

A Comprehensive Review on Emotional Support: Delving into Concepts, Functions, Influential Factors, and Theoretical Frameworks

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Abstract

To deepen the theoretical understanding of emotional support, this study selects 89 Chinese and English scholarly articles related to emotional support from databases such as China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), Web of Science, Elsevier, Wiley, JSTOR, and Taylor & Francis. Utilizing NVivo 12 for coding and framework construction, a comprehensive literature review is conducted across four dimensions: connotation, role, influencing factors, and theoretical models. The findings reveal the following: Firstly, researchers' consensus that emotional support entails the expression of positive emotions such as concern, empathy, understanding, respect, trust, and encouragement towards others. Secondly, emotional support significantly enhances individuals' mental and physical health, and fosters students' learning engagement and academic achievement. Thirdly, the effectiveness of emotional support is influenced by the relationships between the supporter and the supported, as well as the broader supportive environment. Lastly, theoretical models of emotional support encompass the main effect model, the stress-buffering model, and the dynamic effect model.

1. Introduction

Emotion is a person's attitude experience towards whether objective things satisfy his or her needs. (Lin, Yang & Huang, 2003). This experience will be largely influenced by the individual's life experience and life experience, so a major characteristic of emotion is subjectivity. In addition, another characteristic of emotion is social. Marx clearly pointed out that "the nature of man is not an abstraction inherent in a single person, in its reality, it is the sum of all social relations." (Marx & Engels, 2012). Man is not a solitary being, and human emotions cannot exist independently of their social relations. The social nature of emotions determines that people have multifaceted emotional needs, and the fulfillment of these emotional needs depends on the emotional support of others. Good emotional support is a necessary condition for individual survival and development.

In 1972, medical scientist Vosburg introduced the concept of emotional support, defining it as the support, encouragement, care, and love that patients receive from medical staff, family, and friends throughout their treatment for illness^(Vosburg, 1972). Early research on emotional support also focused on the medical field. For example, Welu (1972) believed that emergency room staff should actively provide emotional support for suicide attempts. Wright (1974) explored how to provide emotional support for parents of dying children. In the late 1990s, Western scholars began to introduce emotional support into the field of education, at first focusing on researching the role of emotional support in the family to help children establish good social cognition, and then gradually focusing on the role of emotional support in the family. The role of family emotional support in helping children establish good social cognition, and later gradually focus on the correction of adolescents' problematic behavior and the cultivation of social skills by teachers' emotional support. With the proposal of social support theory, emotional support has been incorporated into the system of the theory and become one of the important components of social support.

The existing literature on emotional support in China mainly focuses on the application of emotional support, such as exploring the specific impact of specific emotional support such as teachers' emotional support, doctors' emotional support, parents' emotional support, etc., and less on the theoretical level of emotional support from the perspective of connotation, role, influencing factors and theoretical model. Therefore, this study searched and sorted out the literature related to emotional support at home and abroad, and reviewed the existing literature from the four dimensions of the connotation, role, influencing factors, and theoretical model of emotional support, so as to further promote the empirical research on emotional support through the theoretical discussion.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research questions

The research objective of this study is to theorize and analyze emotional support by means of a literature review, with specific research questions including: what is the meaning of emotional support? What is the role of emotional support? What are the influencing factors of emotional support? What kinds of theoretical models of emotional support are included?

2.2 Sample selection

In this study, we searched the Chinese and English literature related to emotional support at home and abroad, and we focused on the influential journals such as SSCI and CSSCI in the selection of the literature, and the published literature has been rigorously reviewed. The keywords used in this study are "emotional support" in Chinese and "emotional support" and "effective support" in English. support". This study utilized six databases, namely, China Knowledge, Web of Science, Elsevier, Wiley, JSTOR, and Taylor & Francis, to conduct literature search and collection by using the aforementioned keywords. In the literature screening stage, this study used an issue-by-issue search, as well as a literature screening process based on reading the titles, abstracts, and keywords of the literature. In this study, 89 documents were finally identified, of which 64 were in English and 25 were in Chinese.

