



**RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SOCIAL IDENTITY, SOCIAL SUPPORT,  
SELF-EFFICACY AND DEPRESSIVE TENDENCIES AMONG UNIVERSITY  
STUDENTS IN YUNNAN PROVINCE, CHINA**

**By**

**WU JUN**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra  
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Master of Science**

**July 2024**

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## DEDICATION

*This thesis is dedicated to the people who mean a lot to me*

*Thanks to my family for their understanding, tolerance, and support.*

*Thanks to my lecturers and classmates for their help and care.*

*All these make me feel kindness and warmth.*

*I will always remember this time.*

*Thank you all very much.*



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in  
fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

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**July 2024**

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**Faculty : Human Ecology**

This study aimed to determine the relationships between social identity, social support, self-efficacy, and depressive tendencies among university students in Yunnan Province, China. It employed quantitative methodology and used a survey to perform descriptive and inferential analyses. In addition, the study employed mediator analysis to assess the impact of self-efficacy as a mediator on the link between the independent variables and the dependent variable. 468 university students aged 18 to 23 from two universities in Yunnan Province were selected for this study. Data were collected via a survey that involved a self-administered questionnaire. The respondents were selected using a multi-stage sampling method. Data were collected using a set of questionnaires that included socio-demographic information, the Personal and Social Identity Scales (subscale of Social Identity), the Perceived Social Support Scale, the General Self-Efficacy Scale, and the Beck Depression Inventory. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient values obtained from all instruments

ranged from 0.867 to 0.976. The statistical analyses used were t-test, Pearson correlation, multiple regression, and Bootstrap tests. The findings revealed that the majority of respondents exhibited a moderate level of social identity, along with high levels of social support and self-efficacy. In terms of depressive tendencies, most respondents reported either no or very mild depressive symptoms, followed by severe depressive tendencies. The results revealed that there were significant differences in social identity, social support, self-efficacy, and depressive tendencies between males and females. Males exhibited a higher level of social identity, social support, and self-efficacy than females. Additionally, females have higher depressive tendencies than males. Findings also indicated that social identity, social support, and self-efficacy have a negative significant relationship with depressive tendencies ( $r = -0.398$  to  $r = -0.405$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The findings also revealed a positive significant relationship between social identity and social support with self-efficacy ( $r = 0.398$  to  $r = 0.466$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The multiple regression analysis indicated that predictor variables, namely social identity, social support, and self-efficacy, significantly predicted depressive tendencies [ $R^2 = 0.255$ ,  $F = 52.995$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ]. The results show that social identity was the most important predictor of depressive tendencies, followed by social support and self-efficacy. The Bootstrap test suggested that self-efficacy is not only the mediator of the relationship between social identity and depressive tendencies but also the mediator of the relationship between social support and depressive tendencies. In conclusion, social identity, social support, and self-efficacy were found to be related to and predictive of depressive tendencies among university students in Yunnan Province, China. Enhancing positive social identity, stable social

support, and optimistic self-efficacy can help reduce depressive tendencies. Addressing these factors is crucial for alleviating negative emotions, supporting personal growth, and promoting psychological well-being. Understanding the mediating role of self-efficacy offers valuable insights for designing interventions aimed at reducing depressive tendencies.

**Keywords:** Depressive Tendencies, Self-efficacy, Social identity, Social support, University Students

**SDG:** GOAL 3: Good Health and Well-Being, GOAL 4: Quality Education

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia  
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

**HUBUNGAN ANTARA IDENTITI SOSIAL, SOKONGAN SOSIAL, EFIKASI  
KENDIRI DAN KECENDERUNGAN KEMURUNGAN DALAM KALANGAN  
PELAJAY UNIVERSITI DI WILAYAH YUNNAN, CHINA**

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Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menentukan hubungan antara identiti sosial, sokongan sosial, efikasi sendiri, dan kecenderungan kemurungan dalam kalangan pelajar universiti di Wilayah Yunnan, China. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dan teknik tinjauan dengan mengaplikasikan analisis deskriptif dan inferensi. Selain itu, kajian menggunakan analisis mediator untuk mengukur kesan mediator efikasi sendiri terhadap hubungan antara pembolehubah bebas dan pembolehubah bersandar. Seramai 468 pelajar universiti berumur 18 hingga 23 tahun dari dua universiti di wilayah Yunnan telah dipilih untuk kajian ini. Satu tinjauan soal selidik yang ditadbir sendiri telah digunakan untuk mengumpul data dan kaedah persampelan pelbagai peringkat digunakan untuk memilih responden. Data diperoleh melalui satu set soal selidik yang terdiri daripada latar belakang sosio-demografi, Skala Identiti Peribadi dan Sosial, Skala Sokongan Sosial yang Ditanggapi, Skala Efikasi Kendiri Umum, dan Inventori Kemurungan Beck. Kesemua instrumen

