

**The relationship between Hong Kong adolescents' support from peers and teachers and  
their subjective well-being: The role of happiness character strengths**

by

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### **Statement of Originality**

I, XIE Meng, hereby declare that I am the sole author of the thesis and the material presented in this thesis is my original work except those indicated in the acknowledgement. I further declare that I have followed the University's policies and regulations on Academic Honesty, Copyright and Plagiarism in writing the thesis and no material in this thesis has been submitted for a degree in this or other universities.

## Abstract

An exhilarating period of character and personality development occurs during adolescence. At the same time, however, adolescents may encounter multiple developmental difficulties. Notably, according to previous studies, Hong Kong adolescents' well-being has decreased persistently for years, and it has become urgent to explore what factors can contribute to an increase in their subjective well-being (SWB). Adolescents' SWB has been perceived in Western studies to be associated with certain specific positive character strengths (i.e., happiness character strengths), such as hope, zest, gratitude, love, and curiosity. In addition, appropriate social support from teachers and peers may be regarded as significant factors for enhancing adolescents' SWB. However, limited research has investigated whether happiness character strengths, teacher support, and peer support can work together to increase adolescents' SWB.

The current project examined the associations of Hong Kong adolescents' SWB with happiness character strengths, teacher support, and peer support, with the aim of building a framework for education that promotes Hong Kong adolescents' SWB and helps schools and teachers provide appropriate social support more scientifically and efficiently. The project employed a sequential explanatory mixed methods approach. Four hundred and thirteen local junior secondary school students from four secondary schools in Hong Kong were involved in the project. Surveys and eight focus groups with interviews were conducted during the first and second semesters of academic year 2023/24 to gather a comprehensive picture within schools. First, the project explored the factors associated with Hong Kong adolescents' SWB and found influences from multiple factors, such as age, gender, marital status of parents, academic performance, and character strengths. Second, the results showed a strong

beneficial relationship between the adolescents' SWB and their support from peers and teachers. Third, the project confirmed the mediating role that happiness character strengths play in the relationships between teacher support and the adolescents' SWB, and also between peer support and their SWB. These findings address the crucial influence of the different types of peer support and teacher support in fostering adolescents' SWB, and they suggest approaches that education practitioners could use to foster that support. Also, cultivation of happiness character strengths is another approach to enhance Hong Kong adolescents' SWB. Education strategies and the creation of supportive learning environments not only could improve adolescents' academic performance, but they also could contribute to the young people's general happiness and life satisfaction.

Finally, with the underlying mechanisms revealed and a better understanding of the developmental needs of Hong Kong adolescents, the current project contributes to the establishment of a theory-driven conceptual framework aimed at promoting adolescents' SWB in secondary schools. Furthermore, the project's results can arm stakeholders with solutions that could provide appropriate social support at school, which in turn would facilitate Hong Kong students' positive development during adolescence.

**Keywords:** Subjective Well-being, Happiness Character Strength, Peer Support, Teacher Support, Hong Kong Adolescents

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## List of Abbreviations

CDC	Curriculum Development Council
EDB	Education Bureau
EdUHK	The Education University of Hong Kong
GS	Graduate School
LS	Life Satisfaction
NA	Negative Affect
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PA	Positive Affect
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SES	Socioeconomic Status
SWB	Subjective Well-being
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	The United Nations Children's Fund
VIA	Values in Action
VIA-Youth	Inventory of Strengths for Youth
WHO	World Health Organization

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## 1. Introduction

Subjective well-being (SWB), which includes an individual's cognitive domain (i.e., life satisfaction) and affective domain (i.e., positive and negative affect), is regarded as the subjective evaluation of a person's level of well-being, according to his or her experiences and feelings (Diener, 2000; Diener & Ryan, 2009). Existing studies have produced evidence that high SWB may be beneficial to one's physical health, work performance, social interactions, and societal contributions (Diener & Ryan, 2009; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). In this regard, nowadays SWB is gaining the spotlight worldwide as a gauge of a "good life" (Diener, 2000). For instance, as a measure of life quality, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) includes life satisfaction in the "OECD Better Life Index" (OECD, 2013). However, among the 143 regions and countries participating in the World Happiness Report, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) scored 86th in the recently released "World Happiness Report 2024" with a happiness index of 5.316 out of a total possible score of 10 (Helliwell et al., 2024). Since 2017, Hong Kong's ranking has been declining steadily, from 71st to 86th (Helliwell et al., 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024). The findings of those reports indicate that youths' life satisfaction also declined during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well (Helliwell et al., 2022). Under this situation, promoting Hong Kong adolescents' SWB is a significant goal.

Scholars have been investigating the reasons for the phenomenon of declining happiness and have found that SWB can be associated with many factors, such as demographic variables (e.g., age, gender, education) (Cheng, 2004; Vera-Villarroel et al., 2012), personality (Diener et al., 2018; Lucas & Diener, 2009), social support (Brajša-Žganec et al., 2018; Siewert, 2011), and culture background (Grossi et al., 2011; Steel, 2017). In the existing literature,

limited attention has been paid to the underlying mechanisms of factors associated with adolescents' SWB from different sources that work together to exert an impact on SWB. In this light, therefore, the current project has explored how different factors (i.e., character strengths and teacher and peer support) could work together to contribute to the SWB of Hong Kong junior secondary school students.

## **1.1 Rationale of the project**

### **1.1.1 The importance of adolescents' well-being**

Adolescence, typically defined as the period between ages 11 and 19, is the stage of life during which an individual transition from childhood to adulthood (Barrett, 1996).

Psychologist Erickson (1986) stated that adolescence is an essential phase for shaping an individual's self-identity, which has a lasting impact on their behaviour and development throughout their lifetime. Scholars (e.g., Kagan, 1971; Thornburg, 1983) have further developed three distinct stages within adolescence: early adolescence (11-14 years), middle adolescence (15-17 years), and late adolescence (17-19 years). Together with physical changes and growth, adolescents also go through unique emotional, social, psychological, and mental development (Salmela-Aro, 2011). With the publication of research books and articles, academicians and researchers (Tanner, 1973; Thornburg, 1983) have advanced the public's knowledge about early adolescence.

An exhilarating period of character and personality development occurs during adolescence (Caspi & Roberts, 2001; Eccles, 1999). Adolescents can better participate in social life because they grow and develop various moral skills during adolescence (Hart & Carlo, 2005; Shoshani & Slone, 2013). The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (n.d.) also has stated that adolescence is an essential period of formative growth across the individual's life

span, and adolescents' (aged 10-19) well-being should be further addressed. However, adolescence has also been regarded as one of the “storm and stress” age periods (Hall, 1904). If adolescents acquire a high level of SWB during that period, it appears to be associated with their future positive outcomes (e.g., physical health and social relationships) (Child Trends, 2003; Damon, 2004; Danner et al., 2001; Ryff & Singer, 2000). In summary, adolescents' SWB should be further investigated, especially in the early stage of adolescence.