2.3 Coding scheme

In order to systematically sort out the selected literature, the author utilized the qualitative

analysis software NVivo 12 to code and frame the retrieved literature after intensive reading and translation of the literature. NVivo is a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software developed and designed by QSR, and its greatest advantage lies in its powerful coding function, which can summarize all information in many literatures related to a certain research topic and can integrate a wide range of research topics, which enables the researcher to quickly capture the information points in the literature. All the information is summarized and can be integrated for a wide range of research topics, which can enable the researcher to quickly capture the information points in the literature (Wang & Song, 2014). The pre-determined coding scheme for this study included three categories, which were the connotations, roles, and influences of emotional support. In the specific coding process, this study referred to existing literature and followed the following steps: first, scanning all the articles for overall general meaning; second, selecting each article to read and marking sentences or keywords; third, coding the articles using NVivo 12; and fourth, rereading the articles to list the contents related to the theme but not included in the preset coding, and then including them in the categories. Ultimately, the coding scheme constructed in this study consisted of four categories, which were the connotations, roles, influences, and theoretical models of emotional support.

3. Findings

3.1 The meaning of emotional support

Different scholars have different definitions of the connotation of emotional support. The first is the definition of emotional support by foreign scholars. Tolsdorf (1976) believes that emotional support is a kind of encouragement, personal warmth, love, or emotional support. House (1981) believes that emotional support refers to the expression of love, caring, sympathy, understanding, and trust to the object of support. Leavy (1983) believes that caring, trusting, and empathy are the specific manifestations of emotional support. Langford (1997) believes that emotional support includes understanding, caring, love, and trust. Wills (2000) believes that emotional support is the care, sympathy, acceptance, and listening from others that is available to an individual when they are experiencing a problem or difficulty. Burleson (2003) believes that emotional support refers to a conscious verbal or nonverbal expression of care and concern.

The second is the definition of emotional support by domestic scholars. Xiao Shuiyuan (1994) believes that emotional support is the emotional support that individuals can subjectively feel, including being encouraged and supported, relational understanding, trust, and the release of perceived pressure. He Zhaiping's (2004) study pointed out that the content of emotional support encompasses love, care, sympathy, understanding, acceptance and security.

Comprehensively defining emotional support by scholars at home and abroad, this study defines emotional support as the process by which an individual expresses concern, sympathy, understanding, respect, trust, and encouragement to others through verbal and nonverbal behaviors.

3.2 The role of emotional support

Emotional support has an extremely crucial role and significance for the development of an individual. Based on the existing literature, this study categorizes the role of emotional support into three dimensions, which are psychological aspects, physical aspects, and effects on students' academics.

3.2.1 The role of psychological aspects

(1) Enhancement of the individual's sense of trust

Emotional support contributes to an individual's sense of trust. McElroy (1986) et al. concluded that mothers' emotional support in the family has a positive effect on the development of adolescents' sense of trust, and that mothers' ways of emotionally supporting their children mainly consist of showing love to their children. In addition, this study found that mothers' emotional support had a positive predictive role in effectively reducing adolescents' peer bullying behavior. The findings of Lui (2024) suggest that good emotional support is essential for building lasting doctor-patient trust. For families with hope for a cure, such emotional support can help reduce depression and anxiety, alleviate treatment fears and perceptions of discrimination, and guide the patient to reasonably vent his or her emotions and respect his or her unique experience of the disease; for children whose lives are truly irreversible, it can also try to help the child and his or her family to get through the final stage with less suffering in the absence of a formal hospice culture and arrangement. This directly enhances the emotional trust of the patient in the provider, which in turn promotes cognitive and institutional trust in the medical staff and their hospitals, as well as the emotional comfort and professional growth of the medical staff themselves, thus creating a virtuous cycle.

(2) To alleviate individuals' negative emotions and depressive symptoms and to enhance their emotional management skills.