yang digunakan menghasilkan nilai pekali kebolehpercayaan Alpha Cronbach antara 0.867 hingga 0.976. Analisis statistik yang digunakan ialah ujian-t, ANOVA, korelasi Pearson, regresi berganda, dan Bootstrap. Dapatan menunjukkan bahawa majoriti responden menunjukkan tahap identiti sosial yang sederhana, tahap sokongan sosial, dan efikasi sendiri yang tinggi, manakala bagi kecenderungan kemurungan, majoriti responden menunjukkan bahawa mereka tidak mempunyai kecenderungan kemurungan atau sangat ringan. Keputusan menunjukkan bahawa terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan dalam identiti sosial, sokongan sosial, efikasi sendiri dan kecenderungan kemurungan antara lelaki dan perempuan. Lelaki mempunyai tahap identiti sosial, sokongan sosial dan efikasi sendiri yang lebih tinggi daripada perempuan. Selain itu, pelajar perempuan mempunyai kecenderungan kemurungan yang lebih tinggi daripada pelajar lelaki. Dapatan juga menunjukkan bahawa identiti sosial, sokongan sosial, dan efikasi sendiri mempunyai hubungan signifikan yang negatif dengan kecenderungan kemurungan ( $r=-0.398$  hingga  $r=-0.405$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Dapatan juga mendapati identiti sosial dan sokongan sosial mempunyai hubungan signifikan yang positif dengan efikasi sendiri ( $r=0.398$  hingga  $r=0.466$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Analisis regresi berganda menunjukkan pembolehubah peramal iaitu identiti sosial, sokongan sosial, dan efikasi sendiri telah meramal kecenderungan kemurungan secara signifikan [ $R^2 = 0.255$ ,  $F = 52.995$ ,  $p<0.001$ ]. Keputusan menunjukkan bahawa identiti sosial adalah peramal terpenting kecenderungan kemurungan, diikuti oleh sokongan sosial dan efikasi sendiri. Ujian Bootstrap menunjukkan bahawa efikasi sendiri bukan sahaja pengantara bagi hubungan antara identiti sosial dan kecenderungan



kemurungan tetapi juga pengantara hubungan antara sokongan sosial dan kecenderungan kemurungan. Kesimpulannya, identiti sosial, sokongan sosial, dan efikasi sendiri didapati berkait dan meramal kecenderungan kemurungan dalam kalangan pelajar universiti di Wilayah Yunnan, China. Peningkatan identiti sosial yang positif, sokongan sosial yang berterusan dan efikasi sendiri yang optimis boleh membantu mengurangkan kecenderungan kemurungan. Ia adalah penting untuk mengurangkan emosi negatif, menyokong pertumbuhan peribadi, dan mempromosikan kesejahteraan psikologi. Memahami fungsi efikasi sendiri sebagai pengantara dapat memberikan input yang bernilai untuk merancang intervensi yang bertujuan mengurangkan kecenderungan kemurungan.

**Kata Kunci:** Kecenderungan Kemurungan, Efikasi Kendiri, Identiti sosial, Sokongan sosial, Pelajar Universiti

**SDG:** MATLAMAT 3: Kesihatan dan Kesejahteraan yang Baik, MATLAMAT 4: Kualiti Pendidikan

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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of the Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|                |                                                        |
|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| GHDx           | Global Health Data Exchange                            |
| WHO            | World Health Organization                              |
| NIMH           | National Institute of Mental Health                    |
| AIQ-IIIx       | Personal and Social Identity Scales                    |
| PSSS           | Perceived Social Support Scale                         |
| MSPSS          | The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support |
| GSES           | General Self-Efficacy Scales                           |
| BDI            | Beck Depression Inventory                              |
| APA            | American Psychological Association                     |
| EDA            | Exploratory Data Analysis                              |
| SD             | Standard Deviation                                     |
| SPSS           | Statistical Package for Social Science                 |
| IV             | Independent Variable                                   |
| DV             | Dependent Variable                                     |
| MV             | Mediator Variable                                      |
| n              | Population Size                                        |
| s              | Sample Size                                            |
| df             | Degree of Freedom                                      |
| t              | t-value (from t-distribution)                          |
| r              | Correlation Coefficient                                |
| Beta           | Standardized Coefficient (Beta)                        |
| F              | F statistics distribution                              |
| R <sup>2</sup> | Regression Determinant Coefficient                     |
| p              | Statistical significant                                |

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Introduction

As many of us are aware, World Mental Health Day is annually marked on October 10th. The chosen theme for the 2023 edition of the festival, "Mental Health is a Universal Human Right," provided us with an opportunity to revive our endeavors in building a more improved world (Ivbijaro, 2023). Mental health deserves everyone's attention. According to the United Nations Human Rights Office of The High Commissioner (OHCHR [about UN Human Rights, 2024]), it emphasizes that mental health is a fundamental human right and that all people have the right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. Among mental illnesses, depression is one of the most recognized and understood by the general public.

The diagnostic criteria for Major Depressive Disorder, as outlined by the American Psychiatric Association in the DSM-5-TR (2022), require the presence of five or more of the following symptoms for most of the day, nearly every day, over a continuous two-week period: a depressed mood; a marked decrease in interest or pleasure in all or almost all activities; significant weight loss or gain, or a substantial change in appetite; insomnia or hypersomnia; psychomotor agitation or retardation; fatigue or loss of energy; feelings of worthlessness or excessive or inappropriate guilt; diminished ability to think or concentrate, or indecisiveness; and recurrent thoughts of death, suicidal ideation without a specific plan, suicide attempts, or suicidal behavior with a

specific plan. These symptoms must cause significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning and cannot be attributed to the direct physiological effects of a substance (e.g., medication) or another medical condition (American Psychiatric Association, DSM-5-TR, 2022). However, in daily life, we will find that even if some people have emotional and attention problems, they are still capable of daily work and life, and they are not serious enough to be identified and treated by a psychiatrist in the hospital. People with depressive tendencies are likely to develop into patients with depression. Depressive symptoms arise from the interplay between individuals and society and are a manifestation of social behavior. People have explained and studied them from many aspects and angles. The theoretical framework and empirical research in the field of social psychology provide a significant framework for understanding depression. It demonstrates the validity and insights of theories and research methods of social psychology in explaining the causes, mechanisms and manifestations of depression. Through these theoretical frameworks, we can understand depression more comprehensively, thereby providing more scientific and robust support for prevention and treatment.

