

# **Relationship Between Perceived Social Support And Assertiveness Among Adults**

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of

Bachelor of Science in Psychology

By

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**ST. TERESA'S COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS), ERNAKULAM**

Nationally Re-accredited at 'A++' level (4th cycle)

Affiliated to: Mahatma Gandhi University

**MARCH 2024**

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### **Declaration**

I, Ummu Habeeba, do hereby declare that the work represented in the dissertation embodies the results of the original research work done by me in St. Teresa's College, Ernakulam under the supervision and guidance of Ms. Princy Thobias, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, St. Teresa's College, Ernakulam, it has not been submitted by me to any other university or institution for the award of any degree, diploma, fellowship, title or recognition before.

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## Acknowledgement

It is not possible to prepare a project report without the assistance and encouragement of other people. This one is certainly no exception. I would like to express my deep heartfelt gratitude to the Department of Psychology, St. Teresa's College, Ernakulam for providing me with the opportunity to undertake the research.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Ms. Bindu John, the Head of the Department of Psychology, for her guidance and support throughout the duration of my project. I am truly thankful for her expertise, unwavering encouragement, patience and mentorship, which have been pivotal in my academic journey.

I acknowledge my indebtedness and deep sense of gratitude to my research guide, Ms. Princy Thobias, Assistant Professor, Psychology, for encouraging and guiding me throughout all the phases of my research.

I extend my sincere thanks to my parents, teachers and my friends who all have supported me throughout the time. I am grateful to each and every one who has given me guidance, encouragement, suggestions and constructive criticisms which has contributed immensely for this project.

Above all, I thank God Almighty for blessing me in all the stages of the project and for helping me complete the project successfully.

Thanking you

Ummu Habeeba

## Table of Contents

Chapter I: Introduction.....	9
Perceived Social Support.....	9
Theories of Perceived Social Support.....	10
Factors Affecting Perceived Social Support .....	12
Assertiveness.....	14
Types of Assertiveness.....	14
Theories of Assertiveness.....	15
Models of Assertiveness.....	17
Factors affecting Assertiveness.....	18
Rationale of the Study.....	20
Statement of the Problem.....	20
Chapter II: Review of literature.....	22
Chapter III: Methods.....	28
Aim.....	28
Objectives.....	28
Hypothesis.....	28
Research Design.....	28
Sample and Sample design.....	28
Inclusion criteria.....	29
Exclusion criteria.....	29
Operational Definition of the variables.....	29
Tools used.....	30

Procedure.....	31
Ethical Considerations.....	32
Statistical Analysis.....	32
Normality Testing.....	32
Chapter IV: Results and Discussion.....	33
Chapter V: Conclusion.....	37
Findings.....	37
Implications.....	37
Limitations.....	38
References.....	40
Appendices.....	47
Appendix A .....	47
Appendix B.....	48
Appendix C.....	49
Appendix D.....	50

## List of Tables

Table 1- Test for Normality – Kolmogorov – Smirnov test.....	32
Table 2- Descriptive statistics of the dimensions Perceived Social Support and Assertiveness.....	33
Table 3- Correlation between Perceived Social Support and Assertiveness.....	33
Table 4- Result of Mann-Whitney U test for gender.....	35

## **Abstract**

Understanding how perceived social support and assertiveness relate to each other and potentially differ between genders is vital for promoting well-being and effective social and interpersonal interactions. Perceived social support refers to an individual's subjective evaluation of the availability and adequacy of assistance and resources from their social network in times of need. Assertiveness is defined as the ability to express one's thoughts, feelings and beliefs in a confident and respectful manner while maintaining appropriate boundaries. The study aims to investigate the relationship between perceived social support and assertiveness among adults, along with exploring gender differences in these variables. A sample of 200 adults (100 males and 100 females) aged between 18 and 30 participated in the study. In order to collect data, The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) and Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS) were used. Spearman correlation and Mann-Whitney U Test were employed for statistical analysis. The findings of the study revealed a statistically significant positive relation between perceived social support and assertiveness among adults. No significant gender difference was observed in perceived social support and assertiveness. The study's findings underscore the importance of fostering supportive environments for promoting assertive behaviour among adults.

*Keywords:* perceived social support, assertiveness, adult

*“Assertiveness is not what you do, it’s who you are”*

-Shakti Gawain

The social environment plays a vital role in determining the patterns of behaviour and the formation of personality. None can live without belonging to a trusted group that gives support in all life situations. The first group is family in which a person learns values, social habits, and behaviours that form the personality in childhood and later life stages. By joining the school, university, and work and interacting with others, human behaviour is formed. The more appropriate social support is given, the better the person grows psychologically and socially and builds an assertive personality that enjoys self-confidence, high self-esteem, freedom of expression and mutual respect (Cohen, S. & Wills, T. A., 1985). However, a person always encounters increasing difficulties through various life stages. Adulthood is a critical life stage marked by increased autonomy, responsibility and the navigation of complex social dynamics, making it an opportune period to investigate the interplay between perceived social support and assertiveness (Carstensen, L. L., 1992).

### **Perceived social support**

Social Support is the perception of being cared for by others and having a reliable network to turn to when needed, in everyday situations or specific moments of crisis (Taylor, 2011). Perceived social support has been implicated as a more robust predictor of physical and mental health than objective measures of social support (Brissette et al., 2002; George et al., 1989). Moreover, it has been shown that a high level of perceived social support from multiple sources is associated with better physical and psychological health (Fang et al., 2020). Perceived social support refers to an individual’s subjective evaluation of the availability and adequacy of

assistance and resources from their social network in times of need (Cohen & Wills, 1985). It encompasses an individual's subjective assessment of the emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal support they believe is accessible to them from family, friends and other social connections (Procidano & Heller, 1983). Zimet, Dahlem and Farley proposed that this construct is multidimensional and is divided into three dimensions: family support, friends support and support from significant others (the extent to which individuals perceive that they receive support from others who are not their relatives or friends).