Emotional support can help alleviate individuals' negative emotions and depressive symptoms and enhance emotional management skills. Roeser's (1998) study found that when students perceived insufficient emotional support from teachers, students were less motivated to learn and their distressing emotions (e.g., anger and sadness) were reinforced. Sawka's (2002) study found that teachers' emotional support was effective in helping students to improve their emotion management skills. Patrick (2003) examined the relationship between depressive symptoms and teacher emotional support in Australian adolescents. The study showed that for high school students, the level of teacher emotional support was negatively related to students' depressive symptoms. Especially for high school girls, teacher emotional support can effectively reduce the impact of stressful life events on their depressive symptoms. Aichun Pan's (2008) study found that targeted emotional support implemented by caregivers according to the specific conditions of primary esophageal cancer patients could eliminate the patients' negative emotions and improve the adverse factors affecting treatment adherence, thus improving the patients' psychological adaptability and treatment adherence. Yeung's (2010) study found that parents' and teachers' emotional support had a protective effect on adolescents' peer bullying and behavioral problems, and that teachers' emotional support had a protective effect on adolescents' peer bullying and behavioral problems, and that teachers' emotional support had a protective effect on adolescents' peer bullying and behavioral problems. problems and that teacher emotional support acted as a buffer between adolescent peer bullying and emotional and behavioral problems. Adolescents with high levels of teacher emotional support had fewer emotional and behavioral problems relative to those with less teacher emotional support. Shulan Cai's (2012) study found that emotional support, whether from spouses, children, relatives, or from neighbors, colleagues, or the community, plays an important role in reducing the incidence of depression in

perimenopausal women. Federici's (2013) study found that more encouragement and support from teachers to students when they face academic difficulties or exams can alleviate to a certain degree the students' psychological stress and anxiety, and can further enhance students' self-confidence, thus increasing their commitment to learning. Pössel (2013) studied the relationship between teachers' emotional support and students' adolescent depression, and the results showed that increasing the strength of teachers' emotional support can effectively reduce the depression level of high school students. According to Jona (2013), middle school students are in an emotionally unstable stage and are prone to parent-child conflict. At this time, the teacher's emotional support felt by individuals can increase their perception of external support, which is conducive to their self-emotional regulation and plays a moderating role for the mediating effect of parental involvement. Zylla's (2019) study found that the emotional support given by the family to the patient is more conducive to reducing the patient's adverse emotions, of which the spouse's emotional support is the most important. A study by Wenping Han (2020) found that in the care of patients with ectopic pregnancy, emotional support was beneficial in improving the quality of life and stress coping ability of the patients, and reducing the level of depression and anxiety. A study by Xing (2021) found that emotional support could help individuals to alleviate negative emotions caused by negative life events.

(3) Promoting the development of individual self-esteem

Emotional support contributes to the development of individual self-esteem. Colarossi (2003) used a longitudinal study to examine the differential roles of teacher, parent, and peer emotional support and found that emotional support from teachers and peers was a significant positive predictor of adolescents' self-esteem. Barber's (2004) study found that teacher emotional support was particularly important for students when the school environment changed. The more teacher support students received in response to changes in the school environment, the higher their positive psychological functioning (e.g., self-esteem), the less negative (e.g., repression, loneliness), and the more interpersonal skills they had.

(4) Improvement of individual self-efficacy

Emotional support contributes to individual self-efficacy. Malecki (2003) showed that perceived teacher emotional support was significantly positively related to students' academic self-efficacy, and that the more emotional support, such as caring, encouragement, and so on, that students perceived from their teachers, the higher the level of academic self-efficacy that students perceived. His study also showed that perceived teacher emotional support was indirectly and significantly positively related to academic engagement through the mediating variable of academic self-efficacy. Lehman (2007) conducted a study on the relationship between teacher emotional support and self-efficacy among elementary school students, and his results indicated that teacher emotional support positively predicted students' academic self-efficacy. Patrick (2007) study indicated that perceived teacher emotional support positively predicted students' self-efficacy. Sakiz's (2012) study concluded that there was a significant correlation between teacher emotional support and secondary school students' motivation, affective learning, and learning behaviors, and that perceived teacher emotional support positively predicted students' sense of belonging, positive affect for learning, and self-efficacy.

