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Predicting South Korean University Students' Happiness through Social Support and Efficacy Beliefs

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Abstract This study investigated the adversity and coping experiences of 198 South Korean university students and takes a cultural lens in understanding how social and individual factors shape their happiness. Hierarchical linear regression analyses suggest that Korean students' perceptions of social support significantly predicted their happiness, particularly in their closer social circles. Additionally, their happiness was significantly shaped by their beliefs in their abilities to overcome difficult experiences, but not by their beliefs in maintaining their relationships. Findings demonstrate the importance of better preparing close family and friends to recognize and respond to warning signs, as well as exploring ways to build students' internal coping assets within family and peer group settings.

Keywords Depression · Happiness · Social support · Self-efficacy · Korean · Students · Adolescence

Introduction

According to a recent large-scale study conducted by the South Korean government, South Korea scored lowest on happiness among 30 other industrialized countries in the world, followed by Romania and Poland (Park 2014). The national report associated students' low happiness scores to stressors such as academic performance, school violence and cyberbullying, and Internet addiction. With unhappiness seemingly on the rise in the country, especially among students, South Koreans are now recognizing mental health as an urgent issue of national concern and are looking for ways to foster happiness among students. Government officials and educators, however, have only recently made a serious effort to address

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the problem within the past decade. As such, there is a great need for research that investigates the reasons behind happiness or lack thereof, as well as providing insights into strategies for devising prevention and intervention programs for at-risk students.

One area of positive psychology in particular examines individuals' subjective well-being and how strengthening young people's skills and competencies may result in greater well-being (Diener 2000). Subjective well-being (SWB), more conversationally known as "happiness," refers to people's evaluations of their lives as worthwhile (Diener 2000). According to Diener, individuals evaluate their SWB both cognitively and affectively (Diener et al. 1999). The affective component of SWB encompasses both the pleasant and unpleasant emotions and moods individuals experience in response to different life events or circumstances. The cognitive component of SWB, on the other hand, describes people's cognitive assessments of their own life satisfactions. As studies continue to show the importance of considering cultural contexts in conceptualizing happiness (cf., Kim et al. 2007; Layous et al. 2013), there is greater need for studies that differentiate between individualistic and collectivistic notions of well-being, particularly in considering healthy coping mechanisms.

While studies on the topic of SWB, and of the SWB of South Koreans in particular, have been numerous, not many have investigated culturally sensitive nuances within the individual and social factors that shape their SWB. More specifically, the sharp distinctions between different social relationships within the Korean culture call for studies that distinguish their various types and their differing levels of intimacy within the South Korean population in particular. Additionally, studies have highlighted the importance of individual characteristics like self-efficacy, or the confidence in one's ability to achieve a desired outcome in determining SWB. Many such measures, however, have not included measures of social efficacy beliefs, which gives due consideration to one's relationships in determining SWB, the core of the South Korean identity.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how specific types of social and individual coping mechanisms predict South Korean university students' SWB in the midst of difficult life situations. We assessed SWB by examining students' level of happiness. The study addressed two main research questions: 1) What types of adversities do South Korean university students face during their college years?, and, 2) How do these adversity experiences work together with resilience efficacy beliefs (individual and social) and social support from relationships of varying degrees of intimacy to predict students' level of happiness? The overarching goal was to better understand the problems that are common among South Korean youth, as well as culture-specific ways to promote positive mental health among university students. Understanding SWB from a cultural perspective may provide valuable insight into addressing unhappiness issues not only among South Korean nationals, but also among Korean heritage students who show similar trends in well-being in other parts of the world like the U.S. (Lee and Padilla 2014).

Social Support and Happiness

Social support refers to the availability of others who care about and value an individual, providing emotional, practical, informational, and evaluative support within his or her relationships (Tardy 1985). In understanding South Koreans' conceptualization of happiness, studies have shown that their definition of happiness derives from their collectivistic orientation (Suh 2000). The South Korean "self" exists in relation to others and is fundamentally defined within the social context. Therefore, they not only derive happiness from maintaining

good relationships with those around them (Kwan et al. 1997), but also regulate their happiness based on both affect and socially normative standards (Suh 2000). While numerous research studies have looked at definitions and correlates of happiness among South Koreans, more research is needed that examines how South Koreans relate to their social context when coping with their emotions.

