



The Mediating Effect of Peer Communication between Social Withdrawal and Life Satisfaction of College Students

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Introduction. In this study, an examination as to whether social withdrawal on the part of college students has an effect on satisfaction with college life is presented along with an analysis of the possible mediating effect of peer communication on social withdrawal and dissatisfaction with college life.

Material and Methods. A total of 1,220 college students were analysed using the 7th year data of the Korea Child and Youth Panel Survey conducted by Korea Youth Policy Institute in 2016. Analysis using SPSS 23 and AMOS 23 software programs was carried out, along with t-test, ANOVA and structural equation analysis.

Results. A significant variation in satisfaction with college life according to demographic factors was noted. It was also found that social withdrawal has a direct impact on satisfaction with college life: the higher the degree of social withdrawal, the higher the satisfaction with college life. Moreover, social withdrawal increases satisfaction with college life as a function of peer communication. In other words, peer communication indirectly affects both social withdrawal and satisfaction with college life.

Discussion and Conclusion. Based on the results of this study, practical suggestions are proposed for improving the life satisfaction of college students. Programs for improving peer communication and increasing social interaction should be developed for college students.

Keywords: college students, social withdrawal, college life satisfaction, peer communication, mediating effect

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Влияние общения со сверстниками на социальное отчуждение и психологический комфорт студентов в колледже

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Введение. Статья посвящена изучению стрессовых ситуаций среди студентов колледжей в Южной Корее. Угнетенное психологическое состояние, вызванное неудачным выбором направления подготовки, негативно влияет на академическую успеваемость и становится источником межличностных конфликтов в студенческом коллективе.

Материалы и методы. Для изучения причин дискомфорта студентов в колледже и поиска способов улучшения их психологического самочувствия было проведено анкетирование, в котором приняла

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участие 1 220 студентов. Кроме того, в качестве вторичных источников использовались данные 7-го группового опроса детей и молодежи, проведенного Корейским институтом молодежной политики в 2016 г. Для обработки результатов исследования использовались программы SPSS 23 и AMOS 23, а также t-критерий, ANOVA и анализ структурных уравнений.

Результаты исследования. На основании полученных данных была отмечена значительная разница в уровне удовлетворенности жизнью в колледже среди студентов в зависимости от демографических показателей. Социальная отчужденность напрямую влияет на чувство неудовлетворенности, а интенсификация общения со сверстниками улучшает психологическое самочувствие студентов. Общение со сверстниками помогает студентам преодолеть чувство социального отчуждения и повысить степень удовлетворенности жизнью в колледже. Все это сказывается на их академических достижениях.

Обсуждение и заключение. На основании результатов этого исследования были сделаны практические предложения для проведения мероприятий среди студентов с целью укрепления их чувства удовлетворенности студенческой жизнью. Особенно необходимым для этого является разработка специальных программ для улучшения взаимного общения и социального взаимодействия. Результаты этого исследования будут полезны сотрудникам колледжа и кураторам, занимающимся улучшением условий проживания студентов в кампусе.

Ключевые слова: студент колледжа, социальное отчуждение, удовлетворенность жизнью в колледже, общение со сверстниками, эффект посредничества

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Introduction

In Korea, it is noted that students enter college without sufficiently considering their aptitudes and interests, resulting in struggles with their identity and a lot of stress associated with their preparations for career and employment [1; 2]. Some students, who are not able to adapt to college, suffer conflicts and confusion, eventually abandoning their studies as a result.

Due to the important role that it plays in helping college students make efforts to study and succeed in school life, satisfaction with college life is an important psychological factor. High college life satisfaction is correlated with increased academic achievements, higher levels of participation in school activities, more academic self-efficacy and lower academic stress [3].

In this study, we examine the effect of social withdrawal on college life satisfaction and investigate the mediating effect of peer communication between social withdrawal and college life satisfaction. It is hypothesised that increasing social support through relationships formed with fellow students could be a valuable approach to improving college life satisfaction and adaptability.

Literature Review

Shin Jong-ho et al. (2011) define college life satisfaction as a subjective assessment of the feelings of individuals about the college environment and their experience of it [4]. College life satisfaction refers to a satisfactory degree of quality in the overall experience of higher education [5]. In general, college life satisfaction can be affected by various university services such as educational support, career and employment support, as well as administrative support [6]. Lim Sung-bum (2014) defines college life satisfaction in terms of the difference between the ideal level of student services and the level of service they actually experience [7].

