

The Role of Social Support in Enhancing Psychological Well-Being: The Mediating Effect of Self-Esteem in First-Year University Students

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ABSTRACT

The transition to university life can be stressful for new students, making psychological well-being crucial in overcoming challenges. Social support plays a vital role in psychological well-being, as it influences self-perception and emotional stability. Self-esteem serves as an important mediator in this relationship, where higher self-esteem enhances students' emotional and psychological resilience. This study employed a quantitative research design with purposive sampling, selecting 225 new university students as participants. Data were analyzed using the Structural Equation Model (SEM) with Smart PLS 4.0 to examine relationships between social support, self-esteem, and psychological well-being. Findings indicated that social support significantly influences psychological well-being ($\beta = 0.545$, $p < 0.05$) and self-esteem ($\beta = 0.542$, $p < 0.05$). Additionally, self-esteem positively impacts psychological well-being ($\beta = 0.332$, $p < 0.05$). Mediation analysis confirmed that self-esteem mediates the relationship between social support and psychological well-being ($T = 3.713$, $p < 0.05$). The study highlights the critical role of self-esteem as a mediator in the relationship between social support and psychological well-being among new students. Strengthening self-esteem through social support mechanisms can enhance students' emotional and psychological well-being, aiding their university adjustment process.

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1. INTRODUCTION

College is a period where students feel free to manage their schedules, which is much different from when they were still students in high school (Basri, 2018). Masa perkuliahan juga menjadi periode perubahan yang signifikan, di mana kaum muda mengembangkan keterampilan baru, memperoleh pengalaman, memperluas jaringan sosial, dan memperdalam pengetahuan. Namun, bagi banyak mahasiswa, memasuki universitas bisa menjadi pengalaman yang penuh tekanan. They must adapt to changes in lifestyle, social environment, and form new relationships (Bayram & Bilgel, 2008; Ibrahim

et al., 2013). This new educational environment provides opportunities to improve skills, try new ways of solving problems, and develop the mind (Papalia et al., 2014). Students fall into the developmental stage aged 18 to 25 years, which generally covers the time span from late adolescence to early adulthood. (Lybertha & Desiningrum, 2016; Yusuf, 2012). The period of late adolescence and early adulthood is a transition marked by major physiological and psychological changes, including increased stress (Chiang et al., 2019; Romeo et al., 2016).

New students starting university life experience a transition period full of challenges and changes (Olivas, 2020). First year students' study adjustments will have an impact on academic achievement, self-efficacy, emotional condition and also psychological well-being. They must adapt to a different academic environment than before and face higher and more complex expectations (Salami, 2011). It is important to maintain the welfare of new students because new students will continue their studies in the following years (Gunawan & Bintari, 2021), and students who successfully make academic adjustments in their first year will have the mental toughness to face the following years (van Rooij et al., 2018).

The first year of college is widely recognized as a difficult and demanding period for students (Ang et al., 2019; Mudhovozi, 2012). Research by Talwar et al. (2013) indicates that first-year students experience significantly higher levels of stress compared to those in their second and third years. This challenge is reflected in Vidiawati's (2018) study at a university in Jakarta, which reported that approximately 12.7% of students showed symptoms of depression and anxiety. Similarly, Prasetyo & Triwahyuni (2021) found that 76.9% of students at another university experienced similar psychological distress. The prevalence of mental health issues among students remains alarmingly high, with 76% experiencing depression, 88.4% anxiety, 84.4% stress, and 45.5% reporting other mental disorders (Asif et al., 2020; Auerbach et al., 2019). Students, therefore, navigate a unique developmental stage where they must cope with both academic pressures and increasingly complex social interactions (Acharya et al., 2018).

Psychological well-being refers to an individual's ability to maintain positive mental attributes, effectively adapt to their surroundings, and demonstrate stability and maturity in their personality (Hartati et al., 2021). Maintaining good psychological well-being enhances students' university experiences, positively influencing both academic and personal aspects of life (Guo et al., 2022). A person's psychological well-being is shaped by their ability to manage internal and external factors that impact their quality of life (Fitriani, 2016). Individuals with higher psychological well-being tend to have better overall health, greater resilience to stress, lower risks of illness, and an improved quality of life (Kubzansky et al., 2018; Trudel-Fitzgerald et al., 2019). Given its significance, psychological well-being should be a priority for students.