Zimet et al. (1988) proposed that social support is best understood by gauging a person's subjective satisfaction with their different support systems. They described social support as multifaceted and believed that scholars ought to distinguish between distinct sources of support—namely, family, friends, and significant others. Sampling 275 undergraduate students from Duke University, Zimet et al. (1988) found that support from family was more inversely related to negative perceptions of well-being than support from friends and significant others. There were also gender differences, with females reporting greater supports from friends and a significant other than males, but also experiencing greater symptoms of anxiety and depression. Yet, it was the males that highlighted a stronger connection between their peer support and depressive symptoms.

Recent research further demonstrates that social support serves as an important predictor of positive mental health among adolescents and young adults. A large-scale study on a random sample of college students in the U.S. (Hefner and Eisenberg 2009) revealed that those with lower quality social support experienced a six-fold risk of depressive symptoms relative to students with high quality social support. In collectivistic cultures such as India, a study on 100 postgraduate University of Delhi students (Mahanta and Aggarwal 2013) showed that there was, indeed, a strong connection between life satisfaction and perceived social support. While male and female Indian students did not differ on their perceived support from family members, females reported having higher perceptions of support from friends. These results mirror Zimet et al.'s (1988) results with regard to gender differences. Contrasting with Zimlet et al.'s results, though, is Mahanta and Aggarwal's discovery that females had higher levels of life satisfaction than males, specifically with regard to their satisfaction with their life conditions, perceptions of closeness to their ideal life, and feelings of life stability.

For South Koreans in particular, students gain much of their support from their parents, who often express their relational focus through parent devotion, support, and sacrifice for their children (Kim and Park 2005). If and when their conditions are too difficult to handle by themselves, Koreans may seek informal resources and remedies within the family; but rarely are psychological disorders taken outside of the family (Shin 2002). While a number of other factors have been found to contribute significantly to students' subjective well-being, research shows that it is ultimately Korean adolescents' contentment with family, self, and living environment that promotes their global life satisfaction (Park and Huebner 2005).

Friends also play an increasingly prominent role in the lives of South Korean students once they enter university, and spend less time at home and more time with their peers. Although they may not directly address emotional issues, friends can indirectly influence students' SWB through mere perceptions of their friendships and shared participation in extracurricular activities. In one study, Taylor et al. (2007) found that for Asian heritage participants, simply thinking about a group of people that they were close to and writing about the different aspects of the group that they valued reduced their stress levels, as measured by both psychological and biological indicators. In another large-scale study of 5333 South Korean young adults, participating in gatherings with friends, volunteering, and taking part in religious and job activities was also related to reduced suicidal ideations (Park et al. 2010).

In light of their collectivistic orientation, research on help-seeking behaviors beyond family and friends indicate that South Koreans tend to avoid counseling or psychotherapy, despite great need. A qualitative study on Korean heritage immigrants in the U.S. found that depressed individuals engaged in multiple steps before reaching out to formal mental health services (Shin 2002). In that study, Shin identified four specific stages: solitary coping (e.g., self-reliance and prayer); family and friends; formal services (e.g., primary care, traditional practitioners, minister); and psychiatric services. In this typology, the severity of the mental illness determined how long it took for the person to seek adequate care, and Shin reported that on average it took 5.3 years before participants in the study first sought out psychiatric consultation. These results confirm the findings of other cross-cultural studies that show that Asian Americans typically seek treatment considerably later than African Americans (2.9 years) and Caucasian Americans (1.7 years) (Lin et al. 1982). Many Koreans are often unable to move beyond stages 1 and 2 of help-seeking because they believe that they must overcome mental health issues through their own willpower, thus keeping their difficulties to themselves or downplaying the seriousness of the issue. Participants who are showing signs of severe depression may be assisted by their family members, as long as they are not physically ill or do not show signs of physically endangering others or themselves (Shin 2002).

In handling mental health issues, Korean families typically want to maintain confidentiality, for fear of others' negative perceptions if their emotional problems are exposed. The strong stigma against mental illness and utilization of mental health services originates from the Korean values of "saving one's face" and maintaining family honor and dignity in front of other community members (Lee 1999). Unfortunately, this is one of the most prominent reasons why Koreans, and more generally Asians, underutilize mental health services. Koreans typically judge the social costs of proclaiming a mental illness as far too great in comparison to finding relief from their condition (Shin 2002).

