The relationship of social support, psychological well-being, anxiety, depression, and student needs to self-esteem and assertiveness in first year university students

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INTRODUCTION
Transition to university is a complex process where educational, vocational, personal and social dynamics are interactively engaged. Transition to university life represents a psychological adjustment, primarily “relational” in nature. Research confirms that perceived social support is one of the key factors during the transition to university life. The level of role adjustment is related to a sense of connectedness and belonging to the education environment. Social support is an important determinant for coping with stress at the beginning of studies in university. Social support buffers the effect of life stress and depression. Both the ability to perceive and utilize social support play a role in coping with stress.
Transition process

Self-esteem

Assertiveness

Perceived social support: family, friends, significant others

Psychological well-being:
Positive relations with others
Environmental mastery
Self acceptance
Purpose in life
Autonomy
Personal growth

Anxiety – state
Anxiety – trait
Depression
Social support includes social integration, as well as actual and perceived availability of social support.

Social support provides a sense of emotional connectedness, self-worth and trust, as well as self-validation, feedback and a context for social comparison.

Social acceptance on campus facilitates students’ sense of identity in the new situation and protects their self-esteem and sense of well-being.

Individuals with adequate self-esteem anticipate that they will be able to cope successfully with demands of the university program and social environment.

Assertive individuals are able to express and carry out for their needs and interests. They are ready to ask for and receive support when required.

Relationships with peers have a strong impact on students self-concepts. Students who quickly adapt to the new social environment adjust better to academic demands and maintain their physical and psychological well-being.

Psychological sense of well-being tends to be relatively consistent over time and can be viewed as a dispositional characteristic for individuals adjustment and personal growth. Ryff (1989) proposed a theoretical multidimensional model of well-being which encompasses six components: positive relations with others, environmental mastery, self-acceptance, purpose in life, autonomy and personal growth. Psychological well-being has been positively associated with internal control, self-esteem, and life satisfaction and negatively related to depression.

The aim of this study is to explore the relationship of perceived social support, psychological well-being, anxiety, depression, needs for help to self-esteem, and assertiveness in first year university students.
Method

**Participants**
This study was conducted with 170 first year female students at the University of Latvia.

**Instruments**
Students filled out the following self-report instruments in November: Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, Ryff Psychological Well-being, Survey of Student Needs, State- Trait Anxiety Scale, Beck Depression Inventory-II.

Five months later, in April: Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale, Rathus Assertiveness Scale and Beck Depression Inventory-II.
Table 1 shows a positive association between social support and all indicators of student well-being.
Picture 1 shows that compared to students with low levels of support, those with high level show significantly higher mean scores of psychological well-being.
Table 2 Mean psychological well-being of students with high and low levels of perceived social support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Friends</th>
<th>Significant others</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety-state</td>
<td>-.28**</td>
<td>-.19*</td>
<td>-.21**</td>
<td>-.23**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anxiety-trait</td>
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<td>-.26**</td>
<td>-.25**</td>
<td>-.33**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>-.37**</td>
<td>-.39**</td>
<td>-.22**</td>
<td>-.21**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs total: Learning skills</td>
<td>-.16*</td>
<td>-.21**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social relations</td>
<td>-.28**</td>
<td>-.19*</td>
<td>-.25**</td>
<td>-.18*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self regulation</td>
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<td>-.16*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mental health</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05; ** p < .01

Table 2 shows that there is a significant relationship between having social support and anxiety, depression and identified needs. Students who have higher social support report fewer problems with social relations and learning skills.
Students with high self-esteem have lower depression scores. Students with low self-esteem had lower scores on all dimensions of psychological well-being and especially low assertiveness.
Conclusions

- Students with a high level of perceived social support reported higher scores on all dimensions of psychological well-being.
- Students with a high level of perceived social support have higher level of self-esteem and assertiveness.
- Students with high self-esteem reported higher scores on all dimensions of psychological well-being, indicating their potential for self-actualization.
- Assertive individuals who are willing to express their frustrations or needs to others in a new setting may be more likely receive instrumental assistance, such as information about resources on campus, and avoid increasing of anxiety and depressive feelings. (Strahan, 2003).
- Low level of self-esteem and lack of self-assertiveness suggest that these individuals will be reluctant to seek support and help with their needs for successful adjustment in transition to university.
- The results of this study underscore the potential value of social networks, including peer and faculty advising as well as the need for educational initiatives for raising public awareness in Latvia about the importance of social support to ensure student well-being and academic success.