### *Theories of perceived social support*

**Social cognitive theory.** The social cognitive theory of perceived social support expands the principles of social psychology and applies them specifically to the understanding and application of social support. This theory was proposed by Albert Bandura (1986) and forms the basis for the expansion of the socio-cognitive theoretical framework that shows the interaction between the individual, his behaviour and his environment. According to the social cognitive theory, people's perception of social support is affected by cognitive processes such as observation, interpretation and self-belief. Bandura thought that people acquired their knowledge and beliefs about social support through observational learning, in which they observed and modelled the actions and thoughts of others in their relationship. At the core of the theory is the concept of self-esteem, which expresses one's belief in one's ability to use social support and cope with stress. People with high self-efficacy are more likely to believe that social support is available and helpful when needed, Bandura said. In contrast, individuals with low self-efficacy may perceive that social support has little or no effect on coping with problems (Mimiaga, 2009). In addition, cognitive behavioural studies support the role of cognitive processes in the formation of personal emotions. Individuals interpret and evaluate the responsiveness and satisfaction of

support through communication based on their own understanding of the situation and coping resources. Bandura's theory emphasizes the powerful and interconnected nature of cognition in relation to social support, emphasizing that cognition influences how people perceive, interpret and use information. By understanding the cognitive processes of social support, interventions can be designed to improve people's self-esteem and promote more effective coping strategies in response to stress and depression.

**Attachment theory.** The theory, developed by John Bowlby (1969), focuses on the early bonds formed between infants and their primary caregivers. Although Attachment theory is traditionally associated with parent-child relationship, its principles have been expanded to understand how early attachment experiences affect individual's expectations and behaviour in various relationships, including friendship and romantic partnerships. In the context of perceived social support, attachment theory offers insight into how early attachment experiences shapes the individual and approaches to seeking and interpreting support in later relationships. Attachment theory suggests that individuals develop specific attachment styles based on their early interactions with caregivers. The main attachment styles are secure, anxious-ambivalent, anxious-avoidant and disorganized. These styles influence how people approach relationships and seek support. People develop internal working models based on early nursing experiences. These mental representations guide people to interpret social cues and predict the availability of support in different situations. Internal working models influence expectations about the reliability and responsiveness of others when appropriate.

**Cognitive Appraisal Theory.** Cognitive appraisal theory proposed by Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman (1984) suggest that people interpret and evaluate situations based on how they perceive the situation and its importance to their well-being and ability to cope. In the

context of perceived social support, cognitive appraisal comes into play in the secondary appraisal phase. People value the availability and adequacy of social support as part of their coping resources in stressful situations. Perceived social support, whether from friends, family or social network, is rated in terms of its potential to help cope with stressors.

**The Buffering Hypothesis.** Sheldon Cohen and Thomas Wills introduced the Buffering Hypothesis in relation to social support in their article “Stress, Social Support, and the Buffering Hypothesis” published in 1985. The Buffering hypothesis assumes that social support acts as a protective factor during stress and reduces the negative impact of stressful events on an individual’s health and wellbeing. According to this hypothesis, the presence of social support acts as a buffer that reduces the harmful effects of stressors and promotes resilience. Social support includes emotional, instrumental, and cognitive help people receive from their social networks, such as family, friends and community. The hypothesis suggests that the availability and perception of support can influence a person’s ability to cope with stress. The buffering hypothesis recognizes the importance of perceived social support and emphasizes individual’s subjective beliefs and feelings about the availability of support. Perceived social support, although not always directly received, can still have a positive effect on coping with stress.

### ***Factors affecting perceived social support***

Factors such as age, gender, marital status, number of children and educational status were determined to affect perceived social support.

**Age.** Younger people often rely on peer relationships and may seek social support from friends, classmates or online communities. Perceived support may be influenced by the availability and quality of peer relationships. Older adults may depend more on family and long-

term friendships for social support. Perceived support can be affected by changes in health, mobility and social networks as a person ages.

**Gender.** Studies show that women seek and receive more emotional support than men. Social support for women can be influenced by close relationships with family, friends and community networks. Men may rely more on instrumental support than emotional support. Men perceived social support may be influenced by factors such as marital satisfaction and the quality of peer relationships.

**Marital status.** Married or partners often receive social support from their spouse or significant other. Perceived support can be influenced by relationship quality, including communication, trust and emotional closeness. Single people can rely more on friendships, family ties and social networks for support. Perceived support can vary depending on the strength and availability of these relationships.

**Number of children.** The existence of children can provide and assume social support can provide and assume social support. Perceived social support for parents can come from extended family members, parenting groups or community resources. However, the demands of childcare and parenting may also influence perceived support. Childless individuals may rely more on friendships, romantic relationships and professional networks for social support. The depth and stability of these ties can influence perceived support.

**Educational level.** People with higher education may have access to wider social networks, including peers, co-workers and mentors. Perceived social support can be influenced by educational opportunities, professional networks and socioeconomic status. People with lower level of education may rely more on family and community ties for social support. Perceived

support may be influenced by the availability of resources, job opportunities and social services in their community. These factors interact in complex ways between individuals' perceptions of social support.

Understanding the unique effects of age, gender, marital status, number of children and educational status can help tailor interventions and support systems to meet the diverse needs of communities.

