the findings above, the study found that subjective well-being is indeed related to feelings of autonomy. In addition, the results suggest that

the attribution tendency plays a mediating role. A high sense of autonomy does not necessarily lead to happiness if individuals have negative attributions to life events. The sense of autonomy also mediates the relationship between attributional inclination and happiness, suggesting that positive attributions without a sense of control do not lead to happiness. The bidirectional relationship between autonomy and attribution style suggests that there is an interdependence between psychosocial traits and cognitive style.

2.2 Psychological factor

2.2.1. Emotional regulation

The research results of Zengwen Wang and others on vocational college students showed that emotional stability plays a certain role in promoting subjective well-being, and was good at dispelling negative emotions and promoting positive emotions after setbacks, which was conducive to the improvement of well-being [15]. Positive, negative emotions and specific emotion regulation methods also greatly affected the subjective well-being of individuals.

Individuals with different levels of subjective well-being shows significant differences in these aspects. Lazić Research on the relationship between individual subjective well-being and emotions, emotion regulation modes [16]. The results showed that there are significant differences in the correlation between individual subjective well-being and negative life events, emotional distress and cognitive emotion regulation strategies. Individuals with higher subjective well-being usually had less emotional distress, fewer negative life events, and more frequently used more adaptive emotion regulation strategies.

2.2.2. Personality

There are many factors that affect college students' personality, and different college students will have great differences in personality. Hao Hong's research pointed out that there are significant differences in the dimensions of personality characteristics among college students of different birthplaces and genders. This result indicated that gender and place of birth had a certain impact on the personality characteristics of college students [17].

In terms of the influence of personality on subjective well-being, most researchers used the Big Five questionnaire to study and measure multi-dimensional subjective well-being. Don Zhang and other researchers used the Big Five Personality Inventory (BFI) and the College Students' Subjective Well-being Questionnaire (CSSWQ) to analyze the relationship between five personality types and subjective well-being. The research results showed that extraversion was one of the main predictors of general well-being [18].

Jessie Sun and other researchers also used the Big Five Personality Scale to study and analyzed the relationship between personality and subjective well-being. Participants completed the life satisfaction scale and the research showed that in the field of extraversion, except autonomy, enthusiasm has a significant positive correlation with all happiness indexes [3]. In contrast, self-confidence and autonomy only have a substantial half correlation [3]. In the field of responsibility, diligence was significantly positively correlated with all indicators of positive well-being [3]. Turning to the fields of agreeableness and openness/intelligence, sympathy and intelligence usually have a moderate and similar positive semi partial correlation with happiness variables [3].

2.2.3. Optimism and hope

There are only a few studies on the impact of optimism on subjective well-being. Kevin L. Rand and other researchers studied the impact of optimism and hope on college students' subjective well-being respectively. Research showed that both hope and optimism predicted changes in subjective well-being during the semester, and optimism had no relation with specific performance expectations or academic achievements [19]. The research of Morton, S. and other researchers and Andrew Denovan and Ann Macaskill showed that optimism can reduce college students' pressure, increase their adaptation to life and improve their sense of happiness to some extent [20,21]. Studies by researchers such as Yuan Limin, Zhang Risheng and Liu Zhen showed that temperament optimism

played a regulatory role directly between negative life events and subjective well-being [22]. At the same time, there was a significant difference between men and women in dispositional optimism. The level of dispositional optimism of men was lower than that of women.

Unlike optimism, higher hopes predicted positive impacts and increased life satisfaction. In addition, hope was a unique predictor of academic achievement. Hope (in an optimistic context) means that individuals may have more and better academic performance in the future. Kevin L. Rand also pointed out that because hope and optimism are closely linked in many aspects ($r=.65$, Magaletta&Oliver, 1999), the impact of hope was likely to be covered by the impact of optimism [19].

