

# Investigating The Links Between Social Support, Psychological Distress, And Life Satisfaction: A Mediation Analysis Among Azerbaijani Adults

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## Abstract

Social support may plays a crucial role in promoting individuals' mental well-being by mitigating psychological distress and ultimately contributing to overall life satisfaction. The purpose of this study was to examine the mediating role of psychological distress on the relationship between social support and life satisfaction among Azerbaijani adults. A total of 1011 adults, aged between 18 and 77, from various regions in Azerbaijan participated in the study and completed the Satisfaction with Life Scale, the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale, and the Trait The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support. The bootstrapping procedure were used to analyze the data. The results of the bootstrapping analysis revealed that psychological distress played a significant mediating role in the relationship between social support and life satisfaction among Azerbaijani adults. Specifically, after controlling for age and gender, psychological distress was found to partially mediate the relationship between social support and life satisfaction. Social support may plays a crucial role in promoting individuals' mental well-being by mitigating psychological distress and ultimately contributing to overall life satisfaction..

**Keywords.** Social support; psychological distress; life satisfaction; Azerbaijan.

## Introduction

A positive approach to life is one of the key resources for preventing psychological problems that a person may face in society. People's positive approach to the real life around them has an important influence on the process of their improvement and development

(Lathabhavan & Lathabhavan, 2022). This influence manifests itself in one way or another in various areas of the real life of every person, including professional activity. As a science positive psychology operates at three levels - subjective, individual and group level. The subjective level includes the study of positive

approaches such as joy, well-being, satisfaction, and happiness (Steptoe et al., 2015). The concept of "well-being" included in the subjective level is considered a direction that helps people live better and prevents psychological disorders (Aliyev & Turkmen, 2016).

Psychological well-being is typically thought to consist of a composite of happy feelings and having the ability to function as effectively as possible in both personal and societal situations (Deci & Ryan, 2008). According to Huppert, psychological well-being is centered on having fulfilling lives. It consists of having a positive attitude and performing well (Huppert, 2009). Life satisfaction is included in the framework of subjective well-being and is considered a more stable indicator. Therefore, the concepts of "subjective well-being" and "life satisfaction" include objective and subjective components interacting with each other.

The main cognitive component of subjective well-being and the conscious evaluation of a person's life as a whole is considered as "life satisfaction". The concept of life satisfaction is very close to subjective well-being and in most cases research participants use it as a synonym. "A person's cognitive and emotional assessments of his or her life" is the definition of life satisfaction (Plexico et al., 2019). Among the most crucial elements influencing a person's thoughts and feelings in dangerous circumstances are life satisfaction, meaning in life, and hope (Abrams et al., 2005; Batthyany & Russo-Netzer, 2014; Kutuk, 2023). Satisfaction in people's life determines behavior and types of human activity. Satisfaction and comfort life depend on a person's place of residence, socio-cultural and socio-economic conditions (Mammadzadeh, 2006). Argyle (2001) notes that various factors affect life satisfaction, and among them happiness and its source are considered the main condition. Other factors include the availability of work and free time. In addition, health, self-esteem and life awareness are also

included in the list of key factors (Freire & Ferreira, 2020). Life satisfaction is also influenced by a number of factors such as social relationships, health, full satisfaction with work life, positive emotions and personal qualities (Qu & Robichau, 2023). American scientist Seligman distinguishes in his researches factors like social relationships, health, spiritual satisfaction, personal development, creative opportunities, etc (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Over time, the significance of factors influencing life satisfaction undergoes changes. Different factors come into play at various stages of life, impacting individuals' overall satisfaction. During adulthood, the focus tends to shift towards the future, encompassing career prospects and personal relationships. As individuals navigate their professional paths and cultivate meaningful connections, these factors become pivotal in shaping their satisfaction with life. However, as people transition into later stages of life, their perspectives evolve, leading them to seek alternative pathways for self-actualization. The pursuit of personal growth, finding purpose, and engaging in activities that align with their passions become paramount in determining their life satisfaction. Recent researches have also highlighted the impact of income level, well-being, family status, health, and physical activity on individuals' overall satisfaction with life (Cerci & Dumludag, 2019; Guney et al., 2010).