### **Assertiveness**

Assertiveness is defined as the ability to express one's thoughts, feelings and beliefs in a confident and respectful manner while maintaining appropriate boundaries (Rathus, S. A., 2008).

Assertiveness is the ability to express one's feelings, opinions, beliefs and needs directly, openly and honestly, while not violating the personal rights of others (Ellis & Hartley, 2005).

Assertiveness is the effective communication style characterized by clear, direct and honest expression one's needs, wants and feelings, while respecting the rights and boundaries of others (DeVito, J. A., 2012).

### ***Types of assertiveness***

Assertiveness can take various forms depending on the situation and the individual's communication style. The common types of assertiveness are:

**Direct assertiveness.** This involves expressing one's thoughts, feelings and needs clearly and directly, without being aggressive or passive. Direct assertiveness often involves using "I" statements and being honest about one's feelings and opinions.

**Indirect assertiveness.** Sometimes, assertiveness can be expressed indirectly, especially in cultures or situations where direct communication may not be appropriate. Indirect assertiveness may involve using tact, subtlety or nonverbal cues to assert oneself while still respecting other's feelings and maintaining harmony.

**Strategic assertiveness.** This type of assertiveness involves planning and choosing the right time, place, and approach to assert oneself effectively. Strategic assertiveness may involve considering the context, the personalities involved, and potential outcomes before expressing one's needs or opinions.

**Empathetic assertiveness.** It focuses on understanding and acknowledging the perspectives and feelings of others while still asserting one's own needs and boundaries. It involves active listening, empathy and finding win-win solutions that consider the needs of all parties involved.

**Boundary setting assertiveness.** This type of assertiveness involves clearly defining and communicating personal boundaries to others. It includes saying "no" when necessary, setting limits on behaviour that is unacceptable, and advocating one's own well-being and autonomy.

**Self-advocacy assertiveness.** It involves speaking up for oneself in various settings, such as in the workplace, in relationships, or in social situations. It includes asserting one's rights, advocating for fair treatment, and standing up against injustice or discrimination.

### *Theories of assertiveness*

**Social learning theory.** This theory was proposed by psychologist Albert Bandura (1977). This suggests that people learn by observing others' behaviour patterns, attitudes and their consequences. Social learning theory proposes that assertiveness can be learned by observing,

modelling and reinforcing assertive behaviour in a social context. By observing and imitating others, people gain the skills and confidence to express their needs, rights and opinions strongly while maintaining respect for themselves and others.

**Cognitive Behavioural Theory.** CBT was proposed by Aaron Beck (1960s) and Albert Ellis (1950s). It posits that individuals' thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are interconnected and that cognitive processes play a central role in shaping behaviour. Cognitive behavioural Theory provides a framework for understanding and enhancing assertiveness by targeting cognitive processes, self-talk, behaviour patterns, and beliefs that influence assertive behaviour. Through cognitive restructuring, skills training, and behavioural experiments, individuals learn to overcome barriers to assertiveness and develop more adaptive ways of thinking and behaving in social situations.

**Self-efficacy theory.** This theory was proposed by psychologist Albert Bandura (1977). It focuses on individuals' beliefs in their ability to influence their own functioning and experiences, particularly in specific domains or tasks. In essence, self-efficacy is the belief in one's capability to execute actions necessary to achieve desired outcomes. In terms of assertiveness, self-efficacy plays a crucial role. Individuals with high assertiveness self-efficacy believe in their ability to communicate effectively, express their needs and opinions, and assert their rights while maintaining respect for others. These individuals are more likely to engage in assertive behaviours in various interpersonal situation. Self-efficacy theory highlights the importance of individuals' beliefs in their own capabilities in determining their assertiveness levels. By enhancing assertiveness self-efficacy through skill-building, positive reinforcement, and cognitive restructuring, individuals can develop and maintain assertive communication styles in various personal and professional contexts.

### *Models of assertiveness*

Several models and frameworks have been developed to explain and teach assertiveness. These models often serve as guides for individuals seeking to enhance their assertive communication skills.

**The Bill of Assertive Rights.** Introduced by Manuel J. Smith in his book "When I Say No, I Feel Guilty" published in 1975, outlines a set of fundamental rights that individuals have in their interactions with others. These rights serve as guidelines for assertive behaviour and communication. The right to judge our own behaviour, thoughts, and emotions, and to take responsibility for their initiation and consequences, The right to offer no reasons or excuses for justifying our behaviour, The right to judge whether we are responsible for finding solutions to other people's problems, The right to change our minds, The right to make mistakes and be responsible for them, The right to say, "I don't know", The right to be independent of the goodwill of others before coping with them, The right to be illogical in making decisions. The Bill of Assertive Rights provides a framework for individuals to assert their needs, opinions, and boundaries in a healthy and respectful manner, fostering effective communication and interpersonal relationships.

**The ABCs of Assertive Communication.** Introduced by Alberti and Emmons (1970), is a framework designed to help individuals communicate assertively. The ABCs of Assertive Communication provides a structured approach to expressing yourself assertively while maintaining respect for yourself and others. It encourages clear communication, boundary-setting, and problem-solving in interpersonal interactions.

A: Assertion - This refers to expressing your thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in a direct, honest, and appropriate manner. Assertion involves clearly stating what you want or need, setting boundaries, and standing up for yourself without being aggressive or passive.

B: Behaviour - The B in the ABCs model focuses on describing the behaviour that you find problematic or the behaviour that you would like to see changed. By focusing on specific behaviours rather than making generalizations about the person, you keep the communication more objective and less likely to provoke defensiveness.

