

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT AND RESILIENCE AMONG VIETNAMESE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS:

A Case Study Of Students At The University Of Social Sciences And Humanities, Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City

Nguyen Van Tuong^{1,2*}

Huynh Phat Dat^{1,2}

Doan Khai Hung^{1,2}

Pham Thach Phu Tan^{1,2}

¹*University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam*

²*Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam*

Abstract: Resilience has long been recognized as a critical factor in navigating life's adversities, enabling individuals to adapt to challenges and recover from setbacks. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of resilience has gained renewed attention, particularly among vulnerable populations such as university students, who face unique stressors related to academic, social, and personal development. This study explores the relationship between perceived social support and resilience among university students in Vietnam, emphasizing the role of supportive relationships in fostering adaptive capacities. Using a survey method and statistical analysis through SPSS 20.0, data were collected from 2,031 students at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City. The findings highlight the positive impact of perceived social support from three key sources—family, friends, and significant others—on resilience, with family support emerging as the most influential factor. This research underscores the importance of nurturing supportive networks to bolster resilience in university students, especially in a post-pandemic context where adaptability and mental health are paramount.

INTRODUCTION

For individuals to quickly adapt to life's obstacles, recent studies in Vietnam have highlighted the critical role of resilience across various aspects of life. For instance, in research conducted by Ho Thi Truc Quynh et al., resilience was identified as a key factor in alleviating depression, reducing academic stress, and enhancing life satisfaction.¹ Additionally, when considering the importance of resilience during societal crises, Nguyen Thu Trang et al. conducted a study evaluating resilience during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, emphasizing its significant role in improving mental health among university students.² Given the importance of resilience, exploring its relationships with other factors to enhance resilience is imperative.

A prominent area of focus is identifying factors associated with resilience. Perceived social support significantly contributes to resilience. Individuals with higher perceived social support often exhibit greater resilience.³ Studies on the mediating role of resilience have revealed that enhancing resilience yields positive outcomes in enhancing the effects of perceived social support. Research by Zhang et al. indicated that resilience significantly influences the enhancement of perceived social support in reducing psychological distress.⁴

Despite clear evidence of a close relationship between resilience and perceived social support, research in Vietnam remains limited and faces several challenges. Specifically, there is a lack of detailed analysis and explanation regarding the different types of social support that individuals perceive. This limitation hinders a deeper understanding of which types of perceived social support have the most substantial impact on resilience. Moreover, few studies have assessed students' perceived social support in the post-COVID-19 period. Additionally, many studies have used limited sample sizes, resulting in findings that lack sufficient representativeness and diversity, particularly regarding Vietnamese university students' perceptions of social support and resilience.

This study investigates and clarifies the sources of social support students perceive, especially during the current post-pandemic period. By using a larger sample size, the study seeks to enhance the representativeness of its findings, addressing some limitations of previous research. This emphasizes the role of perceived social support in influencing students' resilience. This study aims to delve deeper into the connection between perceived social support and students' resilience, ultimately offering a useful reference for researchers to build upon in their examination of this subject.

Perceived Social Support

Social support is a broad concept comprising multiple constituent dimensions, and it is essential to clearly define these foundational concepts to accurately measure specific types of social support. We categorize social support into two main types: actual social support received by an individual (Received

Social Support) and the individual's perceived social support (Perceived Social Support).⁵ Studies have demonstrated a certain relationship between these types, with perceived social support being recognized as a key factor for better resilience.⁶ Our research evaluates and measures perceived social support.

Typically, when referring to perceived social support, research often mentions the individual's subjective self-assessment, assuming that sources of support are always available whenever the individual needs them to overcome challenges. Haber et al. defined perceived social support as individuals' awareness of the availability and accessibility of support resources when they require help.⁷

Expanding further on this definition, perceived social support also includes the emotional satisfaction and sense of self-worth individuals experience when they believe they are being supported. Perceived social support is often an individual's evaluation of the level of support they receive, the care they experience, and the value they feel in their relationships.⁸

The content of perceived social support typically includes both material and emotional aspects, reflecting positive beliefs in the support provided by the community and surrounding social relationships. Perceived social support is the subjective feeling of an individual that reflects the belief that there are always social relationships ready to help them when they encounter difficulties, both through material and emotional support.⁶