### **1.1.2 Hong Kong adolescents' developmental issues**

Adolescents from Hong Kong have performed much better scholastically than the overseas students in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), particularly in the subjects of reading, mathematics, and science (OECD, 2018). Unfortunately, while performing at an outstanding level of academic achievement, adolescents in Hong Kong only reported a life satisfaction percentage of 52%, which was much lower than the worldwide norm of 67% (OECD, 2018). Although Hong Kong's adolescents have access to a wealth of educational resources, much more needs to be done to support their holistic development and promote their well-being.

The findings of prior workers suggest that adolescents in Hong Kong may experience a variety of developmental issues, including substance abuse (Shek, 2017), school bullying (Chan & Wong, 2015), and self-harm (Siu, 2019), and one of the most notable issues for them is low life satisfaction and happiness (Kwan, 2021; Shek, 2014). Happiness and one's level of life satisfaction are also signs of SWB (Diener, 1995; Diener et al., 1999). According to Lin and Shek (2019), the life satisfaction of adolescents in Hong Kong has been declining yearly. In addition, Hong Kong students' happiness levels tend to decrease as they enter adolescence, which is consistent with findings from research

conducted in other nations (Chui & Wong, 2016). In actuality, a variety of internal and external factors, such as personal characteristics and environment, have an impact on adolescents' development.

In an effort to answer the question of why Hong Kong youths' SWB is low, many studies have tried to identify the reasons for the problems. Characteristics and social support have been regarded as two significant protective factors. Lo and Ip (2018) hold that the decline in happiness is related to decreasing mental capital, such as engagement, insight, fortitude, and love. Oberle and colleagues (2011) believe that investigating the relationships between SWB and critical development characteristics (e.g., social performance and mental health) helps us to understand adolescents' life satisfaction and overall well-being. In addition to certain personal and life characteristics, lack of social support from teachers and peers is also regarded as a possible reason for Hong Kong adolescents' low SWB. A direct association between perceived social support at school and SWB has actually been found in previous studies (Chou, 1999; Tomas et al., 2020).

## **1.2 Context of the study**

Since the 1990s, positive psychology, which investigates the strengths and virtues responsible for the thriving of individuals and communities, has been increasingly studied by psychologists (Seligman, 2002). Spontaneously, the number of studies focusing on happiness, optimal functioning, character strength, and happiness also has increased rapidly (Csikszentmihalyi & Seligman, 2000; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The application of positive psychology concepts in an educational setting has been found to promote adaptive functioning and is regarded as positive education (Kwok, 2021; Norrish et al., 2013; Seligman, 2012). Seligman et al. (2009) defined character education as a subdiscipline of

positive psychology. Seligman's team employed the whole-school approach in an Australian school to integrate that knowledge into school culture by teaching positive psychology knowledge to both students and teachers (Norrish, 2015). The whole-school approach not only helps students and teachers acquire psychology knowledge, but it also cultivates a culture of well-being (Green et al., 2021). More recently, many other schools in Western countries have also applied positive education to promote students' flourishing, prevent mental health problems, and increase their life satisfaction (Green, 2014). With the expanding application of positive education, it is shown that positive education is an evidence-based approach to enhancing students' well-being (Norrish et al., 2013).

In Hong Kong, efforts from multiple positive education approaches have been made to promote adolescents' well-being in different educational organisations. The positive education approach could make education more "visible", "effective", "measurable", and "concrete". For example, the development of the "Happy School Campaign" has gained increasing attention in Hong Kong society, for its emphasis on learners' well-being and holistic development (UNESCO, 2016). Various positive education programs have been launched with the HKSAR government and the public to reduce students' behavioural and emotional problems (Wu & Mok, 2017). A study by Lai and colleagues (2018) demonstrated that the Assessment Program for Affective and Social Outcomes (2nd version) (APASO-II), which was developed based on positive education and is widely used in Hong Kong schools, can measure students' well-being and physical health status. Positive education is considered to be an evidence-based orientation and has therefore gained popularity in universities and schools. In 2015, the Positive Education Laboratory in the Department of Social and Behavioural Sciences at the City University of Hong Kong introduced a whole school approach project named "JUMP" which has shown effectiveness in promoting adolescents'

subjective happiness and life orientation and it helps to decrease children's negative emotion and develop positive personality (Kwok, 2021). During the 2005/2006 school year, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University and Hong Kong Jockey Club launched the "PATHS to Adulthood: A Jockey Club Youth Enhancement Scheme", which promotes the holistic development of adolescents in Hong Kong. The project team designed a framework that includes 15 positive youth development constructs (e.g., development of self-efficacy and promotion of social competence). Longitudinal research shows that the participants of the projects have a lower level of delinquent behaviours and substance use than their counterparts do (Shek & Sun, 2009).

In addition to their use in tertiary organisations, positive education approaches have also been employed by NGOs. For example, St. James Settlement (2021) initiated an educational programme in Hong Kong aimed at enhancing students' SWB by utilising the character strength framework to increase students' positive affect and reduce their negative affect, The Evangelical Lutheran Church Social Service (2014) also has applied the character strength framework with cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT). According to Duan and colleagues (2014), their strength-based intervention has had a positive impact on the promotion of life satisfaction in Chinese youth. Further research could focus on exploring a localised framework based on the developmental needs of adolescents in Hong Kong.

With the problem of a low level of life satisfaction among Hong Kong adolescents (Helliwell et al., 2022), social support is regarded as another crucial factor for adolescents' healthy development, especially when they are experiencing physical, emotional, and social changes in adolescence (Camara et al., 2017; Ricardo et al., 2005). Adolescents who obtain social-emotional support are more likely to be highly successful in school, have healthy

relationships, and be satisfied with life in general (Kumcagiz et al., 2017; Wenz-Gross et al., 1997). In contrast, individuals who lack social-emotional support are more likely to struggle with mental health problems such as social isolation, depression, and anxiety. Adolescents can obtain social and emotional support from a variety of sources, such as their family, school, peers, professionals, and the community (Demaray et al., 2009; Helsen et al., 2000). In daily school life, a range of social-emotional support could be provided to adolescents. For example, adolescents can enhance their self-confidence, empathy, and communication skills by developing supportive and positive peer interactions (Kohut et al., 2014; Stanton-Salazar & Spain, 2005). Having school teachers with social-emotional learning benefits students' social relationship-building and life skills learning (Wentzel et al., 2010). Therefore, it is crucial for stakeholders to provide adolescents with social-emotional support, which includes creating a supportive atmosphere, allowing for opportunities for self-expression, and promoting positive relationships.