Self-esteem plays an important role in individual awareness regarding mental health and psychological well-being (Dunham et al., 2007). Self-esteem is a factor that originates from the individual which is a personality characteristic and will influence human health (Lestari & Fajar, 2020). Diener et al., (2015) concluded that someone who has a positive perception of themselves will also have a high level of well-being, whereas someone who has a negative perception of themselves will also have a low level of well-being. Self-esteem is not an innate trait; it is a trait that can be formed in individuals (Dewi, 2012). High self-esteem indicates a match between self-image and ideal self, while low self-esteem indicates a mismatch between the two (Pişkin, 2004). Low self-esteem will also make individuals feel incapable of many things, both physically and psychologically (Rihal et al., 2020). This is in line with Yunita (2021) who found that high self-esteem will give rise to positive behavior and the ability to face life problems faced when successfully overcoming all problems. The high level of self-esteem is influenced by the presence of social support, (Lu, Li, et al., 2023).

Social support encompasses various forms, including empathy, concern, attentiveness, encouragement, advice, companionship, and problem-solving assistance (Purwaningsih et al., 2023). It involves feeling accepted, valued, and supported within a social network that offers mutual aid (Eagle et al., 2018). Additionally, it reflects an individual's perception of the availability of support and the

presence of social interactions, such as receiving emotional or informational assistance from different sources (Uchino et al., 2016). In essence, social support provides individuals with reassurance that they are cared for, appreciated, and recognized as valued members of a supportive community.

Several factors influence social support, including individual characteristics, academic environment, family background, cultural influences, technology use, and institutional support. The primary dimensions of social support include emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal support, which can come from family, friends, or significant individuals.

Entering university introduces students to structured academic demands, unfamiliar social environments, and increased expectations compared to their previous education. These transitions require adaptation to new schedules, work rhythms, and academic challenges. Consequently, social support plays a crucial role in fostering students' psychological well-being, particularly when combined with self-esteem, a key personality trait influencing mental health. Psychological well-being is strongly linked to self-esteem, as individuals with higher self-esteem tend to experience better mental health (Leung et al., 2011; Orth & Robins, 2014). Moreover, those who receive social support often demonstrate greater self-confidence and resilience in daily life (Adnan et al., 2016). Students with strong social support networks report higher life satisfaction and reduced feelings of loneliness and despair (Aydin & Hiçdurmaz, 2017). Functional social support enhances mental well-being by positively impacting self-efficacy and self-esteem (Rippon et al., 2022). This study aims to explore the interconnected effects of social support, self-esteem, and psychological well-being, emphasizing self-esteem as a potential mediator in the relationship between social support and psychological well-being among new students.

2. METHOD

This research uses a quantitative method with an explanatory approach that explains relationships and influences through hypothesis testing, the aim of which is to provide an explanation of the relationship between a phenomenon for a variable and other variables based on a research point of view. This is done to determine the influence or relationship of variables that have cause and effect on the object under study between the variables Perceived Social Support (X), Self-Esteem (M), and Psychological Well-being (Y). Perceived social support is measured using aspects of family, friends and significant others, Self-esteem is measured using aspects of Self-worth and self-efficacy, Psychological well-being is measured using aspects of autonomy, mastery of the environment, personal growth, positive relationships with other people, life purpose and self-acceptance.

The data analysis in this study was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS). This method is employed to analyze the relationships between variables within a structural model, including hypothesis testing and model parameter estimation. SEM-PLS integrates principal component analysis with ordinary least squares regression to estimate partial model structures. It was chosen for this study due to its ability to handle complex models with multiple constructs, indicator variables, and structural paths without strict distributional assumptions. Additionally, SEM-PLS is highly effective for prediction, works well with small sample sizes, and provides reliable results.

This research was conducted at a private institution in Asahan. The sampling method used was purposive sampling, where participants were selected based on specific characteristics or eligibility criteria. The sample for this study consisted of 225 first-year students enrolled at Institution X, ensuring that the data focused on individuals undergoing the transition into university life.