C: Consequence - Consequence refers to expressing the consequences, positive or negative, that the behaviour has on you or on the situation. It involves explaining how the behavior affects you personally, without blaming or accusing the other person. By communicating the consequences, you help the other person understand the impact of their actions and why change is important.

### ***Factors affecting assertiveness***

Several factors can influence a person's level of assertiveness.

**Personality Traits.** Certain personality traits, such as self-confidence, self-esteem, and emotional intelligence, play a significant role in assertiveness. Individuals with higher levels of self-confidence and self-esteem are often more assertive in expressing their needs and opinions.

**Cultural Background.** Cultural norms and values can impact how assertiveness is perceived and expressed. In some cultures, assertiveness may be encouraged and seen as a positive trait, while in others, it may be viewed as confrontational or disrespectful.

**Upbringing and Socialization.** Family dynamics, upbringing, and socialization experiences during childhood and adolescence can shape one's assertiveness style. Individuals who

were encouraged to express themselves openly and assertively in their upbringing may demonstrate higher levels of assertiveness in adulthood.

**Communication Skills.** Effective communication skills, including active listening, empathy, and conflict resolution abilities, can enhance assertiveness. Being able to express oneself clearly and assertively while also listening to others and considering their perspectives is crucial for successful communication.

**Fear of Rejection or Conflict.** Fear of rejection, criticism, or conflict can inhibit assertiveness. Individuals may avoid expressing their needs or opinions assertively due to a fear of negative consequences or interpersonal conflict.

**Social Context.** The social context, including the dynamics of relationships, power dynamics, and cultural norms within a specific context, can influence assertiveness. Individuals may adapt their assertiveness style based on the social context and the perceived risks and benefits of assertive behaviour.

**Past Experiences.** Previous experiences of success or failure in assertive communication situations can impact one's willingness to assert themselves in similar situations in the future. Positive experiences of assertiveness can reinforce assertive behaviour, while negative experiences may lead to hesitancy or avoidance.

Understanding these factors can help individuals develop and enhance their assertiveness skills through self-awareness, practice, and seeking support when needed.

## **Rationale of the study**

Assertiveness is related to the skill of establishing successful social relationships. It also allows a person to request a service from others, help them with social support, and participate in social activities (Hussein and Hussein, 2006). Assertiveness is often associated with healthy communication and boundary setting, while social support serves as a buffer against stress and enhance coping mechanisms. Understanding how perceived social support influences assertiveness can provide insights into individual's psychological well-being.

Educators and school administrators can integrate lessons on assertiveness and social support into curricula to help students develop healthy interpersonal skills from an early age. Creating a supportive school environment where students feel empowered to express themselves assertively can contribute to their academic success and emotional well-being. Stakeholders across various sectors can contribute to the creation of supportive environments that empower individuals to express themselves assertively and navigate social interactions effectively. Organizations can utilize insights from the study to create a supportive work culture that fosters assertiveness among employees. Employee training programs and leadership development initiatives can emphasize the importance of social support networks in promoting assertive communication and constructive conflict resolution. Thus, it can be concluded that assertiveness is a key component of personal development and effective social functioning. By investigating how perceived social support correlates with assertiveness, the study can form strategies for personal growth and improving social interactions.

## **Statement of the problem**

Based on the review of the relevant several previous studies on the relationship between two significant variables, the present study investigates the relationship between perceived social

support and assertiveness explore gender differences in perceived social support and assertiveness among adults

The relationship between perceived social support and assertiveness among adults is an area of growing interest in psychology and social sciences (Cutrona, C. E., & Russell, D. W., 1990). The variables chosen for this study are perceived social support and assertiveness. Perceived social support refers to an individual's subjective evaluation of the availability and adequacy of supportive resources from their social networks, encompassing emotional, informational, and instrumental assistance (Cohen, S., & Wills, T. A., 1985). On the other hand, assertiveness pertains to the ability to express one's thoughts, feelings, and needs openly and respectfully in interpersonal interactions, without infringing upon the rights of others (Alberti, R. E., & Emmons, M. L., 2009).

In 2023, Ghazvineh, Jadidi, Nia, and Morovatti investigated the effect of emotional intelligence, self-regulation, and assertiveness on academic satisfaction, mediated by perceived social support, among second high school students in Kermanshah. The study was titled “The Effect of Emotional Intelligence, Self-Regulation, and Assertiveness on Academic Satisfaction with Mediation of Perceived Social Support in Students of the Second High School”. The study employed a multistage sampling method, selecting 384 high school students as the sample. The findings revealed that emotional intelligence, self-regulation, and assertiveness had an indirect and significant effect on academic satisfaction through perceived social support. The study suggested further research to identify factors affecting academic satisfaction to improve educational outcomes.

A study conducted by Younes in 2021 examined the relationship between social support and assertiveness among university students. The sample comprised 360 university students, with 190 males and 170 females. Utilizing correlation analysis, the study found a statistically significant positive relationship between social support and assertiveness, encompassing support

from family, colleagues, friends, and the university. Additionally, the study identified gender and the type of study (scientific or humanities) as factors influencing this relationship.

Fahmi and Aswirna (2020) conducted a study titled "The Social Support and Assertive Behaviour of Students," which explored the social support and assertive behaviour of students majoring in Islamic Counselling Guidance at Imam Bonjol Padang. The sample comprised 182 students out of a population of 334. Employing quantitative research methods and correlation techniques, the study revealed that 64.3% of students reported high social support, while 73.1% exhibited low assertive behaviour. The findings indicated a relationship between social support and assertive behaviour among the students.