Self-Efficacy and Happiness

Working in partnership with environmental factors in the form of social support, individual factors such as self-efficacy can buffer the negative effects of adversity on mental health. Bandura (1997) proposed that self-efficacy, or the belief in one's ability to produce a desired outcome, shapes the way individuals think, feel, behave, and motivate themselves. In Bandura's model, characteristic attainments of the individual play a key role in effecting positive and negative outcomes. Bandura found a strong negative association between self-efficacy and the biochemical elements in neural functions that have been noted to cause depression. Accordingly, Bandura proposed the idea that all types of depression arose from "a profound sense of personal inefficacy to bring about positive outcomes that give satisfaction to one's life" (p. 347).

Bandura's model of self-efficacy complements the deeply rooted Korean cultural tradition of Confucianism that places great importance on personal effort in achieving success (Kim and Park 2003). Koreans believe that self-cultivation comes through their hard work in gaining an education, which fosters the Confucian virtues of "human-heartedness" and "righteousness." These virtues would ultimately serve to maintain societal harmony, and so education, in this sense, became a moral duty (Kim and Lee 2004). South Koreans typically evaluated their progress through the civil service examination; the fundamental way to access power and socio-economic mobility through personal effort.

Several studies have confirmed the significance of Bandura's self-efficacy in shaping Korean mental health. For instance, Kim and Park (2005) conducted a study on 3095 Korean youths (K-12), and demonstrated that social support increased self-efficacy, and that self-efficacy was positively related to happiness and school performance. Findings from Park et al.'s (2000) large-scale, cross-sectional study on Korean students further revealed that in addition to having a significant influence on academic achievement, students' sense of self-efficacy was directly related to life satisfaction. This result was consistent amongst elementary, middle, and high school grade levels.

Caprara et al. (2006) examined the influence of adolescent efficacy beliefs on happiness and positive thinking among 664 Italian students in Rome. They, too, found that adolescents' beliefs in maintaining good relationships and regulating their emotions were important predictors of their SWB. These findings parallel a model proposed earlier by Caprara and Steca (2005) that looked at a broader range of 20–90-year-old Italian adults, supporting the belief that both social and affective efficacy are, indeed, important influences on SWB. Their findings further revealed gender differences; while males felt they were better at regulating their negative emotions, females perceived that they were better with their positive emotions.

Our conceptual framework for this study was based on Kim's transactional model, which integrates both social support and self-efficacy influences (Kim and Park 2005). In this model, students are seen as active agents of their own behaviors, and not just passive recipients of life situations. Students are motivated to exercise personal control of their lives and, thereby, achieve desired goals and outcomes. Subjective qualities of how individuals perceive and interpret different events mediate the relationship between their environment and behavior.

The transactional paradigm allows us to examine how individuals see different events from their personal point of view; later evaluating how this may or may not shape their subsequent actions. In this study, we examined how specific aspects within the environment (i.e., adversity, socioeconomic status, and social support) and agency (i.e., social efficacy and resilience efficacy) predicted South Korean students' levels of happiness.

Method

Participants were 198 university students (138 males, 60 females) from the Gyeonggi-do province in South Korea. In sampling the participants, four classrooms were selected based on availability, from 4 different universities in the Seoul city area. Students had a mean age of 24.7 years ($\sigma = 2.01$), ranging from 21 to 32 years. Most were high-achieving students, with 86 % reporting an overall grade of B or above; 50 % wanted to continue their education and pursue a graduate degree in the near future. Participating students came from a diversity of religious faiths, including Christianity (27.4 %), Buddhism (10 %), Catholicism (8 %), and the remaining percentage as 'None/Unidentified/Other'. In addition, the majority of participants came from average income backgrounds (53.2 %), while 23.7 % came from above average income and 21.9 % from below average income backgrounds.

Students completed a questionnaire packet that requested information on different aspects of their environment, agency, and subjective well-being. Surveys were distributed in person and completed within academic classes. Students volunteered to participate in the study and took approximately 10 min to complete the survey. As a sign of thankfulness for participating, students were given gift pens upon survey completion. The first part of the questionnaire packet included a tailored version of the demographic survey (Kim 2009). Students provided

information on their personal, educational, religious, and family background, including sex, age, overall academic grade, highest academic degree to be pursued, religion and strength of identification with religion, father/mother's education status, and family's standard of living.