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage Distribution
Descriptive Data Analysis

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage%
Gender:		
Man	50	22%
Women	175	78%
Total	225	100%
Semester:		
2 (two)	225	100%
Total	225	100%
Age:		
18 – 24 Years	220	98%
25 – 30 Years	3	1%
31 – 36 Years	2	1%
Total	225	100%
Study Program:		
Islamic Education	109	48,4%
Islamic Education Management	21	9,3%
Islamic Educ. for Early Children.	12	5,3%
Islamic Family Law	43	19,1%
Islamic Economic Law	25	11,1%
Islamic Broadcasting Comm.	15	6,8%
Total	225	100%
Ethnic:		
Aceh	3	1,3%
Batak	61	27,1%
Jawa	120	53,3%
Melayu	28	12,4%
Minang	3	1,3%
Mandailing	4	1,8%
Ethnic Tribes (Bjr, Kr, Pdg, Sun)	6	2,8%
Total	225	100%
Residence Status :		
Parent	201	89%
Boarding House	9	4%
Other	15	7%
Total	225	100%

In this study, three measuring instruments were used, namely:

- a. The psychological well-being scale in this study was measured using Ryff's (1989) Psychological Well-Being Scale, which was adapted into Indonesian by Savitri & Listiyandini (2017). This scale evaluates psychological well-being across six dimensions: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Each of these dimensions reflects different aspects of an individual's ability to maintain psychological health and adapt to life challenges. The scale consists of 42 statement items, with each dimension represented by seven items. A Likert scale was used for responses, offering six levels of agreement, ranging from 1 (Very Unsuitable) to 6 (Very Appropriate). The response options include Very Unsuitable, Not Appropriate, Somewhat Inappropriate, Quite Appropriate, Suitable, and Very Appropriate. The reliability of this scale was established with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.812, indicating high internal consistency. The corrected item-total correlation (r) ranged between 0.2 and 0.6, confirming that the scale is a moderately to highly reliable tool for measuring psychological well-being.

Table 2. Blueprint Scale Psychological Wellbeing

Dimensions	Items	Amount
Autonomy	1,7,13,19,25,31,37	7
Environmental Mastery	2,8,14,20,26,32,38	7
Personal Growth	3,9,15,21,27,33,39	7
Positive Relation With Other	4,10,16,22,28,34,40	7
Pupose in life	5,11,17,23,29,35,41	7
Self Acceptance	6,12,18,24,30,36,42	7
Total		42

- b. The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) is used to measure an individual's perception of social support from three primary sources: family, friends, and significant others. Developed by Zimet et al. (1990), this scale consists of 12 statement items, divided into three subscales—Family, Friends, and Significant Others—with each subscale containing four items. The MSPSS utilizes a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree), allowing participants to express the extent of their perceived social support. This scale was translated into Indonesian by Sulistiani et al. (2022) and has demonstrated strong reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85 and an overall reliability coefficient of 0.77. The validity test was conducted using Aiken's V content validity method, with values ranging from 0.6 to 1, indicating acceptable validity. Additionally, an analysis of item discrimination power showed that all items were valid, with item correlation values between 0.313 and 0.695, confirming that the scale effectively measures perceived social support.

Table 3. Blueprint Scale Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)

Dimensions	Items	Amount
Family Subscale	3,4,8,11	4
Friend Suscale	6,7,9,12	4
Significant Other Subscale	1,2,5,10	4
Total		12

- c. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), developed by Rosenberg (1965), is designed to measure an individual's sense of self-worth and self-acceptance, based on the dimensions of self-confidence and self-deprecation. This scale consists of 10 statement items, divided into five favorable and five

unfavorable items, using a Likert scale with four response options, where scores range from 1 to 4. The RSES demonstrates strong reliability, with a test-retest correlation between 0.82 and 0.88, while Cronbach's alpha values from various samples range between 0.77 and 0.88, indicating high internal consistency. The total score can range from 10 to 40, depending on the scoring method applied. This scale has been translated into Indonesian by Alwi & Razak (2022), ensuring its applicability for use in Indonesian populations.

