THE COMPOSITION AND OPERATING MECHANISM OF THE SOCIAL SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR POOR COLLEGE STUDENTS IN SHANXI PROVINCE, CHINA

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Abstract

To assess the current situation of social support system for poor college students and further to assess the composition and operating mechanism of social support system for poor college students in Shanxi Province. A total of 200 students has been enrolled in the study from January to March 2024. SCL-90 has been used which comprises 90 questions that participants evaluate using a Likert scale, offering insights into different facets of mental health and emotional well-being. The Social Support Rating Scale (SSRS) assessed the degree and nature of social support that an individual receives from their social network, including family, friends, and significant others. At the two colleges in Shanxi Province, there is no statistically significant difference in the levels of anxiety factors between students from low-income homes and non-poor students. The prevalence of positive detection for depression, anxiety, interpersonal sensitivity, paranoia, compulsion, hostility, somatization, and psychosis is greater amongst economically poor students compared to students who are economically strong. The findings indicated that there was no statistically significant disparity in the objective support ratings between economically poor students and their financially stable counterparts. Conversely, students from low financial homes exhibited notably lower levels of emotional support and utilization of support ratings compared to rich students. The Pearson's correlation analysis revealed a significant negative relationship between the social support dimension and the SCL-90 factors, with correlation coefficients ranging from -0.33 to 0.15. This indicates that higher scores in objective support, emotional support, and support utilization amongst poor students are associated with lower scores in the SCL-90 factors. This study established a strong social support system and encourage economically poor students to make full use of the social support services that are available to them.

Colleges should provide a comprehensive educational setting that includes the cultivation of campus culture, the supply of intellectual and moral guidance, and the construction of a financial assistance programme for poor students.

Keywords: social support system; poor college students; operating mechanism; shanxi province.

1. INTRODUCTION

The adolescent stage, including the years spent in school and college, is a pivotal era in a student's life characterized by physical growth, cognitive transformation, and social maturation. The significance of social support systems for economically disadvantaged college students cannot be overstressed, particularly within the context of higher education in China. In Shanxi Province, a region marked by its rich cultural heritage and significant educational reforms, the support extended to impoverished college students is vital for their academic success and overall well-being. This paper explores the composition and operating mechanisms of the social support system specifically tailored for poor college students in Shanxi Province, delving into the various dimensions of assistance provided by governmental, institutional, and community-based entities.

Firstly, the study delineates the structure of the support system, highlighting the collaborative roles played by provincial government agencies, educational institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and local communities. It outlines the types of support offered, which typically include financial aid, academic mentoring, psychological counseling, and career guidance, each designed to address the multifaceted challenges faced by these students. Secondly, the operating mechanism of this support system is analyzed. The focus is on the integration and coordination among various stakeholders involved in delivering support services, and how these elements collectively contribute to an effective support network. The procedural aspects, from identification of eligible students to the disbursement of aid and provision of services, are examined to understand the efficiency and responsiveness of the system.

Through a comprehensive examination of the social support system for poor college students in Shanxi Province, this paper aims to provide insights into the effectiveness of such frameworks and suggest potential improvements for broader application (Xu et al, 2018). This research not only contributes to the academic discourse on social support in higher education but also serves as a valuable reference for policymakers and educational administrators striving to enhance student support mechanisms in similar socio-economic settings. The social welfare system for economically poor college students exhibits substantial variations based on the area, state, nation and location. Through various following programme and support, we are improving and we could improve more the quality of care for economically poor students.

    1. Financial Aid Programs: One of the benefits that lower-income families enjoy is financial aid from the government through scholarship and grants. Some may include tuition payments, text books and living costs (Trauer J et al, 2015).

    2. Government Assistance: Financial support from various government agencies and programmes could is also offered to the students who may require an extra fund to continue with their studies. This may bear grants, loans that are partially subsidized or work-study opportunities.

    3. Institutional Support: Colleges and universities in many cases also have financial aid units that help students specify matters relating to different forms of financial aids. Some organisms might award scholarships covering the need to learn or provide emergency money for students in situation of sudden trouble.

4. Food and Housing Assistance: A lot of colleges and universities have them campaigns standing fiction to problems like the food insecurity poverty among students. This could embrace the food banks, meal plans and also partnerships with support agencies such as local housing facilities.

5. Work-Study Programs: These ambassador programs provide to students with the opportunity of being employed in a part time job on or off-campus for one to earn money that will enable them meet some expenses.

6. Counselling and Support Services: Colleges will often supply counselling support to students for coping with these issues that they face about trying to balance between academics, work and home life (Wade et al, 2015).

