

## Social support Need Differences in Early and Middle – Adulthood

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### Abstract

The objectives of the study was to investigate the difference between early and middle adults in social support and its dimensions. Utilizing between-subjects design, 375 adults divided into two groups: early adults from 20 to 40years (202) and middle adults from 41 to 60 years (173). The participants were administered Interpersonal support evaluation list and data were collected. Independent t-test was used to analyse the data and the results revealed a significant difference between early and middle adults in overall social support and appraisal support. The implications of the study are discussed.

**Key words:** Social support, Tangible support, Appraisal support, Belonging support, Early adults, Middle adults

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With the advancement of technology, there is a change in the mosaic of social network, which has expanded to pan continent. Despite this development there is a great decline in the social support which is very much important at this hour suggesting that social network does not necessarily translate into social support. India is a country with diverse cultures, languages, and religions. Yet, amidst the diversity of Indian life, it is known for its social bonding and support system. The references to social support can be traced back to ancient times. According to Chanakya, the great political adviser, “kinsman, relative is not just by blood, but by their support to and concern for us”. In the following sloka he has explained that, “in sickness, misfortune, famine, danger from enemy, royal appearance, and mortality one who stands by you is really a friend”.

***ātūre vyasane prāpte, durbhikṣe śātrusaṅkaṭe ।***

***rājadvāre śmaśāne ca yastiṣṭhati sa bāndhavaḥ ॥***

Social relationship and support according to Shiv Khera (2000) author of the best seller book ‘you can win’, “we must be willing to give a value addition to another person’s life”. Social support is an individual’s perception that he or she is loved and valued by people in their social network (Demaray et al., 2005) and this is mainly divided under two aspects: structural and functional aspect. Structural aspect defines the number of friends one has and frequency of meeting them (Friedman & Silver, 2007). The functional aspect consists of resources received in order to provide functions such as care, affection and belongingness. Social support has been described differently by different researchers. The following study includes appraisal, belonging and tangible support as variables to be measured. Appraisal support means receiving information, advice and guidance from others. This includes providing suggestion, one’s own decision and information on organizations that provide help. Belongingness include support provided by social relationships which mainly focuses on the emotional aspect. This kind of

support is a major contributor for positive mood (Maestas, Vaquera & Zehr, 2007). Tangible support includes providing financial assistance or material needs (Sanderson, 2013). Providing social support is not just beneficial for the receiver of support, but also for the provider (Harrington, 2013).

From the developmental point of view the stage of adulthood is very important as it precedes the stage of old age. The first two stages of adulthood: early adulthood (20 to 40 years) and middle adulthood (41 to 60 years) were included in this study which would examine the contribution of social support inspired by the convoy model. The essential objective of the convoy model is to offer a heuristic outline suitable for people of all ages, from childhood through old age. It captures the subtlety of diverse cultures and situations and also finds out different factors related with the cause and effects of social relationship (Antonucci, Ajrouch, & Birditt, 2013). Therefore, the present study considers it important and investigates whether there exists any difference between early and middle adults in social support and its dimensions.

On the basis of the objective it was hypothesized that there would be a difference between early and middle adults in social support and its dimensions.

## **Method**

Considering the research objectives, between groups design was used for the study. The independent variable was stages of adulthood and the dependent variable was social support and its dimensions.

## **Participants**

The study included 375 ( $M=35.75$ ,  $SD=12.82$ ) adults divided into two groups: 202 early adults from 20 to 40 years ( $M=24.49$ ,  $SD=4.97$ ) and 173 middle adults from 41 to 60 years ( $M=48.06$ ,

SD=5.45). The age range of the participants was from 20 to 60 years. Willing participants signed a consent form and the scale was administered with demographic details list.

### Measures: Interpersonal Support Evaluation list (ISEL) –

The Interpersonal support evaluation list (Cohen et al., 1985) with 12 items on a 4-point scale ranging from 0(definitely false) to 3 (definitely true) was used. The scale has 3 sub-scales: appraisal, belonging and tangible with Cronbach's alpha 0.70.

### Results

The results were computed using SPSS version 23.0. The statistics used to analyse the data were Descriptive statistics (Mean, Standard deviation, frequency) and inferential statistics (t test). The mean, standard deviation and results of 't' done on social support are presented in table 1.

Results indicated a significant difference between early and middle adults in overall social support  $t(373) = 2.57$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ; the effect size for this analysis Cohen's  $d = 0.26$  showed a small effect. The early adults ( $M = 11.02$ ,  $SD = 3.02$ ) perceive more social support as compared to middle adults ( $M = 10.22$ ,  $SD = 3.03$ ).

**Table 1**

*Difference between Early adult and Middle adults on Social support and its dimensions*

Variables	Early adults (N=202)		Middle adults(N=173)		t	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD		
Tangible	3.57	1.26	3.43	1.27	1.07	
Appraisal	3.75	1.72	3.23	1.43	3.71**	0.33
Belonging	3.70	1.38	3.56	1.26	0.99	
Social Support	11.02	3.02	10.22	3.03	2.57*	0.26

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$

Results also indicated a significant difference between early adults and middle adults in appraisal dimension of social support  $t(373) = 3.71, p < 0.01$ ; the effect size for this analysis Cohen's  $d = 0.33$  showed a small effect. The early adults ( $M = 3.75, SD = 1.72$ ) perceive more appraisal social support as compared to middle adults ( $M = 3.23, SD = 1.43$ ).

## Discussion

The study aimed at investigating the difference between early and middle adults in social support. The findings showed a significant difference between these two groups in appraisal dimension of social support and overall social support. The mean scores in the table reveals that compared to early adults, middle adults perceived less support. Younger adults perceive more support both in appraisal dimension and total support. This might be due to the fact that older adults are competent enough to guide themselves and take decisions. Hence compared to early adults they seek less appraisal support. But no significant differences were noted in case of tangible support and belonging support. This may be because in contemporary times, the material needs of middle class adults are fulfilled to a large extent. Hence people in their adulthood have no craving for material or tangible support. This is in consonant with the viewpoint of Levinson (1986, p.5) that “during the early adult transition, most young people construct a dream—an image of themselves in the adult world that guides their decision making as an independent achiever in an occupational role. They would like to form a relationship with a mentor who facilitates realization of their dream—a senior colleague, a more experienced friend, neighbour, or relative”.

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