



MANAGE THE LATER LIFE PROACTIVELY : THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL-ECONOMIC STATUS AND PROACTIVE COPING ORIENTATION OF ELDERS- THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

Ming-Hao Liang¹

¹National Chung Cheng University, No.168, Sec. 1, University Rd, Min-Hsiung Township,
Chia-yi County 621, Taiwan.

Hui-Chuan Wei²

²National Chung Cheng University, No.168, Sec. 1, University Rd, Min-Hsiung Township,
Chia-yi County 621, Taiwan (R.O.C.)

Corresponding Author: Dr. Hui-Chuan Wei

ABSTRACT

By utilizing proactive coping strategy, elders can better prepare for and cope with various stresses that may arise in their later life; thus, it is crucial for one to not only learn but also to use the proactive coping strategy. In addition, recent research has suggested the direct and positive relationship between one's social-economic status and his ability to proactively cope. Despite the discovery of such relationship, how one's social support, which is one part the whole social-economic status, mediate and affect one's proactive coping ability is not clear. The goal of the research is to examine the role of social support in affecting one's proactive coping ability. Through utilizing structural equation modeling (SEM) with 395 elders (130 males and 265 females) who were over 65 years-old, the effect of social support was tested. The result reveals that one's social support not only plays a crucial role in affecting his or her proactive coping ability; moreover, one's "friend's support" is the most important dimension of social support. In this research, the connection between one's proactive coping ability and social support is made clear and give rise to new ways for helping the elderly to better cope with stresses.

KEY WORDS: *elder, social-economic status, social support, proactive coping*

1. INTRODUCTION

The population of ages 65 and above in Taiwan had reached 10.97% in July, 2014 (Ministry of the Interior, 2014), leading to an aging society. According to the Ministry of Labor (2012), the survey on the living and employment conditions of workers revealed that the highest percentage of workers' planned retirement ages were 60 years old

(35.4%), 61 years old and above (34.5%); followed by 55 years old (15.8%), estimating an average retirement age of 59.6. However, with the extending lifespan, the earlier workers retire, the longer later life they would have, and they may need more resource for their later life. But the result of a survey for retired people showed that less than 30% population made preparation for their later life

(Ministry of the Education, 2008). Therefore, the way to assist senior workers to plan and prepare for an enriched and meaningful retirement life has become an important issue. The term "Proactive coping" is derived from the perspective of positive psychology. Individuals learn to cope with present stresses in order avoid being threatened with more future stresses; moreover, one who copes well may enhance his or her ability to deal with future stressors (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997; Schwarzer & Taubert, 2002).

Proactive coping helps individuals manage their living in old age, thus, the key to impact older adults' living in old age is to see potential future stress and adopt coping strategies. Bode, DeRidder and Bensing (2006) indicate the importance for making preparation for old age. If elder start thinking about their future life early, it's possible to predict the stress which may occurred in the future. Therefore, facilitating elders to focus on the future is very important. However, whether the individual could use prospective view to face potential threats and challenges in the future is affected by their socio-economic background.

According to Chajut and Algom, individuals under pressure tend to focus more on the current pressure and this depletes individuals' attentions (Chajut and Algom, 2003). In addition, past studies (Greenglass, Fiksenbaum & Eaton, 2006; Ouwehand, de Ridder & Bensing, 2009) revealed the reason that individuals with higher socio-economic status tend to be more capable at proactive coping is that they have more resources in the monetary aspect or physical aspect, and these resources allow them to have expanded network that provides emotional support or support in other areas. It is clear that how one uses his resources will affect how he or she copes with stress; moreover, one's socio-economic status directly affect how one learned the proactive coping mechanism.

This research seeks to investigate the role of social support and how it may play an intermediary role in proactive coping and socio-economic status.

2. HYPOTHESIS

In the study of Ouwehand (2009) further illustrates the relationship between proactive coping and socio-economic status. It focuses on the differences between middle-aged and older adults' spontaneous proactive coping to prevent future problems related to aging and socio-economic status. Salary, education, and career can also affect physical and psychological health, thereby affecting the ability of proactive coping. Previous studies found that people with high socio-economic backgrounds took proactive coping strategies more easily

to avoid future crises that may occur (Ouwehand, de Ridder & Bensing, 2009). People of low socio-economic backgrounds are often under living conditions of chronic stress, for example: poor living conditions, family financial burdens and other stresses. Because these pressures may not only occur in the future, but appear in their daily living and is directly related to their quality of life, for people of low-socio-economic status, more effort and resources are spent on the immediate problems encountered, and there is no time to prepare in advance for future life (Ouwehand, de Ridder & Bensing, 2009).