Students' environments were examined by gauging their adversity experiences (i.e., type and degree of hardship) and perceived social support. Students were asked to consider an adverse experience or a difficult situation or condition they were currently overcoming, or a difficult situation that had been resolved but which still affected them. Students then selected their response from a list of adversities common to emerging adulthood, including academic, adjustment, death/ illness of a loved one, delinquency, emotional, identity, financial, occupation, physical, purpose and social issues, none, and other. Next, students rated how difficult the situation or condition was for them personally on a scale of 1 (=Not at all difficult) to 5 (=Extremely difficult).

Participants' perceptions of social support from family, friends, and a special person (other than family or friends) were measured using the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet et al. 1988). Students indicated their response by rating each statement (12 items; e.g., "My family really tries to help me"; "I can talk about my problems with my friends"; "There is a special person [other than my family or friends] in my life who cares about my feelings") on a scale from 1 (=I strongly agree) to 5 (=I strongly disagree).

Individual factors related to students' sense of agency were measured using The Resilience Efficacy Scale (Kim 2009). This scale consists of items that measure both resilience efficacy (i.e., their beliefs in their abilities to bounce back from challenging situations) and social efficacy beliefs (i.e., their beliefs in their abilities to maintain good relationships). Students indicated their resilience efficacy beliefs (7 items; e.g., "How well can you keep tough problems from getting you down?") on a scale from 1 (=Not very well) to 5 (=Very well). Accounting for the Korean culture's relational orientation (Kwan et al. 1997), the social efficacy subscale was included, consisting of 4 items that were rated on the same scale from 1 to 5 (e.g., "How well can you maintain sincere/true relationships with your Korean friends?").

Finally, students' level of happiness served as the outcome indicator of subjective well-being. Students were asked to complete the Happiness scale (15 items; e.g., "I have a happy family life"; Kim 2009), which had them think about how happy they were with different aspects of their life and rate them on a scale from 1 (=Not at all) to 5 (=Very much). All survey questions were translated into Korean by a bilingual researcher in the field, and then checked for translation accuracy of the Korean terms into English by one of the co-authors of the research study.

Results

Reliability

A reliability check on each of the scales in the survey packet demonstrated high internal consistency, with alphas greater than .80. Cronbach's alphas were: .89 for Others' Social Support, .85 for Friends' Support, .82 for Family's Support, .73 for Social Efficacy, .85 for Individual Efficacy, and .89 for the Happiness scale.

Adversity

Participants were asked to select only one adversity experience, with N = 5 students omitted from the analysis because of missing information (so, N = 193). Overall, the Korean students struggled

the most with occupation concerns (22.3 %), which included anxieties over job prospects. These issues were followed by emotional problems such as feeling lonely or depressed (17.1 %) and academic issues like keeping up good grades (15.5 %). Figure 1 shows the types of adversity reported by the participants and the percentages of students reporting the various adversities. There were no significant differences by gender.

Preliminary Analysis

Students had a mean happiness level of 3.43 (σ = .618) on a scale from 1 (=Not at all) to 5 (=Very much). This result demonstrates that students were somewhere in between "Somewhat" and "Much" happy, but were struggling with concerns that were undermining their life satisfaction. In addition, 28.5 % of the participants reported a rating of either 3 or less, demonstrating a less than average level of happiness.

On average, students were from average level socioeconomic backgrounds and had experienced a somewhat difficult situation or condition that they were currently overcoming or that was still affecting them at the time. Participants felt close to neutral towards statements that gauged their level of support from others, but agreed with statements indicating support from friends and family. Furthermore, the participants rated their perceptions of relational and individual efficacy as being "Somewhat well" to "Pretty well" (see Table 1).