7. Community and Nonprofit Organizations: In the local community, some organizations and nonprofits can also be present to offer other help such as scholarships, mentorship programs or even being able to provide with basic aid (Chiang et al, 2017).

8. Online Resources and Platforms: Some organizations and platforms keep online resources and tools to help the student search for different types of financial assistance.

It is crucial to acknowledge that the availability and effectiveness of social support systems for economically disadvantaged college students are not uniform across different regions or institutions. Factors such as geographic location, institutional capacity, and resource allocation can lead to significant disparities in how support is administered and accessed. For instance, some colleges may have well-established programs with robust funding, while others might struggle to provide minimal support due to financial constraints. Furthermore, these support systems are susceptible to fluctuations in external conditions, particularly changes in government policies and economic climates. Governmental adjustments, such as revisions in education funding, scholarship allocations, or social welfare policies, directly influence the scope and scale of support programs available to students (Hofmann et al, 2012). Economic downturns or budget cuts can lead to reductions in funding, thereby constraining the resources that these systems rely on to assist students effectively. Conversely, economic growth or increased educational budgets can enhance the capacity of these support systems, enabling them to reach a broader array of students with more comprehensive services. This dynamic nature of policy and economic factors underscores the importance of continual monitoring and adaptability in managing and sustaining support systems for disadvantaged college students.

Most research focused on adolescents typically defines this demographic as include persons between the ages of 7 and 18. The case study of the mental health status of minors shows that the psychological challenges of minors are mainly reflected in personality, learning and interpersonal communication. Nevertheless, an increasing amount of psychological and medical studies have shown that the maturation of an individual's frontal lobe, responsible for cognitive functions, is not entirely achieved until the age of 25. This discovery emphasizes the broadening of the age range linked to mental and social well-being, shifting from children of school age to those attending college. University students encounter several new psychological problems. A significant number of university students relocate from their hometowns to pursue their academic endeavours and establish an independent lifestyle in a different geographic location. Although these possibilities may have a good effect on a certain group of university students, several studies have shown that the transition between living independently and studying for the first time might increase the likelihood of experiencing feelings of melancholy and anxiety among college students. The cohort often known as the "post-00s" started their enrollment as college students on university campuses with the first semester of 2020. Statistics on new students at Chinese colleges and universities reveal that about 75% of first-year undergraduate students in different institutions in 2020 belonged to the "post-00s" generation. This signifies a significant change in the demographic makeup of China's higher education system. When

comparing pupils from other generations, those born in the 2000s have enhanced material conditions, a wider range of values, unique personality traits, and have access to a varied online culture. These features represent a new era and place a renewed focus on mental health education in higher education institutions. (İnangil et al., 2020; Kwok, 2019)

Chinese higher education institutions are progressively prioritising the mental and behavioural well-being of college students. Upon entering university, the significance of academic success gradually decreases and is substituted by factors such as mental well-being, personal independence, and social assimilation. The psychological and behavioural welfare of college students significantly influences their career progression and social assimilation. Given the current state of the job market, it is crucial for students to foster a positive mindset, build a resilient character, get a comprehensive and accurate understanding of oneself, devise a suitable professional plan, and attain a high degree of social integration. On the other hand, students may experience serious consequences if they have difficulty dealing with the impacts of negative events, such as being forced to move for college, serious incidents at school, social stress, and challenges in adapting to a new environment and emotional changes. Research indicates that the incidence of psychiatric disorders among college students surpasses 31%. (Battagliese et al., 2015)

The importance of focusing on the comprehensive development of poor college students, including their mental, behavioural health, and academic achievements. This focus is essential because these years in college are a critical period for overall development, and the challenges faced by this age group are numerous and complex. The academic community has taken a keen interest in various developmental indicators for students due to the significant impact these years have on their future. The urgency mentioned relates to the necessity of enhancing professional intervention methods and facilities on educational campuses, which play a pivotal role in supporting adolescent development. Additionally, given the large teenage population in China and the substantial influence this group will have on the nation's future, it is imperative for the country to prioritize the allocation of resources. This strategic focus is aimed at ensuring that these poor college students should receive the support so that they need to achieve optimal growth and development during these formative years. Adequately investing in this demographic is not just beneficial for the individual poor college student, but is crucial for the long-term progress and prosperity of the country as a whole. The composition and operating mechanism of the social support system for poor college students can vary across different countries, regions, and institutions. Here is a general overview of the components and mechanisms that are commonly involved in supporting financially disadvantaged college students:

1.1. Financial Aid Programs

1. Grants and Scholarships: Such are usually non operating grants that do not have to be repaid. They may pay for the tuition, book fees and even cater to living expenses.
2. Subsidized Loans: Student's loans with low-interest rates that are provided on condition of financial need. Subsidy of interest is the most common type and this usually takes place while the individual is still in school.