However, in traditional Chinese society, schools have typically placed less emphasis on students' personal growth than they have on their academic learning (Kam et al., 2011). In the past decade, schools in Hong Kong have had lifelong learning and whole-person development as one of their primary educational goals (CDC, 2001). However, schools have been hesitant to integrate emotional literacy into their systems, despite the fact that social and emotional learning is crucial for students (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). Still, there is a call for the Hong Kong educational system to support children's lifelong learning and well-being. In this case, the cultivation of character strengths and identifying appropriate social-emotional support from teachers and peers are crucial for Hong Kong secondary school students, to facilitate the adolescents' development and enhance their SWB. However, limitations remain. Some scholars think that the concepts of positive education stem from positive psychology,

which was developed in Western societies. That notion ignores the contribution of traditional psychology, and there is a lack of empirical studies and theory-based research in Eastern societies (Pang, 2017). In this case, therefore, it is clear that some adaptations need to be made to fulfil Hong Kong adolescents' needs. In order to fulfill the developmental needs of Hong Kong adolescents, educators should further explore the methods of integrating theoretical frameworks of different dimensions and teaching methods so that more adolescents can benefit. Therefore, the current project investigated the factors associated with adolescents' SWB within the context of local secondary schools in Hong Kong. Research on well-being has the potential to inform academic curricula, social initiatives, and policy decisions, all of which contribute to improving the quality of life for individuals and communities worldwide (OECD, 2024).

### **1.3 Significance of the study**

Happiness has been regarded by youths as being more significant than financial assets—in a cross-culture study, only 6% of participants rated money as essential to happiness or life satisfaction (Diener & Oishi, 1998). However, there is no agreement over the definition of good character and the content of character education and even less focus on the interaction of factors associated with SWB from different levels (e.g., character strength and social-emotional support). Therefore, the current project provides new insights for stakeholders in helping adolescents develop their SWB, using both intrinsic and extrinsic approaches.

The significance of the current project can be illustrated on three levels: theory, policy, and practice. First, from a theoretical standpoint, the findings of the present study offer a fine-grid understanding of adolescents' SWB and contribute to the establishment of a theory-driven, conceptual framework to facilitate adolescents' SWB in secondary schools that is based on

Hong Kong adolescents' developmental needs. As Diener (2000) stated, "Psychologists' knowledge of SWB is rudimentary; a stronger scientific base is necessary to make unequivocal recommendations to societies and individuals about how to increase happiness" (p. 40). It is essential to have the findings of a study on specific populations before making educational recommendations based on their needs. However, research topics such as character strength, social support, and well-being that draw on perspectives from positive education are scarce, and in the context of Hong Kong, research on the association of and underlying mechanism between adolescents' SWB, happiness character strengths, and different kinds of teacher/peer support has been limited and equivocal. Future education initiatives to support character strengths and values need to consider different structural factors, and it is essential to employ a systemic and evidence-based strategy in practice (UNICEF, n.d.). The current project offers solutions for teachers and schools to promote positive outcomes in adolescents by providing social-emotional support.

Traditional Chinese values strongly emphasise adolescents' academic achievement while ignoring their holistic development. Happiness, meanwhile, is also an objective of education (Noddings, 2003). In that light, education could be an ideal tool for enhancing adolescents' well-being practically, and educational research gives petitioners an excellent theoretical basis. From a practical standpoint, this project's findings offer stakeholders solutions for assessing the efficacy of the curriculum or project aimed at promoting Hong Kong adolescents' SWB, in addition to providing an evidence-based framework for future development, as the majority of the organisations implementing such projects cannot evaluate effectiveness from an objective viewpoint.

Third, from the perspective of policy, the results of the current project can help the public to

better understand adolescents' SWB and its intrapersonal and interpersonal factors. The OECD believes a comprehensive understanding of SWB can guide academic curricula, policy-making, and social initiatives, thereby enhancing the quality of life for individuals and communities globally (OECD, 2013).

In summary, the present study sought to explore the relationships between the happiness character strengths, social-emotional support, and SWB of adolescents, and also to understand the factors associated with SWB from different levels—for which we have a great need in the field of education.

#### **1.4 Contributions of the study**

The aim of the current project was to fill the research gaps by shedding further light on understanding how the community-level factors (i.e., teacher support and peer support) can facilitate the improvement of SWB, and what the underlying mechanism is between different exterior (i.e., peer and teacher support) and intrinsic impact (i.e., happiness character strengths) factors and junior secondary school students' SWB.

Generally, the hope is that the current project will make a significant contribution to the development of adolescents from the following aspects. First, it can help stakeholders to provide appropriate support for students' positive development. The evidence-based framework can provide schools with ideas for developing appropriate school curricula and projects for school leaders and teachers. Second, cultivating a supportive environment at school can facilitate the development of a “happy school” (UNESCO, 2016). By encouraging teachers and students to provide each other with emotional support, the adolescents' SWB should improve eventually. As a result, the goal of a happy school can also be achieved

simultaneously.

In particular, this study offers primary contributions at both the practical and theoretical levels. On the practical level, the results of the current project can help stakeholders to develop an appropriate intervention to increase adolescents' SWB by providing emotional support and values and character education. Because the results of the current project are derived from adolescents' own perspectives, the findings can also deepen schools' and teachers' understanding of adolescents' developmental needs, especially at the psychological level, to prevent a decrease in life satisfaction and happiness. The findings can also help educators to identify the potential at-risk students, because the factors associated with SWB were raised in the study. Theoretically, the current project provides a deeper understanding of the knowledge of adolescents' SWB, as it identifies the mechanism of how happiness, character strengths, and social support work together to influence SWB. Moreover, the findings provide empirical evidence about how to prevent a decrease in SWB during adolescence. Stakeholders can refer to the results and put them into practice as protective factors. Most importantly, because there has been a dearth of research in the Hong Kong context, this study provides an evidence base for local researchers and petitioners to use in building a more accurate understanding of Hong Kong adolescents' protective factors of SWB and developmental needs. At the least, it provides valid instruments for researchers to use for measuring Hong Kong adolescents' perceived support and SWB.

### **1.5 Chapter overview**

This thesis comprises seven chapters.

Chapter 1 – Introduction. This chapter outlines the background purpose, significance, and contributions of the study.

Chapter 2 – Literature review. This chapter reviews the existing literature that has investigated the main constructs involved in the current project and the relationships between them. This chapter also identifies the research gaps and develops a proposed conceptual framework.

Chapter 3 – Methodology. This chapter illustrates the research design, which includes the scope, sampling, procedures, instruments, and so on.

Chapter 4 - Results. This chapter presents the findings from the quantitative and qualitative studies to address the research questions.

Chapter 5 - Discussion. This chapter interprets the results, discussing their implications in the context of the existing literature and theoretical frameworks.

Chapter 6 - Implications. This chapter discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the study.

Chapter 7 - Conclusions. This chapter summarizes the key findings and the conclusions that can be drawn from those findings, discusses their significance, and suggests directions for future research

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Subjective well-being**

Subjective well-being (SWB) is a broad concept, ranging from momentary moods to global judgements of life satisfaction and from depression to euphoria. In particular, SWB is a scientific term that describes the subjective evaluation of an individual's well-being as it is experienced, such as the person's affective reactions and judgements of life satisfaction (Diener & Ryan, 2009).

