

Association Between Social Support and Welfare in Young Adults Succeeding a Breakup

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Abstract

Young adulthood has been conceptualized as a period of major changes and transitions. Such changes have been understood to increase feelings of stress and negative cognitions. As the development of romantic relationships is understood to be a crucial monument in young adulthood; the termination of a romantic relationship is recognized to induce feelings of depression and overall negatively effecting one's wellbeing. Social support has been theorized as well as researched to be a protective factor in buffering feelings of stress. The current study aimed to explore the relationship between social support and wellbeing following a relationship in a sample of young adults. Participants were asked to complete online questionnaires; Social support was measured using the MSPSS scale while Wellbeing was measured using the WEMWBS scale. The sample for the current study contained (N = 107) young adults, with (N = 51) having had a breakup in the last three months and (N=56) of a non-breakup sample. Analysis of the results revealed there to be no significant difference in wellbeing between a breakup sample and a non-breakup sample of young adults ($p = .420$) ; however, social support was seen to be a significant factor in predicting wellbeing within both the breakup and the overall group of young adults, giving significant implications for future youth mental health studies. Future research may focus on a breakup sample of young adults closer to the time of the breakup, in order to understand if there is a difference in the wellbeing of young adults following a breakup.

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Introduction

Young Adults and Stress

Stress has been conceptualized through previous literature as one's ability to overcome or adjust to life events (Scott et al., 2011). Young adulthood is understood to be a major transitioning period in individuals, with several stressful life changes occurring daily (DeVargas & Stormshak, 2020). Major life changes are understood to come in a variety of experiences from transitioning into parenthood, losing one's job and commencing or concluding higher education (Saxbe et al., 2018). These major life changes are researched to evoke symptoms of depression and anxiety (Harkness & Luther, 2001). Overall shown to negatively affect cognitive patterns in individuals as well as causing deteriorations in one's physical wellbeing (Lepore & Greenberg, 2002). Such deteriorations caused to one's health can be understood through studies which investigate the role of stress on one's immune system, with research in this field inferring that stress may induce the excessive secretion of cortisol (Segerstrom & Miller, 2004), which in turn inhibits the cells ability to activate to anti-inflammatory signals, contributing to the development of health problems such as arthritis, coronary heart disease and multiple sclerosis (Segerstrom & Miller, 2004).

The basis of the current study is to examine the relationship between social support and welfare in young adults succeeding a romantic breakup. Previous literature in the field of breakup studies mainly focuses on older populations or college populations with age demographics ranging from 18-40 (Hawley et al., 2015). Although these studies give insight into cognitive and behavioral patterns of individuals following a breakup, there seems to be a limitation when focusing on demographic factors such as an age group (Hawley et al., 2015). A gap in literature can be identified when focusing primarily on the wellbeing of young adults succeeding a breakup.

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Young adulthood is also perceived to be a time in which most psychological disorders emerge, with the brain undergoing rapid development (Oxhandler et al., 2018). The decrease of childhood support such as school and parental guidance while the individual becomes more independent and self-sufficient may induce higher levels of stress (Oxhandler, et al., 2018). As well as seeking and enduring employment or further education and other societal pressures may increase feelings of stress (Oxhandler, et al., 2018). In correlation with these findings another study focusing on the role of identity on depression in young adults induced that the urgency faced by young adults to figure out and commit to adult positions increases stress, which in turn increases depressive symptoms (Doeselaar et al., 2018). Although the study focuses on the commitment to education, friendship, relationship and job seeking as stress inducers, a limitation can be identified in the association between the levels of depressive and stress inducing symptoms associated with different commitments (Doeselaar et al., 2018).

Romantic Relationship and Wellbeing

The ability to form meaningful intimate relationships with a significant other is considered through studies of developmental psychology as a critical mark in early adulthood (Michaeli et al., 2018) When looking at the association between romantic relationships and wellbeing, several studies show a positive correlation between romantic relationships and mental wellbeing, developmental theorists have recognized the formation of a romantic relationship as a critical part of emerging adulthood (Bae & Kogan, 2020), with romantic affiliations understood to have a profound impact on one's wellbeing (Bae & Kogan, 2020). Romantic relationships were also found to mitigate effects of adverse childhood experiences (Bae & Kogan, 2020). However, such negative childhood experiences may be subject to recall bias, as the experiences were self-reported (Bae &

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Kogan, 2020). The study also may be ungeneralizable as the population consists entirely of African American men (Bae & Kogan, 2020).

Another study on a more racially diverse population deduced, young sexual minorities found involvement in a romantic relationship had buffering effects on life stressors (Whitton et al., 2018). However, further research may be necessary in future studies as the number of individuals who identified as Latino as well as other racial backgrounds were too minute to study separately (Whitton et al., 2018). A study on the cognitions of soldiers in committed romantic relationships found clinical implications that social support from a significant other may attenuate emotional distress and negative cognitions associated with exposure to trauma (Ruhlmann et al., 2018) Future studies may look at dyadic data as the study focused on the soldier's perspective of the relationship and not their partner (Ruhlmann et al., 2018).