1.2. Government Assistance

1. Student Loans: The students loans was administered by the Government with favourable terms of repayment normally availed through income based payment plan.

1.3. Institutional Support

1. Need-Based Scholarships: As colleges and universities might launch the parent college scholarship programs for students who come from poor income background.

2. Financial Aid Offices: In general, institutions offer buildings that facilitate the placement of students in available forms of fin aid and give them individual advice.

1.4. Work-Study Programmes
Job opportunities in the inner premises of the campus. Work-study programmes allow students not only to participate in part-time jobs on campus but also provide funds to minimize payable educational fees.

1.5. Food and Housing Assistance
1. Meal Programs: For many colleges that does not have meal assistance programs or food banks for this particular student.

1.6. Emergency Housing Support
The housing assistance programs are available temporarily in institutions for assisting students struggling with homelessness.

1.7. Counselling and Support Services
1. Financial Counselling: The information that would prove beneficial as tips for coping with the intricacies of budgeting, dealing with student loans, and facing-off other financial challenge.
2. Mental Health Support: Counseling programs that assist the students in handling the difficulties related to finances.

1.8. Community and Nonprofit Organizations
3. Local Resources: Collaborations with community organizations and nonprofits that provide supplementary support e.g,. scholarships, mentorships, basic needs assistance etc.

1.9. Online Resources and Platforms
1. Financial Aid Portals: These include web platforms and resources that offer information on the various available scholarships, grants, and financial aid programs.
2. Budgeting Tools: Like companies that offer online tools of financial management and career planning in pay for use, it should likewise contemplate on the option to provide help to students in their financial management habits with respect to handling school fees.

1.10. Operating Mechanism
1. Application and Eligibility: Applications are usually required in order for a student to obtain financial aid, including information on one's current finances.
2. Needs Assessment: Financial aid offices or relevant agencies assess the financial need of applicants based on factors such as income, family size, and other relevant criteria.
3. Awards and Disbursement: Once eligibility is determined, financial aid is awarded, and funds are disbursed to the student's account or directly to cover educational expenses.
4. Monitoring and Support: Ongoing support may involve monitoring students' progress, providing counseling, and addressing any changes in financial circumstances.

It's crucial to note that the specific details of the social support system can vary widely, and the effectiveness of these mechanisms depends on the policies in place at the institutional, regional, and national levels. (Carsley, Khoury, & Heath, 2018; Cohen, Deblinger, & Mannarino, 2018; Cristea et al., 2017; Ebert et al., 2015; Farahmand et al., 2011; Gonzalez-Suarez et al., 2009; Grant et al., 2001) So, the objective of the study to assess the current situation of the social support system for poor college students and further to assess the composition and operating mechanism of the social support system for poor college students in Shanxi Province.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

A total of around 200 students has been enrolled in the study from January to March 2024 were involved in this research conducted, out of which 50 poor students and 150 non poor students. The respondents were an individual or group of people randomly selected in a specified geographical area, from whom questionnaires were administered. The part contained the information on key variables to be used for analysis, including gender, age, ethic group and place of origin from urban or rural areas as well monthly household expenditure. Most living standards in the area are based on a median minimum of fewer than 200 yuan every month. Students were divided into two distinct groups based on their spending patterns, which correlate with their economic backgrounds and types of educational institutions they attend. The first group consists of low-income students who typically pursue their education through trade schools. This choice of institution might be influenced by factors such as cost, accessibility, and the direct career pathways that trade schools often provide. The second group includes students who are not economically disadvantaged and who continue their education by enrolling in more traditional academic studies or higher-cost educational institutions. This classification highlights the differences in financial behaviours and educational choices between students from varying economic backgrounds. The interrogation of this section was to analyse and compare the overall psychological well-being between disadvantaged and advantaged pupils.

2.1. SCL-90 Checklist

The SCL- 90 is a short checklist questionnaire in which people are asked to fill to report a wide range of psychiatric symptoms which they may have been experiencing. The so-called SCL-90 is a tool employed in clinical and research settings for assessing psychopathology as well as measuring the dynamics of changes to symptomatology during some time interval. Questionnaire being an assessment evaluates 90 questions from the participants on a Likert type pinpointing several aspects of mental health and emotional well-being.

2.2. Scale Composition

SCL-90 is consists of nine primary symptom dimensions representing distinct elements or aspects which comprise psychological distress.