As shown in Table 2, the results from the correlational matrix revealed that except for gender, the predictor variables SES, Adversity Strength, Others' Support, Friends' Support, Family's Support, Social Efficacy, and Individual Efficacy were significantly related to the dependent variable of Happiness. Prior to testing for the other variables, gender was included in a regression analysis, with the finding that its influence was insignificant. Gender was, therefore, only included in the last stage of the regression analysis.
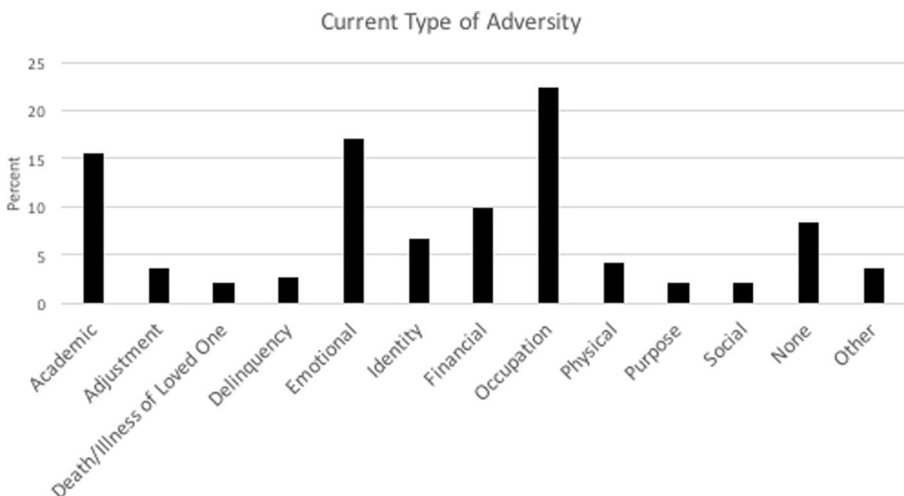
Fig. 1 Types of adversity experienced and percentages reported

Table 1 Means and standard deviations of predictor and dependent variables

Variable	M	SD
Dependent Variable		
1. Happiness	3.43	.62
Independent Variable		
1. SES	2.99	.83
2. Strength of Adversity	3.08	1.05
3. Support from Others	3.15	1.14
4. Support from Friends	3.74	.77
5. Support from Family	3.97	.83
6. Social Efficacy	3.80	.71
7. Individual Efficacy	3.47	.72

Hierarchical Linear Regression

A four-stage hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted with happiness as the dependent variable (see Table 3). At stage one, SES and adversity level were entered as control variables. Social support variables (from Family, Friends, and Others) were included as independent variables at stage two. At the third stage, Efficacy variables (Social and Individual) were entered into the regression analysis, followed by Gender at the fourth and final stage. The analysis revealed that at stage one, SES and Adversity significantly contributed to the regression model - $F(2, 170) = 26.64$, $p = .000$ - and accounted for 23.9 % of the variation in Happiness.

When adding the Social Support variables (from Family, Friends, and Others) into the regression analysis in step two, the change in the model was significant - $F(3, 167) = 21.21$, $p = .000$ - and accounted for an additional 21.0 % of the variation in Happiness. In step three of

Table 2 Correlational matrix for social and individual factors and happiness

	SES	Gender	Adversity Strength	Others' Support	Friends' Support	Family's Support	Social Efficacy	Individual Efficacy	Happiness
SES	—	.004	−.16*	.16*	−.016	.14*	.21**	.14	.35**
Gender	.004	—	−.116	−.05	−.016	−.019	−.014	−.085	.099
Adversity Strength	−.16*	−.116	—	−.12	−.12	−.19*	−.32**	−.23**	−.40**
Others' Support	.16*	−.05	−.12	—	.39**	.31**	.23**	.083	.33**
Friends' Support	−.02	−.016	−.12	.39**	—	.45**	.37**	.17*	.43**
Family's Support	.14*	−.019	−.19*	.31**	.45**	—	.48**	.18*	.43**
Social Efficacy	.21**	−.014	−.32**	.23**	.37**	.48**	—	.51**	.46**
Individual Efficacy	.14	−.085	−.23**	.083	.17*	.18*	.51**	—	.46**
Happiness	.35**	.099	−.40**	.33**	.43**	.43**	.46**	.46**	—

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$

Table 3 Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for variables predicting happiness

Variables	β	T	sr^2	R	R^2	ΔR^2
Step 1				.488	.239	.239***
SES	.280	4.13***	.0761			
Adversity	−.360	−5.31***	.126			
Step 2				.670	.449	.210***
SES	.242	4.09***	.0552			
Adversity	−.253	−4.23***	.0590			
Support from others	.097	1.55	.00792			
Support from friends	.283	4.25***	.0595			
Support from family	.226	3.48**	.0400			
Step 3				.729	.532	.083***
SES	.234	4.24***	.0511			
Adversity	−.194	−3.37**	.0324			
Support from others	.112	1.92*	.0104			
Support from friends	.238	3.77***	.0404			
Support from family	.174	2.66**	.0199			
Social efficacy	.023	.326	.000289			
Individual efficacy	.297	4.97***	.0702			
Step 4				.735	.541	.009
SES	.234	4.27***	.0511			
Adversity	−.175	−3.01**	.0253			
Support from others	.116	1.99*	.0110			
Support from friends	.239	3.82***	.0408			
Support from family	.171	2.64**	.0196			
Social efficacy	.027	.388	.000441			
Individual efficacy	.307	5.16***	.0745			
Gender	.097	1.80	.00903			