Based on Bronfenbrenner's theory of human developmental ecology, Kim Aehee and Yun Jong-hee (2010) summarise the environment surrounding the organism in terms of micro system, middle system, external system and macro system, examining the influences of self-efficacy, interpersonal skills, internal control, emotional intelligence, school, friends and family on school life satisfaction [8]. Seo In-seok and Hwang Hong-ik (2009) reported that factors affecting school life satisfaction were divided into individual variables and

school variables for high school students. The personal variables included gender, family, friendship, student motivation and self-efficacy. The school environment variables included school size and location, facility, class and teacher relationships [9].

School life satisfaction can vary depending on the convenience and comfort of the school's facilities and environment, in terms of school-related variables [9; 10]. However, there are also studies that find the school environment or facilities do not affect student satisfaction [11]. Shing Jong-ho et al. (2011) found empirical evidence that learners' school life satisfaction is more affected by socio-environmental variables such as sense of belonging than learning related variables [4]. Elsewhere, the comportment of professors and the quality of the instruction are seen as closely related to school satisfaction [12]. Choi Young-joon (2013) argued that educational content and education methods have a significant effect on school satisfaction [10]. Considering gender, studies have found that female students tend to have higher school life satisfaction than male students [13–15]. In contrast, there are studies that find male students to be more satisfied with school life [9; 12]. Kim Kyung-hwa (2016) reported that students with a high level of professional attitude maturity were very satisfied with college life [16]. Huebner & McCullough (2000) found that self-efficacy was an important factor in school satisfaction [17]. Hwang Yeo-jung and Kim Kyung-geun (2006) reported that intrinsic learning motivation had a positive effect on school satisfaction [18].

Many scholars have found that the better the social support and relationship with friends, the higher the satisfaction of school life [12; 15; 19–21]. Lee Yong-ho et al. (2013) found a correlation between social support and self-esteem, also noting that age has a direct effect on social support and indirectly influences the satisfaction of school life through social support [21]. Park Jae-am and Cho Min-hang (2011) analysed that social support significantly influenced college students' school life satisfaction [20]. In the study of medical students, Jun Soo-koung et al. (2016) analysed the rela-

tionship between junior and senior students as a major factor influencing school life satisfaction [12]. Junior-senior relationships can be regarded as a factor reflecting the special environment of medical schools in terms of social support. Social relationships with peers affect self-identity and have a positive effect on school adjustment [22].

Social support is an important variable of college life satisfaction. On the contrary, social alienation and social deprivation can be seen as a factor that can negatively affect college life satisfaction. The Korean Children & Youth Panel Survey (KCYPs) surveyed the Korean children and adolescents panel to evaluate social withdrawal. The questionnaire consisted of questions such as 'I feel awkward when there are a lot of people around me', 'I get very shy', 'I do not like to go out in front of people'. A study (2010) defines social anxiety as a form of social maladjustment [23], which is defined as a condition in appropriate relationships in interaction with people and the environment around them are not formed or maintained. If they fail to form a socially supportive relationship, students will not be able to develop a positive attitude toward the school, but will exhibit various psychological maladjustment problems [24].

Socially depressed adolescents may have difficulty developing appropriate social skills because of limited opportunities to learn peer relationship skills. Therefore, it is necessary to provide opportunities for socially depressed college students to acquire roles as social members in relationship with their peers, school and community, as well as to enjoy satisfying social relations.

Materials and Methods

Research Model. This study examines the effect of social withdrawal on college life satisfaction and considers whether social withdrawal on the part of college students improves college life satisfaction through peer communication. In order to achieve the purpose of the study, the research model is set out as depicted in Figure 1, according to the following research hypotheses.

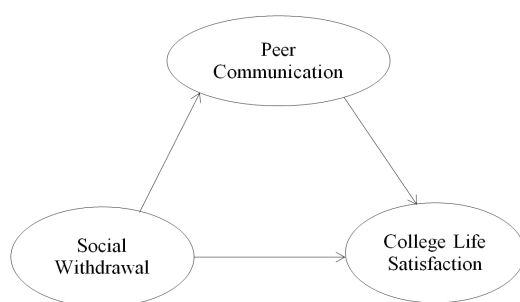


Fig. 1. Research model

Hypothesis 1: The social withdrawal of college students will directly affect college life satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2: The peer communication of college students will mitigate the effect of social withdrawal on college life satisfaction.