When evaluating the components of perceived social support, this study focuses more on resources derived from social networks than the content of the resources, such as material values, tools, and emotional and mental aspects. Instead, we provide a clearer explanation of the sources and forms of support from key sources. Perceived social support is an individual's subjective awareness of their satisfaction with the support they receive from three main sources: family, friends, and significant others.⁵

In our study, instead of measuring perceived social support based on the classification of its nature and content—such as emotional assistance, sharing of information, or material and instrumental support⁹—we focused on the classification of three main sources of support within social networks (family, friends, and significant others), as proposed by Zimet et al.⁵

a. Family Support

Family support refers to close, familial relationships characterized by mutual care and sharing among family members. This source of support is often perceived as accessible and intimate for students, providing emotional satisfaction, financial assistance, and guidance to help them navigate life's challenges. It establishes a foundation of security and companionship, thus ensuring that individuals do not face difficulties alone during their developmental journey.⁵

The family plays a crucial role as a solid resource that enhances individual resilience. A positive perception of family relationships can help students overcome academic pressures and personal challenges.⁵ In Eastern contexts, family support is often regarded as the cornerstone of social support systems.¹¹

A lack of family support can lead to issues such as difficulty managing emotions, reduced social adaptability, and conflicts in friendships.¹²

b. Friend Support

Friend support refers to an individual's perception of their friends' willingness to help during challenging times and emphasizes the perceived effectiveness of the assistance they expect to receive. This support is demonstrated through encouragement, active listening, and empathy.⁵

Unlike family support, friend support plays a greater role in sharing life experiences, fostering empathy, and providing necessary assistance. This form of support helps build a sense of community belonging and enhances self-awareness.¹⁰

Friend support is particularly characterized by sharing emotions when understanding is difficult in family contexts. Additionally, it fosters a sense of community, increasing individuals' perception of social connectedness.¹³ Friend support is often more evident in daily activities, providing companionship during social engagements, sharing obstacles and joys more freely, and offering help when needed.¹⁴

c. Significant Others or "Special Person" Support

Some social relationships extend beyond familial ties and peer connections, such as friendships. A significant other, or "special person," is considered a distinct relationship that fosters trust and emotional security. This relationship serves as a safe space where individuals feel confident sharing their challenges. Examples include life partners or romantic partners who contribute to individuals' emotional and material well-being as they face life's difficulties.⁵

Significant others may also emerge from academic or social environments, such as teachers, educational personnel, and members of social organizations that provide support services.¹⁵

When examining the support provided by significant others in relation to resilience, a close connection with a significant other can create a sense of safety and assist students in developing essential coping skills for stress, ultimately enhancing resilience.¹⁶

Definition of Resilience

Resilience has various definitions and approaches, and to measure resilience accurately, it is essential to establish clear criteria. This section clarifies the key concepts and outlines the theoretical framework of resilience that this study seeks to measure.

A meta-analysis by Windle et al. defined resilience as the process of negotiating, managing, and adapting to significant stressors or trauma. This study highlights the interaction between internal personal resources and external environmental factors that enable individuals to adapt and recover from adversity. The life stages and individual resilience experiences continuously evolve and vary. This study focuses on examining how perceived social support facilitates or hinders resilience.¹⁷

The American Psychological Association defined resilience as the ability to adapt when confronted with trauma, adversity, tragedy, or ongoing severe stressors in one's life.¹⁸

It is important to consider the presence of resilience and the contexts in which resilience is clearly demonstrated. Masten et al. defined resilience as successful adaptation despite significant risks that could hinder the process. They outline two core components: (1) the presence of risks, tragedies, or adversities that disrupt normal developmental processes, and (2) positive adaptation to these circumstances. The authors also discuss the risks individuals may encounter and the need for appropriate resources to overcome such risks. Adequate resources and a stable environment reduce the occurrence of risks; however, resilience may become less evident under such circumstances. When examining resilience, it is essential to evaluate the criteria for adaptation to reflect how well individuals adjust, particularly in the cultural and societal contexts in which they live. This highlights that assessing resilience goes beyond measuring one's coping ability or resistance to adversity; it also involves learning and growing from negative experiences.¹⁹