Therefore, the higher the level of the older adults' education is, the more abundant their economic resources. Those of higher socio-economic status are more ready for their future life in old age, and can better use proactive coping strategies in everyday life to prevent encountering potentially relevant problems. Because they have spare time and can prepare for old age, they have sufficient money and are able to produce better response to target policy and planning for facing future challenges. Conversely, for disadvantaged persons normal life is already not easy, let alone preparing for old age. Accordingly, the first hypothesis of this study is as follows:

Hypothesis 1: the level of socio-economic status will positively affect the ability of proactive coping in older adults

Due to the requirement of internal and external resources to establish or enhance the proactive coping capabilities of individuals, resources are the element that the individual can apply. These resources may be of a physical, psychological, or social nature, or may exist in self-applied skills (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Social support features, through the interaction of different social networking levels and gaining instrumental and emotional support resources, help the individual prevent and reduce stress that causes negative impacts and deviant behavior, enhancing their ability to adjust to life. In other words, if the individual has a more solid social support network, then he/she can obtain more available resources, and can better solve problems encountered in life. For instance, the research of Greenglass and Fiksenbaum (2009) points out that the higher the degree of social support, the more the instrumental and emotional resources there are to help advanced preparation for future potential threats. Accordingly, the second hypothesis of this study is as follows:

Hypothesis 2: the degree of social support level will positively affect the ability of proactive coping in older adults

From the perspective of social capital, the higher the socio-economic status of individuals, the more help

there is for the construction of the individual's social capital in order to obtain the available resource. In other words, individuals of higher socio-economic status will be able to get better social support (American Psychological Association, 2007). These social support resource areas include "the formal support systems" and "informal support systems" (Caplan, 1974), the former referring to schools, law, or welfare agencies; the latter, family, peers, and other support. These resources enhance the ability of proactive coping in individuals through social support. For example: The research of Ouwehand, Ridder and Bensing (2009) indicates that proactive coping capability is promoted through learning, and through education, individuals can learn more skills that can help them respond to future possible pressures, such as the ability to problem-solving and communication ability, etc. However, older adults of typical low socio-economic background generally have a low level of education and are relatively closed to educational resource pipelines. Therefore, it is more difficult for them to obtain the social support resources needed for proactive coping capability through learning activities. Accordingly, the third hypothesis of this study is as follows:

Hypothesis 3: Social support plays an intermediary role between socio-economic status and the ability of proactive coping

3. METHOD

3.1 Research subjects:-

A total of 400 questionnaires were issued to subjects (130 males and 265 females) who are 65 years old or older, and the average age was 66.5. With respect to participants' education level, 5% were elementary or lower, 23% were junior high, 32% were senior high school, and 40% were university or higher. About participants' job status, 12% were farmer, 15% were worker, 20% were engaged in eommerce, 22% were engaged in service, 31% were teacher and civil servants.

3.2 Research tools:-

3.2.1 Socio-Economic Status:-

Socio-Economic Status was measured by "Two factors Index of Social Position" (Lin, 2005) to classify the socio-economic status of the subjects.

3.2.2 Proactive coping orientation:-

The part of proactive coping was measured by the "older adult proactive coping orientation assessment scale" to make measurements (Liang, Wei & Li, 2014). There were 11 items in this scale, and this instrument assesses the extent to which adults take a future-oriented viewpoint, set feasible goals and make plans with respect to these goals (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.89$). All items were assessed

with a 5 point Likert scale, with possible scores ranging from 0 (=no, not at all) to 5(=yes, very much).

3.2.3 Social Support:-

The part of social support was measured by the "social support questionnaire" (Sarson, Levine & Basham, 1893). There were 27 items in this questionnaire, and asked people in their environment who provided them with help or support. There were 3 dimensions in each item, including "From family member". "From friendship" and "From job support", and participants scored the degree of each dimension from 1(not at all) to 5(very much) according their life situations.

3.3 Statistical analyses:-

We employed hierarchical regression analysis to test the relationship between social-economic status, social support and proactive coping, in order to exam the hypothesis 1 and 2.

In addition, we used Maximum Likelihood (ML) estimation in Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) with AMOS 7 to test the mediation hypothesis. In SEM, it is possible to test the relationships between variables simultaneously while adjusting for measurement errors. The univariate skewness of the distributions of all variables ranged between -0.26(proactive coping) and 1.48 (social support). The multivariate kurtosis, measured by Mardia's coefficient, was 5.24 for the overall model. Both were sufficiently normal to allow parametric statistics. In addition to chi-square statistics, which is sensitive for large sample sizes, we also inspected four fit indices recommended for ML-estimation. If the model fits the data well, RMSEA is small (<0.08) and AGFI, GFI and CFI are high (>0.9).

4. RESULT

4.1 The relationship between socio-economic status and proactive coping capability:-

Through the Table 1, we can see that the relevance of socio-economic status and proactive coping capability is 0.862, reaching a significant level of ($p < 0.01$), and the variable interpretive amount (R^2) is 0.743, explaining the variability of 74.3%. From the result, the hypotheses of this study is confirmed, showing that the higher the individual's socio-economic status, the higher the individual's proactive coping capability.