Table 4. Blueprint Scale Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)

Dimensions	Items	Amount
Positive Components (Self Worth)	1,3,4,7,10	5
Negative Components (Self Depreciation)	2,5,6,8,9	5
Total		10

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Structural Model Evaluation (Structural Model)

To evaluate the structural model, the R-squared (R^2) test and path coefficient estimation were conducted. The bootstrapping procedure was used to generate t-statistic values for each relationship path, which were then utilized for hypothesis testing. These t-statistic values were compared against the t-table values to assess statistical significance. Additionally, the R-Square (R^2) value was analyzed to determine the percentage of influence that social support has on psychological well-being and self-esteem, providing insights into the strength and predictive power of the model.

Table 5. R-Square

	R Square
Psychological Well-being	0.603
Self-esteem	0.294

The R-Square value of Psychological Well-being is 0.603, which means that the influence of Social Support and Self-esteem on Psychological Well-being is 60.3%. The R-Square value of Self-esteem is 0.294, which means that the influence of Social Support on Self-esteem is 29.4%.

Presenting the F-Square value, to determine the influence of the structural level of social support on psychological well-being, social support on self-esteem and self-esteem on psychological well-being.

Table 6. F-Square

	F Square
Social Support -> Psychological Well-being	0.528
Social Support -> Self-esteem	0.416
Self-esteem -> Psychological Well-being	0.195

The F-Square (F^2) value of 0.528 indicates that social support accounts for 52.8% of the variance in students' psychological well-being. Similarly, an F-Square value of 0.416 suggests that social support explains 41.6% of the variance in students' self-esteem. Additionally, the F-Square value of 0.195 demonstrates that self-esteem contributes 19.5% to psychological well-being, highlighting its mediating role in the relationship between social support and well-being.

Furthermore, the Q-Square (Q^2) value was assessed to evaluate the predictive accuracy of the model in estimating indicator values for new data. A Q^2_{predict} value greater than 0 confirms that the model possesses strong predictive capability, indicating its effectiveness in explaining the relationships between social support, self-esteem, and psychological well-being.

Table 7. Q-Square

	Q² (=1-SSE/SSO)
Psychological Well-being	0.516
Self-esteem	0.272

The Q-Square (Q²) value for psychological well-being is 0.516, indicating that social support and self-esteem have significant predictive relevance for psychological well-being, as suggested by Hair et al. (2021), where a Q² value greater than 0 confirms a model's predictive capability. Similarly, the Q-Square (Q²) value for self-esteem is 0.272, demonstrating that social support effectively predicts self-esteem, further reinforcing the model's relevance in explaining the relationships between these variables.

Table 8. Path Coefficient Test & Significance of Direct Effect

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistic (O/STDEV)	P Values
Social Support -> Psychological Well-being	0.545	0.546	0.071	7.695	0.000
Social Support -> Self-esteem	0.542	0.544	0.081	6.716	0.000
Self-esteem -> Psychological Well-being	0.332	0.330	0.077	4.305	0.000

The analysis indicates that social support has a positive and significant effect on psychological well-being, with a coefficient value of 0.545, a T-Statistic of 7.695 (>1.96), and a P-Value of 0.000 (<0.05). This confirms that higher levels of social support contribute to improved psychological well-being among students. Similarly, social support positively and significantly influences self-esteem, as reflected in the coefficient value of 0.542, a T-Statistic of 6.716 (>1.96), and a P-Value of 0.000 (<0.05). This suggests that students who receive greater social support tend to have higher self-esteem.

Additionally, self-esteem has a positive and significant impact on psychological well-being, with a coefficient value of 0.332, a T-Statistic of 4.305 (>1.96), and a P-Value of 0.000 (<0.05). This indicates that students with higher self-esteem are more likely to experience better psychological well-being.

Table 9. Path Coefficient Test & Significance of Indirect Effects

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistic (O/STDEV)	P Values
Social Support -> Self- Esteem -> Psychological Well-being	0.180	0.179	0.048	3.713	0.000

The results indicate that self-esteem significantly mediates the relationship between social support and psychological well-being, as evidenced by a T-Statistic of 3.713 (>1.96) and a P-Value of 0.000 (<0.05), confirming the hypothesis. This suggests that social support enhances psychological well-being not only directly but also indirectly through its positive effect on self-esteem.