In this study, the main theory used is the self-efficacy theory from social psychology. Self-efficacy theory is based on social cognitive theory, which conceptualizes person-behavior-environment interactions as triadic reciprocity (Bandura, 1977, 1986). Self-efficacy has gained significance as a crucial factor in social psychology studies due to its correlation with numerous positive outcomes, particularly in the domains of physical and mental well-being

(Gecas, 1989). The theory of self-efficacy posits that it has a significant impact on the success of therapeutic interventions aimed at improving psychological adjustment, dysfunction, and emotional and behavioral issues (Maddux, 1995). Self-efficacy plays a significant role in shaping individuals' decisions and actions. According to Schunk and Pajares (2009), people tend to select tasks and activities that align with their perceived competence and confidence, while avoiding those that they feel less capable of. Individuals with a low sense of self-efficacy may hold the belief that tasks and challenges are more difficult than they are. This mindset can lead to increased anxiety, stress, and even depression, as well as a limited perspective on effective problem-solving strategies.

Social psychology is a scientific field focusing on understanding and improving interactions among individuals and groups, combining theory and practical applications for social enhancement (Ward, 2022). Meanwhile, social psychology is a subdiscipline of psychology that focuses on how individuals are influenced by the presence of others (Harlak, 2022). It focuses on the personal and social factors that influence thoughts, behaviors, and emotions, such as interpersonal perception, attraction, inhibition, and facilitation, as well as group dynamics like cohesion and decision-making, which can have a significant impact on mental health (Ma, 2020). At the personal level, social psychology explores individual psychological features such as needs, motives, emotions, and personal characteristics that facilitate social interaction and adaptation; At the group level, it investigates collective meanings and social needs that drive group dynamics and interactions (Grachev et al., 2023). As

human beings are a complex combination of physiological, psychological, and social dimensions, an individual's mental health is often influenced by social factors (Zhang, 2019). Social psychology explores social-psychological phenomena in everyday life, emphasizing ecological validity and person-environment transactions, aiming to bridge the gap between lab experimentation and field observation (Hofmann & Grigoryan, 2023). Therefore, social psychology places great importance on analyzing the psychological factors that affect individuals and emphasizes the interaction between the individual and society (Shen, 2020).

The World Mental Health survey is a representative community-based survey conducted in 28 countries around the world, and the results show that mental disorders are prevalent in all participating countries (Kessler et al., 2009). According to the Global Health Data Exchange (GHDx) in 2023, the prevalence of depression is estimated to be around 280 million individuals worldwide. Severe depression can even lead to suicidal behavior. More than 700,000 people die by suicide each year, and it is the fourth leading cause of death among 15-29 year olds (WHO, 2023). According to the National Institute of Mental Health (2023) statistics, 21 million adult Americans are thought to have experienced a serious depressive episode at least once. This figure corresponds to 8.3% of all adult Americans. Adults between the ages of 18 and 25 had the highest frequency of major depressive episodes (18.6%).

A research study shows that the lifetime prevalence of adult depressive disorders in China is as high as 6.8 percent (Lu et al., 2021). It is worth noting

that the current phenomenon of depression is getting younger and more common. In China, depression screening has been included in the basic physical examination of primary and secondary school students. The incidence of depression among adolescents has reached 15-20%, a figure that is comparable to that of adults. This is a concerning trend, as 50% of those affected are school students (Huang Shan University, 2022). Some scholars have noted that depression is prevalent among university students and has emerged as a significant factor impacting their mental well-being (Wang et al., 2020). In China, the prevalence of depression among university students remains high. Therefore, it is crucial to make more efforts to provide better mental health care for Chinese university students (Gao et al., 2020).

In actual diagnosis, a psychiatrist can only detect depression in a restricted proportion of persons. Many people who have partial symptoms of depression but cannot meet the criteria for diagnosis and treatment of depression can only be classified as depressive tendencies. Depressive tendencies refer to the extent to which an individual exhibits symptoms associated with depression, characterized by persistent negative feelings, loss of interest, and cognitive impairments such as difficulty in forgetting negative material (He et al., 2022; Xie et al., 2018). It is a psychological state that can adversely affect an individual's physical and mental health, as well as their social and occupational functioning (Huang et al., 2023). Depressive tendencies are an early stage in the onset of depressive disorders and are usually characterized by high scores on the Depressive Symptom Assessment and mild depressive symptoms (Liu, 2002; Heponiemi et al., 2006). Its scope mainly includes depressive states in

the normal range and mild depressive states caused by systemic diseases. It is an interval between normal people and depressed patients.

Research on university students revealed that social isolation and loneliness were major contributors to depressive syndromes, with a notable decrease in these symptoms following the alleviation of social restrictions (Holm-Hadulla et al., 2023). A longitudinal analysis indicated a bidirectional relationship, where social isolation positively influenced depressive symptoms and vice versa, particularly in older adults (Zhu et al., 2024). However, evidence suggests that social identity is a strong predictor of overall mental health and well-being (Cruwys et al., 2014). Research indicates that social identities can serve as psychological resources, enhancing resilience and well-being, particularly among first-generation migrants who face challenges such as prejudice and identity disconnection during integration into host societies (Brance et al., 2024). For athletes, social identities serve as psychological resources that support mental health, especially during transitions. Leadership informed by a social identity approach can enhance athlete mental health by fostering a supportive environment (Stevens et al., 2024). In collegiate athletes, social identity and team dynamics significantly affect help-seeking behaviors for mental health issues, with male athletes often experiencing stigma that discourages them from seeking assistance, while female athletes benefit from supportive environments (Aditya et al., 2024). The correlation between social identity and mental health outcomes such as sadness, anxiety, and life satisfaction has been established (Uchino, Bowen & Kent, 2016). Based on this, social identity, as an important factor in predicting depression tendency,



will be studied in this study.