1. Somatization
2. Obsessive-Compulsive
3. Interpersonal Sensitivity
4. Depression
5. Anxiety
6. Hostility
7. Phobic Anxiety
8. Paranoid Ideation
9. Psychoticism

2.3. Item Format

There are 90 questions in a questionnaire. Each of them describes one symptom aspect or, to be more precise, the relationship between individual components. To measure distress from each symptom, participants are requested to indicate the number of points for the severity of their present distress associated with that symptom over a specified period on a numerical Likert scale ranging between 0 indicating No distress and 4 reflecting Significant distress.

2.4. Scoring

Each of the nine dimensions in which the SCL-90 is divided results in a score for that dimension and leads to development this psychological symptom profile. In its abbreviated form, GSI is typically applied as a brief descriptor of the total degree amounting to psychic suffering.

2.5. Clinical and Research Applications

A therapy setting has led the use of SCL-90 as an additional instrument for hazarding psychopathy and severity of psychological disturbances. The researcher also took this procedure as a topic of evaluating psychological stresses among different groups and measurements of the treatment's efficiency.

2.6. Norms and Interpretation

Clinicians and researchers, in using the SCL-90 can compare individual scores of the population so generated to those of general populations due to norms having already been developed based on diverse collections.

2.7. Social Support Rating Scale

The Social Support Rating Scale (SSRS) is a self report instrument used to assess the subjective social support of individuals and it can be either from random people or specific selected individuals. It evaluates the quantity and quality of social help that is around a person from their corresponding web, e.g., family, colleagues, soul-mate etc. Dysfunctional attitudes and interpersonal sensitivity were measured using SSRS, a scale developed by Zimet et al. in 1988. The scale takes forms that the items need to be representing dimensions of social support.

2.8. Objective Support

This dimension measures the number of social support resources that are accessible to an individual, including kin or relatives, pal and other form support.

2.9. Subjective Support

This factor reflects the judgment about friend potential and how good they are for one's health. It is concerned with emotion and instrumental support both of which are vital during the parenting process.

2.10. Support-Seeking Behaviour

The structure of this dimension investigates the ability and readiness for making use of available social support when necessary.

2.11. Scoring

The scoring of each item in the questionnaire utilizes the Likert scale, where participants respond by selecting a number that typically ranges from one to four, five, or occasionally six. These numbers represent varying degrees of agreement or applicability to the stated question. The overall measure of perceived social support is determined by aggregating t he scores from each sub-scale within the Social Support Rating Scale (SSRS). This scale is extensively used both in research and practical settings to evaluate the level of social support across different demographics and under various circumstances.

2.12. Ethics Statement

The study conducted with human participants was exempt from ethical review and approval, since it complied with local legislation and institutional standards. Acquiring formal informed consent from the participants or their legal guardian/next of kin was not required for their involvement in this study, since it adhered to both national legislation and institutional guidelines.

3. RESULTS

Table 1 and Figure 1indicates that the majority of the participants were male, accounting for 52.5%, while females accounted for 47.5%. The average age of the participants was 21.25±2.25 years.

Table 1: Gender and Age of the Participants.

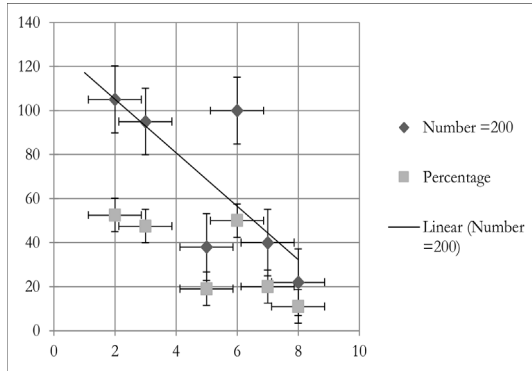|	Number =200	Percentage
Gender		
Male	105	52.5
Female	95	47.5
Age		
Below 20	38	19
20-22	100	50
23-25	40	20
Above 25	22	11
Mean Age	21.25±2.25	

Figure 1: Gender and Age of the Participants.

3.1. Factors of the SCL-90 Questionnaire for College Students from Low-income and High-income Backgrounds

Based on the data shown in Table 2 and Table 3, there is no statistically significant disparity in the levels of terror variables among students from low-income households and non-poor students at the two colleges located in Shanxi Province. Nevertheless, disadvantaged subjects have a notably higher average score in the other eight criteria (Figure 2 and Figure 3).

Table 2: SCL-90 Factors for Poor and Non-poor Students.

