Subjective well-being and its association with peer caring and resilience among nursing vs medical students: A questionnaire study

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**INTRODUCTION**

Subjective well-being (SWB), a focal concept in positive psychology, has attracted increasing interest in research. The significance of SWB levels and the factors influencing them are well recognized. Nursing students often experience high levels of stress (Gibbons, 2010). Continued high stress can affect students’ mental health. Psychological well-being enables people to be more productive and effective, making it a very important component in the training and development of future nurses (Ratanasiripong et al., 2012), and medical staff.

Over 10% of Chinese nursing students suffer from moderate to severe anxiety, and nearly 1/3 score high on depressive symptoms which is more than other Chinese young people. (Cao et al., 2003; Zhang et al., 2007). More attention has been focused on the mental health of nursing students in China, and other countries (Prydenberg, 2004; Ross et al., 2005; Gibbons, 2010). Psychologically healthier nursing students tend to be more productive and successful in their academic and clinical studies, work more efficiently, and provide better care for patients (Ratanasiripong et al., 2012).

Although previous international studies have revealed influencing factors of nursing students’ depression and burn-out (Ross et al., 2005; Gibbons, 2010), a little is known about the factors influencing their positive state, and keep them feeling well. In addition, little attention has been paid to investigating the general well-being of nursing students and medical students. Dyrbye et al. (2006) showed that prevalence of depression and anxiety is higher among medical students than in general population. Caring about the health of both nursing and
medical students is necessary to provide high-quality treatment and care. Identifying the differences between the two groups in terms of general well-being and protective factors will provide meaningful guidance for future education. It is necessary to explore SWB and factors connected.

**Background**

Subjective well-being has gained increasing research attention in recent years (Hawker, 2012; Lent et al., 2014). Previous studies have emphasized the importance of well-being in the quality of life, positive emotions, cognitive capacity, physical health, and social productivity, rather than the absence of disorder (Pavot and Diener, 2004). Students have been reported to fare lower on psychological well-being than the general population (Roberts and Zelenyanski, 2002), but it seems that they do not seek help for these health complaints (Boot et al., 2009). A sense of well-being benefits students' intellectual and professional development, instead of simply completing enough credits for a degree (Jimenez, 2011). It is thus necessary to understand their level of SWB and the factors influencing it.

Peer caring refers to caring behavior in students’ peer-to-peer interactions (Kuo et al., 2007). Peer caring has attracted little attention from researchers in Western countries (Wagnild, 2009). Resilience can have an increased positive effect leading to enhanced self-esteem, improved life satisfaction, and successful buffering of negative experiences (Liu et al., 2012). As a result, it has become a popular topic of research in positive psychology (Frydenberg, 2004).

Resilience may enable individuals to retain health in difficult times (Connor and Davidson, 2003). Thus, we expected resilience to be a strong predictor of SWB. Bíró et al. (2015) report that support from family and peers had a positive impact on resilience among physiotherapy students. The support from peers may also exert more effects on SWB when students have higher resilience. Based on the relationships of peer caring, resilience and SWB, we also hypothesized that as a psychological resource, resilience may mediate and moderate the effects of peer caring on SWB.

**Methods**

**Design**

A cross-sectional survey design was used to examine peer caring, resilience, and SWB in nursing and medical students, and to test the mediating and moderating effects of resilience in the two groups. The following hypotheses were tested (Fig. 1): H1: Peer caring and resilience predict well-being. H2: Resilience mediates and moderates the relationship between peer caring and SWB among the two samples. We hypothesize that peer caring will play a more significant role for resilient students in improving SWB and peer caring predicts SWB fully or partly through resilience.

**Ethical Consideration**

The study was approved by the director of the school of nursing and by the academic affairs office of the university. The students were informed verbally about the purpose of the study and their freedom to participate or withdraw from the study. They were given a small gift if

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**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants’ demographic information and comparisons of SWB peer caring and resilience of nursing vs medical students in SWB.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>N (%)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Nursing students</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender Female</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Medical students</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender Female</td>
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<td>Male</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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Maximum points for SWB scale was 124, for peer caring 102 and for resilience 175.

* p < 0.05.
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