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$

the analysis, Efficacy (Social and Individual) variables contributed to the model significantly - $F(2, 165) = 14.61$, $p = .000$ - explaining 8.3 % more of the variation in Happiness. The seven variables in the third regression model explained 53.2 % of the variation in Happiness; Support from Others and Social Efficacy were non-significant predictors, while Individual Efficacy (7.0 %), SES (5.1 %), and Support from Friends (4.1 %) uniquely explained the largest percentage of variation in Happiness. The model change in step four of the analysis as a result of including Gender was non-significant, however, only explaining .9 % more of the variation of Happiness.

Discussion

As South Korea continues to seek to understand issues related to levels of unhappiness in the country, mental health professionals are beginning to address the nation's problem. Some high-achieving Korean university students in our study were, indeed, struggling with fully

engaging with "happiness" in their daily lives. Unlike results from prior studies, however, gender did not significantly explain different levels of happiness in our model, nor did males or females demonstrate differences in the types of adversities they faced (Mahanta and Aggarwal 2013; Zimet et al. 1988). This may be because other demographic factors such as strength of adversity and socioeconomic status contributed to their subjective well-being to a greater extent. More specifically, income was found to be significantly and positively related to happiness, suggesting the importance of financial stability in shaping happiness. Previous literature has also shown similar trends between personal income and SWB in economically developed nations like South Korea, although the relationship was generally weaker in other studies (Diener and Biswas-Diener 2002).

Although lower levels of happiness have been attributed to a variety of reasons, many instances have been connected to social and academic stressors that have originated from an inordinate cultural emphasis on succeeding in these particular areas of life. In prior studies, the strong association between SWB and social and academic challenges has also been found among Korean heritage students living in the U.S., including Korean international and American born Korean students (Dundes et al. 2009; Lee et al. 2009; Lee and Padilla 2014). In accordance with Korean Confucian traditions, education is believed to be a necessary step towards self-cultivation and family honor. Academic and occupational success brings individuals and their families respect for the person's wisdom, knowledge, and self-cultivation (Kim and Park 2000), and, more importantly, allows them to fulfill their filial duties as sons and daughters. Dundes et al. (2009) discussed the Korean sense of duty to succeed and to honor the family, rather than to pursue happiness in college and in their career choices. Moreover, passing the national examination for entrance into Korea's top universities generally guarantees economic stability for future generations, and is thus an indispensable tool for social mobility and success. Living under such high expectations and stringent conditions puts Koreans at high risk for stress, anxiety, and depression.

In addition, Diener et al. (2010) argued that some Koreans view happiness as a shallow pursuit, with more meaningful life pursuits including success and loyalty to family. This also implies that relaxation is not practiced sufficiently as a coping response to lessen stress, resulting in fatigue and depression. Our findings reinforce the belief that students feel challenged and burdened with personal and familial concerns related to their future (i.e., occupational and academic) and struggle to maintain emotional balance in their lives. Unhealthy coping responses can lead to negative mental health outcomes, and, in some instances, more serious consequences such as self-destructive behaviors.

Our results provide insights into how we can contribute to prevention and intervention programs to facilitate Korean university students' happiness. In accordance with our theoretical framework, we find that both aspects of one's environment (i.e., social support from close others) and personal qualities (i.e., resilience efficacy) are important influences on Korean students' mental health in the context of adversity. According to our regression model (stage 3), the strong predictive relationship of support from closer social circles on levels of happiness (Kim and Park 2005; Park et al. 2010) suggests that it may be beneficial to invest in better preparing family and friends within a Korean cultural context. These findings may be explained by South Korea's deep cultural grounding in collectivism. Individuals from collectivistic cultures see others at the core of their identities and often prioritize working for the good of others and meeting their expectations (Fiske et al. 1998). Perceptions of having good relationships with close others, therefore, may be strong indicators of positive mental health. But in order to maintain family honor and dignity before others, Korean students may feel strong

reservations against utilizing mental health services (Lee 1999). Prevention and intervention programs, therefore, may consider helping family and friends within their closer social circles to recognize warning signs of poor mental health. They would learn concrete and effective approaches in supporting young persons showing extreme levels of stress and unhappiness. For example, studies related to Korean heritage students have shown the psychological benefits of simply thinking and writing about what they value in their social circles, participating in social activities with friends, drawing emotional support from counselors with whom they can share their concerns, and receiving practical economic support (Park et al. 2010; Taylor et al. 2007).