Another contributing component is social support. Social support is seen as a predictor of individual depression, being one of the significant social components in depression (Guo et al., 2021). Social support significantly reduces negative feelings in individuals and is particularly effective in lowering the risk of depression (Szkody et al., 2020; Mohd Khir et al., 2020). Additionally, perceived social support has been negatively correlated with depression, anxiety, and stress, with family support being especially crucial in reducing depression among pregnant women (Ajmal et al., 2024). Moreover, during the COVID-19 pandemic, a large-scale study demonstrated that overall social support was associated with a 55% reduction in the odds of experiencing depression. Emotional and informational support, along with positive social interactions, were particularly effective in reducing depressive symptoms (Choi et al., 2023). The study of social support continues to expand and deepen, and the link between social support and depression is being investigated and defined. This study continues to investigate the link between social support and depression utilizing university students as the research group.

In addition, research has demonstrated a link between self-efficacy and depression. The mental health of individuals is affected by their self-efficacy (Feng & Zhang, 2023). Self-efficacy may serve as a protective factor for mental health (Ruotolo et al., 2023). Patients with higher self-efficacy levels experienced fewer depressive symptoms, suggesting that self-efficacy can be

a protective factor against depression in this group (Azano et al., 2024). Furthermore, negative experiences on social media were linked to lower self-efficacy and increased depressive symptoms among adolescents, highlighting the importance of self-efficacy as a protective factor against negative social influences (Bonsaksen et al., 2023). Similarly, there is an abundance of study on self-efficacy. Self-efficacy enhances flexibility and reduces negative feelings like anxiety (Kestler-Peleg et al., 2020). The self-efficacy of university students has a notable impact on the subjective well-being of university students (Li, 2016). Therefore, self-efficacy is important in preventing and reducing depression.

This study aimed to examine the relationship between social identity, social support, self-efficacy, and depressive tendencies. The study utilized path diagrams to reveal the direct and indirect influences among these variables, thereby enhancing comprehension of the mechanisms and processes implicated in the emergence of depressive tendencies. This research also has practical ramifications, since it can provide valuable insights for the creation of policies and actions aimed at fostering a conducive social environment. Hence, it is imperative and significant to investigate the correlation among these four parameters.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

As the pace of life continues to accelerate and the competitive pressures people face in life and work are increasing, the incidence of depression is on the rise year after year. It is noteworthy that in the past 10 years, the incidence

of depression among young people aged 10 to 24 (especially females) has shown a sharp increase and has become a serious public health problem (Thapar et al., 2022). In addition, the Chinese National Mental Health Development Report (2019-2020) released by the Institute of Psychology, Chinese Academy of Sciences showed that the detection rate of depression in Chinese adolescents was 24.6%, and the detection rate was 7.4 % of cases classified as severe depression. University students as a relatively high detection rate of depression group, and many scholars' survey results have confirmed this. Zhang et al. (2020) found the incidence of depression among university students in China ranges from 13.25% to 79.90%, much higher than the general population, and is on the rise year by year. Wang et al. (2020) found the prevalence of depression among university students has been 31.38% in the last ten years, with a higher prevalence of depression among university students than among the general population. A study in the United States revealed that more than half of university students have at least mild depression (Grineski et al., 2021). As well, according to the American College Health Association (ACHA, 2023), about 40% of college students reported symptoms of depression in 2023, and 20% of them believed that their depression had a significant impact on their academic performance. A study in Bangladesh found that mental depression, along with anxiety and stress, is rising sharply among tertiary-level students, posing a critical social challenge (Shafi et al., 2023). In Malaysia, Ashraful Islam et al. (2018) has shown that 30% of university students have experienced depression; another repeated cross-sectional study reported a prevalence of depressive symptoms ranging from 26.4% to 36.8% (Cheong et al., 2022). The prevalence of depression

among university students is concerning.

Some studies have shown that the average age of onset of depression is about 25 years old (Herrman et al., 2022; Medical Xpress, 2022), 15-19 years old, and 25-29 years old are the two age stages of the high incidence of depression. University students are mostly in this age stage; thus, university students have a high incidence of depression, and depression has become one of the main factors affecting university students' life, study, and work. Therefore, depressive situations are common for this group of university students and, at the same time, deserve attention.

On the other hand, individuals in the university stage need to face and deal with more complex interpersonal relationships, whether they can obtain external support, and whether they have confidence and belief in themselves to complete and deal with events, which will affect their emotions and thus affect their mental health.