Social support is recognized as a significant factor in increasing life satisfaction. The perception of social support is closely associated with subjective well-being, particularly in terms of life satisfaction (Kong et al., 2019). Satisfaction with perceived social support serves as a crucial component of subjective well-being. Numerous studies have highlighted the advantageous effects of social support, with well-being and life satisfaction emerging as prominent outcomes (Demir, 2023; Heng et al., 2020; Khatiwada et al., 2021;

Khodabakhsh, 2022; Turner & Brown, 2010). Moreover, research has demonstrated that social support surpasses other protective factors in mitigating the detrimental impacts of both physical and psychological illnesses (Siewert, 2011). When individuals receive social support, it fulfills essential human needs such as closeness, trust, protection, help, information, and communication, thereby contributing to overall well-being. Social support encompasses three primary dimensions: emotional support, assistance in problem-solving, and support from specific individuals who provide a sense of security and encourage personal growth (Chao, 2012). When social support provides a person with missing resources, feelings of insecurity, helplessness, and loneliness are significantly reduced (Segrin et al., 2016). Thus, social support helps to integrate into society, create relationships with other people and groups, strengthen relationships, and increase self-esteem (Faw, 2018). People who know that they can get support from their close people at any time can cope with various situations more easily. In this case, social support belongs to the field of internal resources because it is based on past and successful experience. However, the lack of social support has a destructive effect on the person, and the feeling of isolation in the early stages of trauma increases the symptoms of psychological distress. Studies consistently confirm a negative relationship between social support and psychological distress (Gokdag, 2021; Kagan, 2021).

A prevalent mental health issue in the community is psychological distress (Drapeau, 2012; Keles et al., 2020). Psychological distress is a condition of psychological damage that is frequently characterized by depressive and anxiety symptoms (McGinty et al., 2020). Even in normal circumstances, psychological distress has a negative impact on wellbeing and life satisfaction (Cömert et al., 2016; Tonsing, 2014). Psychological distress can lead to impairment of psychological well-being and psychological satisfaction in the context of an individual's psychological safety. Possible

sources of psychological distress are difficulties in the professional and family spheres, macro-social problems, and blocking of personally important social needs, and in some cases perceived as threats (Rao & Ramesh, 2015). Compared to traumatic events, they are less powerful, but because they are cumulative in nature, they deplete physiological and psychological resources. Subjectively, the most severe traumatic events can affect changes in attitudes towards family, work, and friends, and reduce life satisfaction. Psychological distress manifests itself in the form of negative emotional reactions, cognitive, communicative and behavioral disorders.

The mentioned research findings indicate that an increase in social support is associated with a decrease in psychological distress and subsequently an improvement in life satisfaction. Building upon these insights, our study aims to explore the relationship between social support and life satisfaction among adults in Azerbaijan. Furthermore, we seek to investigate the potential mediating role of psychological distress in this relationship. By examining these dynamics, we aim to contribute to the understanding of the factors that influence life satisfaction and shed light on the mechanisms through which social support impacts individuals' overall well-being.

## Methods

### Participants

The research study encompassed a total of 1011 participants from different regions within Baku, Azerbaijan, and the final participant count comprised of 795 (78.6%) female and 216 (21.4%) male, aged between 18 and 77 years old, with a mean age of 26.24 and a standard deviation of 10.09. Out of the 1011 participants, 338 were married (33.8%), while 673 were single (66.6%). In terms of financial status, 304 (39.9%) had poor financial status, 545 (53.9%) had moderate financial status, and the rest had a high financial status ( $n = 62$ , 6.1%). The

participants had varying work experience ranging from 1 to 42 years ( $M = 4.95$ ,  $SD = 7.88$ ), with an average daily working time of 4.3 hours.