Relationship Termination and Stress

The current study identifies the termination of a romantic relationship as a stress inducing major life event. This understanding stems from previous literature which proposes that a breakup can have negative effects on ones psyche as well as physical wellbeing (Love et al., 2018). With studies correlating a relationship termination to suicidal tendencies (Love et al., 2018). As well as such findings, breakups were also found to induce feelings of depression and anxiety amongst college students (Lepore & Greenberg, 2002). As a study which required college students to maintain a journal following a breakup inferred such negative cognitions amongst the students participating (Lepore & Greenberg, 2002). The same study also deduced that students also experienced respiratory problems (Lepore & Greenberg, 2002). Another study on university students showed similar results as students also reported negative thinking patterns as well as sleep disturbances following a breakup (Verhallen et al., 2019).

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Other studies in the field reflect such findings, with researches noting that consequences of romantic break ups may induce conditions such as broken heart syndrome, the development of insomnia, the reduction of immune functioning as well as the development of depression and suicidal behavior (Langeslag & Sanchez, 2018). The same study also reported that individuals may develop negative cognitions towards oneself following a breakup (Langeslag & Sanchez, 2018).

Social Support and Wellbeing

However, to combat such feelings mitigating factors have been researched and employed. The current study aims to understand if social support may play a role in the wellbeing of individuals following a breakup, as social support has widely been researched to play a mitigating role in life stressors (Quittner et al., 1990). In one study revolving chronic parenting stress, low levels of social support amongst parents were linked to higher levels of emotional distress (Quittner et al., 1990). In another study which dealt with social support and sleeping patterns of paramedics, results deduced paramedics who experienced a high level of perceived social support reported to have a high quality of sleep regardless of levels of stress faced during the work week, while paramedics who reported a low level of social support only experienced a high quality of sleep when dealing with a relatively stress free week of work (Pow et al., 2017). Although a limitation of the study may be in the measurement of sleep quality, as it was self-reported with a single item; self-proclaimed quality of sleep is understood to be linked with quality of life and health (Pow et al., 2017).

When deducing how social support may be implemented in order to predict wellbeing in individuals following a breakup, several studies correlate social support to wellbeing (Stronge et al., 2019). In one study focusing on relationship status, social support and wellbeing, N= 20,774, the study found empirical evidence that men

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experienced an increased life satisfaction when in a relationship as opposed to women (Stronge et al., 2019), as men attributed their significant other as their most significant social support system while, women were found to have bigger social circles and were found to seek emotional support from platonic relationships (Stronge et al., 2019). The study also notes that 24% of men identified their spouse as their only source of social support while, only 6% of women reported their significant other as such (Stronge et al., 2019). Although the data was cross-sectional and so may not allow for causal assertions; the study gives a large nationally representative sample that social support is necessary for the wellbeing of individuals, as results deduced that men benefitted emotionally whilst in a relationship due to the social support received from their spouse (Stronge et al., 2019).

Theories of Social Support

In assistance with such research, theories of social support also contribute to emphasizing the importance of social connections relative to an individual's mental health and wellbeing (Luciano & Orth, 2017). The significance of interpersonal relationships in relation to positive self-identification can be understood through theories such as the sociometer theory (Luciano & Orth, 2017); which can be highlighted through previous research deducing that one's self-worth may be affected a breakup (Langeslag & Sanchez, 2018). As well as support from a significant other, peer acceptance has also been linked to self-esteem in several studies; with lack of positive peer reception being correlated to negative cognitions and anti-social behavior tendencies (McDonough et al., 2018).

Another theory in correlation with the sociometer theory is the social ecological theory which infers that the development of one's emotional intelligence and self-perception is profoundly influenced by interpersonal relationships with peers, family and significant others (McDonough et al., 2018).

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This understanding can be highlighted through developmental and criminal psychology studies, as research in this field highly associate lack of positive social support to the development of abnormal thinking patterns and detrimental behaviors (Gao & Cummings, 2019). Social support in itself, can be considered a protective factor in one's overall development (Gao & Cummings, 2019). Such findings infer that social acceptance and support may be a necessity in the management of one's wellbeing (Luciano & Orth, 2017)

Another theory which infers the positive relationship between social support and wellbeing is the relational regulation theory, which speculates that sharing of both consequential and mundane stories, as well as shared activities mitigate the negative effects of life stressors (Lahey & Orehek, 2011). This insight can be seen reflected in modern treatments such as group therapies, which are widely employed and understood to be efficient treatments for recovering individuals (Hutchinson et al., 2018).

A study focusing on adolescents with negative attachment towards parental figures found that group therapy was a reliable means to prevent anxiety and hostility amongst participants however, a limitation in the results can be deduced as positive changes in the participant's behaviour and anger management was inferred by means of self-report (Cone et al., 2009). The positive effects of group therapies can also be understood when looking at the recovery process of gamblers (Hutchinson et al., 2018). Group therapy was correlated to show a major decrease in relapse amongst participants, as the perceived social support was considered as a mutually beneficial program to aid recoveries (Hutchinson et al., 2018).

The validity of the relational regulation theory can also be determined when looking at individuals of different backgrounds. In one study, villagers in a community in central Asia were found to share stories of grief in order to receive a sense of belonging

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and comfort from one another (Montgomery, 2013). Such studies and theories highlight how social support may be used for recovery in individuals, as well as maintaining one's overall mental wellbeing.