Depression is influenced by a multitude of factors, as evidenced by recent literature. The first one of the primary factors is social identity. The study conducted by Cruwys et al. (2014) provided evidence that social identification strongly predicts mental health and overall well-being. A meta-analysis revealed that strong social identification generally correlates with lower depression levels (Postmes et al., 2018). Some researchers have proposed that social identity theory can be used as the conceptual basis of social relations in depression research to further explore the relationship between

social relations and depression (Cruwys et al., 2014). The second is social support. Social support has been related to significant mental health outcomes including depression, anxiety, and life satisfaction (Uchino, Bowen & Kent, 2016). A review of literature confirmed that perceived social support from family and friends correlates with reduced depressive symptoms, emphasizing its protective nature (Jain & Jha, 2022). Similarly, a large-scale study of adolescents in low- and middle-income countries found that peer support and parental connectedness were protective factors against depressive symptoms (Wu et al., 2022). Additionally, research on Nigerian-Libya returnees revealed that social support not only predicts resilience but also reduces hopelessness and depression (Olajubu & Afolabi, 2019). The last is self-efficacy. Miller et al. (2019) found that self-efficacy is a separate factor that can predict depressive symptoms. In adolescents, self-efficacy was shown to buffer the impact of stress on depressive symptoms (Fürtjes et al., 2023). Furthermore, a quasi-experimental study demonstrated that self-efficacy training significantly reduced depression in patients (Fakhrialsadat et al., 2020).

When exploring the relationship between social identity, social support, self-efficacy, and depressive tendencies, there is a gap between the current situation and the ideal state. From the perspective of related factors, social identity has an important impact on mental health, but the specific mechanism is not fully understood. In addition, there is insufficient discussion of the mechanism by which social support affects depressive tendencies through self-efficacy. In general, the theoretical model of how social identity, social support, and self-efficacy affect depressive tendencies is not mature enough.

The study was conducted with a group of university students in a specific cultural context in China, which enhances the general applicability of the research results. Based on the research results, comprehensive intervention measures can be developed and implemented to improve social identity, social support and self-efficacy.

Therefore, what is the depressive situation among university students? How do the factors associated with it manifest themselves, and what are their relationships, etc.? These are the questions that will be examined and explored in this study.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

1. What are the levels of social identity, social support, self-efficacy, and depressive tendencies among university students in Yun Nan Province, China?
2. Are there any differences in social identity, social support, self-efficacy, and depressive tendencies of university students in Yun Nan Province in terms of gender?
3. Are there any significant relationships between social identity, social support, self-efficacy, and depressive tendencies of university students in Yun Nan Province, China?
4. Which factors uniquely predict depressive tendencies among university students in Yun Nan Province, China?
5. Does self-efficacy mediate the relationship between social identity and depressive tendencies among university students in Yunnan Province?
6. Does self-efficacy mediate the relationship between social support and depressive tendencies among university students in Yunnan Province?

## **1.4 Research Objectives**

### **General Objective**

The main purpose of the current study is to explore the relationship between social identity, social support, self-efficacy, and depressive tendencies among university students in Yun Nan Province, China.

### **Specific Objectives**

1. To identify the level of social identity, social support, self-efficacy, and depressive tendencies of university students.
2. To determine the differences in social identity, social support, self-efficacy, and depressive tendencies in terms of gender among university students.
3. To determine the relationship between social identity, social support, self-efficacy, and depressive tendencies.
4. To determine significant predictors of depressive tendencies among university students.
5. To examine the mediation effect of self-efficacy on the relationships between social identity and depressive tendencies among university students.
6. To examine the mediation effect of self-efficacy on the relationships between social support and depressive tendencies among university students.

## **1.5 Hypotheses**

Several hypotheses were formulated based on the specific objectives of this study (Objectives 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6). A hypothesis can be defined as a



preliminary explanation of the research question, a possible outcome of the study, or an educated guess about the results of the study (Sarantakos, 2012).

In this study, alternative hypotheses are proposed considering that many studies in the past have shown significant differences or relationships between the variables under study. In addition, the nondirectional/two-tailed hypothesis was selected for this study because when studying the mediating factor, the mediating effect exhibits different directions or intensities in different situations. This allows a more comprehensive understanding of the role of mediating factors while avoiding potential reverse effects.

Objective 2: To determine the differences in social identity, social support, self-efficacy, and depressive tendencies in terms of gender among university students.

$H_{a1}$ : There are significant differences in social identity between males and females.

$H_{a2}$ : There are significant differences in social support between males and females.

$H_{a3}$ : There are significant differences in self-efficacy between males and females.

$H_{a4}$ : There are significant differences in depressive tendencies between males and females.

Objective 3: To determine the relationships between social identity, social support, self-efficacy, and depressive tendencies.

$H_{a5}$ : There is a significant relationship between social identity and depressive tendencies of university students in Yunnan Province.

$H_{a6}$ : There is a significant relationship between social support and depressive tendencies of university students in Yunnan Province.



*H<sub>a</sub>7*: There is a significant relationship between self-efficacy and depressive tendencies of university students in Yunnan Province.

*H<sub>a</sub>8*: There is a significant relationship between social identity and self-efficacy of university students in Yunnan Province.

*H<sub>a</sub>9*: There is a significant relationship between social support and self-efficacy of university students in Yunnan Province.

Objective 4: To determine significant predictors of depressive tendencies among university students.

*H<sub>a</sub>10*: Social identity, social support, and self-efficacy are significant predictors of depressive tendencies among university students.

Objective 5: To examine the mediation effect of self-efficacy on the relationships between social identity and depressive tendencies among university students.

*H<sub>a</sub>11*: Self-efficacy will mediate the relationship between social identity and depressive tendencies among university students.

Objective 6: To examine the mediation effect of self-efficacy on the relationships between social support and depressive tendencies among university students.

*H<sub>a</sub>12*: Self-efficacy will mediate the relationship between social support and depressive tendencies among university students

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

Depression has already been the subject of extensive studies. This research has, however, taken on a slightly different focus throughout time. This study aims to create a pathway map of the impacts by examining the relationship

between university students' depressed tendencies and social identity, self-efficacy, and social support.