(5) Enhancement of the subjective well-being of individuals

Emotional support helps to enhance an individual's subjective well-being. Cui Lijuan (1997) found in a study of 100 retired elderly people in Shanghai that the ability of children to provide more emotional support to their parents had a significant impact on the life satisfaction of the elderly. This suggests that the support the elderly need from their children is not only material and behavioral support, but more importantly, spiritual understanding and support. Lin's (1999) study found that emotional support is beneficial to alleviating psychological stress, which is beneficial to mental health and quality of life, and that elderly people who have access to emotional support will have higher life satisfaction. Becker's (2002) study showed a significant positive correlation between adolescents perceived emotional support from teachers and students' subjective well-being. Li's (2007) study found that emotional or spiritual support positively impacted older adults' life satisfaction. They found that older adults talking to people regularly had a positive and positive impact on life satisfaction. Older adults who talked with their children or grandchildren had significantly higher life satisfaction compared to those who talked with other people or no one. In addition, older people's life satisfaction increased when there was emotional support to look forward to. Compared to the reference group who talked to other people or no one about what was on their mind, older people who could talk to their children or express what was on their mind with their spouses were significantly more satisfied with their lives. Wu Jie's (2008) study concluded that although the subjective support that older adults receive emotionally is not an objective reality, it is more meaningful than objective support. Emotionally obtained support is much better than material objective assistance because this emotional experience is closely linked to their subjective feelings and is more likely to improve the subjective well-being of older adults. Wu Junfu's (2010) study found that parent-child support was significantly related to the subjective well-being of older adults, and that receiving financial and emotional support from children had a significant positive predictive effect on the total subjective well-being scores of urban and rural older adults.

3.2.2 Physical role

(1) Fostering pro-social behavior and suppressing anti-social behavior in individuals

Emotional support helps to foster pro-social behavior and inhibit antisocial behavior in individuals. Licitra-Kleckler (1993) examined the moderating effects of adolescents' perceived family emotional support, and showed that adolescents who had high levels of family emotional support exhibited less repressive and negligent behaviors. Seidman (1999) used self-reported, cross-sectional research to examine the relationship between parental emotional support and instrumental support and repressive and antisocial behaviors among 11–14-year-old adolescents. the relationship between parental emotional support and instrumental support and repressive, antisocial behavior among 11–14-year-old adolescents. The results found that adolescents with high levels of parental emotional support and instrumental support exhibited low levels of repressive and antisocial behaviors. Craig's (2000) study showed that teacher emotional support significantly reduced bullying among students in a school setting. Merritt's (2012) study found that teacher emotional support had a significant impact on students' prosocial behaviors (e.g., aggression toward peers' rejection of peers, and pro-social behaviors) and self-regulation skills

had a relatively large impact. Specifically, higher teacher emotional support was associated with lower child aggression and higher self-control, i.e., higher teacher emotional support was effective in reducing students' aggressive and exclusionary behaviors and increasing their pro-social behaviors.

(2) Improvement of the physical health of individuals

Emotional support helps to improve the physical health of individuals. A study by Yan Cui (2005) found that by giving emotional support such as comfort, encouragement, and guidance to cancer patients, it can help them to control their chaotic thinking and emotions, reestablish psychological balance, and help to improve the quality of their survival. Li's (2007) study found that the presence of accessible emotional support had a positive and positive impact on health self-assessment of the elderly. Elderly people who had children and spouses to talk to had significantly higher health self-assessments compared to a reference group who talked to other people or no one about what was on their mind or thoughts. Being able to talk to one's spouse, i.e., "old partner", about what is on one's mind has a positive impact on the health self-assessment of older adults. Pillemer's (2015) study of 355 community-dwelling older adults found that positive social interactions, as well as emotional support, can delay cognitive decline in older adults. A study by Peihong Wang (2017) found that systematic nursing interventions including emotional support for pregnant women can lead to more support related to behavioral change, reduce anxiety, help control and improve the condition, and increase adherence and motivation to treatment, thereby reducing adverse pregnancy outcomes and neonatal-related complications in pregnant women with gestational diabetes. A study by Youqiong Zhang (2018) found that the introduction of an emotionally supportive care model for patients with severe hepatitis who were treated with an artificial liver support system could effectively alleviate adverse emotions such as anxiety and depression, improve biochemical indexes of liver function, and effectively improve patients' adherence to treatment. The study of Ren Liping (2018) found that providing emotional supportive care interventions for patients with severe hepatitis can improve the patients' condition, delay the deterioration of the condition, and improve the patients' self-care ability and quality of life, so that the patients will be more satisfied with the nursing services.