Research Aims, Rationale

Previous literature has recognized the relationship between romantic breakups and increase in negative mental and physical health outcomes (Love et al., 2018), with breakups shown to increase feelings of stress and suicidal idealizations (Love et al., 2018). Social support has been theorized and researched in several studies to have positive effects on the wellbeing of individuals (Luciano & Orth, 2017), With effects of social support on the mental health of young adults being widely investigated (Gao & Cummings, 2019). However, to the authors knowledge there seems to be a gap in literature when focusing on the effects of social support on primarily a breakup sample of young adults.

Young adulthood is conceptualized through previous research as a period in which most psychological disorders arise and is understood as a pivotal point in which individuals become increasingly independent from parental guidance (Oxhandler et al., 2018). Societal pressures such as seeking employment can also be correlated to the increase of stress levels faced by young adults (Doeselaar et al., 2018).

Therefore, the current study is conducted to investigate the relationship between social support on wellbeing after a romantic breakup in young adults by primarily focusing on four hypotheses.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis one: People who have had a romantic breakup within the past three months have a lower Well-being Scale score than people who have not had a romantic-breakup within the past three months (N = 107); and there will be a difference between the groups on their levels of perceived social support.

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Hypothesis two: Within people who have had a romantic breakup within the past three months, Perceived Social Support score is correlated with and predicts the Wellbeing Scale score (N = 51).

Hypothesis three: Within a sample of individuals who have not had a romantic breakup within the past three months (N = 56), Perceived-Social-Support predicts variation in Wellbeing.

Hypothesis Four: In a large sample of young adults (N = 107), including individuals who have had a romantic breakup within the past three months (N = 51), and individuals who have not had a romantic breakup within the past three months (N = 56), Perceived-Social-Support predicts variation in Wellbeing.

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Methods

Participants

The sample for the current research was collected between the 28th of December and the sixth of February; consisting of 107 young adults between the ages of 18-25. The sample consists of 63 Females and 44 Males. With 72 participants reported to be single while, 35 reported to be in a relationship. 51 participants reported to having a breakup in the past three months while, 56 participants reported to not being part of a breakup in the past three months. Participants were recruited using a non-probability method of sampling; being convenience sampling. Snowball sampling was used by utilizing social media sites such as Snapchat and Facebook to allow individuals to share the given survey. Individuals who wished to partake were presented with an inclusion criterion. Participants were not required to give personal information such as names, to maintain data anonymity. Participants were required to be between the ages of 18-25. Individuals of all ethnic and religious backgrounds could participate. Participants were asked to confirm the understanding that any information submitted will automatically become unidentifiable and so will be unable to be withdrawn however, participants were made aware that they may withdraw any time prior to submission.

Measures

Data for the current study was collected anonymously through Google forms, where individuals were presented with the basis of the study, as well as information on their rights. Such rights include the right to withdraw at any point prior to submission. Once participants have confirmed to the presented information (see Appendix); participants were required to answer 4 sections before beginning the surveys. These sections include, (1) demographics; being the participants gender, (2) age, (3) relationship

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status and (4) If you have recently broken up in the last three months. Once these questions were completed, participants were presented with two scales (see Appendix).

The first scale employed will be the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet et al., 1988). This 12-question scale will be utilized to measure the IV; social support by measuring social support from family, friends and a significant other. Participants were to rate themselves between one to seven, one being very strongly disagree and seven being very strongly agree (Zimet et al., 1988). The scale is researched to have excellent internal consistencies (Mitchell, Zimet, 2000), as the psychometric properties of the scale have been widely established by various studies of social support and mental health (Hefner, Eisenberg, 2009).

The second scale employed to measure the DV; wellbeing, is The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (Stewart-Brown et al., 2009). The 14-question scale required participants to rate themselves between one and five, one being none of the time and five, being all the time. Psychometric testing of The WEMWBS shows exceptional internal validity, as it is found to be a reliable scale to test a multitude of different populations (Stewart-Brown et al., 2009).

Design

The current study will be interpreted using a quantitative method. A cross sectional within subject design was utilized to measure the independent variable, being social support and the dependent variable, wellbeing. The study was conducted using self-reported questionnaires to determine whether a recent breakup would influence wellbeing and whether perceived social support can predict wellbeing.

Procedure

Individuals were firstly presented with a link to the google form survey through social media platforms between 28th of December and sixth of February. Participants were

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required to read an information page, with highlights the purpose of the study, the criteria for participation, the procedure, the confidentiality agreement as well as the benefits, advantages and disadvantages of participating. The contact details of both the researcher and the supervisor were also presented if further information was required. Once consent was confirmed by participants, participants were to select their gender, age, relationship status and if they had recently broken up in the last three months. Once such information was given participants were to fill out two questionnaires, the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support and the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale. Once both questionnaires were completed a debrief form was presented (see Appendix) with contact information to helplines and support groups in the incidence that participants may have felt distress. The contact information of both the researcher and supervisor were also presented again.

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Results**Descriptive Statistics**

Descriptive statistics were conducted on the current sample of young adults aged 18-25 (N= 107). The current sample consisted of 58.9% females and 41.1% males (see Table 1). 67.3% of the sample reported to be single, while 32.7% reported to be in a relationship. The sample consisted of (N=51) participants who have experienced a romantic breakup in the last three months and (N=56) who have not experienced a breakup in the last three months.