Secondly, the researcher attaches importance to this study because it can help individuals to better understand the effects of depressive tendencies on their psychological and social functioning and to promote the overall health of the individual. For example, the results of this study can be used to identify dimensions of social identity, social support, and self-efficacy among university students enrolled in Yunnan Province, China. Through knowledge lectures, psychological games, fun quizzes, flyers, group counseling, and other methods and means, university students gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between these factors, which can be provided with better mental health support and assistance to improve their quality of life and well-being.

Third, the findings of this study can help schools understand students' needs and challenges and provide appropriate support services. Schools can develop targeted mental health programs, social support networks, and training programs based on research findings to help students better adjust to college life. For example, group counseling activities can be intentionally implemented to help university students address and improve their mental health issues.

Finally, the findings of this study can serve as a crucial foundation for the formulation of educational and university management policies. By utilizing the results of this study, policy makers can make necessary adjustments to

promote the mental well-being and holistic development of university students, ultimately enhancing the quality and competitiveness of the nation's human capital. Furthermore, a deeper understanding of the key factors influencing university students' mental health and social adjustment can guide future research efforts. Building upon the results of this study, future research can delve into the various factors impacting university students' mental health, devise more effective interventions, and evaluate the long-term effects of these measures.

Overall, this has certain theoretical and practical significance for promoting the mental health of university students, improving the quality of education, and promoting social progress.

## **1.7 Theoretical Framework**

This section outlines the main theories of the study. In this chapter, the researcher will explain the interrelationships between the various concepts or variables involved in this study through existing academic theories that will help clarify the research question to enhance the scholarship of the thesis and make the argument informed.

### **1.7.1 Self-Efficacy Theory**

The concept of self-efficacy was first proposed by the American psychologist, Bandura in 1977. In the theory of self-efficacy, self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief or confidence in his or her ability to successfully complete a task or achieve a goal. Bandura argued that by changing an individual's self-

efficacy he could change the individual's psychological and behavioral processes (Jin & Gui, 2014). The concept of general self-efficacy is also derived from self-efficacy theory.

Bandura argues that self-efficacy is realized through the mediating processes of choice, thought, motivation, and psychosomatic reactions, among other mediating processes, to realize its subjective mechanism of action. The first one is a selection process. In general, individuals choose to avoid environments over which they feel they have no control and which, in turn, affect the development of their behavioral skills and personality. This is one way in which self-efficacy plays an active role in the selection process. Another way is that self-efficacy determines an individual's choice of behavioral activities.

The second is the thought process. Individual activities can either facilitate or hinder themselves because self-efficacy is influenced by thought processes. This facilitation varies as self-efficacy changes. The primary mechanism for self-regulation of human behavior is goal setting, while the individual's imaginative realization of activities is also a manifestation of self-efficacy's influence on behavior through thought processes. through the thought process.

Motivational processes are the third process. Self-efficacy plays a primary role through thought processes, often with an element of motivation as well. For example, goal setting is governed by an individual's level of achievement motivation. individual's level of achievement motivation and attribution as a

thought process influence activity by affecting an individual's level of motivation. Attribution as a thought process also influences activity by affecting the level of motivation of the individual.

The fourth is psychosomatic response processes. According to Bandura et al. (1997), self-efficacy determines an individual's psychosomatic response processes such as emergency, anxiety, and depression. This, in turn, affects the individual's behavior and functioning through thought processes.

### **1.7.2 Self-Efficacy Theory and Social Identity**

Self-efficacy theory emphasizes an individual's beliefs about his or her own abilities and how such beliefs influence his or her behavior, thinking, and feelings. Social identity is a concept related to the degree to which an individual perceives himself or herself to be connected to another person, society, or group. Within the framework of self-efficacy theory, social identity can be understood. Self-concept involves an individual's perception, evaluation, and understanding of himself or herself, including the individual's perception of his or her role, relationships, and identity in society. Social identity is an important component of self-concept and involves the individual's identification with the social group to which he or she belongs. When individuals tend to reinforce and emphasize their particular identity, role, or relationship in society, this may be related to their sense of self-efficacy. For example, there is an interaction between farmers' identity and self-efficacy (Lu & Wu, 2012).

Positive feedback indicates that a strong social identity can support individual self-efficacy. Individuals with a high sense of self-efficacy possess a more comprehensive self-awareness and a greater capacity to enjoy social interactions (Yang, 2019). This enhanced self-awareness, coupled with positive relationships within social groups, contributes to strengthening their self-efficacy. Negative feedback shows that social exclusion can diminish individuals' social self-efficacy (Chen et al., 2018). Experiencing exclusion may lead individuals to question their value and competence within society, thereby decreasing their self-efficacy.

In the context of social identity, individuals may view social roles, social group affiliation, etc. as a task, and their self-efficacy for these tasks will affect the formation and stabilization of their social identity.

### **1.7.3 Self-Efficacy Theory and Social Support**

Explanations of social support from self-efficacy theory involve individuals' perceptions of their abilities and confidence in social support. Social support is an important environmental variable in the development of self-efficacy (Yang et al., 2010). Similarly, social support is an important support system in the socialization process of individuals (Hu et al., 2016). In the context of social support, individuals' confidence and performance in social relationships can be explained through self-efficacy theory.