Yet, as a result of the "shame" culture in Korea (i.e., importance placed on the idea of "saving one's face") and also in the cultural transmission of "shame" (Lee 1999), Koreans often believe that they must overcome adversity through their own willpower, or that they are unable to go beyond the support of their family for fear of what others might think of them and their families if their emotional problems were revealed (Dundes et al. 2009). In such a culture where social support may not always be an option, educators, school counselors, and mental health professionals may consider building students' internal assets (Kang and Romo 2011). Our findings demonstrate that beliefs in one's abilities to maintain good relationships may not significantly predict happiness. This may be explained by the idea that social efficacy is not directly related to the most prominent adversities apparent among South Korean university students—namely, school and job-related concerns. The social efficacy scale also included a wide range of different relationships, including parents, siblings, relatives, teachers, and community. Parallel to the findings on social support, it is possible that South Korean students derive more happiness from closer social circles, rather than neighboring acquaintances.

Students' individual efficacy beliefs with regard to hardships, however, were found to play an important role in fostering positive mental health. In fact, prior research has demonstrated strong associations between self-efficacy and life satisfaction (Kim and Park 2005). Thus, prevention and intervention programs that foster self-efficacy may also elicit positive outcomes in SWB. Prior research has utilized methods such as acquiring tangible indicators of one's mastery, vicariously experiencing others' success, receiving positive and meaningful feedback from others, and improving emotional and physiological states (Bandura 1997). In the context of Koreans' strong collectivistic ties to the family and value for "saving face," however, programs that seek to foster students' self-efficacy may be more effectively implemented within family or peer group contexts, rather than in a professional mental health setting.

A number of limitations to the current study stand out. First, participants were selected from four classrooms based on availability, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Second, the SWB measure relies on participants' self-reports, which may veil actual levels of well-being due to cultural norms on appropriate emotional display (Lee 1999; Shin 2002).

Still, this study demonstrates the importance of taking a cultural approach to understanding and fostering South Korea's mental health concerns. Programs that foster South Korean students' happiness ought to recognize that their happiness is ultimately embedded within the family; with family not only providing social support, but also sharing in their happiness in order for them to experience a holistic sense of personal fulfillment. Efforts would best be embedded within a cultural framework that accounts for South Korea's collectivism, whilst also allowing for saving face in light of the stigma against mental health issues. They would prioritize the role that close family and friends may play in supporting individuals around them who are suffering from psychological distress. These would include culturally relevant

practices that honor South Korea's collectivistic orientation, such as fostering remembrance of valued relationships and encouraging active engagement in social groups.

Additionally, study findings show promise in culturally sensitive strategies that help bolster students' resilience efficacy beliefs within close family and peer group settings. These strategies can include monitoring evidence of mastery or providing meaningful affirmation of abilities. These results are especially informative for advocates in the educational setting, given that many Korean heritage students' areas of concern and stress are fundamentally related to academics and success in school (Dundes et al. 2009; Korea National Statistical Office 2007; Lee et al. 2009).

Additionally, given South Korean's increasing globalization, programs that foster happiness within the Korean cultural context ought to address the cultural gap between parents as a support group and the millennial generation university students who are exposed to a wider and more global perspective of what happiness may entail. The ingredients for a happy life are different in collectivistic countries like South Korea in comparison to more individualistic counties like the U.S. Happiness in the South Korean context may rely more heavily on education, occupation, security, and finances for meeting larger familial needs and desires; whereas individuals from places like the U.S. may value happiness based on an individualistic sense of self-fulfillment (Fiske et al. 1998; Maday and Szalay 1976; Suh 2000). Effective prevention and intervention programs that target the millennial generation would evaluate ingredients to happiness beyond those things that their parents value, while also helping both South Korean parents and youths mutually support one another and honor South Korean values of "saving face."

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