2.2.4 Self-esteem

According to the self-esteem expert Morris Rosenberg (1965), individual self-esteem was simply a person's attitude towards himself or herself. The research results of Zhang Wen, Zhang Lin and other researchers showed that individual self-esteem, collective self-esteem and subjective well-being are positively correlated [22,23]. College students with higher levels of individual self-esteem evaluating themselves more objectively often have higher self-awareness. They understand their own abilities, strengths and weaknesses, so as to better solve problems and cope with stress, and have a higher overall sense of happiness. Xu Weiyu and other researchers studied the impact of college students' individual self-esteem and attribution methods on subjective well-being. The results showed that different individual self-esteem and attribution methods had different prediction effects on the overall and different levels of subjective well-being [24]. People with high individual self-esteem may have stronger well-being than those with low individual self-esteem [24].

It is worth noting that the effects of individual self-esteem and collective self-esteem on subjective well-being are complex, and they are not necessarily the same. Good interpersonal relationships are easily recognized and respected by others, and can also promote self-esteem.

2.2.5 Psychological stress

Psychological stress is negatively correlated with subjective well-being. The university stage is a critical period of psychological change (18-24 years old) as college students enter a new living environment and social model. During the development to maturity, the inadaptability to life and the aggravation of studies will lead to negative emotions and psychological pressure. Liang Yan also pointed out that students' place of origin, their position, grade and family environment can all predict psychological pressure, and excessive psychological pressure will form a psychological burden and have a negative impact on subjective well-being [25]. Therefore, individuals who can better handle psychological pressure have a higher level of subjective well-being.

2.2.6 Interpersonal satisfaction

Research by researchers such as Ziyun Huang, Shuai Zou and Yansong Wang shows that when college students make interpersonal attribution, interpersonal satisfaction will affect their subjective well-being [26]. There is a positive correlation between college students' subjective well-being and interpersonal satisfaction. College students who tend to attribute trouble or good interpersonal relationship to internal factors have higher interpersonal satisfaction and higher subjective well-being.

2.2.7 Life satisfaction

Xiaodong Zheng's research showed that attribution style was significantly positively correlated with life satisfaction [27]. The research of Hao Wei, Zhao Fengjuan, Shi Wanghong and other researchers showed that life satisfaction, as a predictive variable, had a significant correlation with subjective well-being, which would have an impact on subjective well-being to a certain extent [28].

2.2.8 Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy can be divided into many aspects, such as emotional self-efficacy, innovative self-efficacy and academic self-efficacy. Different types of self-efficacy play different roles in the relationship between attribution style and subjective well-being. Kun Wang, Yang Li, Tingran Zhang,

Jing Luo showed that in the research on the relationship between self-efficacy and subjective well-being, the two were significantly positively correlated. General self-efficacy was also affected by gender, age, social status and other factors, and was significantly positively correlated with subjective well-being [29].

2.2.9 Psychological resilience

Changshong Gao, Ming Dongyan and other researchers used the resilience scale and the multi-dimensional multi-attribution scale to conduct a questionnaire survey[30]. The results showed that college students' resilience was significantly positively correlated with each dimension of attribution style [30]. DandanBi and XinyingLi's research using potential profile analysis showed that college students with different levels of resilience (PF value) had different subjective well-being, and college students with high resilience (HPF) had higher subjective well-being [31].

2.3 Environmental factor

Environmental factors are external interventions or social help factors in addition to the factors influencing one's own personality traits. Some factors may even surpass the role of internal traits on positive or negative emotions in subjective well-being. Nonetheless, the external environmental factors have not been systematically summarized in China yet. Therefore, a systematic analysis of environmental factors is essential. The following analysis will be conducted from three aspects: social support, socioeconomic status, and cultural factors.

2.3.1. Social support: school environment, family environment, peer support

Social support is a psychological feeling or objective connection of being helped, accepted, and recognized in people's lives. Good social support helps to prevent the reduction of subjective well-being and is thus an important guarantee for maintaining the relative stability of subjective well-being. The order of the scores of college students in each dimension of social support is presented as family support, friend support and other support.