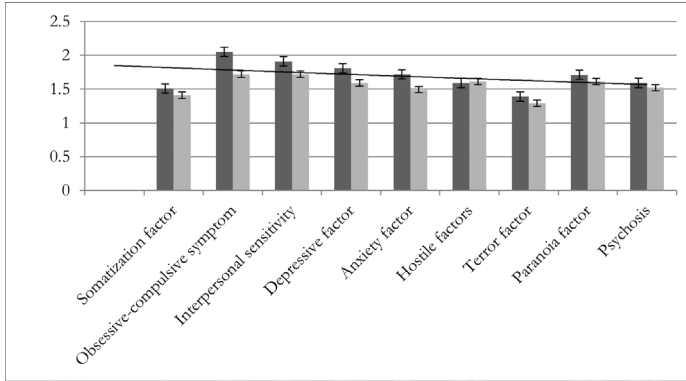| Factor	Poor Students=50	Non-poor Students=150	T	P value
Somatization factor	1.51 ± 0.31	1.41 ± 0.47	2.12	0.001
Obsessive-compulsive symptom	2.05 ± 0.47	1.72 ± 0.36	4.25	0.002
Interpersonal sensitivity	1.91 ± 0.43	1.72 ± 0.46	5.39	0.002
Depressive factor	1.81 ± 0.52	1.59 ± 0.33	4.15	0.001
Anxiety factor	1.72 ± 0.44	1.49 ± 0.39	3.17	0.001
Hostile factors	1.59 ± 0.39	1.61± 0.29	2.05	0.12
Terror factor	1.39 ± 0.36	1.29 ± 0.28	3.69	0.17
Paranoia factor	1.71 ± 0.44	1.61 ± 0.33	3.47	0.003
Psychosis	1.59 ± 0.34	1.52 ± 0.22	6.85	0.004

Figure 2: SCL-90 Factors for Poor and Non-poor Students.

Table 3: SCL-90 Factors for Poor and Non-poor Students.

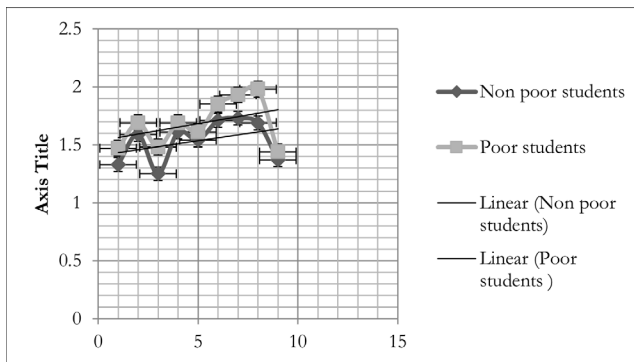| Factor	Non Poor Students	Poor Students	p value
Psychosis	1.33	1.47	0.12
Paranoia factor	1.59	1.69	0.21
Terror factor	1.25	1.48	0.14
Hostile factor	1.61	1.69	0.17
Anxiety factor	1.54	1.61	0.15
Depressive factor	1.71	1.85	0.18
Interpersonal sensitivity	1.73	1.93	0.17
Obsessive-compulsive symptom	1.69	1.98	0.16
Somatization factor	1.37	1.44	0.17

Figure 3: SCL-90 Factors for Poor and Non-poor Students.

3.2. Rate of Positive Detection of SCL-90 Variables among Students from Low-income and High-income Backgrounds

As per the SCL-90 scale, a factor over two is deemed affirmative, indicating that the person is encountering symptoms. The equivalent percentage is referred to as the positive detection rate. Tables 4, 5, and 6 demonstrate that economically disadvantaged students have a higher prevalence of positive detection for depression, anxiety, interpersonal sensitivity, paranoia, compulsion, symptoms, hostility, somatization, terror, and psychosis compared to students who are not economically disadvantaged (Fig 4, 5, 6).

Table 4: Positive Detection Rates of SCL-90 Factors among Poor Students.

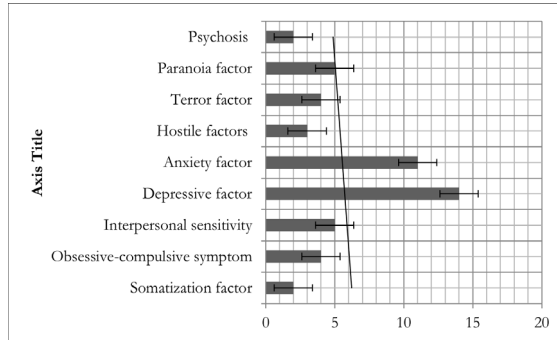| Factor	Number of Poor Students=50	Positive Detection Rate (%)
Somatization factor	2	4
Obsessive-compulsive symptom	4	7
Interpersonal sensitivity	5	9
Depressive factor	14	25
Anxiety factor	11	21
Hostile factors	3	6
Terror factor	4	8
Paranoia factor	5	9
Psychosis	2	3

Figure 4: Positive Detection Rates of SCL-90 Factors among Poor Students.