## Measures

A questionnaire created by the researchers was initially completed by study participants. The survey's purpose was to gather participant demographic data. The participant's job activity was the subject of the questions.

The Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21) was created by Lovibond (1995). The 21-item scale was broken down into three sub-dimensions: stress, anxiety, and depression. For example, depression might be described as the inability to feel anything positive at all (e.g., I felt that I was rather touchy). Using a 4-point Likert scale, the DASS-21 rates negative emotional symptoms. (0 = never applied to me, 3 = frequently or heavily applied to me) For the depression subscale, anxiety subscale, and stress subscale, respectively, the Cronbach alpha internal consistency reliability coefficient in the clinical sample is 0.87, 0.85, and 0.81.

Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985) created the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). The SWLS is a brief 5-item questionnaire used to assess overall cognitive judgments of life satisfaction. Respondents often just have to spend one-minute answering questions using a Likert scale. This scale is appropriate for adults from a variety of backgrounds because the questions are open-ended. Use in non-clinical groups is where it is most suitable. A 6-point Likert scale is used by SWLS to evaluate life satisfaction. 5–9 = Extremely dissatisfied, while 30–35 = Extremely satisfied. According to the reliability study of the SWLS, there was 0.74 Cronbach's alpha internal consistency.

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) is a quick research tool created to assess how family, friends, and a

significant other are perceived as providing support. Family, Friends, and Significant Other are the three subscales that were determined to have strong factorial validity. They each target a distinct source of support. The study also showed that the MSPSS had a moderate level of construct validity, good internal and test-retest reliability, and test-retest validity. As expected, low levels of depression and anxiety symptomatology as determined by the Hopkins Symptom Checklist were associated with high levels of perceived social support. There are four items in each subscale for a total of 12 items on the scale. The rating system works a 5-point Likert scale (0 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

## Data analysis

First, to examine the links between social support, psychological distress, and life satisfaction, we conducted a Pearson correlational analysis. Descriptive statistics, such as mean, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis, were also performed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26. To test the mediating role of psychological distress, we used a bootstrapping procedure. As recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2008), we performed a Model 4 bootstrapping analysis with 5,000 re-samplings to ensure the significance of the mediation coefficients for the increase in life satisfaction resulting from psychological distress through life satisfaction. For the indirect effect to be considered significant, the bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval must not entirely include zero (Satici, 2020).

## Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and correlations for the variables of interest. Social support was found to have a positive relationship with life satisfaction ( $r = .495$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and negative relationships with psychological distress ( $r = -.361$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Furthermore, life satisfaction was negatively

related to psychological distress ( $r = -.500$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

**Table 1** Descriptive statistics and correlations among study variables

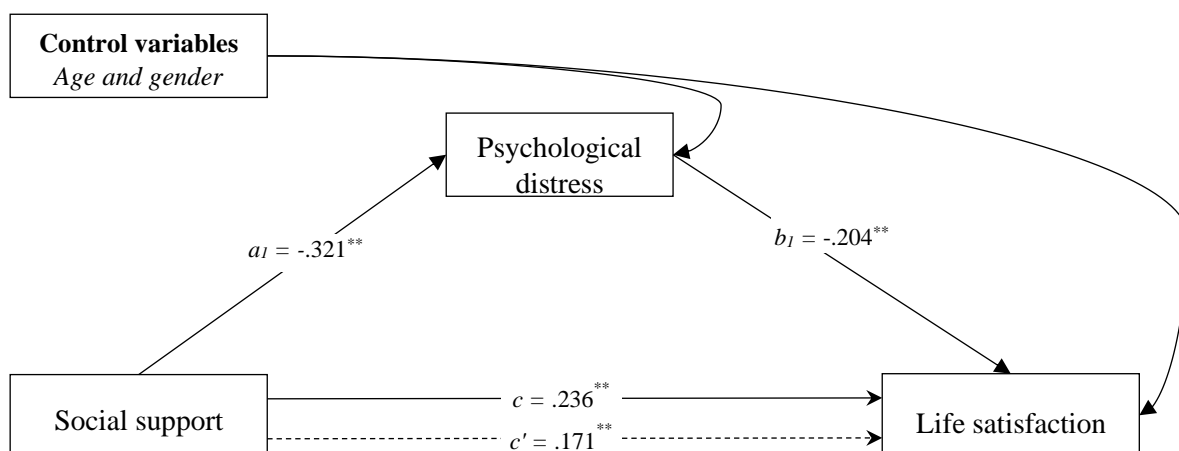
Variable	Social support	Psychological distress	Life satisfaction
Social support	–		
Psychological distress	-.361**	–	
Life satisfaction	.495**	-.500**	–
Mean	60.07	19.38	21.38
SD	14.14	12.73	6.72
Skewness	-.720	.836	-.336
Kurtosis	.410	.470	-.393