When an individual successfully seeks or receives social support, the experience may increase his or her self-efficacy in social support. Successful

social support experiences may include receiving effective help, feelings of understanding, and support that increase an individual's confidence in his or her ability to be socially supportive. For example, the higher the subjective perception of parental support (Gushue et al., 2006) and peer support (Ali et al., 2005), the higher the sense of self-efficacy in career decision-making. Individuals with good social support feel more support and encouragement in the process of completing tasks, and have more confidence in their ability to accomplish their goals (Lu et al., 2004), which promotes self-efficacy.

When individuals receive support in social relationships, they may often receive positive feedback and encouragement from others. This positive feedback can increase an individual's confidence in their abilities. From the contextual factors perspective of social cognitive career theory (Lent & Brown, 2013), individuals gain a sense of respect and acceptance from the informational and emotional support of significant others, and this positive feedback can help to enhance an individual's self-confidence. Similarly, Cheng et al. (2004) also emphasized the positive effect of social support on individual and social development, considering social support as a force or factor that promotes human development in a social environment, and this positive effect is generated in certain social interactions, which is conducive to the positive development of university students' growth. Social support has a generalized gainful effect on maintaining an individual's mental health (Sarason et al., 1991).

#### **1.7.4 Self-Efficacy Theory and Depressive Tendencies**

Self-efficacy theory has been applied across various domains to enhance individual performance and adherence to tasks. In healthcare, it has been utilized to improve medication adherence among older adults with glaucoma, where nurses play a pivotal role in fostering self-efficacy through tailored support and education, addressing the complexities of managing multiple chronic conditions (Soud & Livana PH, 2024). Similarly, in the context of advanced esophageal cancer, self-efficacy was enhanced through personalized nursing interventions, which included verbal persuasion and vicarious experiences, leading to improved patient outcomes (Cheng et al., 2022). In educational settings, self-efficacy has been linked to professional learning among teachers, where participation in learning communities positively influenced their beliefs and behaviors, thereby enhancing their teaching effectiveness (Pan & Cheng, 2023). These applications underscore the versatility of self-efficacy theory in promoting positive outcomes across diverse fields.

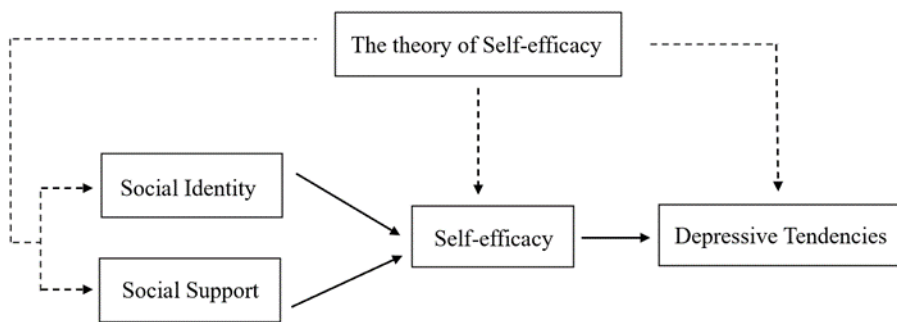
Self-efficacy theory presents a framework that helps explain depressive tendencies. Self-efficacy has a beneficial impact on reducing depression symptoms (Li et al., 2022). When an individual's self-efficacy is low, experiencing negative feedback can adversely affect mental health (Adrián Medrano et al., 2016). Self-efficacy theory emphasizes an individual's beliefs about his or her own abilities, and people with depressive tendencies usually exhibit negative self-evaluation. They may focus too much on their failures and shortcomings and ignore successes and positive experiences. This negative



self-evaluation reduces their sense of self-efficacy and makes individuals more vulnerable to depression (Rosenberg, 1986; Segal et al., 2002). Self-efficacy is closely related to an individual's ability to face life challenges. Individuals with depressive tendencies indulge in negative emotions due to lack of confidence in their abilities and negative coping increases depressive symptoms (Areba et al., 2017).

#### **1.7.5 The Integration of the Self-Efficacy Theory**

Self-efficacy theory has been applied across various domains to enhance individual performance and adherence to tasks. Its integration across these domains underscores the theory's significant role in enhancing motivation and facilitating behavior change. In this study, the application of self-efficacy theory reveals its close connection to mental health. By integrating the theory of self-efficacy, it can be assumed that social identity, social support, and self-efficacy, as key factors in social psychology, can influence depressive tendencies, thereby impacting mental health. Figure 1.1 presents the theoretical framework of the study, illustrating the relationships between social identity, social support, self-efficacy, and depressive tendencies. Overall, self-efficacy emerges as a crucial factor in promoting positive health behaviors and outcomes across diverse populations and contexts.

