The Social Well-being of University Students and Factors Affecting it

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Extended abstract

1. Introduction

World Health Organization has defined health in 1948 as “welfare of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not just being sick or disabled”. (Official report of the World Health Organization, 2002, p. 100). According to this definition, health is a “state of complete physical, mental and social well-being”, (WHO, the international health conference, New York, 19–22 June 1946) and accordingly, social well-being is one of the aspects of individual’s public health. Individuals’ health is one of the basic foundations of a balanced society and clearly the survival of any society depends on its members. Health has a direct impact on individual’s quality of life; hence, that’s why scientists have considered health issues for a long time and conducted many studies on physical and mental health. However, social well-being is one of the most important aspects of health that has been ignored and less attention has been paid to it by researchers.

2. Theoretical Framework

In this study, Keyes’s (1998) theory has been taken as a definition model and the framework to provide indicators of social well-being. According to Keyes (1998), social well-being refers to the appraisal of one’s own circumstances and functioning in society. Keyes defined five dimensions of social well-being, namely, social integration, social acceptance, social contribution, social realization and social coherence. Social integration consists of individuals’ appraisal of the quality of their own relation with society and community. It refers to the degree to which people feel they have something in common with others and they belong to their own community, in contrast to feelings of isolation and loneliness. Social acceptance refers to positive attitudes toward other people. Individuals who get a higher score on this dimension trust others and have favorable opinions on the

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human nature. Social contribution refers to the feeling of being a vital member of
the society, with something important to offer to the world. Social actualization is
the evaluation of the potentials of society and social groups, and corresponds to the
idea that society has potentials that can come true by institutions and citizens.
Social coherence refers to the perception of the quality and the organization of
social world, and reflects a sense that social life and society are meaningful and
intelligible.

3. Methodology

The study population included all students at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad in
the academic year 2012 that were selected using stratified sampling with an
estimated sample size of 379. The instruments of the study were Keyes’s (1998)
Social Well-being Scale, Hiobner’s (1991) Life Satisfaction Scale, and Social
Support Scale as well as demographic information of participants. The participants
were randomly selected from 15 faculties based on academic disciplines, gender, and
the number of students enrolled in each faculty. The Reliability of the scales were assessed by Cronbach's alpha and all of the scales
were above 0.70; as a result, it indicated that the questionnaires were reliable.
Furthermore, Factor Analysis was used to assess the validity of the questionnaires.
Accordingly, the findings showed that all five dimensions of social well-being
loaded truly on their factor in accordance with Keyes theory.

4. Results

The respondents were 22.7 years old in average (176 male and 203 female). The
majority of students were single (about 77 percent). In this study, the mean score of
social well-being is 65.7. In other words, it can be concluded that the social well-
being of Ferdowsi university students is above average. The students hit the highest
point of social well-being in social integration dimension and also the minimum
score was in the dimension of social acceptance. There was no significant
relationship between gender and dimensions of social well-being, except for social
actualization. The results show that some variables including age, marital status,
and membership in student associations, being satisfied with life, and having social
support affect social well-being. The result of regression analysis shows that three
variables including age, satisfaction with life and social support affect social well-
being simultaneously. Multiple correlation coefficient factors affecting social well-
being is 0.51, coefficient of determination is 0.26, and adjusted coefficient of
determination is 0.25.
5. Conclusion

The average social well-being scores show that Ferdowsi University students are in a good position in this case. Among five dimensions, respondents have got the highest score in social integration and with a little difference in social contribution while they have got the lowest score in social acceptance. Social integration represents the evaluation of the quality of individual’s relationship with the community; a high level of this dimension represents a sense of belonging to the community and believing to common things between people and community. The results about social acceptance illustrates that students have not a positive attitude toward the people; in other words, it shows the low level of social trust among them. In this research, it is approved that social support, as the most influential variable, can play an important role in improving student’s social well-being. Thus, it is necessary that family and university pay attention to this matter. In addition, university can improve the social well-being of students by facilitating student’s communications with each other and with student’s associations.

Key words: Social well-being, Satisfaction with life, Social support, Students

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