Rather than focusing on the presence of adverse events in an individual's developmental journey, some definitions prioritize adaptation and overcoming challenges despite obstacles. Luthar, Cicchetti, and Becker defined resilience as a dynamic process involving positive adversity adaptation.²⁰ Similarly, Kurlychek et al. described resilience as consisting of two main components: (1) the ability to confront threats or severe adversity, and (2) the capacity for positive adaptation despite challenges.²¹

Based on the core aspects of resilience discussed, we align with several perspectives that comprehensively capture measured resilience. These include:

An individual's capacity to cope with adversity encompasses resilience, which enables them to successfully navigate difficult circumstances, obstacles, and life's stressors. In addition to coping with difficulties, it involves recovery and positive adaptation to adversity, such as stress, psychological trauma, or other negative events.²²

Resilience is the capacity of an individual to respond constructively to traumatic experiences, adversity, or high-pressure situations. It also involves gaining experience and personal development by coping with difficulties.²³

Resilience is not a single characteristic but a construct formed by multiple factors, including self-regulation, persistence, adaptability to change, and stress management. These factors are expressed through emotional regulation, perseverance in achieving goals, optimism in facing challenges, and humor in overcoming difficulties.²² According to Campbell-Sills and Stein, these elements are not strong enough to form separate factors but are closely interconnected, contributing to a single core concept of resilience.²²

Building on the work of Campbell-Sills and Stein, Nguyen Ngoc Quynh Anh and Dinh Thi Hong Van adapted a resilience scale suitable for the Vietnamese context. Resilience is reflected and measured through two main constructs: (1) RES-Optimism, which provides information about optimism, confidence, and

adaptability in addressing challenging situations, such as difficulties, failures, or maintaining activities under pressure, and (2) RES-Coping, which focuses on individual responses or coping strategies when encountering negative life events.²³

For this study, we adopt the conceptualization and single-factor structure of resilience proposed by Campbell-Sills and Stein, where resilience is treated as a unified construct rather than divided into multiple dimensions.²²

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Survey Sample

Based on Watson's sample size calculation formula, an estimated 385-390 students were required to ensure representativeness (out of a total population of 13,000 students).²⁴ Our study collected data from 2,031 students using a survey method with convenient, non-probability sampling (meeting the representativeness criteria as per the sample selection formula). The research was conducted from October 16, 2024, to November 10, 2024, through online student groups on Facebook at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City. The sample characteristics are summarized in Table 1.

Demographic Variables		Quantity	Weightage (%)
Gender	Male	261	12.9
	Female	1770	87.1
Academic Cohort	First year	936	46.1
	Second year	549	27.0
	Third year	360	17.7
	Fourth year	186	9.2
Economic Condition	Difficult	110	5.4
	Average	1615	79.5
	Well-off	304	15.0
	Wealthy	2	0.1

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Survey Sample

Research Methodology

This study employs a quantitative approach, combining survey methods with statistical data analysis, to align with the research purpose of examining the relationship between perceived social support and resilience among university students. This methodology was chosen for its ability to collect data from a large

sample and provide reliable, generalizable insights into how different sources of social support influence resilience. The survey method enables the direct measurement of students' perceptions, while statistical analysis ensures an objective evaluation of the relationships between variables.

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) developed by Zimet et al. in 1988 was used to assess perceived social support as defined by Zimet et al.⁵ This scale is particularly suited for the study's purpose as it captures three distinct sources of support—family, friends, and significant others—providing a comprehensive view of social support systems. The scale consists of 12 items that reflect three different sources of support: (1) family; (2) friends; and (3) significant others. Each source comprises four items that were assessed on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Completely Disagree) to 7 (Completely Agree). The scale has been standardized for use in Vietnam.²⁵ The reliability analysis showed good overall reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.849), with item-total correlations ranging from 0.336 to 0.704.

Resilience was measured using the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC), which initially included 25 items but was reduced to 10 items (CD-RISC-10) by Campbell-Sills and Stein.²² This scale aligns with the research purpose by capturing the core aspects of resilience, such as adaptability and stress management, in a concise format. The scale consists of 10 items answered on a 5-point scale: 1 - Not True at All, 2 - Rarely True, 3 - Sometimes True, 4 - Often True, and 5 - Almost Always True. This scale has been adapted for use in Vietnam.²³ The reliability analysis showed good overall reliability, with the removal of item R8 due to an insufficient item-total correlation. The remaining items demonstrated item-total correlations ranging from 0.450 to 0.642.