(3) Role in students' academic performance

Emotional support helps to increase students' engagement in learning as well as their academic achievement. Ryan's (1994) study found that adolescents who have a sense of emotional security look to their teachers as a source of emotional support and also have a higher sense of control, self-control, and engagement in learning. Becker's (2002) study showed that adolescents perceived emotional support from teachers was significantly and positively correlated with students' academic achievement and engagement. Crosnoe's (2004) study of upper grade students found that positive and close relationships with teachers increased students' motivation to learn, which led to greater academic success. A study by Becker (2002) showed that adolescents' perceived teacher emotional support was significantly positively related to students' academic achievement and engagement in learning. Crosnoe's (2004) study of students in the upper grades found that positive and close teacher-student relationships increased students' motivation to learn, which led to greater academic achievement. Pianta's (2008) study of a longitudinal study found that teachers' affective support was significantly positively correlated with the math achievement

of fifth-grade students. Teachers' emotional support for students had a greater effect on students' math achievement than the number of math instructions provided by teachers. Hamre's (2010) study found that children's risk of dropping out of school could be effectively reduced by increasing teachers' emotional support. The researcher randomly divided the subject students who also had inattention, low academic level, and susceptibility to behavioral problems into two groups and gave them different levels of teacher emotional support. It was found that the group with lower levels of teacher emotional support exhibited low academic achievement and susceptibility to conflict with the teacher. Gregory (2016) argued that when teachers invest a great deal of emotional support in their students at the beginning of the school year, students' motivation and engagement in learning increases. In emotionally supportive classrooms, adolescents' academic autonomy develops and improves during daily learning activities, and they are able to build more congenial and stable relationships with their peers. Kashy-Rosenbaum (2018) used a multilevel research approach in her study to explore the impact of home teachers' emotional support and classroom climate on academic achievement. The results of the study showed that the emotional support of home teachers positively influenced the academic achievement of individuals. Chen Xu (2018) discussed the effects of teachers' overall support and emotional, competence, and learning support on secondary school students' academic achievement separately in his study, and his findings indicated that teachers' emotional support was significantly and positively related to individuals' academic achievement. Zhao Chengling (2018) conducted a study on online learners and found that the emotional support of teachers felt by the subjects could alleviate their learning burnout to a great extent, and the positive atmosphere created by the teachers when the learners had a low mood had the most obvious effect on their improvement.

3.3 Factors influencing emotional support

Emotional support can be affected by a range of factors. Throughout the process of emotional support, the supporter, the supported, the relationship between the supporter and the supported, and the supportive environment are necessary for emotional support to take place. These four elements make up the influences on emotional support.

3.3.1 Gender, ethnicity and psychological factors of supporters

The supporter is usually the giver of emotional support, and according to a summary of the relevant literature it has been found that demographic factors of gender, ethnicity, and psychological factors of the supporter can have an impact on emotional support.

The first is the gender factor. Gao Ge (2011) conducted a survey on the situation of rural elderly people over 60 years of age in Ye County, Henan Province, and found that, in terms of support for the elderly, sons mainly provide financial support, while daughters provide more emotional comfort and life care support to meet the psychological needs of their parents. Liang Lixia (2011) studied the gender effects of "caring responsibilities" and concluded that different genders play different roles in the family, with men being expected to provide for the family economically, while women are expected to play the roles of caring for the family and providing emotional support, and that there is a feminization of "caring responsibilities". "There is a feminization. Pushkar (2014) conducted a study on the impact of children of different genders on parental well-being, and his results showed that daughters have more emotional interaction and communication with their parents compared to sons. A study by Kanaan Lee (2022) showed that daughters improve the physical health of their elderly parents by providing more emotional

support to their parents than financial support. The facilitating effect of the number of daughters on older parents' physical health was more pronounced when parents' emotional needs for the family were more pressing. Further, in families with more daughters, children visited and contacted their elderly parents more frequently, thus suggesting that daughters provide more emotional support to their elderly parents, which in turn improves their physical health.