\*\*  $p < .01$

### Mediation analysis

The mediation analysis was conducted using a bootstrapping procedure to examine the role of psychological distress in the relationship

between social support and life satisfaction. Figure 1 present the results of the regression pathways and the direct effects tested in the mediation analysis.



**Figure 1.** Bootstrapped mediation analysis

The direct effects were examined and the results showed that social support was a significant negative predictor of psychological distress ( $B = -0.321$ ,  $t = -12.25$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Additionally, psychological distress were significant predictors of job satisfaction, ( $B = -0.204$ ,  $t = -14.34$ ,  $p < .001$ ). A bootstrapping analysis was performed to confirm the indirect effects of social support and life satisfaction via

psychological distress. The results confirmed that psychological distress (bootstrap value = .137, 95%CI = .107, .169) significantly mediated the relationship between social support and life satisfaction.

### Discussion

Life satisfaction is a significant value in today's society, particularly among adults.

Understanding the factors that influence life satisfaction in adults is of great importance. Therefore, the aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between social support, psychological distress, and life satisfaction. By examining the extent to which psychological distress acts as a mediator between social support and life satisfaction, we aimed to shed light on this complex dynamic. The findings of the study provided valuable insights into the intricate interplay between these variables. In particular, it was found that psychological distress plays a mediating role in the relationship between social support and life satisfaction. This suggests that individuals who experience higher levels of social support are more likely to have lower psychological distress, leading to increased life satisfaction.

Social support plays a crucial role as a psychosocial protective resource, as it facilitates emotionally supportive social connections that mitigate the impact of psychological distress and its adverse health consequences (Bukhari & Afzal, 2017). Extensive research has consistently demonstrated a significant relationship between social support and psychological distress. Studies investigating the influence of social support on psychological distress have consistently found that individuals with high levels of social support experience lower levels of psychological distress (Khatiwada et al., 2021). Support from family, friends, and other significant individuals plays a pivotal role in preventing psychological distress and equips individuals with the emotional strength necessary for adapting to new environments and cultures. In a study conducted by Samson (2020), it was revealed that individuals tend to actively seek social support from their friends, family, and colleagues during stressful events, seeking help, comfort, and reassurance. This form of open social support involves actively seeking advice, assistance, and emotional support from others and has been associated with reduced negative psychological outcomes linked to stressful situations (Awang et al.,

2014). For instance, research conducted during the pandemic has shown that individuals experienced increased psychological distress due to reduced social support resulting from isolation measures (Mak et al., 2009). These findings underscore the essential role of social support in buffering the adverse effects of psychological distress and highlight the detrimental consequences of lacking such support. Further exploration of this relationship is warranted to develop a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms through which social support influences psychological well-being. Ultimately, promoting social support networks and fostering a culture of open support-seeking can significantly contribute to reducing psychological distress and enhancing overall well-being.