This methodological approach effectively supports the study's goal of identifying the factors contributing to resilience by using validated scales tailored to the Vietnamese context and leveraging statistical tools for robust data analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the descriptive statistical analysis, the students rated social support quite high in the two aspects of family, friends, and significant others as 5.32, 5.18, and 3.91 on average. In addition, students rated resilience at 3.91, which is on average. In addition, the aspects of social support and resilience had similar mean, median, and mode. The skewness and kurtosis of these variables are also close to 0. This indicates that the dataset of variables had an approximately normal distribution.

Variables	Range	Mean	Median	Mode	SD.	Skewness	Kurtosis
Family	0-7	5.32	5.50	6.00	1.190	-.728	.230
Friend	0-7	5.18	5.25	6.00	1.213	-.675	.200
Significant others	0-7	3.91	4.00	1.00	2.198	-.020	-1.460
Resilience	1-5	3.37	3.33	3.00	.645	-.011	.156

Table 2: Descriptive statistical results of social support components and students' resilience

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis indicated that all three components of social support were positively and significantly correlated with students' resilience ($p < 0.01$). Among these, perception of support from family shows the strongest correlation ($r = 0.183$), followed by perception of support from significant others ($r = 0.176$), and perception of support from friends ($r = 0.173$). Additionally, the demographic characteristics of the survey sample provide an enriched context to understand these relationships, reflecting the nuanced and culturally embedded nature of support systems in Vietnam.

Family Support and Resilience

Family support emerged as the strongest predictor of resilience ($r = 0.183$, $p < 0.05$), consistent with collectivist cultural values in Vietnam, where family is often the primary source of emotional and practical support.²⁶ The survey results further confirmed this finding, with 63% of participants rating "My family really tries to help me" (F3) at the highest level (7) and 61.1% scoring "I receive emotional and practical support from my family" (F4) at levels 6 or 7. This indicates that family provides a stabilizing influence during stressful periods, enabling students to maintain a sense of security and confidence. Family support was particularly significant for first-year students, who comprised 46.1% of the sample. These students face significant transitions, such as adjusting to university life, developing independence, and navigating academic challenges. The strong reliance on family aligns with research suggesting that family acts as a psychological anchor during life transitions.¹⁷

Additionally, families in Vietnam often play an integral role in financial support, with 79.5% of respondents reporting an "average" economic condition. This dual role of emotional and financial support likely contributes to students' resilience in coping with academic pressures. Interestingly, the relationship between family support and resilience appears more nuanced among students from "difficult" economic conditions (5.4% of the sample). These students may experience greater financial strain, which could limit the family's capacity to provide consistent support. This finding suggests the need for targeted interventions to address economically disadvantaged students' unique vulnerabilities, such as university-sponsored financial aid and counseling programs that strengthen family dynamics.

Friend Support and Resilience

Friend support also significantly predicted resilience ($r=0.173$, $p<0.05$), underscoring the critical role of peer relationships in the university context. The survey results highlighted the importance of friendships, with over 60% of respondents rating "I can count on my friends during difficult times" (M7) at levels 6 or 7. Similarly, the ability to share problems with friends (M12) was rated highly by over 70% of respondents, emphasizing the role of friends as emotional confidants. The importance of friend support varied across the academic cohorts. Second- and third-year students, who together comprised 44.7% of the sample, demonstrated higher reliance on friends, likely reflecting stronger peer networks established over time. As students progress through university, they increasingly depend on friends to navigate shared experiences, such as academic stress and personal challenges. This aligns with Arnett's theory of emerging adulthood, which posits that peer relationships become central to identity exploration and emotional development during this life stage.³² In Vietnam, where modernizing influences intersect with traditional values, peer relationships provide a unique avenue for emotional support. Students may turn to friends for issues they feel uncomfortable discussing with family, such as mental health difficulties or romantic relationships. This highlights the need for universities to foster peer networks through initiatives like mentorship programs, group counseling, and extracurricular activities. These programs enhance the resilience-building effects of friendships by creating safe spaces for emotional sharing and mutual support.