Table 1. Frequencies for the current sample of young adults (18-25) on each demographic variable (N = 107)

Variable	Frequency	Valid Percentage
Gender		
Female	63	58.9
Male	44	41.1
Relationship status		
Single	35	67.3
In a Relationship	72	32.7
Experienced a breakup in the last 3 months		
No	56	52.3
Yes	51	47.7

The presented tables (Table 1. And Table 2.) represent a visual summary of the descriptive statistics for the current study. P.P plots and histograms were analysed to

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assess the normality of the residuals. No extreme outliers were found in both the Social Support and Wellbeing scales, through the examination of the scatterplots.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of all continuous variables

	Mean (95% confidence Intervals	Std. Error mean	Median	SD	Range
Social Support	56.76 (53.04– 60.48)	1.87	63	19.4	15-84
Wellbeing	43.73 (41.20 – 46.27)	1.27	43	13.23	21-68

Inferential Statistics

The Results for the current study will be divided into four sections for each hypothesis:

Hypothesis One:

Hypothesis one: People who have had a romantic breakup within the past three months have a lower Well-being Scale score than people who have not had a romantic breakup within the past three months (N = 107); and there will be a difference between the groups on their levels of perceived social support.

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the mean Mental Wellbeing Scale score between the romantic breakup and no-romantic breakup group. There was no significant difference in scores for the romantic breakup group (M = 42.62, SD = 16.10) and the no-romantic breakup group (M = 44.75, SD = 9.97; $t(81.95) = -.810$, $p = .420$ two-tailed). The magnitude of the difference in the means (mean difference = -2.12, 95% CI: -7.33 to 3.08) was very small (Cohen's $d = 0.15$). These results deduce that there is no significant difference in the breakup group and no-breakup group in wellbeing.

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An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the groups on perceived social support. There was a significant difference in participants who reported single ($M = 47.17$, $SD = 22.05$) and in a relationship ($M = 68.18$, $SD = 15.94$; $t(21.75) = -3.53$, $p = .002$ two tailed) The magnitude of the difference in means (mean difference = -21.00, 95% CI: -33.33 to -8.68) was small (Cohen's $d = 1.09$) These results indicate that there is significant difference between individuals who were single versus in a relationship and their perceived social support.

Hypothesis two:

Hypothesis two: Within people who have had a romantic breakup within the past three months, Perceived Social Support score is correlated with and predicts the Well-being Scale score (N = 51).

To examine hypothesis two, the relationship between perceived social support and well-being was examined within the romantic breakup group $N = 51$. The relationship between perceived social support and wellbeing in the romantic breakup group was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity and homoscedasticity. There was a strong, positive correlation between the two variables, $r = .879$, $n = 51$, $p < .001$, with high levels of social support associated with high levels of wellbeing.

Hierarchical multiple regression was used to investigate the ability of two control measures (Perceived Social Support scale) to predict levels of wellbeing (Well-being scale), after controlling for the influence of relationship status (see Table 4). Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity and homoscedasticity. Relationship status was input

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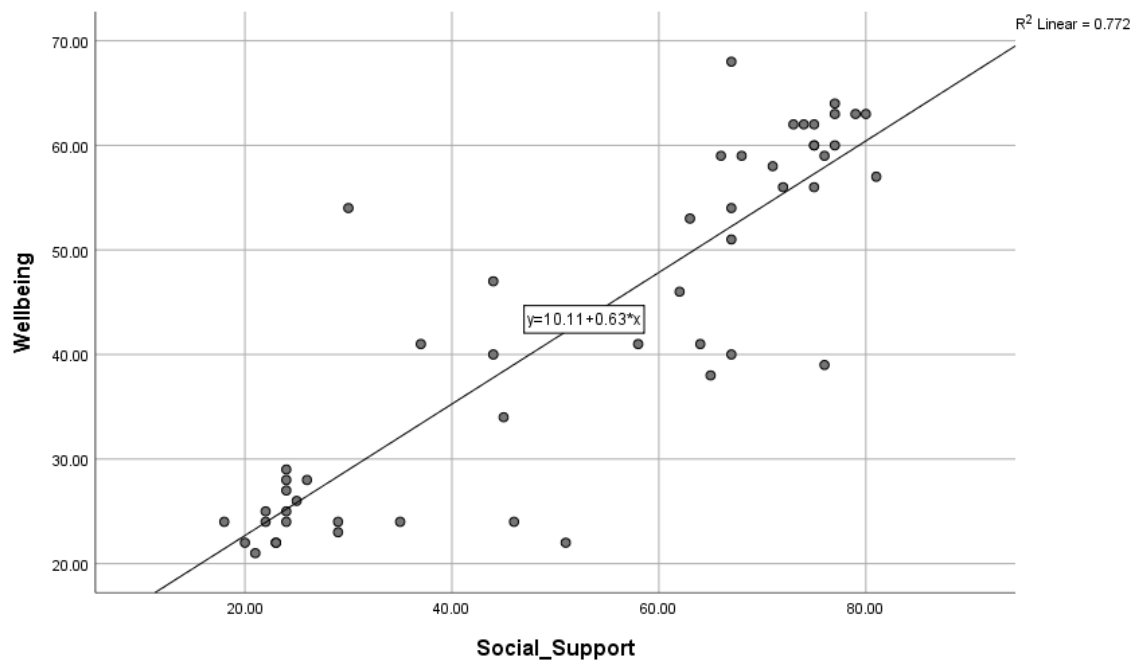
at Step 1, explaining 17% of the variance in Wellbeing. After entry of the Perceived Social Support scale at Step 2 the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 77.8%, $F(2, 48) = 83.93, p < .001$. The control measures explained an additional 61% of variance in wellbeing, after controlling for relationship status, $R^2 \text{ change} = .61, F \text{ change}(1, 48) = 131.61, p < .001$. In the final model Social Support was found statistically significant with the Wellbeing scale ($\beta = .847, p < .001$).