Table 5: Positive Detection Rates of SCL-90 Factors among Non-poor Students.

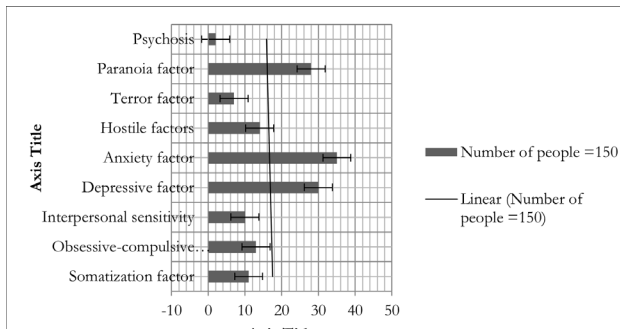| Factor	Number of Students =150	Positive Detection Rate (%)
Somatization factor	11	3
Obsessive-compulsive symptom	13	6
Interpersonal sensitivity	10	4
Depressive factor	30	10
Anxiety factor	35	14
Hostile factors	14	8
Terror factor	7	4
Paranoia factor	28	11
Psychosis	2	1

Figure 5: Positive Detection Rates of SCL-90 Factors among Non-poor Students.

Table 6: Positive Detection Rates of SCL-90 Factors among Poor and Non-poor Students.

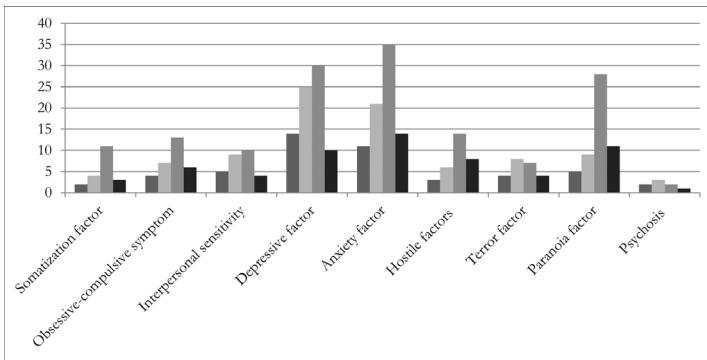| Factor	Poor Students =50		Non Poor Students =150	
	Number of Students	Positive Detection Rate (%)	Number of Students	Positive Detection Rate (%)
Somatization factor	2	4	11	3
Obsessive-compulsive symptom	4	7	13	6
Interpersonal sensitivity	5	9	10	4
Depressive factor	14	25	30	10
Anxiety factor	11	21	35	14
Hostile factors	3	6	14	8
Terror factor	4	8	7	4
Paranoia factor	5	9	28	11
Psychosis	2	3	2	1

Figure 6: Positive Detection Rates of SCL-90 Factors among Poor and Non-poor Students.

3.3. Analysis of the Prevalence Rates of Psychiatric Disorders

To assess the presence of a psychological condition, a straightforward and efficient method is to determine whether the factor score exceeds three points. Generally, a factor score above three points, or an overall average score of three points or more, indicates the existence of an average or above-average psychological condition; the greater the score, the worse the level of mental well-being. The research found that 20 subjects, about 10% of the whole student body, had psychological disorders of at least moderate severity. There is no noticeable difference in the rate at which psychological disorders are identified among male and female students. Nevertheless, economically disadvantaged learners had a 6% higher prevalence of detecting psychological disorders compared to their non-economically disadvantaged peers. The disparity between urban and rural students is substantial, which might account for the higher proportion of economically disadvantaged students hailing from rural areas.

3.4. Survey Findings and Analysis of the Social Support Rating Scale

The findings indicated that there was no statistically significant disparity in the objective support ratings between economically disadvantaged students in higher technical institutions and their financially stable counterparts. Conversely, children from low financial homes exhibited notably lower levels of emotional support and utilization of support ratings compared to non-poor pupils. Evidently, economically disadvantaged students at higher technical institutions express dissatisfaction with the degree of respect and help they get, and demonstrate a lack of proficiency in effectively using social support to address their difficulties. Poor college students exhibit a lower level of knowledge

about the use of social support and are less inclined to cultivate the practice of using diverse sources of support, as shown by the findings presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Comparison of the Social Support Dimensions between Needy Students and Non-poor Students.