Significant Others and Resilience

The relationship between significant others and resilience ($r=0.176$, $p < 0.05$) was characterized by greater variability compared to family and friend support. The survey data revealed that although some respondents reported strong support from significant others, others experienced low levels of support. For example, the mean score for significant others (3.91) was notably lower than those for family (5.32) and friends (5.18). Additionally, the mode for significant others (1) indicates that a significant proportion of respondents reported minimal support from this source. This variability may reflect the transient nature of romantic relationships during university years. Fourth-year students, who comprised 9.2% of the sample, may face unique challenges in balancing romantic relationships with the pressures of preparing for post-graduation life. Furthermore, cultural norms in Vietnam often prioritize academic and familial responsibilities over romantic commitments, which could limit the role of significant others in providing consistent support. Despite these challenges, significant others can play a meaningful role in resilient students who report stable and supportive relationships. Items such as "There is a special person who cares about my feelings" (S10) received moderately high ratings, suggesting that significant others contribute to individuals' emotional well-being. These findings align with the Connor-Davidson Resilience Model, which emphasizes the importance of external support systems in bolstering internal coping

mechanisms.³³ To address the variability in this dimension, universities should consider offering relationship counseling services to help students navigate romantic challenges and build healthy emotional connections. Programs that promote emotional self-reliance and communication skills can further enhance students' resilience, even in the absence of consistent support from significant others.

Demographic Influences on Resilience

Demographic information about the participants provided further insights into the dynamics of social support and resilience. Gender distribution, with 87.1% female respondents, suggests that the findings predominantly reflect the experiences of women, who are often more likely to seek and benefit from social support networks.¹⁷ This gender imbalance highlights the need for further research to explore how male students experience and use social support, particularly given the cultural stigmas surrounding men's emotional expression. Economic conditions also play a significant role in shaping resilience. Students from "average" or "well-off" economic backgrounds reported higher levels of perceived support, reflecting their families' greater capacity to provide financial and emotional resources. Conversely, students from "difficult" economic conditions may face compounded stressors, limiting their access to consistent support. These findings underscore the importance of addressing economic disparities through targeted interventions, such as scholarship and financial counseling. Academic cohort further influenced resilience, with first-year students relying more heavily on family support, while second- and third-year students placed greater emphasis on peer relationships. Fourth-year students, who face the added pressure of transitioning into professional roles, demonstrated more variability in their reliance on significant others. The identified patterns underscore the necessity for support strategies that can be customized to address the specific obstacles encountered by students at distinct phases of their academic development.

Resilience as a Multidimensional Construction

Survey responses on resilience items provide a nuanced understanding of students' adaptive capacities. High ratings on items such as "I can adapt to changes" (R1) and "Dealing with stress makes me stronger" (R7) suggest that students view themselves as capable of managing adversity. These findings align with previous research emphasizing the role of social support in enhancing adaptability and stress tolerance.³³ However, moderate scores on items like "I can manage emotions like sadness or fear" (R19) indicate a relative gap in emotional regulation skills. This gap is particularly relevant for male students (12.9% of the sample) who may face cultural stigmas in seeking emotional support. Addressing this issue requires targeted interventions that promote emotional resilience through strategies such as mindfulness, cognitive-behavioral techniques, and stress inoculation training.

The results revealed a positive correlation between all three sources of perceived social support and resilience. Individuals who feel that they receive higher levels of support from these sources generally exhibit greater resilience. Among these, family support was identified as the most significant predictor of resilience. This aligns with the findings of Lakzaei et al., in which family support also showed the highest correlation ($r = 0.42$, $p < 0.0001$), followed by support from significant others and, finally, friends.³⁰ These results underscore the critical role of family as a foundational social support system. The perception of lacking family support can greatly decrease one's ability to adapt to challenges and manage stressors.