Table 4. Multiple regression model predicting Wellbeing scores within breakup group $N = 51$

	R^2	R^2	B	SE	β	t
	Change					
Step 1	.168**	.168**				
Relationship Status			15.89**	5.05	.410	3.145
Step 2	.778***	.610***				
Social Support			.606***	.053	.847	11.472

Note. $N = 51$; Statistical significance: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

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Fig 1- breakup group N = 51**Hypothesis Three:**

Hypothesis three: Within a sample of individuals who have not had a romantic breakup within the past three months (N = 56), Perceived-Social-Support predicts variation in Wellbeing.

The relationship between Gender and Relationship status on perceived social support was examined within the nonromantic breakup group N = 56.

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the relationship between gender and perceived social support within the nonromantic breakup group. There was a significant difference in males (M = 53.72, SD = 14.26) and females (M = 65.00, SD = 13.86; $t(54) = 2.818$, $p = .007$ two tailed). The magnitude of the difference in means (mean difference = 11.277, 95% CI: 3.25 to 19.30) was large (Cohen's $d = 0.8$) These results deduce that there is a significant difference in gender within the nonromantic breakup group.

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An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the perceived social support within the nonromantic breakup group. There was a significant difference in participants who reported single ($M = 57.37$, $SD = 15.57$) and in a relationship ($M = 66.70$, $SD = 12.167$; $t(54) = -2.43$, $p = .018$ two tailed) The magnitude of the difference in means (mean difference = -9.33 , 95% CI: -17.03 to -1.633) was large (Cohen's $d = 0.6$) These results indicate that there is significant difference between individuals who were single versus in a relationship and their perceived social support within the nonromantic breakup group.

Hierarchical multiple regression was used to investigate the ability of two control measures (Perceived Social Support scale) to predict levels of wellbeing (Wellbeing scale) within the nonromantic breakup group, after controlling for the influence of relationship status and gender (see Table Five). Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity and homoscedasticity. Gender and relationship status was input at Step 1, explaining 8% of the variance in Wellbeing. After entry of the Perceived Social Support scale at Step 2 the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 10%, $F(3, 52) = 1.926$, $p > .05$. The two control measures explained an additional 25% of variance in wellbeing, after controlling for relationship status and gender, $R^2 \text{ change} = .025$, $F \text{ change}(1, 52) = 1.423$, $p > .05$. In the final model Social Support was found not statistically significant with the Wellbeing scale ($\beta = .171$, $p > .05$).

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Table 5. Multiple regression model predicting Wellbeing scores in non-breakup group N=56

	<i>R</i> ²	<i>R</i> ²	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>β</i>	<i>t</i>
	Change					
Step 1	.075	.075				
Relationship Status			-4.466	2.94	-.223	-1.518
Gender			1.881	3.12	.089	.604
Step 2	.100	.025				
Social Support			.115	.096	.171	1.193

Note. N = 56; Statistical significance: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Hypothesis Four:

Hypothesis Four: In a large sample of young adults (N = 107), including individuals who have had a romantic breakup within the past three months (N = 51), and individuals who have not had a romantic breakup within the past three months (N = 56), Perceived-Social-Support predicts variation in Wellbeing.

The relationship between Gender and Relationship status on perceived social support was examined within the overall group N = 107

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the relationship between gender and perceived social support within the overall group. There was no significant difference in males (M = 55.75, SD = 19.05) and females (M = 57.47, SD = 19.77; $t(105) = .451$, $p = .653$ two tailed). The magnitude of the difference in means (mean difference = 1.726, 95% CI: -5.86 to 9.31) was small (Cohen's $d = 0.08$) These results deduce that there is no difference between gender and social support within the overall group.

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An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the perceived social support within the overall group of young adults. There was a significant difference in participants who reported single ($M = 51.70$, $SD = 19.97$) and in a relationship ($M = 67.17$, $SD = 13.24$; $t(105) = -4.152$, $p = .000$ two tailed) The magnitude of the difference in means (mean difference = -15.46 , 95% CI: -22.84 to -8.07) was very large (Cohen's $d = 0.9$) These results indicate that there is significant difference between individuals who were single versus in a relationship and their perceived social support within the overall group.

Hierarchical multiple regression was used to investigate the ability of two control measures (Perceived Social Support scale) to predict levels of wellbeing (Well-being scale) within the overall group, after controlling for the influence of relationship status (see Table 6). Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity and homoscedasticity. Relationship status was input at Step 1, explaining 1.4% of the variance in Wellbeing. After entry of the Perceived Social Support scale at Step 2 the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 39.4%, $F(2, 104) = 34.19$, $p < .001$. The control measures explained an additional 38% of variance in wellbeing, after controlling for relationship status, R^2 change = .038, F change (1, 104) = 66.04, $p < .001$. In the final model Social Support was found statistically significant with the Wellbeing scale within the overall group ($\beta = .668$, $p < .001$).