Research subjects. This study used data from the Korean Children & Youth Panel Survey (KCYPS) conducted by the Korea Youth Policy Institute. The KCYPS was conducted in 2010 for the purpose of identifying the growth and developmental patterns of children and adolescents. The multistage cluster sampling method was used to sample 7,071 students from 16 provinces consisting of 1st graders, 4th graders in elementary schools and 1st graders in middle schools. For the purposes of the present study, 1st year college students were selected in 2016 who used to be the 1st year students of middle school in 2010. Among the 2,351 extracted samples, questionnaires with missing values in the responses related to this study were excluded and the remaining 1,220 questionnaires were used for the final analysis.

Variables and measurement tools. College life satisfaction, comprising a dependent variable of this study, utilised the 7th survey data in 2016. Since middle school student panels became the first-year university students in 2016, 'career status following high school graduation' is added in the survey. College life satisfaction is composed of 5 items asking about lectures and educational content, teaching professors, curriculums, school facilities and the school support system. In this study, 4 items excluding school support system were used with 4-point Likert scale. The

larger the sum of the items, the higher the satisfaction with college life. The reliability of college life satisfaction (Cronbach's alpha) was .790.

Social withdrawal of the study used the survey data included in the section of emotional problem of the social-emotional development of personal development. The Korean Youth Policy Institute (KYDI) modified the question items originally made by Kim Sun-hee and Kim Kyung-yeon (1998), all 5 items with four-point Likert scales (not at all = 1, no = 2, yes = 3, and very much = 4). The higher the sum of the items, the higher the social withdrawal. The reliability of social withdrawal (Cronbach's alpha) of college students was .894.

The peer communication study component utilised data from the peer environment section. The tool used to measure the peer environment was that developed by Armsden & Greenberg (1987) having 3 sub-categories: Peer trust, Peer communication, Peer alienation. In this study, peer communication of 3 items was used with 4-point Likert scale (not at all = 1, no = 2, yes = 3, and very much = 4). The higher the sum of the items, the higher the peer communication. The reliability (Cronbach's alpha) was .745.

Analysis method. In this study, the analytical methods and procedures for solving research problems and verifying hypotheses are as follows. The SPSS 23 and AMOS 23 statistical software programs were used for the study analysis. Firstly, descriptive statistical and frequency analysis were conducted to examine the outliers, missing values and regularity of the main variables to be included in the research model along with the demographic characteristics of the subjects. Secondly, reliability analysis, correlation analysis and factor analysis were performed using SPSS 23. Thirdly, t-test and ANOVA were used to analyse the differences between the demographic variables according to the main variables. Finally, the model's suitability and the relationship between social withdrawal and college life satisfaction were examined according to the Structure Equation

Model (SEM) and an examination of the mediating effect of peer communication in between social withdrawal and college life satisfaction was carried out. Bootstrap analysis was performed to verify the mediating effect.

Results

General characteristics of the subjects. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the 1,220 college students who were selected for the final analysis. The results of this study are as follows. The subjects of the study consisted of 575 male students (47.1%) and 645 female students (52.9%). 375 (30.7%) were 2-year junior college students and 845 (69.3%) were 4-year college students. 273 (22.4%) students were from the national and public universities, while 947 (77.6%) were from private universities.

Descriptive statistics of main variables. The results of the descriptive statistics and verification of the normality of the main variables are shown in Table 2. The average of the social withdrawal variable was 2.20 out of 4, while the average of college life satisfaction was 3.11 and peer communication was 2.82. The model of this study consists of three latent variables of college student social withdrawal, college life satisfaction and peer communication. The minimum value of all variables is 1, while the maximum value is 4.

The mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis of the major variables to be included in the structural equation analysis model are shown in Table 2. In the structural equation model, if the normal distribution condition of each variable is not satisfied, a distorted result can be obtained. The main parameters used in this

study satisfy the normal distribution condition necessary for applying the structural equation model to the values of skewness and kurtosis, respectively, which are less than the absolute value 2.

Correlations of main variables. The results of correlations between social withdrawal, college life satisfaction and peer communication are shown in Table 3. As a result of the analysis, the correlation between all potential variables showed a significant correlation as $**p < .01$. The correlation between social withdrawal and college life satisfaction was $-.168$, social withdrawal and peer communication was $-.234$, while college life satisfaction and peer communication was $.163$.