Social support derived from various sources, including friends, family, colleagues, and others, plays a crucial role in promoting psychological well-being and mitigating psychological distress. Numerous studies have consistently demonstrated that individuals lacking access to social support often experience elevated levels of distress, exhibiting symptoms associated with depression and anxiety (Kugbey et al., 2015). In contrast, actively building and seeking social support during times of stress acts as a vital protective factor, helping to alleviate the detrimental impact of negative psychological outcomes (Wang et al., 2014). The findings of this study align with previous literature, reinforcing the significance of social support in influencing psychological well-being. The importance of cultivating and maintaining social connections cannot be understated, as they serve as a valuable resource in times of need, providing individuals with emotional solace, understanding, and practical assistance. The presence of a supportive social network can enhance resilience, offering individuals a sense of belonging, validation, and encouragement. In times of stress or adversity, the availability of social support acts as a buffer, helping individuals navigate challenges more

effectively and reducing the likelihood of experiencing significant psychological distress.

Psychological distress inherently exerts a detrimental impact on both life satisfaction and overall well-being. Extensive research has consistently demonstrated the influential role of depression, anxiety, and stress as key factors affecting individuals' subjective well-being and life satisfaction (Choi et al., 2021). The negative relationship between depression and life satisfaction has been substantiated by findings from Samaranayake et al. (2014), suggesting that depression significantly impairs life satisfaction. Furthermore, it has been observed that anxiety is negatively associated with life satisfaction, highlighting the adverse consequences on life satisfaction when individuals experience both anxiety and depression concurrently (Samaranayake & Fernando, 2011). Empirical evidence also supports the notion that depression, stress, and anxiety significantly predict life satisfaction and are inversely related to it. Individuals grappling with depression, stress, and anxiety tend to exhibit lower levels of life satisfaction (Bukhari & Saba, 2017). Furthermore, research indicates that as the level of psychological distress escalates, life satisfaction proportionally diminishes. These collective findings underscore the pivotal role of psychological distress in shaping individuals' perceptions of satisfaction with life. Moreover, they emphasize the critical need for interventions and support systems aimed at addressing and alleviating psychological distress to enhance overall well-being and life satisfaction. By recognizing and prioritizing the management of depression, anxiety, and stress, individuals can cultivate a more positive and fulfilling life experience, thereby promoting higher levels of life satisfaction.

Insufficient social support from various sources such as family, friends, colleagues, and the broader environment can significantly contribute to heightened levels of psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, and

stress. Consequently, individuals may experience a decline in their overall life satisfaction. Conversely, when social support is lacking, psychological distress tends to increase, leading to a further decrease in life satisfaction. Extensive research consistently emphasizes the positive association between social support and life satisfaction, with studies conducted by Cömert et al. (2016) and Tonsing (2014) highlighting this relationship. Social support plays a crucial role in reducing problem behaviors, enhancing individuals' ability to adapt, and mitigating negative psychological impacts (Shi et al., 2015). By providing emotional assistance, practical aid, and a sense of belonging, social support systems act as protective factors that foster individuals' well-being and positively influence their subjective perception of life satisfaction. When individuals feel supported and connected within their social networks, they are better equipped to cope with life's stressors, experience improved psychological well-being, and ultimately perceive higher levels of life satisfaction.

Social support holds significant importance in enhancing overall well-being, even among individuals experiencing high levels of stress. Seeking and receiving social support has been found to improve psychological well-being. The World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes the detrimental consequences of lacking social support, including increased mortality, disease prevalence, heightened psychological distress, and reduced life satisfaction (WHO, 2002). Research studies consistently demonstrate that social support from family and friends plays a pivotal role in reducing psychological stress and increasing life satisfaction among individuals (Park et al., 2011). Expanding social connections and strengthening the social support network have proven effective in mitigating the extent of psychological distress experienced by individuals (Shiels et al., 2008). These findings, both from previous research and the current study, highlight the interrelationships between social support, psychological distress, and life

satisfaction across different contexts. Notably, individuals who receive adequate social support tend to experience a decrease in the level of psychological distress they encounter. Consequently, this reduction in psychological distress is associated with an increase in individuals' satisfaction with life. The findings collectively reinforce the critical role of social support in buffering the adverse effects of psychological distress and promoting a higher level of life satisfaction. Promoting and fostering social support networks is crucial in ensuring individuals have the necessary resources to cope with stressors, improve their mental well-being, and ultimately lead more fulfilling lives.