Family is the source of motivation and emotional support for the development of college students' life. Family atmosphere and parenting style are important factors affecting college students' subjective well-being, and a good family atmosphere and democratic parenting style help students experience more happiness and joy. The mother's occupation, education level and family upbringing style have significant effects on college students' subjective well-being. This is due to the fact that mothers are more present with their children in the real world, and invariably their cognitive concepts, emotional tendencies, and personality traits will implicitly influence their children's attribution styles. The mother's stable occupation, high level of education and democratic education style can promote positive attributions and generate a high level of subjective well-being among college students. In contrast, fathers have little influence.

School culture, infrastructure, and humanistic care all influence college students' subjective well-being experiences. A positive and diverse campus cultural life contributes to students having good subjective well-being. Maria Cristina J. Santos et al. in their study found significant differences in life satisfaction between students in private and public schools, with students in public schools having relatively lower life satisfaction [32]. This is due to the fact that private schools tend to be more expensive, have better infrastructure and more public resources, and provide students with a teaching environment and teaching methods that are more targeted.

Interpersonal relationships are the process of communication in which people convey information and communicate through certain expressions, words or actions in their daily lives. Interpersonal relationships are positively correlated with positive subjective well-being. Good interpersonal relationships are necessary for a person's physical and mental health. If a person is in a caring, loving, close and harmonious interpersonal relationship, his mood will be more comfortable and beneficial to health.

2.3.2. Socioeconomic status (SES): urban-rural, financial status, employment, modernity

Socioeconomic status (SES) is a combined economic and social measure of a person's economic and social status relative to others, which to some extent can also have a significant impact on subjective well-being.

In terms of urban-rural differences in schools, Zhang Lin and Xu Qiang argued that the environment should be further refined into cities, towns and villages. There were fewer differences between urban and town students, and there were still differences in the level of subjective well-being between rural and urban sources [33]. This is due to the economic development of rural areas since the 20th century, parents' improvement in their way to raise their children, and the penetration of new media. For instance, the Internet has narrowed the information gap between urban and rural areas and increased shared resources, so that the influence of the external environment on the growth conditions of college students does not dominate. Owing to the restricted education level and employment opportunities, rural college students are burdened with greater parental expectations and family life pressure, and have greater psychological pressure.

Regarding family income, the research results show mixed results. While the study by Biao-Bin Yan et al. showed that there were significant differences in life satisfaction among college students with different family incomes, the study by Yuehua Tong showed that family income was not a good predictor of subjective well-being among college students [34, 35]. This may attribute to the fact that the state currently has a certain subsidy policy for poor college students and that contemporary college students also focus on spiritual well-being, so material aspects are less influential.

In terms of employment anxiety, rural fresh graduates have higher employment anxiety than urban ones. The higher the core self-evaluation of fresh graduates in employment is, the lower the employment anxiety they will present. On the other hand, urban graduates have less stress in employment, which helps to enhance subjective well-being.

Modernity refers to the era when the "new" world system was created since Enlightenment, which is a concept of continuous development and progress in time. Elias Mpofu's research indicated that the subjective well-being of college students with higher modern status, higher social education, and higher expectations of an ideal life was higher [36]. Since students who identify with a higher level of individualism have a higher emotional experience in terms of family, friends and recreational matters, their expectations of their standard of living correspond more to the actual one. Therefore, their subjective well-being level is higher.

2.3.3. Cultural factor: collective self-esteem

Collective self-esteem is an individual's sense of personal achievement and self-worth in a collectivist culture. Collective self-esteem includes four aspects: membership self-esteem, private collective self-esteem, public collective self-esteem, and social identity. It emphasizes the self-efficacy of the individual's role in the group society.

Kyeong-Ho Cha's study concluded that collectivist culture was more prevalent in Korea and China, which advocates enforcing norms and fulfilling obligations. He also pointed out that the self in collectivism was more associated with subjective well-being than the individualistic self in an individualistic culture [37]. Having high collective self-esteem led college students to gain more social identity and social support, further increasing subjective well-being [37]. People cannot live alone, and all activities need to be carried out through collective cooperation, which is why the collective is so important to people. If people want to create value in the collective, they need to cooperate with each other in the collective. Collective identity will naturally arise in order to create a sense of belonging, honor, etc., which in turn creates greater value and enhances subjective well-being.