The next factor is race. Almeida's (2009) study found that Latinos born in other countries and the United States, especially Mexicans born in other countries, reported higher levels of family emotional support compared to non-Latino whites. Hill's (2016) study noted that Mexican Americans tend to have large family networks and high levels of emotional support. Chan (2019) study of ethnically diverse older adults found that more Latino older adults than Whites were in the high emotional support group.

Finally, there are psychological factors. Batson's (1983) study found that altruistic motivation to help others is elicited when potential supporters develop empathy for the fate of others. Weiner's (1985) study showed that attributions about the controllability of a person's situation affect feelings toward that person, which in turn further affects willingness to provide emotional support. For example, if the supporter attributes the problems experienced by the supported person to the supported person's inability to control events, this can lead to compassion and empathy as well as higher intentions to help. Bennet's (1990) study found that feelings of helplessness and frustration as a result of unsuccessful past endeavors may reduce willingness to give emotional support to others. In addition, Carlson's (1987) study found that concern for others may help to increase empathy or facilitate perspective taking, thereby enhancing emotional support for others. For example, Thompson (1980) asked subjects in a study to imagine that a good friend of theirs was about to die of cancer, and half of them were asked to focus on the feelings of their sick friend and the other half were asked to focus on their own reactions. The results of the study indicated that those who focused on their friend's feelings were more willing to provide emotional support than those who focused on themselves.

3.3.2 Psychological factors of the supported

The supported person of emotional support is usually the receiver of emotional support. According to the summary of relevant literature it was found that psychological factors such as the supported person's sense of psychological consistency, resilience, self-esteem, and optimistic tendencies have an impact on emotional support.

Antonovsky's (1979) study showed that individuals with a greater sense of psychological coherence were able to receive more emotional support. Kobasa's (1983) study noted that individuals with greater resilience were able to maximize the use of the emotional support they already had to alleviate their stress, even if they received relatively little emotional support. Shumaker's (1984) study found that if an individual feels indebted to others for emotional support, he or she will prefer to consider other solutions to the problem. Scheier's (1987) study found that individuals with optimistic tendencies were more active in seeking emotional support from others and had a stronger base of emotional support. Vaux's (1988) study found that self-esteem, interpersonal trust, and negative social network orientation affected the emotional support received by individuals. Hobfoll (1988) investigated the emotional support status of 107 Israeli mothers. Hobfoll (1988) investigated the emotional support received by 107 Israeli mothers and found that women who experienced more trials and tribulations received more emotional support. Feinstein (1989) found that if a person consistently refuses to accept emotional support from others, the likelihood that others will give emotional support decreases over time, whereas if a

person is open to receiving emotional support, the likelihood of emotional support increases. support. Dunkel-Schetter (1990) stated that an individual's ability to cope with problems affects his willingness to actively seek emotional support. Sarason's (1991) study found that perceptions and feelings of emotional support affect the process by which an individual seeks and receives emotional support.

3.3.3 The closeness of the relationship between the supporter and the person being supported

It has been shown that the closeness of the relationship between the supporter and the supported has an impact on the status of emotional support. Hobfoll's (1988) study noted that in stressful environments, individuals will be more likely to want emotional support from those with whom they have a close relationship. Harasemiw (2018) analyzed the types of social networks for older Canadians with regard to their findings found that older adults with diverse social networks (including family, friends, neighbors, etc.) received the most emotional support. In contrast, older adults with fewer friends and restricted social relationships received less emotional support. He Zhaiping's (2006) study of rural elders over 60 years of age in Shanxi province found that: relatives were the main source of emotional and practical support; friends were more often the main companions of older people's interactions and also provided some emotional support; and neighbors mainly provided minor support such as borrowing things, and were also the object of older people's interactions. Among relatives, sons mainly provide practical support, daughters provide emotional support, spouses play a role in all three types of support, siblings are helpful to older persons in terms of individual emotional and social support, and other relatives are similar to neighbors in that they provide some minor practical support.