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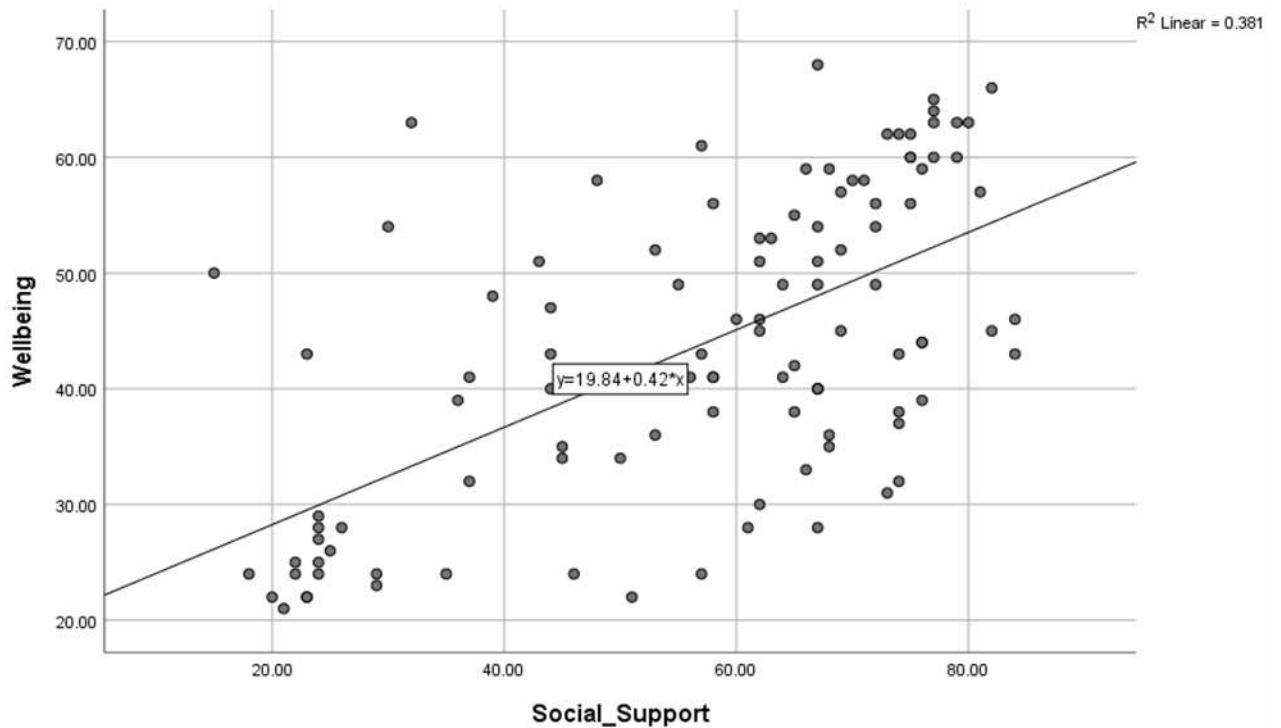
Fig 2- Overall group N = 107

Table 6. Multiple regression model predicting Wellbeing scores within Overall group N=107

	R^2	R^2	B	SE	β	t
	Change					
Step 1	.014	.014				
Relationship Status			3.276	2.72	.117	1.204
Step 2	.397***	.383***				
Social Support			.455***	.056	.668	8.126

Note. N = 107; Statistical significance: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Discussion

The current study aimed to explore the relationship between social support and wellbeing in young adults following a breakup. Young adulthood is understood to be a period in which most mental health problems are revealed (Oxhandler et al., 2018), as well as being a period of major change, as individuals begin to face adult societal pressures (Doeselaar et al., 2018). Young adulthood is also a period in which individuals become increasingly independent from parental and other authoritative figures (Oxhandler et al., 2018). These factors are understood through previous literature to contribute to increasing stress levels; such feelings of stress are researched to negatively affect ones physical and mental wellbeing (Doeselaar et al., 2018). Theories of social support such as the sociometer (Luciano & Orth, 2017) and the social ecological theory, as well as studies of development and mental health highlight the importance of social support in influencing one's overall wellbeing (McDonough et al., 2018).

Through studies of romantic affiliations and research on the effects of romantic breakups, the termination of a romantic relationship has been considered a stressful life event, which can induce negative cognitions and deteriorations in health (Love et al., 2018). As the positive effects of social support has been widely reported in earlier research (McDonough et al., 2018). The current study aimed to investigate the relationship between social support and wellbeing in young adults following a romantic breakup. Although previous literature within youth mental health studies and developmental psychology highlight the importance of social support for the wellbeing of individuals; to the authors knowledge there seems to be a gap in literature when looking at a breakup sample of entirely young adults. Four main hypotheses were explored with results deducing both significant and contradictory results to previous research.