2.4 Demographic factor

2.4.1. Age and grade

Qiu Zhang's research showed that college students of different grades had significant differences in overall life satisfaction, positive emotion, negative emotion and overall subjective well-being. The results of different researchers on this dimension are basically the same, but there are some contradictions in the research on the subjective well-being level of college students in different grades.

Some studies suggest that the subjective well-being of first-year college students is lower than that of second-year students. Other studies suggest that the subjective well-being of freshmen is higher than that of juniors. According to the studies of He Ying, Shuhua Jing and Jijia Zhang, the overall happiness of college students in the first, second and third grades decreased, and increased slightly in the fourth-grade, and the fourth grade students had the highest subjective happiness [39]. These findings are in contradiction with the results from the research of Li Jing and Yujin Zhao, which found that the happiness index of senior college students was the lowest [40].

Due to the influence of different sample types, sample sizes and measurement methods, the results of the influence of college students' grades are contradictory. In addition, whether freshmen adapt to college life, whether seniors are affected by employment pressure and other aspects will affect the relevant research on the influence of grades on subjective well-being.

2.4.2. Gender

The research results of different scholars on the differences in subjective well-being between different genders are not consistent. Zhang Qiu's research showed that girls were higher than boys in overall life satisfaction, positive emotion and overall subjective well-being [38]. In terms of negative emotion, boys were higher than girls [38]. There were significant differences in the scores of positive emotion, negative emotion and overall subjective well-being of male and female students ($p < 0.01$), but there were no significant differences in the scores of overall life satisfaction [38].

3. Limitations

Part of analyzed empirical studies are of age, and the literature researches supported in the recent five years are insufficient, which cannot well reflect the positive factors affecting the subjective well-being of college students according to the characteristics of the times. At present, the rapid change of science and technology, the continuous development of network technology and information technology, as well as online teaching and closed teaching caused by the widespread influence of the pandemic, all have a significant impact on the psychological condition, learning situation and interpersonal relationship of college students, thus affecting their subjective well-being. In addition, few studies in these areas, lack of literature and professional data support, and failure to keep up with The Times, combined with the epidemic and other emergencies, all call for further research and analysis.

At the same time, researchers should pay more attention to whether the research objects themselves have certain characteristics and lack universality. For example, through the researches and analysis of college students taking a particular course, it is revealed that many literature works ignore whether college students themselves have a certain commonality in choosing this course and whether such common characteristics will lead to uneven sample analysis. They also lack overall analysis and certain one-sidedness. Sampling surveys in different regions and different types of universities can avoid these problems. The above points need to be further explored in the future.

This paper mainly focuses on the factors that have a positive impact on the subjective well-being of college students, but does not explore the negative factors. A comprehensive study on the factors that affect the subjective well-being of college students needs to be combined with more professional literature in the future for more in-depth and comprehensive studies and summaries.

4. Conclusion

Subjective well-being is an important indicator used to measure the level of mental health of college students. In the future, researchers can also improve students' subjective well-being by increasing activities to mobilize students' positive emotions, teaching students emotion regulation methods and increasing humanistic care for students.

The factors that affect college students' subjective well-being often need to be described from both positive and negative aspects. This paper summarizes the positive factors that affect college students' subjective well-being from four aspects: individual ability factors, emotion, environment, and demography. However, the level of the summary is still shallow, and the systematic summary among the factors is not deep enough, which needs to be criticized and corrected and further studied by future generations. Researchers should explore the rules in order to make more outstanding contributions in relevant fields. For the so-called negative influencing factors, if they can be well transformed and handled, these behavior modes will also become positive interventions in subjective well-being, and enhance subjective well-being.

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