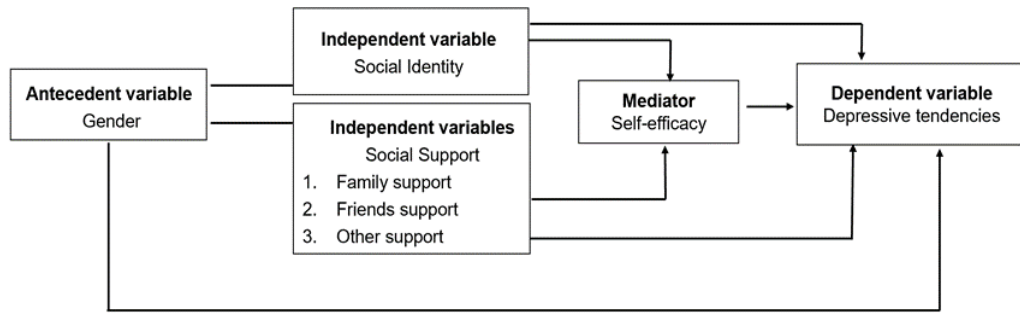


**Figure 1.1 : The Theoretical Framework of Social Identity, Social Support, Self-Efficacy, and Depression Tendencies**

## 1.8 Conceptual Framework

The study's conceptual framework aims to illustrate the overall position of the variables under investigation, which encompasses antecedent variables, independent variables, dependent variables, and the mediator variable. The conceptual framework was established based on the theoretical basis of the investigation. This study was designed to ascertain the extent of the correlations between specific characteristics encountered by university students. This study includes several variables: a socio-demographic component (sex), independent variables (social identity and social support), a dependent variable (depressive tendencies), and a mediator variable (self-efficacy). Figure 1.2 depicts the conceptual framework of the investigation. The conceptual framework illustrates the distinctions among social identity, social support, self-efficacy, and depressive tendencies in relation to the socio-demographic element of sex. Furthermore, it illustrates the connections between the independent factors (social identity and social support), intermediary factor (self-efficacy), and the outward manifestation of emotions (tendencies towards depression). In addition, all the variables are aggregated

to identify the distinct factors that contribute to university students' propensity for depression. Finally, this study proposed that self-efficacy would act as a mediator in the connections between social identity and social support, and depressed inclinations.



**Figure 1.2 : The Conceptual Framework of Social Identity, Social Support, Self-Efficacy, and Depression Tendencies**

## 1.9 Terminology Definition

This section provides explanations for the meanings of the variables, both in terms of their operational and conceptual definitions. The study variables are defined as follows:

### 1.9.1 University Students

*Conceptual Definition:* University students refer to persons who take the courses of a university or a higher education institute (Baidu, 2023).

*Operational Definition:* In this study, university students pertain to people who study in one of the universities in Yun Nan Province, China.

### **1.9.2 Social Identity**

*Conceptual Definition:* Social identity pertains to the role of social identity or the self-description obtained by all members of a social category (Turner & Tajfel, 1986). Social identity also refers to one's public image as presented through social roles and relationships (Miller, 1963).

*Operational Definition:* In this study, social identity refers to the respondents' sense of who I am identified by their group memberships, through the respondent's score on Social Identity Orientation of AIQ-IIIx (Cheek et, al., 1994). The higher the score indicates the higher level of social identity.

### **1.9.3 Social Support**

*Conceptual Definition:* Generally, social support refers to the general term of various support from individuals, which is a social behavior accompanied by the existence of vulnerable groups. Social support refers to the material or spiritual help individuals obtain from communities, social networks, or relatives and friends (Cullena, 1994). Social support encompasses various forms of support, including emotional, informational, and tangible aid from family, friends, and community members (Lu et al., 2021).

*Operational Definition:* In this study, social support refers to the respondent's score on Perceived Social Support Scales (Jiang, 2001), including the family support, friends support, and other support. High score indicates a higher level of social support.

#### **1.9.4 Self-Efficacy**

*Conceptual Definition:* Self-efficacy refers to the speculation and judgment of individuals on whether they have the ability to complete a certain behavior (Bandura, 1977).

*Operational Definition:* Self-efficacy refers to an individual's overall self-confidence in coping with the challenges of different situations or in facing new things (Schwarzer et al., 1997). In this study, self-efficacy refers to the respondent's score on the General Self-efficacy Scale (Luszczynska et al., 2005). High scores indicate a greater sense of self-efficacy.

#### **1.9.5 Depressive Tendencies**

*Conceptual Definition:* Depressive symptoms can include persistent sadness, irritable or anxious mood, reduced concentration and attention, low energy levels or fatigue, low self-esteem or self-confidence, feelings of hopelessness, sleep or appetite problems, loss of interest or pleasure in activities that used to be enjoyable, or difficulty in carrying out usual work or social activities (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

*Operational Definition:* In this study, depressive tendencies refer to individuals who has the behavior and symptoms of depression, but did not meet the diagnostic criteria. Its scope mainly includes the normal range of depressive states and systemic diseases caused by mild depressive states (Tan et al., 2010). More precisely, depressive tendencies refer to the respondent's score on the Beck Depression Inventory (Gao et al., 2005). A high score indicates

more severe depressive tendencies.

### **1.10 Limitation of the Study**

This study was conducted at Yunnan University and Kunming University of Science and Technology in Yunnan Province, China by using a self-administered questionnaire to explore the “The relationship between Social Identity, Social Support, Self-Efficacy, and Depressive Tendencies among University Students in Yunnan Province, China”. It is important to note that this study has some limitations. The data collection of this study was done through self-administered questionnaires where the accuracy and reliability for collected data highly depend on the honesty and un-biasness of the respondents. Distortedness may occur if the respondents do not understand the questionnaire. Moreover, there is a limitation in measuring the variable for depressive tendencies. It is possible that respondents might be influenced by social expectations and choose not to acknowledge or underestimate their depressive symptoms in order to conform to societal expectations or to minimize undesirable labels. Choosing to answer some questions out of social expectations.

### **1.11 Summary**

This chapter commenced with an introductory section that examined the study situation and the ramifications of depressed tendencies on university students and society. Based on the figures provided in the problem description, it is necessary to investigate the factors that lead to the increase in depressive tendencies among university students in Yunnan Province, China.

Consequently, based on the research questions, specific aims and hypotheses were formulated. This chapter also included the presentation of the conceptual framework, theoretical framework, definition of words, and importance of the study. The current study holds significance as it can furnish valuable insights and act as a method or guideline for individuals, educators, educational institutions, and other stakeholders.



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