In their 2020 study, Kim and Lee delved into the nuances of perceived social support and assertiveness across Western and Eastern cultures. The study was titled "Cultural Variations in Perceived Social Support and Assertiveness". With a sample size of 150 adults from each culture, the researchers employed ANOVA as their statistical tool. The results of the study unveiled notable cultural variations in the relationship between perceived social support and assertiveness. These findings shed light on the significant influence of cultural norms on these psychological constructs. By highlighting the cultural disparities in how individuals perceive and express social support and assertiveness, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of cross-cultural psychology and underscores the importance of considering cultural contexts in psychological studies.

In 2016, Ateş from the Faculty of Education at Erzincan University conducted a study to explore the predictive relationship between perceived social support, assertiveness, and the psychological well-being of candidate psychological counsellors. The study was titled "Perceived Social Support and Assertiveness as a Predictor of Candidates Psychological

Counsellors' Psychological Well-Being". The sample consisted of 308 individuals enrolled in the Psychological Counselling and Guidance Department at Erzincan University during the 2015-2016 academic year, with 56.5% females and 43.5% males. Statistical analysis employed was regression analysis, revealing that both assertiveness and perceived social support significantly predicted the psychological well-being of the participants. The study concluded that assertiveness training and the cultivation of social support networks play crucial roles in enhancing the psychological well-being of future counsellors.

A study was conducted by Lee and Ciftci in 2014, titled "Asian international students' socio-cultural adaptation: Influence of multicultural personality, assertiveness, academic self-efficacy, and social support," wherein they investigated the factors influencing socio-cultural adaptation among Asian international students (ISs). The sample comprised 330 Asian international students, and the authors utilized Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) as their statistical tool to analyse the data. Their findings revealed significant associations between Multicultural Personality, Assertiveness, and Socio-cultural Adaptation, with Academic Self-efficacy mediating the relationship between the former two variables and socio-cultural adaptation. Interestingly, while Multicultural Personality showed an association with Social Support, bootstrapping results indicated no indirect effect from Social Support to Socio-cultural Adaptation. Thus, the mediation paths between Multicultural Personality to Social Support and Social Support to Socio-cultural Adaptation were not supported. These findings suggest that academic self-efficacy plays a crucial role in facilitating socio-cultural adaptation among Asian international students, while the role of social support in this process may be more complex than initially hypothesized.

Voitkane and Miežite (2006) conducted a study investigating the intricate relationship between social support, psychological well-being, anxiety, depression, student needs, self-esteem, and assertiveness among first-year female students at the University of Latvia. Analysing a sample of 170 participants, the authors employed correlation and regression analyses to explore these associations. Their findings revealed that students who reported higher levels of perceived social support demonstrated elevated scores across all dimensions of psychological well-being. Moreover, the study highlighted a positive correlation between perceived social support and both self-esteem and assertiveness. Notably, students with high self-esteem exhibited higher scores across all dimensions of psychological well-being.

In their study titled "The Effects of Locus of Control, Communication Skills, and Social Support on Assertiveness in Female Nursing Students," Kukulü, Buldukođlu, Kulakaç, and Köksal (2006) investigated the factors influencing assertiveness among female nursing students. With a sample size of 105 nursing students, the authors utilized path analysis as their statistical tool to examine the interplay of locus of control, communication skills, and perceived peer support in relation to assertiveness. Their analysis revealed that the proposed model, which included locus of control, communication skills, and perceived peer support, explained a certain degree of variance in assertiveness among the participants. Notably, the only variable that directly influenced assertiveness was found to be communication skills, suggesting its crucial role in fostering assertive behaviour among female nursing students. Contrary to expectations, perceived family support showed neither a direct nor an indirect effect on assertiveness in their model.

Eskin (2003) conducted a study titled "Self-reported assertiveness in Swedish and Turkish adolescents: A cross-cultural comparison." The study involved 1306 high school

students, comprising 406 female and 246 male Swedish students, as well as 263 female and 391 male Turkish students. Utilizing a multidimensional measure called the Scale for Interpersonal Behaviour (SIB), the researcher employed ANOVA and MANOVA as statistical tools. The results revealed several significant findings. Firstly, Swedish adolescents exhibited higher levels of assertiveness compared to their Turkish counterparts. Secondly, contrary to expectations, there were no differences in assertiveness between Swedish girls and boys, nor between Turkish girls and boys. However, it was observed that girls, in general, displayed greater proficiency in expressing and managing personal limitations than boys. Additionally, adolescents who reported higher levels of assertiveness in both Sweden and Turkey tended to have more friends and receive greater social support than their less assertive peers. Lastly, the data supported the notion that older adolescents were more assertive than younger ones. These results were discussed in the context of cultural and gender differences, shedding light on the nuanced dynamics of assertiveness among adolescents in different cultural settings.

In 1998, a prospective study was conducted on the interplay between life stress, social support, and assertiveness among Turkish university students from Middle East Technical University. The sample comprised 335 participants. Using regression analysis, the study found partial support for its hypotheses, indicating that social support and assertiveness moderated the effects of stress on psychological well-being to some extent.

In their 1990 study titled "Assertiveness, Social Support, and Psychological Adjustment Following Spinal Cord Injury," Elliott, Herrick, Patti, Witty, Godshall, and Spruell explored the psychological dynamics among individuals with spinal cord injuries. The sample comprised 156 persons undergoing either in-patient or out-patient care for cord injuries. Trained raters conducted interviews and administered measures of assertiveness, social support, depression, and

psychosocial impairment. Utilizing Pearson correlation analysis, the study revealed intriguing findings: individuals who expressed a heightened sense of responsibility for others' welfare reported higher levels of depression and impairment. Conversely, those reporting increased support facilitating social integration and enhancing personal worth exhibited lower levels of depression. Furthermore, significant interactions between assertiveness and various social support relationships unveiled both beneficial and detrimental effects on depressive behavior and impairment linked to the disability. The results contribute to advancing theoretical understanding regarding the interplay of assertiveness and social support in psychological adjustment following spinal cord injury. Moreover, the study proposes implications for tailored intervention strategies, particularly in assertion training, emphasizing the significance of discriminative cue learning for individuals with physical disabilities.