Table 10. Direct and Indirect Effects of Social Support towards Psychological Well-being through Self-Esteem

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistic (O/STDEV)	P Values
Social Support -> Psychological Well-being	0.545	0.546	0.071	7.695	0.000
Social Support -> Self- Esteem ->Psychological Well-being	0.180	0.179	0.048	3.713	0.000

The direct effect and indirect effect of Social Support on psychological well-being through Self-esteem can be seen. The magnitude of the direct influence of Social Support on psychological well-being is 0.545, the magnitude of the indirect influence of Social Support on psychological well-being is 0.180. Meanwhile, the total effect is $0.545 + 0.180 = 0.725$. Therefore, the value of the direct influence path of social support on psychological well-being is 54.5% higher than the value of the indirect influence path which is only 18%. In connection with the conclusion that has been conveyed that the direct influence of social support is more explicit than the indirect influence of the mediating role of self-esteem.

Discussion

Social support plays a crucial role in helping individuals navigate life's challenges, regulate emotions, and enhance mental well-being. It serves as a protective factor in difficult times, offering emotional stability and resilience (Oktavia & Muhopilah, 2021). Previous research highlights that social support significantly influences psychological well-being, as it helps individuals cope with life pressures and fosters better mental health outcomes (Febriyanto & Listyati, 2017; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Receiving support from parents, friends, and significant others has been shown to improve psychological well-being, particularly during periods of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Akbar & Aisyawati, 2021). Moreover, social support from different sources—parents, peers, and close relationships—functions independently, each contributing uniquely to psychological well-being (Tonsing et al., 2012).

Findings from this study reinforce the strong influence of parental and social relationships on student well-being (Adyani et al., 2018; Awang et al., 2014; Harijanto & Setiawan, 2017; Kurniawan & Eva, 2020). The presence of social support acts as a buffer against depression and provides adolescents with the psychological resources needed for future well-being (Stephen, 2023; Chen et al., 2017). Additionally, peer support plays a significant role in shaping students' psychological health, as seen in studies conducted during the pandemic (Hamonangan et al., 2022). Research also suggests that peer support is often the most frequently accessed form of social support (Pasinringi et al., 2022). Given its substantial impact, social support remains a key determinant in enhancing the psychological well-being of students (Khoirunnisa & Dewi Rosiana, 2023).

Social support plays a crucial role in shaping self-esteem, as individuals who receive consistent support from their social environment tend to develop a stronger sense of self-worth and confidence (Harris & Orth, 2019; Lestari & Fajar, 2020). Those with high self-esteem feel secure in their abilities and perceive themselves as accepted and valued by others, whereas individuals with low self-esteem often struggle with self-doubt and report receiving less social support. Research indicates that social support—whether from family, friends, or significant others—positively influences self-esteem, enabling individuals to engage more actively in social interactions and express themselves with

confidence (Lu, Song, et al., 2023). High self-esteem is associated with academic success, positive social relationships, and the ability to accept constructive feedback, while those with low self-esteem may experience social anxiety, environmental alienation, and a perceived lack of recognition from their surroundings.

Guindon (2009) emphasizes that self-esteem impacts motivation, adaptive behavior, and overall quality of life, playing a key role in long-term well-being. Similarly, Orth & Robins (2014) found that self-esteem serves as a predictor of life success and psychological well-being. Pandey et al. (2021) further confirmed a positive correlation between self-esteem and well-being, while Bajaj et al. (2016) noted that higher self-esteem enhances psychological well-being, enabling individuals to positively influence both themselves and others. Self-esteem is often shaped through comparisons with others or societal standards (Maricic et al., 2023). When high, it acts as a protective factor against psychological disorders and enhances well-being, but when low, it can lead to significant psychological distress (Steinberg, 2011).

Psychological well-being is a critical component of student life, as they frequently encounter academic and social pressures. It extends beyond mental health, encompassing an individual's ability to function effectively in daily life. Strong social support, whether from friends, family, or the academic environment, fosters a sense of acceptance and appreciation, which contributes to higher self-esteem. Students who perceive strong social support tend to be more confident in their academic abilities and social interactions, ultimately improving both their academic performance and overall well-being.