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Hypothesis one stated that “people who have had a romantic breakup within the past three months have a lower Well-being Scale score than people who have not had a romantic-breakup within the past three months ($N = 107$); and there will be a difference between the groups on their levels of perceived social support.” Although individuals who reported to be in a relationship were found to have higher levels of social support, which aligns with previous findings (Whitton et al., 2018). Contrary to previous research, which suggest major deteriorations in wellbeing amongst individuals following a breakup (Love et al., 2018), there was seen to be no difference in wellbeing between the breakup and non-breakup group of young adults. However, the null hypothesis may be significant for further research as three months may be considered an insignificant amount of time to measure wellbeing succeeding a romantic breakup in a young adult population. Studies have also deduced that the duration of the relationship termination may not be the only significant factor in influencing one’s wellbeing after a breakup, as spirituality, sexuality (Hawley et al., 2015) and parenthood may also contribute to individual’s wellbeing after a romantic breakup (Cooper et al., 2009). However, if participants of the current study were instead asked to recall a previous breakup which they found distressing; participants may have been more prone to recall bias.

Hypothesis two stated that “within people who have had a romantic breakup within the past three months, Perceived Social Support score is correlated with and predicts the Well-being Scale score ($N = 51$).” The hypothesis was found to be statistically significant, (see Table 4) with a strong positive correlation between social support and wellbeing within the romantic breakup group $r = .879$, $n = 51$, $p < .001$, and social support strongly predicting wellbeing within the romantic breakup group. The findings correlate with previous research suggesting that social support contributes to the wellbeing of individuals following stress inducing life events (Samuel & Burger, 2019). Further

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research may be necessary to examine whether breakup and non-breakup samples of young adults are the same group or whether three months is considered too long of a time period to measure wellbeing following a breakup; as the breakup sample may be the same as the non-breakup sample after three months. Research in the field of breakup studies and the effects of social support on wellbeing highlight how individuals benefit from sharing stressful breakups with friends or relations as a means of a coping mechanism to mitigate effects of such stressors (Choi & Toma, 2017). Such understandings which are reflected in the current study, may be useful in aiding youth mental health, especially in young adults who have experienced a romantic breakup.

Hypothesis three stated “within a sample of individuals who have not had a romantic breakup within the past three months ($N = 56$), Perceived-Social-Support predicts variation in Wellbeing.” The results of the current study found that social support was not statistically significant in predicting wellbeing in the non-breakup group $\beta = .171$, $p > .05$ (see Table 5). These findings conflict with previous studies, as social support is understood through prior theories and studies to play a role in individuals overall wellbeing (McDonough et al., 2018). As well as being understood to be a protective factor when faced with life stressors, especially amongst young adults as peer relationships are reported to be crucial factor in healthy psychological functioning (Samuolis et al., 2019). However, most psychological research on young adults in the field of social support and wellbeing mainly focuses on vulnerable populations of young adults such as individuals who have problems with addiction or psychological disorders (Ashford et al., 2019). The contrast between the breakup group and the non-breakup group in association between social support and wellbeing may also suggest that social support was a necessary factor for wellbeing in individuals experiencing a breakup, although there is no statistical

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difference in the wellbeing levels of both breakup and non-breakup group as reported in hypothesis one.

Hypothesis Four stated “in a large sample of young adults (N = 107), including individuals who have had a romantic breakup within the past three months (N = 51), and individuals who have not had a romantic breakup within the past three months (N = 56), Perceived-Social-Support predicts variation in Wellbeing.” This hypothesis was found to be statistically significant $\beta = .668, p < .001$ (see Table 6) aligning with previous studies emphasizing the importance of social support on wellbeing amongst young adults. Youth mental health studies vastly explore how social support from family, friends, significant others or communities gives individuals a sense of belonging and connectedness, which is noted to play a vital factor in recovery from feelings of mental distress (Sommer et al., 2019). With both theoretical and empirical research highlighting how perceived social support may give individuals a sense of security and comfort and over all buffering effects of adversities that may be faced (Jakubiak et al., 2019) From such findings as well as the results deduced by hypothesis four, social support may be an effective means to predict wellbeing within a larger population of young adults as well as a breakup population of young adults.

Limitations, Strengths and Future Research

The implications of the current study deduce that social support can be attributed to wellbeing within a breakup sample of young adults N = 51, as well as a larger population of young adults N = 107. However, the study is not without limitations. The current study required young adults’ introspective abilities to score themselves on the scales for both wellbeing and social support which may be subject to response bias. However, as the questionnaires were online based participants were able to complete the

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survey in their own time, as well as having privacy. Participants of the current study were also majority women; future studies may focus more on the differences in gender and breakup recovery within young adults. Another limitation can be seen reflected in hypothesis one, young adults who had broken up in the last three months did not differ in levels of wellbeing in comparison to the non-breakup group however, the null hypothesis may be significant for future research as studies may focus on the wellbeing of a breakup sample of young adults closer to the time of the actual breakup and measure the increase of wellbeing across three months, while measuring factors that may contribute towards the wellbeing. As participants of the current study were only required to be between the ages of 18-25, future studies may investigate if there is a difference in early young adulthood and late young adulthood in terms of wellbeing following a breakup by asking participants to give their exact age. Although the study was not without limitations the study also contained strengths which may benefit future research. The study may contribute to youth mental health studies and future romantic breakup studies, as studies in this field mostly focus on older adults or focus entirely on a college demographics (Lepore & Greenberg, 2002). Future studies may look at young adults who are not currently in third level education and evaluate how a breakup may affect their wellbeing and measure if social support may contribute to their wellbeing. The current study gives insight into a breakup sample of entirely young adults as well as highlighting the significance of social support on wellbeing in a breakup sample of young adults $N = 51$ and a larger sample of young adults $N = 107$.