Differences in college life satisfaction by gender and university related variables. As a result of analysing the difference of college life satisfaction according to the gender, college type and college foundation, there was a significant difference according to college type and foundation type excluding gender as shown in Table 4. College life satisfaction of students attending four-year colleges ($M = 2.87$) was higher than that of 2-year junior colleges ($M = 2.79$). National/public college ($M = 2.90$) was higher than private ($M = 2.83$).

Measurement model analysis. The analysis of the measurement model (Figure 2) was carried out using confirmatory factor analysis to confirm whether the measurement variables reflected the potential variables, i.e., social withdrawal, college life satisfaction and peer communication. As a result of evaluating the fit of the measurement model before analysis, $TLI = .959$, $CFI = .968$, and $RMSEA = .058$ showed that the fit of this model was satisfactory. As shown in Table 5, all the measured variables are significant

Table 1. General characteristics of the subjects

	Classification	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	575	47.1
	Female	645	52.9
College type	2-year college	375	30.7
	4-year college	845	69.3
College foundation	National/public	273	22.4
	Private	947	77.6



at the level of $p < .001$, indicating that the measured variables are well reflected and constitute the latent variables.

Structural model analysis. The fit of the structural model (Figure 3) is shown as $TLI = .959$, $CFI = .968$ and $RMSEA = .058$. The results of the analysis (Table 6) show that the path from social withdrawal to college life satisfaction is $CR = -3.878^{***}$, the path from social withdrawal to peer communication is $CR = -6.284^{***}$, and the path from peer communication to college life satisfaction $CR = 3.592^{***}$. Peer communication of college students was shown to have

a positive (+) effect on college life satisfaction through social withdrawal. This result shows that social withdrawal has a negative effect on college life satisfaction, which means that the greater the degree of social withdrawal, the lower the college life satisfaction. On the other hand, college student peer communication was demonstrated to play a mediating role in increasing college life satisfaction among college life satisfaction due to social withdrawal. Therefore, it can be said that the peer communication of college students is an important variable for increasing college life satisfaction.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of main variables

Latent variables	Measurement variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Social withdrawal	Social withdrawal 1	2.16	.880	.098	-.987
	Social withdrawal 2	2.33	.842	-.127	-.792
	Social withdrawal 3	2.02	.780	.345	-.410
	Social withdrawal 4	2.25	.846	-.079	-.910
	Social withdrawal 5	2.27	.880	.059	-.840
College life satisfaction	College life satisfaction 1	3.20	.481	.297	1.297
	College life satisfaction 2	3.22	.520	.044	.849
	College life satisfaction 3	3.16	.675	-.595	.694
	College life satisfaction 4	2.87	.584	-.619	1.471
Peer communication	Peer communication 1	2.84	.630	-.448	.694
	Peer communication 2	2.82	.686	-.489	.499
	Peer communication 3	2.82	.705	-.483	.397

Table 3. Correlations of main variables

Variables	Social withdrawal	College life satisfaction	Peer communication	Cronbach's α
Social withdrawal	1			.894
College life satisfaction	-.168**	1		.790
Peer communication	-.234**	.163**	1	.745

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

Table 4. Difference of college life satisfaction by gender and college variables

	Classification		N	Mean	SD	F/t
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Gender	Male		575	2.85	.49	.078
	Female		645	2.85	.45	

1	2	3	4	5	6
College type	2-year college	375	2.79	.47	-2.843**
	4-year college	845	2.87	.46	
College foundation	National/public	273	2.90	.43	2.016*
	Private	947	2.83	.48	