The concept of subjective well-being is receiving an increasing spotlight throughout the world (Diener et al., 2004). People have been exploring the question “What is a good life?” for a long time. In the field of positive psychology, how an individual's well-being contributes to his or her happiness is regarded as the fundamental principle with which psychologists are concerned (Diener et al., 2008). Even though a positive SWB alone is not sufficient for a good life, it is greatly needed in people's lives (Diener et al., 1998). The word “happiness” is frequently used as a commonplace term for this group of constructs that relate to quality of life (e.g., Myers, 1993; Seligman, 2002). However, happiness is often not the scientific term of choice for measuring well-being (Diener et al., 2018). Suldo and colleagues (2016) stated that SWB is “a scientific term for happiness” (pp. 434-435). Others maintain that an individual's quality of life is greatly affected by his or her general emotional well-being and experiences (Skevington & Böhnke, 2018). Importantly, SWB is clearly a key indicator for assessing one's quality of life, and a high quality of life promotes adolescents' healthy development (Child Trends, 2003; Damon, 2004).

#### **2.1.1 History of the science of subjective well-being**

Philosophers have long considered happiness to be the measure of a good life. Subjective well-being has a broad definition, which includes pleasure, positive emotions, life satisfaction, a feeling of contentment, or a meaningful life (Diener et al., 2004). The emphasis of the study of SWB has also changed over time.

The study of happiness was initiated by philosophers, and the early scholars focused on exploring the definition of happiness, raising various definitions. The Greek philosopher Aristippus valued happiness as the pursuit of immediate enjoyment and pleasure. Another Greek philosopher and polymath, Aristotle, put forward that happiness means “possessing the greatest goods available” (Tatarkiewicz, 1976). English philosopher Bentham also agreed with Aristotle and suggested that “benefits, profits, or good” should be included in the connotations of pleasure (Bentham, 1996; Goldworth, 1972). Thus, the philosophers’ work has provided objective standards for happiness. In early research on happiness, researchers often focused on a single self-reported item to measure happiness (Andrews & Withey, 2012), such as “How do you feel about your life as a whole?”, with answers ranked using such measures as a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from “delighted” to “terrible”.

In the early 20th century, scholars focused not only on what constitutes happiness, but also on the questions of how to measure happiness and what makes a person happy. Numerous studies have been interested in those topics. In the 1940s, French moralist La Rochefoucauld (1940) stated, “Happiness and misery are mostly determined by temperament and fortune” (p. 23). From a biological perspective, Headey and Wearing (1989) also proposed that a human being’s basic level of happiness (i.e., hedonic set-points) was determined by his/her personality. However, Greek pre-Socratic philosopher Democritus believed that a happy person’s life is joyful not because of one’s possessions but rather because of how one

responds to their circumstances, and happiness is a “case of mind” (Kesebir & Diener, 2008; Tatarkiewicz, 1976). In the 1960s, American scholar Warner Wilson (1967) postulated that “happiness is caused by prompt satisfaction of needs (p.302),” while unhappiness is because of the persistence of unfulfilled needs and adaptation or aspiration level—which are the two factors that affect the degree of fulfilment required to produce satisfaction, and which are impacted by personal values, past experience, and comparison with others. Gray (1981) suggested that an individual’s level of happiness may also be affected by life events, and biological factors affect the sensitivity of an individual in coping with life events. In summary, it is suggested that the happiness or well-being of human-beings is affected by multiple intrinsic and extrinsic factors, such as personality and environment.

As the research advanced, a debate arose on the characteristics of “happy people”. Wessman and Ricks (1966) were the earliest scholars to investigate whether characteristics could influence an individual’s happiness level. Wilson (1967) conducted the first review of SWB and proposed the concept of “avowed happiness” and doubted whether “real happiness” could be measured scientifically. Later, Wilson (1967) concluded that demographic characteristics of happy people and defined a happy person as “young, healthy, well-educated, well-paid, extroverted, optimistic, worry-free, religious, married person with high self-esteem, job morale, modest aspirations, of either sex and a wide range of intelligence” (p. 294). Diener (1984) further reviewed the theories of SWB and developed the famous “top-down” and “bottom-up” processes, which have an impact on SWB and which were based on Wilson’s theory. With the efforts of scholars, the profile of human beings with happiness or high SWB has been made more precise.

The idea of subjective well-being has been further developed in modern science. Some

scholars have proposed that well-being is not a unidimensional concept, and life satisfaction has been suggested for inclusion in the measurement of SWB as the cognitive component (Andrews & Withey, 2012). In addition, behavioural scientists study the factors that lead individuals to perceive and experience their lives positively or negatively (i.e., SWB), in contrast to philosophers and religious authorities, who have sought to define what a good life comprises (Diener et al., 2018). Some scholars have proposed that positive affect (PA) and negative affect (NA) should also be included separately in the measurement of SWB (Bradburn, 1965, 1969; Bradburn & Caplovitz, 1965). In the 1990s, Lucas and colleagues (1996) proved via multi-trait-multi-method analyses that pleasant affect, unpleasant affect, and life satisfaction were separable constructs. Diener and Diener (2009) defined SWB as a bi-dimensional concept which includes an affective component that contains both positive and negative affect, and a cognitive component, usually referred to as life satisfaction. In addition, some scholars are still exploring whether there is a fourth component of SWB, such as domain satisfaction (Campbell, 1976).

Life satisfaction applies to general assessments of one's life and may also include one's satisfaction with work, health, marriage, and so forth (Diener et al., 1999). Recently, scholars have continued to focus on exploring the factors associated with SWB. Behavioural scientists have redirected their attention to the subject, focusing instead on the elements that influence people's subjective perceptions of their lives as worthwhile and rewarding, rather than defining what a good life should entail (Diener et al., 2018). Diener and Suh (2003) discussed how societal variables influence SWB.

Indeed, over the past several decades, the study of SWB has expanded significantly (Diener et al., 2018), and nowadays, the focus of research has turned to the underlying processes (e.g.,

coping strategies) instead of demographic information about “happy people”. Oishi et al. (1999) found that low sensation seekers chose contentment, but high sensation seekers preferred days filled with pleasure and highly arousing emotions. Although one’s temperament may have an impact on some goals, such as the desire for excitement, other goals are likely to be far more adaptable. In addition, an international organisation has begun introducing strategies for promoting SWB—the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2013) now includes life satisfaction in the “OECD Better Life Index” as an indicator of the quality of life (OECD, 2013).

In summary, making people happy is not just about making them feel good. The goal is to make individuals obtain fulfilment in life (Park, 2004). Subjective well-being merits special consideration because it plays a crucial role in the development of positive young people as an indicator, a predictor, a moderator or mediator, and ultimately as a successful outcome (Park, 2004).