	Poor Students N=50	Non- poor Students N= 150	t	P value
Objective support	11.34 ± 1.47	11.02 ±1.36	0.33	0.14
Subjective support	21.58 ± 1.69	21.14 ± 145	−2.14	0.13
Support utilization	8.14 ± 1.52	8.67 ± 1.36	−2.47	0.11

3.5. Examining the Social Support Aspect of Financially Disadvantaged College Students and the Several Variables of the SCL-90

The Pearson's correlation analysis indicated a statistically significant inverse association between the social support dimension and the SCL-90 variables, with correlation values ranging from -0.33 to 0.15. These findings suggest that needy students who get greater levels of objective assistance, emotional support, and support utilization tend to have lower scores in the SCL-90 categories, as seen in Table 8 and Figure 7.

Table 8: Social Support Dimension and SCL-90 Factors.

| Factor	Objective Support	Subjective Support	Support Utilization	P Value
Somatization factor	−0.24	−0.31	−0.19	0.002
Obsessive-compulsive symptom	−0.17	−0.32	−0.21	0.003
Interpersonal sensitivity	−0.21	−0.29	−0.25	0.001
Depressive factor	−0.19	−0.31	−0.28	0.003
Anxiety factor	−0.17	−0.35	−0.19	0.002
Hostile factor	−0.17	−0.28	−0.22	0.001
Terror factor	−0.08	−0.19	−0.18	0.001
Paranoia factor	−0.16	−0.18	−0.17	0.001
Psychosis _	−0.17	−0.29	−0.23	0.002
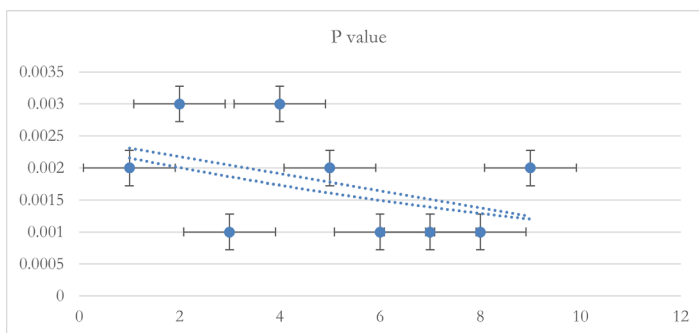
Figure 7: Social Support Dimension and SCL-90 Factors.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings from this study shed significant light on the state of the social support systems in place for economically disadvantaged college students in Shanxi Province, China. Despite no evident

disparity in the objective support levels between students from low-income backgrounds and their more affluent peers, our analysis unveils a critical gap in emotional support and utilization of available social resources. These results underscore a complex landscape of support where structural aid is available but may not adequately address the nuanced needs of economically poor students.

4.1. Emotional Support and Utilization Gaps

The notably lower levels of emotional support and utilization of support among students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds suggest a disconnect between the availability of support mechanisms and their accessibility or relevance to these students . This gap could be attributed to several factors including stigma associated with seeking help, lack of awareness about available resources, or cultural and social barriers that prevent these students from taking full advantage of the support offered. It is essential for institutions to not only provide support services but also to actively work towards making these services inclusive and accessible to all students, particularly those who are economically disadvantaged.

4.2. Impact of Social Support on Mental Health

The significant negative relationship between social support dimensions and psychological distress indicators, as revealed by the SCL-90 scores, highlights the protective role of effective social support. Higher levels of both emotional support and active utilization of support resources are linked with lower levels of distress and better mental health outcomes. This finding aligns with existing literature suggesting that social support can buffer against the effects of stress and improve psychological resilience among college students.

4.3. Strategic Implications for Higher Education Institutions

In light of these findings, higher education institutions in Shanxi Province, and potentially in similar regions, need to reevaluate and enhance their support systems. There is a clear need for:

1. Improving Awareness and Accessibility:

    1.1 Institutions should increase awareness of the support services available, particularly targeting economically disadvantaged students to ensure they are fully informed and feel encouraged to access these resources.

2. Cultivating Inclusive Campus Cultures:

    2.1 Developing a campus culture that promotes inclusivity and reduces stigma associated with seeking help is crucial. This involves training staff and faculty to recognize and appropriately address the unique challenges faced by economically disadvantaged students.

3. Enhancing Emotional Support Networks:

    3.1 Given the impact of emotional support on mental health, institutions should focus on expanding counseling services, peer support networks, and mentorship programs that address emotional and psychological needs.