## **Aim**

The aim of the study is to investigate the relationship between perceived social support and assertiveness and to explore gender differences in perceived social support and assertiveness among adults.

## **Objectives**

- To investigate the correlation between perceived social support and assertiveness in adults.
- To explore the differences in perceived social support and assertiveness based on gender.

## **Hypothesis**

H1: There is a significant relationship between perceived social support and assertiveness among adults.

H2: There is a significant difference in perceived social support and assertiveness between gender.

## **Research design**

A cross-sectional study was conducted to explain the relationship between perceived social support and assertiveness among adults, employing nonparametric analysis including the Spearman correlation test and the Mann-Whitney U test.

## **Sample and Sampling design**

This study aims to investigate the interplay between perceived social support and assertiveness within the adult population aged 18-30. The sample size comprises 200 individuals,

with equal representation from both genders, encompassing 100 men and 100 women. Convenient sampling is chosen to collect the data for this study.

*Inclusion criteria*

1. Individuals willing to participate voluntarily in the study
2. Individuals within the age group 18 – 30
3. Both men and women will be included

*Exclusion criteria*

1. Individuals of age below 18 and above 30
2. Individuals who cannot read or write english

**Operational definition of the variables**

Perceived social support refers to an individual's subjective evaluation of the availability and adequacy of assistance and resources from their social network in times of need (Cohen & Wills, 1985). It encompasses an individual's subjective assessment of the emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal support they believe is accessible to them from family, friends and other social connections (Procidano & Heller, 1983).

Assertiveness is defined as the ability to express one's thoughts, feelings and beliefs in a confident and respectful manner while maintaining appropriate boundaries (Rathus, S. A., 2008). Assertiveness is the ability to express one's feelings, opinions, beliefs and needs directly, openly and honestly, while not violating the personal rights of others (Ellis & Hartley, 2005).

Assertiveness is the effective communication style characterized by clear, direct and honest expression one's needs, wants and feelings, while respecting the rights and boundaries of others (DeVito, J. A., 2012).

## Tools used

### 1. Socio-demographic sheet

Socio-demographic sheet was used to collect information regarding age and gender.

### 2. Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)

This scale was developed by Zimet (1988). The MSPSS is a widely used self-report questionnaire consisting of 12 items, designed to assess the perceived adequacy of social support from family, friends, and significant others. It is typically scored on a 7-point Likert scale with responses ranging from “very strongly disagree” to “very strongly agree”. Higher scores on the MSPSS indicate greater perceived social support from family, friends and significant others. This suggests that individuals feel more supported in various aspects of their lives. Lower scores suggest lower levels of perceived social support, indicating that individuals may feel less supported by their family, friends and significant others. Based on a number of investigations, it has been determined that this scale has good reliability and validity. The internal consistency of the MSPSS as indicated by Cronbach alpha (0.93) is high. The MSPSS scale exhibited an excellent construct validity and was retained and assessed through confirmatory analysis.

### 3. Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS)

This scale was developed by Rathus (1973). The RAS is a self-report inventory comprising 30 items, designed to measure an individual's assertiveness skills and behaviors. It assesses an individual's ability to express their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in a confident and respectful manner while maintaining appropriate boundaries and considering the rights of others. It is scored on a 6-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from “very much like me” to “very much unlike me”. A high positive score on RAS suggests that an individual demonstrates high levels of assertiveness. This means they are likely to express their thoughts, feelings and needs

directly, respectfully and without violating the rights of others. Conversely a low score (high negative score) indicates lower levels of assertiveness. They may have difficulty communicating their boundaries., standing up for themselves, or expressing disagreements in a helpful way. High positive scores indicate high assertiveness while high negative scores indicate the opposite. The validity of the RAS was established by comparing self-reported RAS scores to two external measures of assertiveness. The Test-retest reliability for the scale is 0.78, where the Cronbach's alpha is 0.82.

### **Procedure**

Participation in the study was conducted through questionnaires. A sample of 200 individuals, 100 males and 100 females, aged between 18 and 30 were selected. Prior to participation, participants were provided with detailed information about the study and were asked to fill in the informed consent form. Only those who provided the consent voluntarily, proceed to complete the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) and Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS) questionnaires. Both scales were selected based on their established reliability and validity in measuring perceived social support and assertiveness. Data collected from the questionnaires were scored according to the scoring guidelines given in them and the data was analysed using the SPSS software. Spearman correlation was employed to examine the relationship between perceived social support and assertiveness, and Mann-Whitney U test was utilized to understand the significant difference in gender on the relationship between perceived social support and assertiveness. These tests were used due to the non-parametric nature of the variables. The findings were interpreted within the context of existing literature.

### **Ethical considerations**

- Consent of the participant was obtained prior to the study.
- Adequate level of confidentiality of participants information was maintained.
- Participants were treated with respect for their autonomy and dignity.
- Transparency was upheld in all forms of communication regarding the study.

### **Statistical Analysis**

SPSS or Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (version 29) was used for the research's data analysis. Kolmogorov-Smirnov was used to check the normality. The statistical analysis included non-parametric tests due to deviation from normality assumptions. The Spearman correlation test was employed to assess the association between perceived social support and assertiveness. The Mann-Whitney U test was utilized to investigate potential gender differences in perceived social support and assertiveness.