### **2.1.2 Definition of subjective well-being**

There are also different concepts describing different aspects of an individual’s emotional or mental health in the field of positive psychology, such as subjective well-being (SWB) and psychological well-being (PWB). Although both PWB and SWB are concerned with quality of life, PWB places more emphasis on self-actualization, personal development, and purpose than SWB does on emotional experiences and life satisfaction (Joshnloo, 2019). However, the two concepts can be differentiated from multiple aspects. In contrast, SWB emphasises a person's subjective evaluation of their life as a whole, with a particular emphasis on their own views of happiness and life satisfaction (Diener, 2000; Veenhove, 2011). Self-report questionnaires and surveys are typically used to gauge it, asking respondents to rank their

emotional experiences and satisfaction levels (Andrews & Robinson, 1991). PWB emphasises self-realization, purpose, and the quality of relationships while concentrating on the psychological functioning and growth of the individual (Ryff & Singer, 1996). It is frequently evaluated using tools like the Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being that gauge the existence of these six qualities (Kafka & Kozma, 2002; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Comparing with PWB, which is more in line with long-term elements of personal growth and life objectives, SWB can change more often owing to shifting circumstances, moods, and life events, reflecting both short-term and long-term states of happiness (Diener, 1999). Both of SWB and PWB are useful in understanding overall well-being and can complement each other in providing a comprehensive picture of an individual's mental and emotional health. In the current project, the emphasis is on adolescents' subjective perceptions, and SWB is used as the indicator of the adolescents' level of happiness.

Subjective well-being is a multidimensional scientific concept related to happiness, and it implies satisfaction with life or pleasure (Diener et al., 2003). It consists of two components: positive and negative affect (the affective component), and life satisfaction (the cognitive component) (Diener, 2000). Satisfaction with life refers to the global judgement of one's life, while positive affect and negative affect refer respectively to one's experiences of pleasant and unpleasant emotions and moods (Diener, 2000). Although the two constructs are obviously distinct, they are moderately inversely connected (Diener, 1995). Life satisfaction and positive affect contribute to alleviating the negative affect from a stressful life event (Park, 2004). In recent years, in addition to the two components, domain satisfaction has also been investigated (Carp & Carp, 1982; Easterlin & Sawangfa, 2007; Tiefenbach & Kohlbacher, 2015).

### *2.1.2.1 Life satisfaction*

Life satisfaction refers to people's assessment of the conditions in their lives, by first considering how important these conditions are, and then rating their lives on a scale from "unsatisfied" to "satisfied" (Diener et al., 2013). In other words, the information that is accessible at the moment of the judgement forms the basis of people's evaluations of their satisfaction, yet most of that information remains constant over time (Diener et al., 2009). The benefit of using life satisfaction as a well-being indicator is that it captures an overall sense of well-being from the perspective of the respondent. Higher levels of life satisfaction inspire young people to challenge themselves and travel the world in order to advance and flourish (Park, 2004). Usually, people's judgement of their own life satisfaction is corrected along with other hedonic components (Diener, 2000).

### *2.1.2.2 Positive affect and negative affect*

Positive affect refers to the extent to which a person feels enthusiastic, active, and alert, while negative affect refers to a person's negative emotional states, such as anguish, dissatisfaction, and aversive moods such as anger, guilt, displeasure, and fear (Diener et al., 1999). An individual's emotional state is regarded to be an indicator of one's organismic valuation processes, and in this case, positive and negative affect are included in the measurement (Rogers, 1963). Specifically, a measurement of positive affect is concerned with the frequency of perceived positive emotional states (e.g., enthusiastic and active), and a high level of positive affect indicates sufficient concentration and high vivacity (Shek, 2017). Inversely, states of negative affect are an individual's overall distress state, which could be derived from anger, disgust, guilt, and other mood states (DiLeo et al., 2022). High negative affect implies disagreeableness (Sun, 2014). Our experiences of both positive affect and negative affect from situations or events is partially predetermined—we may differ from

others in terms of our positive and negative emotionality, a quality that is generally constant and causes us to react differently to the same event or scenario, depending on our own emotional nature (Tellegen, 1985; Watson & Clark, 1984). Our lives are made of various events and situations, and our positive affect and negative affect reflect how we reflect on the situations or events in our lives. In that light, measurement of positive affect and negative affect may indeed indicate people's feelings about life (Diener, 1985; Fujita et al., 1991).

### *2.1.2.3 Domain satisfaction*

Some scholars have suggested that the measurement of SWB should focus not only on an individual's overall life satisfaction and emotions at present, but should also look at other domains of life (e.g., work and relationship satisfaction) (Lent et al., 2005). Other scholars suggest that domain satisfaction should also be further investigated (Carp & Carp, 1982; Easterlin & Sawangfa, 2007; Tiefenbach & Kohlbacher, 2015). Life satisfaction applies to general assessments of life, and it may also include people's satisfaction with work, health, marriage, and the like. Domain satisfaction represents how a person feels about specific areas of his/her life (Diener et al., 1999) and is regarded as the fourth component of SWB. Our living circumstances influence these distinct components of happiness in various ways and may not always coexist. Usually, all components of SWB are measured at the same time (Garcia & Erlandsson, 2011).

### **2.1.3 Significance of subjective well-being**

Diener (2009) stated that SWB is primarily concerned with why and how people have positive life experiences, and it includes both affective and cognitive evaluations. The results of empirical studies also underline the importance and benefits of SWB. In recent years, SWB has drawn additional attention researching its foundations and its effects on society,

such as improved job performance, more satisfying social interactions, increased creativity, heightened self-esteem, greater longevity, and stronger resilience (Diener et al., 2018). A high level of life satisfaction is believed to be associated with youths' optimal mental health, successful adaptations, prosocial behaviours, high levels of self-efficacy and self-reliance, and being more social (Park, 2004; Greenspoon & Saklofske 2001; Gilman 2001). Generally speaking, SWB may benefit people in the several respects.

Importantly, higher SWB appears to promote excellent mental and physical health. According to Diener (1999), a person with high SWB tends to be more satisfied with life and feel happier. Happier people tend to be physically healthier and live longer (Danner et al., 2001; Ryff & Singer, 2000). There is evidence that a high level of SWB is positively associated with desirable developmental outcomes and negatively correlated with problems. Furr and Funder (1998) believe that people with low life satisfaction are especially at risk for psychological disorders such as depression and maladaptive relationships with others. High satisfaction with life among adolescents may decrease their probability of engaging in problematic behaviours (Shek & Sun, 2009). Subjective well-being also has an impact on human academic and work performance. Park et al. (2004) found that utilising signature qualities at work improved the well-being and performance of employees. High SWB may even benefit an individual's social interaction skills. Indeed, high life satisfaction is believed to be associated with youths' optimal mental health, high adaptability, prosocial behaviours, high level of self-efficacy and self-reliance, and being more social (Gilman, 2001; Greenspoon & Saklofske, 2001; Park, 2004). In addition, Govindji and Linley (2007) found that students who used their signature strengths more often and fully reported higher levels of SWB, confidence, psychological well-being, psychological vitality (i.e., having feelings of positive energy), and self-esteem.

In summary, numerous studies have focused on the SWB of individuals and have found that a high level of SWB enables a person's positive development and is clearly associated with positive outcomes (Child Trends, 2003; Damon, 2004). The importance of promoting SWB is confirmed, as it helps an individual's positive development and reduces problematic behaviours.