3.3.4 Pressure conditions and regional differences in the support environment

The environments in which the supporter and the supported also have an impact on the status of emotional support. First, the stressful condition of the environment affects the frequency of emotional support. Dunkel-Schetter's (1987) study found that individuals received more emotional support during high-stress events compared to low-stress events. Hobfoll's (1988) study noted that when both potential supporters and potential supported perceived the environment, they were in to be stressful, the frequency of emotional support occurs more frequently.

Second, some researchers have also found differences in the status of emotional support between urban and rural areas. For example, Wu Junfu's (2010) study found that there is a significant difference between rural and urban older people in receiving emotional support, and that urban is higher than rural. Since most urban elderly are retirees, have higher financial giving capacity and cultural level, and are located in cities with rich and diverse lifestyles, they can learn a lot of information through media such as TV, newspapers, and the Internet, and have more interactions with their children and the third generation, so they can receive emotional support in a timely manner.

3.4 Theoretical models of emotional support

The theoretical model of emotional support summarizes emotional support at a high theoretical level. As one of the important components of social support, the theoretical model of emotional support is consistent with the theoretical model of social support, which is proved by

existing research (Li, Qiao, Liu, et al., 2019; Zhang, Song, Wang, 2022). Existing studies have identified three theoretical models of social (emotional) support, which are the main effect model, the stress buffer model, and the dynamic effect model.

3.4.1 Main effects model

Cohen (1985) proposed a main effects model of social support. The main effects model suggests that social support has an important gain for anyone at any given time, regardless of the presence or absence of stress, and that it improves an individual's overall well-being, which reduces an individual's psychological problems. Cohen (2000) suggests that the gain of social support is gained in two ways, by being in a network of support, and by the perceived availability of support. Being in a support network provides a sense of security, stability, and belonging, thus stimulating an individual's sense of self-worth. Perceived availability of support provides emotional and psychological satisfaction and may produce positive outcomes even in stressful situations (Cohen, Underwood & Gottlieb, 2000).

The main effects model of social support has been confirmed by many studies. For example, Berkman's (1979) follow-up of 6,928 adults in California found that people who lacked social and community ties had a higher likelihood of death during the follow-up period compared to those who were more connected. Similarly, House (1982) followed 2,754 adults in a community and found that men with higher levels of social ties and social activity were significantly less likely to die during the follow-up period.

3.4.2 Pressure buffer model

Cohen (1985) proposed the stress buffer model of social support. The stress buffer model suggests that social support can alleviate an individual's physical or psychological experience of stress. It reduces the negative impact of a stressful event and decreases the individual's perception of the severity of the stressful event, thereby increasing the individual's problem-solving ability. Social support is only protective in high stress or high risk situations.

Social support as a buffer often works through a person's internal cognitive system. Cohen suggests that social support may act on two links in the chain of the relationship between stressful events and health status. First, it may act on the middle link between stressful events and subjective appraisals. If an individual receives some social support, then he will underestimate the harmfulness of the stressful situation and reduce his appraisal of the severity of the stressful event by increasing his perceived ability to cope with himself. Second, social support can act as a buffer between the subjective experience of stress and the acquisition of illness. Social support can mitigate the adverse effects of stressful experiences by providing problem-solving strategies that reduce the importance of the problem. The buffering effect of social support can be both general and specific. Generalized means that any kind of social support can act as a buffer for any kind of stressful event, and specific means that a particular kind of social support acts as a buffer for only a particular kind of stressful event (Gong, 1994).

The stress-buffer model of social support has likewise been confirmed by numerous studies. Brown's (1975) study of the link between women's intimate social relationships and their health showed that such social relationships were effective in preventing negative events from having a serious impact on them if the intimate partner was their husband or boyfriend. Paykel's (1980) study found that communication between postpartum women and their husbands about problems significantly reduced the prevalence of postpartum depression. Husaini (1982) studied the stress buffering effects of personal competence and social support on depression, and his results showed

that the stress buffering effect of social support was significant. Na Zhang (2022) investigated the mediating role of reading interest and the moderating role of parental emotional support in the relationship between family socioeconomic and cultural status and adolescents' digital reading literacy, and found that parental emotional support served as a protective factor for adolescents' digital reading literacy in the context of the risk factor of low reading interest.