### **Normality testing**

**Table 1**

*Test for Normality using Kolmogorov-Smirnov test*

	Sig.
Perceived social support	0.001
Assertiveness	0.001

From the table, it can be inferred that the distribution is not normal as the significance for perceived social support and assertiveness is less than 0.05.

The study aims to investigate the correlation between perceived social support and assertiveness among adults aged 18 to 30. With a sample size of 200, comprising 100 men and 100 women, this research aims to discover how these variables are related.

**Table 2**

*The table shows the descriptive statistics of the data*

	N	Mean	Std.Deviation
Perceived social support	200	5.43	.919
Assertiveness	200	43.08	27.450

The table provides descriptive statistics for two variables, perceived social support and assertiveness. The sample size for both variables is 200. The mean score for perceived social support is 5.43, with a standard deviation of 0.919. For assertiveness, the mean score is 43.08, with a standard deviation of 27.450

Hypothesis 1 - There is a significant relationship between perceived social support and assertiveness among adults

**Table 3**

*Indicates the correlation between perceived social support and assertiveness among adults*

	Assertiveness
Perceived social support	.998**

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The results show that the correlation coefficient between perceived social support and assertiveness among adults is highly significant at the 0.01 level, with a value of .998. This indicates a very strong positive correlation between perceived social support and assertiveness. In simpler terms, individuals who perceive higher levels of social support are likely to demonstrate higher levels of assertiveness. Thus, the hypothesis is not rejected.

The findings of this study align closely with previous research conducted by Younes in 2021, which examined the relationship between social support and assertiveness. Younes's study, which included 360 university students, reported a statistically significant positive relationship between social support and assertiveness. This positive correlation encompassed various sources of support, including family, colleagues, friends, and the university.

Similarly, a study conducted by Fahmi and Aswirna in 2020, titled "The Social Support and Assertive Behaviour of Students," provides further evidence supporting the strong positive correlation between perceived social support and assertiveness. The research focused on students majoring in Islamic Counselling Guidance at Imam Bonjol Padang and involved a sample of 182 students out of a population of 334. The consistent pattern observed across studies underscores the strength of the relationship between perceived social support and assertiveness. Thus, the findings from Fahmi and Aswirna's study lend further support to the notion that individuals who perceive higher levels of social support are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of assertiveness.

Hypothesis 2 - There is a significant difference in the relationship between perceived social support and assertiveness on gender

**Table 4**

*Shows the result of Mann-Whitney U test for gender*

Variable	Mean rank		<i>U</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>
	Female	Male			
Perceived social support	105.3	95.71	4520.500	-1.173	.241
Assertiveness	105.73	95.28	4477.500	-1.277	.202

The results obtained from Mann-Whitney U test shows that there is no significant difference in perceived social support between males ( $M = 95.71$ ) and females ( $M = 105.3$ ),  $U = 4520.500$ ,  $p = 0.241$ . Similarly, there is no significant difference in assertiveness between males ( $M = 95.28$ ) and females ( $M = 105.73$ ),  $U = 4477.500$ ,  $p = 0.202$ . Hence, hypothesis 2 is rejected.

This study is in contrary to the study conducted by Younes (2021) on the relationship between perceived social support and assertiveness among university students. His study found a significant difference in gender regarding the relationship between perceived social support and assertiveness.

This can be due to the age range and demographic composition of the samples in these two studies, as they differ. This study focused on adults, while Younes's study specifically targeted university students. Differences in life experiences, social roles and developmental stages between adults and university students could influence the relationship between perceived social support, assertiveness and gender.

Also, the environment in which the studies were conducted might have played a role in gender differences. University settings often provide unique social dynamics and support

structure compared to broader adult population. Factors such as academic stress, peer interactions and campus resources could interact with gender in influencing perceived social support and assertiveness among students. Difference in sample sizes between the studies could also affect the differences in gender. Younes's study had a larger sample size of 360 students compared to the study on adults.

The study aimed to investigate the relationship between perceived social support and assertiveness among adults and their differences in gender. The results of Spearman correlation analysis revealed a strong positive correlation between the two variables perceived social support and assertiveness. This suggests that individuals who perceive higher levels of social support tend to exhibit greater assertiveness in their interactions. Hence, hypothesis 1 was not rejected. The Mann-Whitney U test indicated no significant gender differences in perceived social support and assertiveness among adults. Hence, hypothesis 2 was rejected.

### **Findings**

- The study found a strong correlation between perceived social support and assertiveness among adults, suggesting that individuals who perceive higher levels of social support tend to exhibit greater assertiveness in their interactions.
- Gender differences in perceived social support and assertiveness were not significant, suggesting that there are no notable disparities between men and women in terms of perceived social support and assertive behaviour.

### **Implications**

The study highlights the importance of perceived social support in fostering assertive behaviour among adults.

- Organizations, communities and social networks can benefit from understanding the relationship to create environments that encourage individuals to express themselves confidently and assertively.

- Understanding how social connections and relationships help people become more assertive can help improve support systems, which in turn can boost assertiveness skills indirectly.
- The findings of the study have implications for educational and therapeutic interventions focused on assertiveness training. Incorporating lessons and exercises that emphasize the role of social support in assertiveness development can enhance the effectiveness of such interventions.
- Understanding the positive relationship between perceived social support and assertiveness can empower individuals to actively seek out supportive relationships and environments. Encouraging individuals to cultivate strong social networks and seek support when needed can promote personal growth and enhance their ability to navigate various social and professional settings assertively.