Conclusion

The existing research aimed to investigate the relationship between social support and wellbeing in a sample of young adults following a breakup. Although results deduced no difference in wellbeing between the romantic breakup group and the non-

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romantic breakup group, social support was still considered to play a factor in the well being of the romantic breakup group $N = 51$ and the overall sample of young adults $N = 107$; suggesting that social support may be factor which predicts wellbeing in individuals. Further research may be necessary to investigate if three months is too long of a time period to investigate the wellbeing of young adults following a romantic breakup or if there is no difference in the breakup and non-break up group of young adults. As well as such findings the current study may be useful for youth mental health studies as it may act as a foundation for future research on a breakup sample of young adults.

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Appendix

Information Page

Purpose of study:

The purpose of this study is to examine well-being in young adults following a breakup.

Criteria for participation:

Individuals who wish to participate must be between the ages of 18-25.

Individuals of all genders, ethnicities and religious backgrounds are free to participate.

Individuals who wish to participate must understand that participation is voluntary and if at any moment participants wish to withdraw, they are able to do so prior to submission.

Once submitted participants will be unable to withdraw as information will be unidentifiable.

Study procedure:

the study involves a series of questionnaires relating to social support and well-being.

Confidentiality:

Only demographical information such as age will be identifiable. Factors such as participants name will be completely confidential and unidentifiable.

NCI board of ethics and the psychology department undergraduate ethics committee will determine if intended study is appropriate and ethical.

Results of the study will be written up and presented.

Benefit of research:

This research will help us to better understand well-being of young people following a breakup

Disadvantages of taking part:

reflecting on a distressing life event such as a breakup may induce negative cognitions. As there is a risk of distress, a debrief sheet will be presented at the end of the survey with numbers to helplines and support services.

Advantage of participating:

Participants will aid in completing my final year research project.

Participants will gain experience in the conduction of a final year project and completing standardized psychology scales.

If any further information is required please feel free to email me at x16377981@student.ncirl.ie or you may email my supervisor at David.Mothersill@ncirl.ie Thank you for taking the time to participate! Your response is highly appreciated!

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Debrief Page

Examining well-being of young adults following a recent romantic breakup
The aim of the current research is to better understand well-being of young adults following a recent breakup

Thank you for participating!

If participants have any further queries, please contact Laurel Benny at
x16377981@student.ncirl.ie

Or my supervisor at David.Mothersill@ncirl.ie

If any feelings of distress have been caused while taking this questionnaire, please contact helplines:

Niteline -1800 793 793- support group for individuals looking for someone to listen and to talk to someone about any emotional distress.

Samaritans - 116-123- support group to help individuals cope with any form of distress.

Pieta House- 1800- 247-247- Support group specialized in individuals who self-harm or have suicidal tendencies. Offers counselling over the course of 4 to 6 weeks one to one.

Aware- 1800-80-48-48- offering help to clients over 18 help involving their moods and mental health

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Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support

(Fam), friends (Fri) or significant other (SO).

Instructions: Reflect on how you feel about the following statements and rate yourself by circling:

(1) if you Very Strongly Disagree

(2) if you Strongly Disagree

(3) if you Mildly Disagree

(4) if you are Neutral

(5) if you Mildly Agree

(6) if you Strongly Agree

(7) if you Very Strongly Agree

1. There is a special person who is around when I am in need. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 SO

2. There is a special person with whom I can share my joys and sorrows. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 SO

3. My family really tries to help me. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Fam

4. I get the emotional help and support I need from my family. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Fam

5. I have a special person who is a real source of comfort to me. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 SO

6. My friends really try to help me. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Fri

7. I can count on my friends when things go wrong. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Fri

8. I can talk about my problems with my family. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Fam

9. I have friends with whom I can share my joys and sorrows. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Fri

10. There is a special person in my life who cares about my feelings. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 SO

11. My family is willing to help me make decisions. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Fam

12. I can talk about my problems with my friends. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Fri

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The Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS)

Below are some statements about feelings and thoughts.

Please tick the box that best describes your experience of each over the last 2 weeks

STATEMENTS

- 1. None of the time**
- 2. Rarely**
- 3. Some of the time**
- 4. Often**
- 5. All of the time**

1. I've been feeling optimistic about the future 1 2 3 4 5
2. I've been feeling useful 1 2 3 4 5
3. I've been feeling relaxed 1 2 3 4 5
4. I've been feeling interested in other people 1 2 3 4 5
5. I've had energy to spare 1 2 3 4 5
6. I've been dealing with problems well 1 2 3 4 5
7. I've been thinking clearly 1 2 3 4 5
8. I've been feeling good about myself 1 2 3 4 5
9. I've been feeling close to other people 1 2 3 4 5
10. I've been feeling confident 1 2 3 4 5
11. I've been able to make up my own mind about things 1 2 3 4 5
12. I've been feeling loved 1 2 3 4 5
13. I've been interested in new things 1 2 3 4 5
14. I've been feeling cheerful 1 2 3 4 5