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

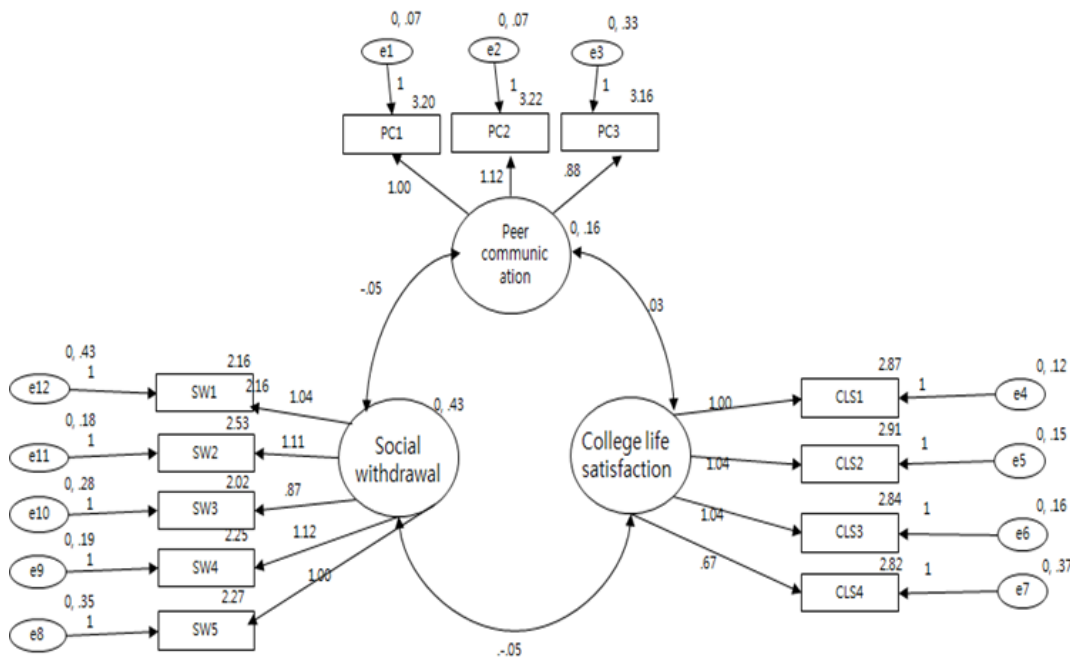


Fig. 2. Measurement model

Table 5. Analysis results of measurement model

Latent variables	Measurement variables	Estimate		SE	CR
		B	β		
1	2	3	4	5	6
Social withdrawal	Social withdrawal 1	1.000	.743		
	Social withdrawal 2	1.104	.853	.037	29.631***
	Social withdrawal 3	.871	.730	.035	25.169***
	Social withdrawal 4	1.114	.865	.037	30.026***
	Social withdrawal 5	1.038	.771	.039	26.669***
College life satisfaction	College life satisfaction 1	1.000	.808		
	College life satisfaction 2	1.1038	.788	.039	26.290***
	College life satisfaction 3	1.038	.777	.040	26.052***
	College life satisfaction 4	.666	.459	.044	15.096***

1	2	3	4	5	6
Peer communication	Peer communication 1	1.000	.829		
	Peer communication 2	1.125	.861	.053	21.228***
	Peer communication 3	.877	.518	.052	16.979***

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

Analysis of mediation effect. The structural model shows that peer communication plays a mediating role between social withdrawal and college life satisfaction. Bootstrapping, which comprises one of the possible verification methods of mediating effects, was performed to verify the mediating effect. Table 7 depicts the analysed total, direct and indirect effects. The mediating effect of peer communication between social withdrawal and college life satisfaction was $-.156$, the direct effect was $-.130$ and indirect effect was $-.028$, indicating that peer communication was partially mediated between social withdrawal and college life satisfaction. The indirect confidence

interval was $-.052 \sim -.009^{**}$, which was significant at the significance level $p < .01$. The effect of social withdrawal on college life satisfaction was partially mediated by peer communication ($-.026^{**}$).

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of social withdrawal of Korean college students on college life satisfaction and the effect of peer communication between social withdrawal on college life satisfaction, based on the data of 1,220 college students in the 7th year of KCYPS conducted by Korea Youth Policy Institute.