#### **2.1.4 Theories of well-being**

Studies of well-being can be launched from within a range of theoretical frameworks, from biological theories that focus on genetic predispositions for happiness to relative standards theories that investigate how others influence one's perceived SWB (Diener & Ryan, 2009). Some mainstream theories on SWB are listed below.

##### *2.1.4.1 The top-down and bottom-up theory*

Diener (1984) described the "top-down" and "bottom-up" theories. The debate between top-down and bottom-up well-being theories has been crucial to the subject. According to bottom-up views, the good and bad times in a person's life are added together to create their perception of their SWB. In this perspective, a happy or pleasant moment will make a person feel good, and the higher the number of happier moments a person has, the higher the person's levels of well-being will be. Top-down theories, on the other hand, suggest that a person's interactions with the outside world will be influenced by their innate inclination to experience the world in a particular way. Top-down theories claim that an individual with an innately more positive attitude may perceive or interpret a particular occurrence as "happier" than a person with a more negative perspective might, thus making the positive attitude, rather than the objective events, the causal component in well-being (Diener, 1984; Diener &

Ryan, 2009). The top-down and bottom-up theories clarify the correlations between SWB and particular variables (Heady, 2006). However, the direction of the causal relationships between SWB and the factors associated with it (e.g., social support) is still unknown.

#### *2.1.4.2 Broaden and build theory*

Based on evolutionary models, which hold that things that help humans survive offer sensations of pleasure and well-being, a relatively new theory called the “broaden and build theory” by Fredrickson (2004) posits that individuals can expand their thought-action repertoires when they are feeling well, which then leads to a gradual change in their mental, psychological, social, and physical resources. Thus, according to Fredrickson, a condition of high SWB and positive affect allows people to boldly explore their surroundings, take on new challenges, and thereby develop significant personal resources. In this manner, contrary to earlier beliefs, happiness is not simply an epiphenomenon. Positive emotions provide adaptive advantages that have played a crucial role in helping humans survive and driving the evolutionary progress of the species, much like negative emotions have. The beneficial effect of positive affect on SWB is confirmed. However, the limitation of this theory is that it does not adequately account for the significance of “appropriate negativity” or qualitative distinctions within the spectrum of positive emotions (Kjell, 2010). However, for those who believe that education for happiness must also include education for unhappiness—teaching youngsters to understand and share the unhappiness of others, as per philosopher of education Nel Noddings (2003)—it is “unsettling to see how some positive psychologists seem to view beatific feelings as a magical elixir that brings release from and transcendence of the human condition” (p. 36).

#### *2.1.4.3 Relative standards theory*

There are different approaches to the relative standards theory. Carp and Carp (1982) posited the “social comparison theory” and suggested that a comparison between some standard (such as one’s past, others, objectives, or ideals) and the actual conditions yield a measure of well-being. According to the social comparison theory, an individual views other people as the standard. Hence, if one is better off than others, one will feel happier (Carp & Carp, 1982; Diener & Seligman, 2004).

With similar thinking, Brickman and colleagues (1978) proposed the “adaptation theory”, which states that individuals compare their current situation with their past experiences. For example, according to their adaptation theory, a person who receives a high mark could experience a rise in happiness due to the mark exceeding the person’s own prior expectations. Diener et al. (2002) found that people who are happy are more inclined to give the best aspects of their lives a high priority, whereas sad people are more likely to give the worst aspects of their lives a high priority. However, from the perspective of the adaptation theory, circumstances and events only affect the well-being of a human-being for a short time (Brickman, 1971; Diener & Seligman, 2004). It is doubtful that experiences lose their ability to arouse strong emotions over time.

#### *2.1.4.4 Social-ecological model*

The social-ecological model of human development introduced by Bronfenbrenner (1977) (see Figure 2.1) is a framework that focuses on the dynamic relationships between an individual and his/her environment as a determinant of that individual’s behaviour. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory helps us understand the dynamic interrelationships among various personal and environmental factors.

According to this theory, human beings' behaviour is determined by complex interactions of intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, community, and policy factors (Jacobs et al., 2020; Masten, 2008; Clay, 2005). Hence, health outcomes are not just the consequence of the individual's behaviour choices but are also impacted by external factors, such as social norms and the availability of resources (Atkiss et al., 2011).

In the Social-ecological model of Bronfenbrenner, all of these systems interact interdependently. Thus, risky and protective variables function across contexts and at varying intensities in various situations (Clay, 2005; Masten, 2008). As one of the essential systems for children and young people, as well as for the community as a whole, the school system has a responsibility to promote positive development outcomes (Henderson, 2007).

Furthermore, Israel and colleagues (1998) suggested that because the ecological method acknowledges differences in health status caused by poverty, lack of opportunity, racism, and powerlessness, the method is a good match for research involving urban adolescents. More specifically, the personality characteristics and dispositions, family characteristics, and environmental influences (exosystems, such as peers, school, and community) of adolescents are the three primary domains that have an impact on their protective factors and mechanisms. Although a person's daily participation in several systems (including those related to family, school, culture, recreation, social, and religious surroundings) has an impact on their development, that is especially true for children and young people. In such a case, the individual's character strengths may be influenced by external factors—the individual's personality may be influenced by educational and occupational opportunities, a loving and stable family, a safe neighbourhood and schools, political stability, and (perhaps) democracy. Furthermore, mentors, role models, and supportive peers, whether within or beyond the immediate family, may also have an effect on the developing individual (Peterson &

Seligman, 2004). In summary, a variety of social-ecological factors, ranging from intrapersonal to policy-related factors, should be taken into consideration in building an understanding of the development of adolescents.

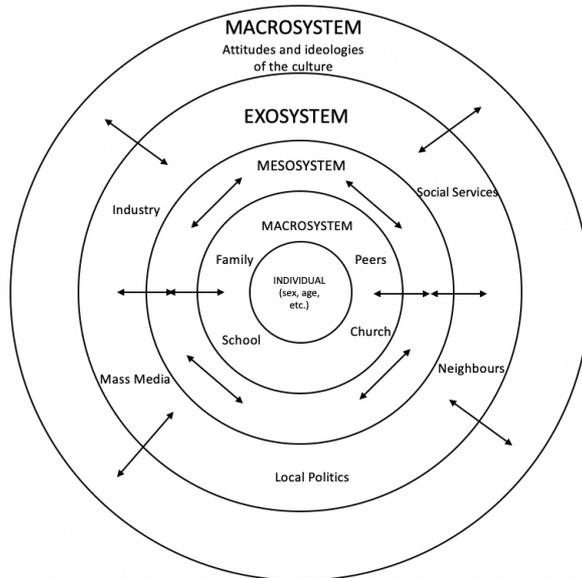


Figure 2.1 Social-ecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

It is crucial to have a broad framework within which to understand the human development processes, given the intricacy of the ways in which different social and ecological contexts affect people individually. This study used a social-psychological framework to explain psychological processes by describing who and how personality and environment affect different people. Compared with other theories, the social-ecological model is regarded as a more comprehensive model that incorporates various levels of factors, such as personality at the individual level and school at the micro level.