However, some studies have presented contradictory results. Hamdan-Mansour et al. found that support from friends was more strongly correlated with resilience.²⁶ This difference highlights an important aspect: peer relationships often provide empathy for the difficulties and challenges students encounter. Support from friends has become increasingly significant in high-pressure academic environments, where students have limited opportunities to share their concerns with their families. This is especially true in contexts where family communication is limited or distant.²⁷ Additionally, studying away from home can lead students to perceive family support as less present.²⁸

In conclusion, further research is required to analyze and explain the differences in perceptions of various sources of social support to identify those that best predict student resilience. This will help establish and enhance critical support systems to improve resilience.

Correlation Analysis	Family	Friend	Significant others
Resilience	0.183**	0.173**	0.176**

Remark: **sig.<0.05

Table 3: Pearson Correlation Analysis of the Components of Social Support and Students' Resilience

The univariate regression analysis shows that the Durbin-Watson coefficient falls within the range of 1.5-2.5, indicating no first-order autocorrelation. The significance coefficients (sig.) from the ANOVA and coefficient tests confirm the statistical significance of the regression analysis ($p = 0.000$). All components of social support can explain variations in students' resilience. The standardized Beta coefficients are positive, indicating that all components of social support positively impact students' resilience. Specifically, the results demonstrate that perceptions of support from family, significant others, and friends explain 3.3%, 3.1%, and 2.9% of the variance in students' resilience, respectively.

Component	Summary model		ANOVA	Coefficients		
	Adjusted R ²	Durbin-Watson	F (sig.)	B	Beta	t (sig.)
Family	0.033	2.038	0.000	0.071	0.131	0.000
Friend	0.029	2.029	0.000	0.054	0.102	0.000
Significant others	0.031	2.033	0.000	0.40	0.136	0.000

Table 4: Impact of each component of social support on students' resilience.

The regression analysis results revealed that students' perceptions of family support had the strongest positive impact on resilience. This finding aligns partially with the study by Lamei and Hui, who also found that resilience is most influenced by perceptions of family support.³¹ However, significant differences exist between their study and ours. Their research focused on students in private schools, where peer relationships were less effective, and was conducted in the Chinese cultural context, which places high value on family. In this context, family is often a source of security and motivation for students to overcome challenges. Additionally, an important indicator to note is that their study demonstrated that in families experiencing divorce or a lack of cohesion, perceptions of family support decrease significantly, which directly impacts students' resilience.

It is undeniable that students' perceptions of family support significantly impact their resilience. However, in studies conducted in different contexts, the influence of support from friends and significant others was more substantial. Narayanan and Weng Onn also highlighted the importance of family support, but their findings revealed that support from friends had a stronger positive effect on students.³⁰ The reason for this is largely due to the fact that students typically spend most of their time studying, which makes interactions and communication with friends a central part of their daily routine, resulting in a clearer understanding of their friends' support.

However, in some other studies, significant others were considered the most influential factor in enhancing resilience. Najafi and Belil, in the context of families with chronically ill members, found that the perception of support from significant others was a more substantial contributor to improving students' resilience.²⁹ In such contexts, family support is less profound because of the challenges associated with chronic illness. Outside the immediate family and social circle, support from healthcare and social organizations is crucial for

students in overcoming challenges and enabling families to manage the impact of illness.

To fully understand the varying effects of diverse social support sources on resilience, additional research is required to clarify these distinctions. This will enable the development of models and solutions that significantly predict improvements in students' resilience. Additionally, careful consideration must be given to selecting appropriate social support sources tailored to specific groups. Differences in context and individual characteristics may render certain sources of support less effective in enhancing students' resilience.

CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that most perceptions of social support significantly influence students' resilience. In this study, family support was the strongest predictor compared with the other two sources of support. However, these results require further theoretical and practical analysis to identify the critical aspects of determining which social support sources should be prioritized in specific situations and contexts.

The study has several notable strengths, including a substantial sample size and significant contributions to theoretical clarity and comprehension of the connection between perceptions of social support and resilience among Vietnamese students, but it also has certain limitations. This study does not thoroughly examine the theoretical underpinnings of the different levels of impact that various sources of social support have on resilience in different settings, for example, in cases where support from peers may be a more reliable indicator. Additionally, the research has yet to develop predictive models or practical solutions to improve students' resilience through social support. Future studies are recommended to address these gaps, clarify the relationships further, and develop models and solutions to enhance resilience effectively.

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