### **Limitations**

- The study relied on self-report measures for obtaining data from individuals, i.e., it relied on people to tell how supported they feel and how assertive they are. Sometimes, people may not accurately report their feelings or behaviors, either because they want to present themselves in a certain way or because they are not fully aware of their own tendencies. This could affect the accuracy of results.
- The study had a cross-sectional research design and focused on participants of selected age group, i.e., 18 – 30 years. The group of people studied might not represent the entire population. The adults were from a certain area, i.e, Ernakulam, and it is not sure if the relationship observed holds true for everyone.

- The study only looked at certain aspects of perceived social support and assertiveness. There may be other factors that are not considered which could also affect these traits, like cultural differences and personality traits.
- The study gave some insights, and there's still a lot not known. Future studies could explore these relationships in more depth, using different methods or including different groups of people, to get a more complete understanding of how perceived social support and assertiveness are connected.

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## **Appendix A**

### ***Informed Consent***

This study is conducted to explore the relationship between perceived social support and assertiveness among adults. If you are a person belonging to the age group of 18-30 years, I request you to kindly participate in this study.

I assure you that the information collected will only be used for academic purposes. Your responses will be kept anonymous and strict confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study. Please ensure you answer the questions according to your true feelings and experiences. Your honest and open responses are crucial for the success of this study.

## **Appendix B**

### ***Socio-Demographic Form***

This appendix consists of the sociodemographic details gathered during the course of the study.

Name / Initials:

Age:

Gender:

## Appendix C

### *Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support*

Read each statement clearly and select your answer by ticking 1 of the 7 options provided for each statement.

	Statements	Very Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mildly Disagree	Neutral	Mildly Agree	Strongly Agree	Very Strongly Agree
1	There is a special person who is around when I am in need.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2	There is a special person with whom I can share joys and sorrows.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3	My family really tries to help me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4	I get the emotional help & support I need from my family.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5	I have a special person who is a real source of comfort to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6	My friends really try to help me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

7	I can count on my friends when things go wrong.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	I can talk about my problems with my family.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9	I have friends with whom I can share my joys and sorrows.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10	There is a special person in my life who cares about my feelings	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11	My family is willing to help me make decisions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12	I can talk about my problems with my friends.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

## Appendix D

### *Rathus Assertiveness Schedule*

Read each statement clearly and select your answer by ticking 1 of the 6 options provided for each statement. Try to describe yourself accurately and generally.

		Very much like me	Rather like me	Slightly like me	Slightly unlike me	Rather unlike me	Very much unlike me
1	Most people seem to be more aggressive and assertive than I am.*	3	2	1	-1	-2	-3
2	I have hesitated to make or accept dates because of "shyness". *	3	2	1	-1	-2	-3
3	When the food served at a restaurant is not done to my satisfaction, I complain about it to the waiter or waitress.	3	2	1	-1	-2	-3
4	I am careful to avoid hurting other people's feelings, even when I feel that I have been injured. *	3	2	1	-1	-2	-3
5	If a salesperson has gone to considerable trouble to show me merchandise that is not quite suitable, I have a difficult time saying "No". *	3	2	1	-1	-2	-3
6	When I am asked to do something, I insist upon knowing why.	3	2	1	-1	-2	-3
7	There are times when I look for a good, vigorous argument.	3	2	1	-1	-2	-3
8	I strive to get ahead as well as most people in my position.	3	2	1	-1	-2	-3
9	To be honest, people often take advantage of me. *	3	2	1	-1	-2	-3
10	I enjoy starting conversations with new acquaintances and strangers.	3	2	1	-1	-2	-3
11	I often don't know what to say to people I find attractive. *	3	2	1	-1	-2	-3

12	I will hesitate to make phone calls to business establishments and institutions. *	3	2	1	-1	-2	-3
13	I would rather apply for a job or for admission to a college by writing letters than by going through with personal interviews. *	3	2	1	-1	-2	-3
14	I find it embarrassing to return merchandise. *	3	2	1	-1	-2	-3
15	If a close and respected relative were annoying me, I would smother my feelings rather than express my annoyance. *	3	2	1	-1	-2	-3
16	I have avoided asking questions for fear of sounding stupid. *	3	2	1	-1	-2	-3
17	During an argument, I am sometimes afraid that I will get so upset that I will shake all over. *	3	2	1	-1	-2	-3
18	If a famed and respected lecturer makes a comment which I think is incorrect, I will have the audience hear my point of view as well.	3	2	1	-1	-2	-3
19	I avoid arguing over prices with clerks and sales people. *	3	2	1	-1	-2	-3
20	When I have done something important or worthwhile, I manage to let others know about it.	3	2	1	-1	-2	-3
21	I am open and frank about my feelings.	3	2	1	-1	-2	-3
22	If someone has been spreading false and bad stories about me, I see him or her as soon as possible and "have a talk" about	3	2	1	-1	-2	-3
23	I often have a hard time saying "No." *	3	2	1	-1	-2	-3
24	I tend to bottle up my emotions rather than make a scene. *	3	2	1	-1	-2	-3

25	I complain about poor service in a restaurant and elsewhere.	3	2	1	-1	-2	-3
26	When I am given a compliment, I sometimes just don't know what to say. *	3	2	1	-1	-2	-3
27	If a couple near me in a theater or at a lecture were conversing rather loudly, I would ask them to be quiet or to take their conversation elsewhere.	3	2	1	-1	-2	-3
28	Anyone attempting to push ahead of me in a line is in for a good battle.	3	2	1	-1	-2	-3
29	I am quick to express an opinion.	3	2	1	-1	-2	-3
30	There are times when I just can't say anything. *	3	2	1	-1	-2	-3