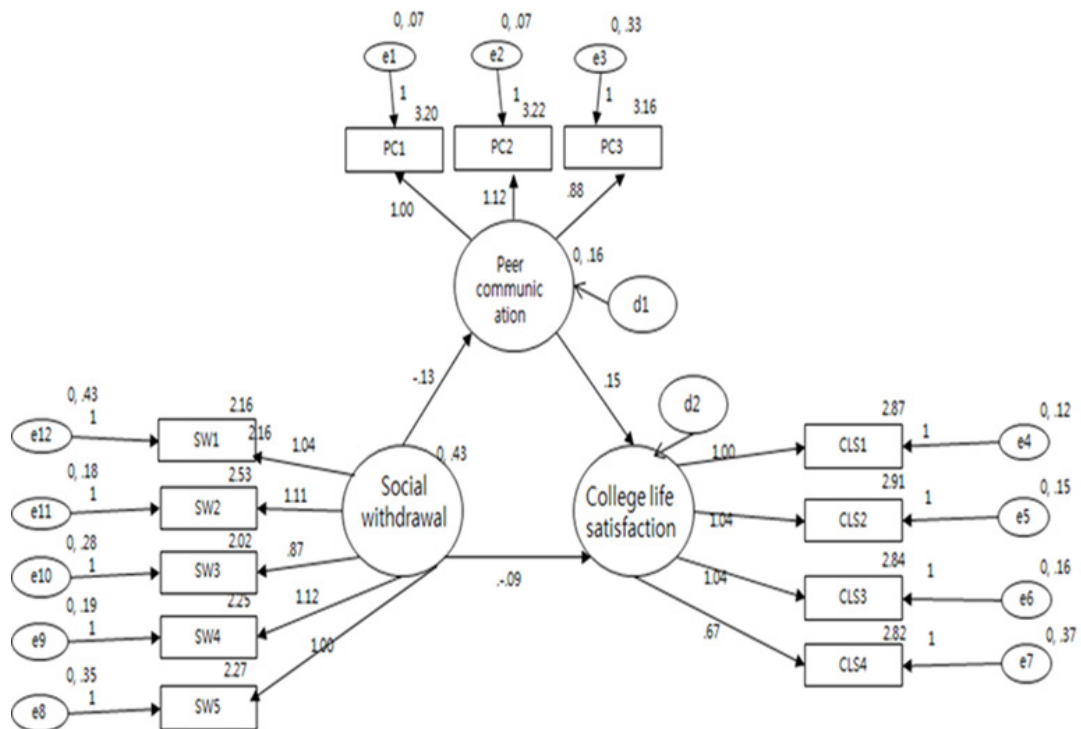


Fig. 3. Final model analysis

Table 6. Final structural model analysis

Path	Estimate		SE	CR
	B	β		
Social withdrawal → College life satisfaction	-.094	-.130	.024	-3.878***
Social withdrawal → Peer communication	-.127	-.208	.020	-6.284***
Peer communication → College life satisfaction	.147	.124	.041	3.592***

Table 7. Path effect of structural model

Path	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Indirect Confidence Interval
Social withdrawal → College life satisfaction	-.156	-.130	-.026	-.052---.009**
Social withdrawal → Peer communication	-.208	-.208	.000	
Peer communication → College life satisfaction	.124	.124	.000	

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

First, the social withdrawal of college students has a significant direct influence on college life satisfaction. Social withdrawal has a negative effect on college life satisfaction, which means that the greater the social withdrawal, the lower the college life satisfaction. These results are consistent with previous research demonstrating that school life satisfaction is affected by social support and social relations [15; 19–22; 12; 24].

Social withdrawal is a psychological maladjustment problem that occurs when a person’s relationships are not properly formed. In recent years, due to changes in the environment of universities following a decline in the school-age population, the university authorities are paying more attention to improving student satisfaction and school satisfaction [6]. While improving the quality of education and education services is a necessary condition for improving college life satisfaction, it is important to examine the psychological state and attitude of students more directly in order to help them to form social relations and structure support approaches especially in college life. From the results, it is apparent that a support programme should be developed in order to provide opportunities for college students to form relationships

with colleagues and students, thus acquiring necessary social skills.

Second, the peer communication of college students plays a mediating role in increasing college life satisfaction in the context of processes of social withdrawal and their effect on college life satisfaction. Peer communication was found to be an important factor in improving college life satisfaction due to having a significant (+) influence on college life satisfaction and a negative (-) relationship with social withdrawal. This is also related to the confirmation of the first hypothesis of this study and implies that it is meaningful to raise the level of peer communication as one way to mitigate social withdrawal, since social withdrawal is a factor that reduces college life satisfaction. In the KCYPS of the Youth Policy Research Institute, peer communication is measured through items such as ‘my friends respect my thoughts when they talk with me’, ‘my friends listen to what I say’, ‘I talk about my problems and concerns to my friends’. Therefore, it can be seen that college students do not form peer relations on the basis of superficial dialogue but rather on mutual respect and the need to form relationships that help them to talk about their anxieties and problems.



This study increased the likelihood of generalisation of the research results by analysing the nationwide sampling data of Korean children and adolescents. The significance of this study lies in providing a foundation for discussing the importance of college support and designing various programs within the college aimed at improving students' peer communication in relation to boosting college life satisfaction.

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