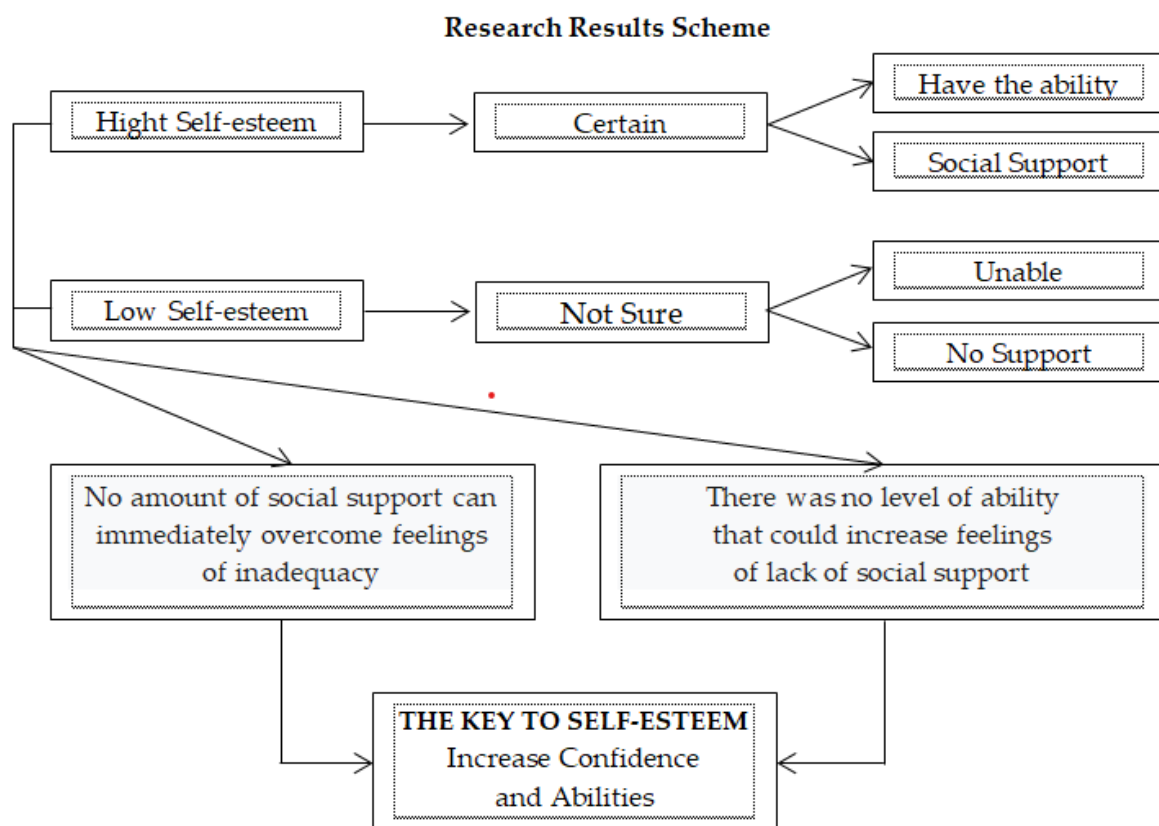


Figure 1. Research Result Scheme

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that social support significantly contributes to students' psychological well-being, particularly in navigating academic challenges. The findings indicate that higher social support correlates with better psychological well-being, as demonstrated by a coefficient value of 0.545, a T-Statistic of 7.695 (>1.96), and a P-value of 0.000 (<0.05). Additionally, social support plays a crucial role in enhancing self-esteem, with a coefficient value of 0.542, a T-Statistic of 6.716, and a P-value of 0.000, confirming its significant impact. Higher self-esteem, in turn, improves psychological well-being, as evidenced by a coefficient value of 0.332, a T-Statistic of 4.305 (>1.96), and a P-value of 0.000 (<0.05). Furthermore, self-esteem significantly mediates the relationship between social support and psychological well-being, with a T-statistic of 3.713 and a P-value of 0.000, indicating that social support is more effective in enhancing psychological well-being when students have strong self-esteem.

Despite these findings, this study has some limitations, including the use of purposive sampling, which may limit the generalizability of the results to broader student populations. Additionally, the study relies on self-reported data, which may be subject to biases in perception and response tendencies. Future research should consider diverse sampling techniques, longitudinal studies, and interventions that strengthen self-esteem and social support mechanisms to provide deeper insights into their long-term effects on psychological well-being.

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