3.4.3 Dynamic effects model

There is no consensus on whether the theoretical model of social support is a main effects model or a pressure buffer model. Some studies support the main effects model, some support the pressure buffer model, and some even support both effects at the same time. For example, Turner (1990) examined the effects of social support on pregnant mothers, and his results indicated that the effect model of social support was influenced by socioeconomic status. Under conditions of low socioeconomic status, the findings supported the main effect model. Whereas, under the condition of high economic status, the findings support the pressure buffer model (Turner, Grindstaff & Phillips, 1990). As another example, Jin (2011) studied the effects of emotional intelligence and parental social support on the social adjustment of delinquent adolescents. Their results showed that parental social support significantly predicted both positive and negative social adjustment of delinquent adolescents regardless of the presence of emotional intelligence and the interaction term of emotional intelligence and parental social support, which supported the main effect model of social support. At the same time, however, parental social support played a moderating role in the prediction of positive and negative social adjustment by emotional intelligence. That is, parental social support increased the positive predictive effect of emotional intelligence on positive social adaptation and the negative predictive effect on negative social adaptation, which supports the stress buffer model of social support. For this reason, some researchers have proposed a dynamic effects model of social support.

The dynamic effects model argues that social support, stress, and mental health are not simply positively influenced relationships in terms of conceptual, methodological, and empirical relationships, but rather a complex relationship in which these concepts are able to influence and interact with each other. The model argues that the main effect model of social support and the buffer model are not quite in line with reality, while social support and stress can be both independent variables directly or indirectly play a role in the level of physical and mental health, and the relationship between stress and social support is a process of mutual influence and interaction that can change over time (Wang, 2004).

The dynamic modeling of social support is evidenced by existing research. Munroe's (1986) study found that there is a complex interaction between social support, stress, and physical and mental health, and that this effect changes over time. Therefore, researchers believe that the relationship between social support, stress and physical and mental health is not a simple straight-line relationship, sometimes it may be a curved relationship, and sometimes it may be a phase change or a threshold relationship.

4. Conclusions and Implications

4.1 Conclusions of the study

This study systematically combed 89 domestic and international literatures related to emotional support, and conducted a literature review of the retrieved literatures from the four dimensions of the connotation, role, influencing factors, and theoretical models of emotional

support. The conclusions obtained in this study are as follows: first, as for the connotation of emotional support, researchers generally agree that emotional support is the process of individuals expressing positive emotions to others, and such positive emotions encapsulate care, sympathy, understanding, respect, trust and encouragement. Second, in terms of function, emotional support can improve the mental health and physical health of individuals. For students, emotional support helps to improve their learning engagement and academic achievement. Third, in terms of influencing factors, the effects of emotional support are affected by the supporter, the supported, the relationship between the supporter and the supported, and the supportive environment. Fourth, in terms of theoretical models, the theoretical models of emotional support include the main effect model, the stress buffer model, and the dynamic effect model.

4.2 Research Implications

First, the definition of emotional support needs to be further clarified. Most of the existing definitions of emotional support focus on the content of emotional support, while a few take into account the content and methods of emotional support. In order to further promote the development of empirical research related to emotional support, it is necessary to make a comprehensive conceptual definition of emotional support from the aspects of purpose, subject, content and method.

Second, the focus is on the mechanisms by which emotional support works. Emotional support has multiple effects on the development of individuals, what are the relationships between these effects? Are there mediating and moderating effects? In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to explore the mechanism of emotional support through further research.

Finally, the theoretical model of emotional support is explored at a deeper level. Existing studies have shown that the main effect model and the stress buffer model of emotional support can coexist under certain conditions. Therefore, some researchers have proposed a dynamic effects model of emotional support in order to break through the drawbacks of the main effects model and the stress buffer model. It is necessary for future researchers to further validate the correctness of the dynamic effects model of emotional support by means of empirical studies.

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