### 2.1.5 Direction of research on subjective well-being

Indeed, the empirical research on SWB, which is sometimes referred to as happiness or

life satisfaction, has evolved significantly during recent years (Diener et al., 2018). The emphasis has been on what causes people to be happy and how those processes affect SWB. People's values and goals appear to be inextricably linked to their evaluations of positive and negative experiences; therefore, it is logical to hypothesise that goal modification is an intrinsic aspect of adaptation (Diener, 2000).

Following the development of the science of SWB, the direction of the research has also evolved. In the first stage of the evolution of understanding SWB, scholars focused on the demographics of “happy people”, meaning that research on SWB focused on the characteristics of happy people (Diener et al., 1999)—on whether those being evaluated were married, wealthy, or spiritual individuals, or fell into other demographic groups. For example, as was mentioned above, W. Wilson (1967) defined happy people as “young, healthy, well-educated, well-paid, extroverted, optimistic, worry-free, religious, married person with high self-esteem, job morale, modest aspirations, of either sex and of a wide range of intelligence” (p. 294).

More recently, in the second stage of SWB studies, scholars have tried to explore the factors that affect SWB. In contrast to the environmental emphasis of the early demographic research on SWB and the genetic emphasis by heredity researchers, researchers have investigated how behaviour affects SWB. A growing number of scholars are now interested in people's ambitions and aspirations and how they deal with adversity. For example, the meta-analysis conducted by DeNeve and Cooper (1998) shows that SWB is associated with 137 personality constructs. In the university student population, task-oriented coping has been found to be positively associated with SWB, whereas emotion-oriented coping is negatively associated with well-being (Özdemir & Kerse, 2020).

In recent years, the spotlight has been shone on the underlying mechanisms between various factors and SWB, and more attention has been drawn towards researching SWB's foundations and its effects on society, including improved job performance, more satisfying social interactions, and increases in the individual's creativity, self-esteem, longevity, and resilience (Diener et al., 2018). According to Diener (1999), a person with high SWB is more likely to be satisfied with life and feel happy. Evidence indicates that a high level of SWB is positively associated with desirable developmental outcomes and negatively correlated with problems. In summary, with confirmation of the positive effect of high SWB on the development of human beings and clarification of the definition of SWB, the underlying mechanisms between SWB and its multiple factors associated with it is worthy of an in-depth study. However, the studies targeting younger adolescents have remained quite limited (i.e., 10-15) (Helliwell et al., 2024).

### **2.1.6 The factors associated with subjective well-being**

Multiple intrinsic and extrinsic factors are known to be associated with SWB, such as personality, demographic characteristics (e.g., educational level, social status, economic status, family income), environmental factors, and cultural factors (Lyubomirsky, 2001; Vera-Villaruel et al., 2012). It has been suggested that genetic variables, as well as external circumstances and deliberate actions, have the most significant influence on SWB (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). The major factors correlated with SWB are categorised by their sources (i.e., internal and external factors).

#### *2.1.6.1 Internal factors: Genetic factors*

Genetics is regarded as one factor associated with SWB. Tellegen and colleagues (2013)

examined the levels of happiness of monozygotic twins who grew up in different families and dizygotic twins who were rarely together and found that monozygotic twins were more similar in their levels of happiness. Moreover, their work suggests that genes account for approximately 40% of the variance in positive emotions. Cardon and colleague (1992) also found substantial heritability in one-year-old twin babies.

#### *2.1.6.2 Internal factors: Character traits*

The character trait is also regarded as one potent and reliable indicator of SWB (Diener et al., 1999). Previous studies have indicated that SWB is associated with character traits such as optimism, self-confidence, and extraversion (Diener et al., 1999; Diener, 2000). Costa and McCrae (1980) believed that extraversion promotes positive affect, while neuroticism affects negative affect. Furthermore, some specific factors may play a more significant role in prompting SWB—for example, evidence shows that perseverance (Datu et al., 2016), gratitude (Peterson et al., 2007), zest (Telef & Furlong, 2017), and self-regulation (Baumeister & Vohs, 2003) are associated with adolescents' subjective well-being.

#### *2.1.6.3 External factors: Environmental factors*

Cultural differences, as external, environmental factors, have also been found to be associated with SWB in previous studies (Diener, 2000). Specifically, there are both universal and society-specific predictors of SWB (Diener et al., 2018). Studies across cultures have indicated that distinct cultural factors connect with SWB in diverse communities. Different variables have been found to contribute to SWB for individuals with different values and objectives. According to research by Tsai and colleagues (2006), Asian Americans and Chinese participants appreciate low arousal positive affect, while European Americans value high arousal positive affect (excitement) more. In another study, when compared with

respondents from Denmark, low-income Americans reported more negative emotions and lower life satisfaction (Biswas-Diener et al., 2008). Researchers should be receptive to the potential that different tactics work better in distinct situations and for distinct individuals.

Additional environmental factors have also been found to be associated with SWB (Ferrer-i-Carbonell & Gowdy, 2007). For example, Bjorkman (2018) found that there is a significant correlation between well-being and proximity to the coast—the findings showed that having a residence within a kilometre of the seaside has a considerably favourable effect on SWB.

#### *2.1.6.4 External factors: Demographic factors*

Other variables that also affect SWB include demographic characteristics (e.g., educational level, social status, economic status, and family income) (Lyubornirsky, 2001). However, scholars continue to debate the impact of demographic factors on SWB, and some have suggested that demographic factors account less than other factors do for SWB (Campbell et al., 1976; Andrews & Withey, 1976).

Table 2.1 below lists some major factors influencing SWB and their related studies. To be sure, previous research has provided ample evidence to demonstrate that both internal and external influences significantly influence SWB. Nevertheless, there is a scarcity of research that has examined the intricate mechanisms by which factors from many perspectives collaborate to impact SWB. Furthermore, research conducted in the context of Hong Kong society is limited. The present project therefore examined the levels of influence of the various factors on the SWB of adolescents in Hong Kong.