### **Implications**

The findings derived from this study hold significant implications in comprehending the intricate dynamics among social support, psychological distress, and life satisfaction. By shedding light on the mediating role played by psychological distress, our research illuminates the underlying mechanisms through which social support impacts individuals' overall satisfaction with life. These results underscore the critical importance of nurturing robust social support networks as a means to cultivate mental well-being and augment life satisfaction. The outcomes of this study suggest that interventions targeting the enhancement of social support systems, both at the individual and community levels, possess the potential to alleviate psychological distress and foster an improved sense of overall life satisfaction. Employing strategies that foster the development of supportive relationships, promote effective communication, and encourage social integration may prove instrumental in reducing distress levels and enhancing individuals' subjective well-being. Moreover, these findings underscore the necessity for employing multidimensional approaches in both research and practice. Integrating a diverse range of methodologies, such as qualitative interviews and longitudinal designs, would offer a more comprehensive

understanding of the intricate interrelationships linking social support, psychological distress, and life satisfaction. Additionally, future studies should encompass various age groups, including adolescents, to capture the developmental nuances inherent in these associations. Ultimately, these findings make a valuable contribution to the ever-expanding body of literature concerning the significance of social support in fostering mental health and overall well-being. They provide valuable insights into the potential pathways through which social support can exert a positive influence on individuals' satisfaction with life. Moreover, they offer evidence-based guidance for the development of interventions and policies aimed at enhancing overall quality of life.

### **Limitation**

It is essential to consider several limitations when interpreting the results of this study. Firstly, the samples used in the study were limited to adults, and it would be beneficial to extend the research to include adolescents as well. Understanding how social support, psychological distress, and life satisfaction interrelate in different age groups can provide a more comprehensive understanding of these dynamics. Secondly, the data collection process relied solely on scales, neglecting alternative methods such as observation or interviews. Incorporating diverse data collection techniques can offer a more nuanced and comprehensive exploration of the variables under investigation. Furthermore, the study lacked a random selection process, potentially introducing bias into the sample. Random sampling methods would enhance the generalizability and representativeness of the findings. Lastly, employing longitudinal methods would be valuable in establishing the temporal relationship between social support, psychological distress, and life satisfaction. Longitudinal studies can elucidate whether social support leads to a decrease in psychological distress or vice versa, as well as whether an increase in psychological distress



leads to a decrease in life satisfaction or vice versa. This would provide a deeper understanding of the dynamic nature of these constructs over time. Future research should address these limitations to advance our understanding of the complex relationships between social support, psychological distress, and life satisfaction.

### Conclusion

This research aimed to investigate the intricate relationship between social support, psychological distress, and life satisfaction among Azerbaijani adults. It represents one of the pioneering studies to explore the life satisfaction of individuals in the adult age group within the Azerbaijani context. The findings of this study reveal that psychological distress acts as a mediator between social support and life satisfaction. In other words, while a direct association exists between social support and life satisfaction in adults, an inverse relationship is observed between psychological distress and life satisfaction. These results indicate that higher levels of social support among adults are linked to reduced psychological distress, ultimately leading to an enhancement in overall life satisfaction.

### Data availability statement

The datasets generated during and analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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#### Author Note

**Conflict of Interest.** No conflict of interest exists for this manuscript for any of the authors.  
**Ethical Approval.** The study was performed in accordance with the ethical standards laid down in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its following updates.

**Consent to Participate.** Informed consent was obtained from all the individual participants that were included in the study.

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