Regular assessment of the effectiveness of support services should be conducted, with a focus on adapting these services to meet the changing needs of students. Feedback mechanisms can be vital in understanding how well services are meeting the intended goals. This study found that the objective support evaluations of economically disadvantaged students and financially stable students were comparable when examining the various aspects of social support. As social beings, humans need contact with other members of society and depend on social persons and groups for both tangible and emotional support. Psychological research suggests that social support plays a vital role in overcoming psychological problems and crises. Due to the existence of interactive and interdependent interactions

among people, it is necessary for them to seek support and aid from each other in order to tackle the problems and difficulties they face (Riper et al., 2014; Ruocco, Gordon, & McLean, 2016). However, it should be noted that material help still has importance. Although there may be significant differences in how people perceive and receive social support, it typically has a clear and measurable basis. The government offers a range of subsidies, including awards, grants, help, supplements, and reductions, particularly tailored to aid financially disadvantaged students. However, this study did not discover any significant differences in the objective support evaluations between students from low-income households and those from higher-income ones. This research argues that the funding may be insufficient or the scholarship amount may be inadequate, leading to no noticeable effect on economically disadvantaged students. The study found that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds had much lower levels of emotional support compared to students who were not economically disadvantaged. Additionally, their utilization of social support was also significantly decreased. Impoverished students exhibit a deficit in using social support to tackle problems, as opposed to their non-impoverished counterparts, owing to their limited understanding of social support and tendency to seek assistance from accessible resources. This might be linked to their family lineage and their cognitive and evaluative differences, resulting from emotions of inadequacy, melancholy, and interpersonal sensitivity, which impede their ability to use social assistance. To address the mental health issue among economically disadvantaged children, it is essential to increase funding and ensure the provision of respect, support, and empathy for the issues these students encounter.

A significant negative association was observed between the social support component of economically disadvantaged children and the SCL-90 components, as shown by the correlation analysis. This implies that seeking further aid or support might aid students in effectively handling their crises or obstacles, therefore fostering the cultivation of optimistic and well-rounded mindsets. (Liu & Li, 2023) Extensive academic study has carefully investigated the relationship between social support and health, and experts widely agree that strong social support has a favourable effect on one's well-being. In contrast, the absence of sufficient social ties has adverse consequences for both physical and mental health (Son et al, 2019). Social support serves as a defensive barrier, safeguarding individuals from the adverse consequences of stress. Nevertheless, it is crucial for maintaining their overall emotional well-being. The data given in this paper is consistent with and substantiates this conclusion. In essence, successful social assistance should include more than just one-sided support from the provider to the recipient. The ideal scenario would be a bilateral exchange or a process of "reciprocal co-creation" between the advocates and the beneficiaries. Consequently, disadvantaged people are no longer only recipients of social assistance, but rather active participants. Instead, individuals should internalize the assistance they get and actively contribute to the advancement of social support systems that are advantageous to them. Inter-constructed social support refers to the intentional and proactive actions taken to provide aid to marginalized communities. The process entails transitioning support from a spontaneous and passive state to a conscious and proactive one. Therefore, it is essential for society to not only provide social assistance to disadvantaged students but also encourage and inspire them to actively pursue and embrace such support with an optimistic perspective. (Kamarul Bahrin et al., 2023) The objective of this intervention is to mitigate pupils' sense of seclusion and susceptibility, enabling them to efficiently surmount their obstacles within a brief period. Moreover, rejecting or denying aid and backing from others may have a comparable effect on both physical and mental well-being, rendering it beneficial for their mental health as well.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Financially disadvantaged students at higher education institutions had substantially diminished

levels of mental well-being, as indicated by the SCL-90 symptom test. Psychological disorders vary in their severity, and students who need support are more susceptible to experiencing conditions such as obsessive-compulsive disorder, interpersonal sensitivity, melancholy, anxiety, anger, paranoia, psychosis, and other psychological problems that can also impact their physical well-being. An analysis of the utilization of different forms of social assistance among economically disadvantaged and financially comfortable students reveals that the former group expresses dissatisfaction with the degree of respect, support, and comprehension they get. They exhibit a lack of proficiency in exercising authority and using social assistance to tackle issues.

The correlation research done among financially disadvantaged students at higher education institutions reveals a strong negative relationship between social support and SCL-90 components. These findings indicate that retaining sufficient social support is crucial for preserving optimal emotional well-being. Hence, in order to adequately safeguard the mental well-being of underprivileged students, it is imperative to build a robust social support infrastructure and actively promote the use of relevant social support services by economically disadvantaged students. Higher education institutions should provide a holistic educational environment that encompasses the development of campus culture, the provision of intellectual and moral direction, and the establishment of a financial aid programme.

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