Table 1: The relationship between SES and proactive coping

	R	R ²	F
Socio-economic	0.862	0,743	1136.591*

Note. *p<0.01

4.2 The relationship between social support and proactive coping capabilities:-

From the regression analysis, the correlation between social support and proactive coping capabilities is 0.809, which reached a significant level of (p <0.01), and the adjusted variables interpretable amount (R²) is 0.652, indicating that social support can explain 65.2% of the variability. In addition, in exploring the relationship between the three levels of social support for proactive coping capability, “support of friends” impacts the individual’s proactive coping capability the most (R=0.446, p<0.01), which confirms the second hypothesis. Such result make sense because When an individual’s social support is higher, his/her personal proactive coping capability will also be higher, with the “support of friends” as the most important level of social support

Table 2. Relationship between social support and proactive coping capabilities

	B	SE	R	t
Family	0.059	0.022	0.12*	2.696*
Friend	0.214	0.029	0.446*	7.514*
Job	0.136	0.026	0.288*	5.193*
R=0.809* R²=0.652* F=246.854*				

Note. *p<0.01

4.3 The verification of the intermediary effects of social support

This study was carried out using SEM to verify the effect of social support agencies, as shown in the diagram in Figure 2. The model $\chi^2 = 42.2$, df = 11, and RMSEA = 0.085, although not up to the standard of less than 0.08, covers 90% of the confidence interval between 0.059 and 0.113; and CFI = 0.98, AGFI = 0.927 are greater than the standard of 0.9 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1989), and SRMR = 0.25 is between 0.05 and 0.08 (Bollen, 1989), so this research model still has some degree of adaptation. In this study the correlation model adaptation indicators are summarized as follows in Table 3.

Table 3: Model fit summary

RMSEA	CFI	GFI	SRMR	AGFI	PGFI
0.085	0.98	0.971	0.25	0.927	0.582

$\chi^2=42.2$, df=11

In the verification of agency effect, we can find that the effect of “socio-economic status - social support” and “social support - proactive coping capability” is 0.762 (0.82 * 0.93), greater than the main effect of “socio-economic status-proactive coping capability” of (0.11), and the major effect of “socio-economic status - proactive coping capability” in this mode is less than significant, showing the full mediation effect of “social support”, and the third hypotheses of this study are also confirmed.

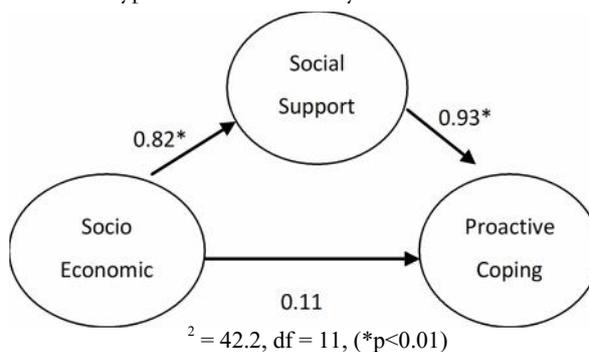


Figure 1 Standardized estimates model

5. Discussion

The study aimed to investigate the intermediary role of “social support” in one’s proactive coping ability. By way of statistical method, not only the relationship between socioeconomic status and proactive coping ability is verified, but how socio-economic status is an issue of social support through affecting an individual’s proactive coping ability is also confirmed.

The result indicated that, elders who are in low social-economic need to focus on the current event, but not on the future. Because lacking of the preparation for the future, they may not cope the potential stress in their later life successfully. Therefore, providing educational preparatory program for aging is important for the elder who are low social-economic status rather than high social-economic status.

Besides, the result of the research revealed that individual’s social support positively impacts one’s proactive coping ability and that “support of friends” as one of the categories of social support is the most important support. **Because** that the social support aspect of the proactive coping strategy correlates with Erikson’s theory of society development, which explains that at every age, one has its own developmental tasks and they are very similar among the similar age group. According this result, we indicate that proper social support provide emotional and other personal resources to help individuals to learn the proactive coping mechanism; thus, it is crucial to establish an awareness

that foster the need for finding proper resources to deal with stresses in later life in a community of friends and relatives of an elder

Finally, the study confirmed the mediating effect of social support between socio-economic status and proactive coping orientation. From the point of view of social capital, when the higher socio-economic status of individuals, will be able to obtain more good social support (American Psychological Association, 2007). These sources of social support area include “formal support systems” and “informal support systems” (Caplan, 1974), the former refers to schools, welfare agencies or law; the latter refers to family, peer and other support, which positively affect the proactive coping orientation. Generally, the low socio-economic background elders lack of education opportunity, so they are difficult to obtain the necessary social support resources for enhancing proactive coping orientation through learning activities.

Although previous research indicates that individual socio-economic status affects the development of the individual prospective response capability (Greenglass, Fiksenbaum, & Eaton, 2006; Ouwehand, de Ridder & Bensing, 2009), the result of this article indicates that social support is the main mediator to affect the proactive coping orientation. Based on this study, the educational preparatory program for aging should first focus on helping elders find social support pipes, to help them find and accumulation of available resources. Helping elders who are low socio-economic expand their social support is a key point to enhance their proactive coping orientation to prepare their later life well.

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