Table 2.1 Factors associated with SWB (Selected)

Origin	Factor	Example	Reference
Internal	Personality	Genetic predisposition	Tellegen et al., 2013 Cardon et al., 1992
	Personality	Optimism, Self-confidence, Extroversion	Diener et al., 1999
	Personality	Extraversion, Neuroticism	Costa & McCrae, 1980
	Personality	Perseverance	Datu et al., 2016
	Personality	Gratitude	Peterson et al., 2007
	Personality	Zest	Telef & Furlong, 2017
	Personality	Self-regulation	Baumeister & Vohs, 2003
External	Demographic variable	Education level, Social economic status, Family income	Lyubornirsky, 2001; Vera-Villarroel et al., 2012
	Demographic variable	Gender	Diener et al., 1999
	Demographic variable	Religion	Witter et al., 1985; Dilmaghani, 2018



Origin	Factor	Example	Reference
	Demographic variable	Education	Furnham & Petrides, 2003
	Demographic variable	Age	Diener et al., 1999
	Environmental factor	Cultural background	Tsai et al., 2006; Biswas-Diener et al., 2010
	Environmental factor	Climate	Björkman, 2018
	Environmental factor	Social support	Chou, 1999; Siewert, 2011; Siedlecki et al., 2014



## 2.2 Character strengths

Character refers to the qualities that motivate an individual to aspire to and pursue the good (Peterson & Park, 2006). Character strengths, which stem from positive education, often refer to a collection of positive traits that are shown in a person's attitudes, feelings, and behaviours (Park et al., 2004; Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

In fact, the importance of character strengths has been confirmed in previous studies. In the past decade, there has been considerable research on the relationships between character strengths and mental health, including negative affect, stress, and trauma (Murrell, 2015). Empirical evidence also supports the notion that character strengths manifest in a variety of circumstances and places and contribute to a person's psychological and physiological health and functioning, and they are essential for the healthy growth and flourishing of children and adults throughout their lifetimes (Harzer, 2016; Peterson & Park, 2006; Proyer et al. 2013). Character strengths are also regarded as one type of significant factor associated with an individual's SWB (Dametto & Noronha, 2019; Gillham et al., 2011; Hausler et al., 2017; Weber, 2021; Zhang & Chen, 2018).

The development of character strengths has been highlighted by the education sector and is regarded as being one of children's rights to "acceptable" education (Perry-Hazan, 2015, p. 630). Indeed, nurturing students to develop good character is an enduring goal of education cross-culturally (Brown et al. 2012; Peterson & Seligman 2004). Beyond the skills, abilities, and knowledge generally taught in schools, the components of good character—that is, the ethically valued traits of a person's personality—are believed to be essential to the healthy development of youths (Colby & Shifren, 2013; Park & Peterson, 2009). Good character can

benefit the development of adolescents in multiple respects—for instance, higher levels of character strengths are positively associated with self-esteem and negatively correlated with depression, which may also contribute to higher life satisfaction in adolescents (Dametto & Noronha, 2020). Individuals devoid of good character may lack the motivation, courage, perseverance, and will to do the right thing and act in ethically and socially desirable ways, despite the importance of skills, abilities, and knowledge (Peterson & Park, 2006). The building and enhancement of competence and character for optimal youth development (i.e., social skills, emotional skills, and moral skills) can prevent negative developmental outcomes (Botvin et al., 1995; Catalano et al., 2004), and it is also essential for outcomes of positive development and thriving (Kornberg & Caplan, 1980; Park, 2004; Weissberg et al., 2003). Character-strength-based intervention programmes, which are intended to develop emotional, intellectual, and social abilities, also have shown encouraging effects for enhancing prosocial competencies and socioemotional function and decreasing risky behaviour (Lickona et al. 2007). These interventions may also be effective in helping cultivate a caring, contributing, and responsible youth (Pala, 2011, p. 26).

Certain specific character strengths are highly relevant to SWB. In particular, hope, zest, and leadership have been found to predict an individual's well-being, in measures of both life satisfaction and happiness. Greater life satisfaction has been found to be predicted by fairness, while greater happiness was predicted by curiosity (Cummins & Lau, 2005; Toner et al., 2012). Studies have shown that zest, love, and hope are closely related to life satisfaction. Zest, love of learning, and hope are closely related to positive affect, whereas zest is also associated with negative affect. In addition, character strengths may have an impact on the increase of positive affect rather than reducing negative affect (Littman-Ovadia & Lavy, 2012; Oliveira et al., 2016).

In summary, numerous research studies have shown that character strengths are essential for leading a happy life and fostering well-being (Dahlsgaard et al., 2005; Gillham et al., 2011), and good character is considered to be an essential component for adolescents in order to thrive and experience a healthy development (Duan et al., 2014; Park, 2009).

### **2.2.1 The history of positive education**

Positive education is a field that has attracted significant attention from scholars in recent decades. With a theoretical basis in positive psychology, positive education is related to the degree of an individual's involvement (e.g., mental health), positive emotions (e.g., happiness) and meaning (e.g., goals), and so forth (Seligman et al., 2009). Positive psychology has been regarded as an investigation of “what goes right in life, from birth to death and at all stops in between” (Peterson, 2006, p. 4). At the same time, multiple scholars posit that happiness is a fundamental goal of education (Brighouse, 2006; Noddings, 2003). To turn the theory of positive psychology into practice, schools could be viewed as a positive institution for cultivating positive traits and positive affect, for the aim of education (Kristjansson, 2012). In this case, positive education is regarded as the application of positive psychology in educational settings (e.g., schools) (Kristjansson, 2012). Although historically the study of psychology focused on the diagnosis and treatment of mental disorders in individuals, in the 1950s, some scholars contended that this approach to understanding human functioning was insufficient (Jahoda, 1958). Based on philosophical concepts, virtue ethics is regarded as a modern approach to investigating human beings' strengths of character (Anscombe, 1958).

In the 1990s, the focus of psychological studies was “understanding, treating, and preventing

psychological disorders” (Evans et al., 2005, p. 507). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) (APA, 1994) and the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) (WHO, 1992) were developed to provide reliable statements for the assessment of disorders. However, criteria are lacking for measuring wellness, mental health, well-being, or what we should strive for in life. Scholars also have failed to identify the specifics in different populations, even though it is agreed that wellness is important for human goodness (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Positive psychology, which focuses on positive individual traits, positive subjective experiences, and institutions that enable positive experiences and traits, provides solutions to these questions (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). In this case, scholars began by exploring the question, “What is character?”

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the definition of positive psychology had become more explicit. Seligman et al. (2005) stated that positive psychology includes “positive emotion, positive character, and positive institutions” (p. 410) and explored concepts relating to an individual’s past (contentment, well-being, and satisfaction); present (happiness and flow); and future (optimism and hope) (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). At the same time, Seligman et al. (2004) underlined the importance of an individual’s everyday well-being, thus supplanting the previous focus on understanding suffering and curing illness. Many theoretical models have been developed that are based on positive psychology. To give psychologists a better grasp of psychological well-being, in line with what the DSM (APA, 2000) accomplishes for psychological disorders, a classification system for strengths and virtues was created (Seligman et al., 2004) that is also meant to be a beneficial addition to the DSM (Murrell, 2015). In 2004, Peterson and Seligman (2004) presented The Values in Action (VIA) Classification of Character Strengths, which was based on the perspective of positive psychology in the book *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*

(Csikszentmihalyi & Seligman, 2000; Seligman et al., 2005). In the VIA classification, 24 measurable character strengths were grouped into six categories: courage, transcendence, justice, humanity, wisdom, and temperance (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

In addition to the VIA classification, the PERMA model, also developed by Dr. Martin Seligman (2018), the father of positive psychology, emphasises that happiness consists of five measurable elements: positive emotion, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishments/achievements. The movement for positive psychology has raised the visibility of studies on happiness and well-being and other positive elements of human health (Duckworth et al., 2005; Peterson, 2006). Based on Seligman's PERMA model, interventions should aim to strengthen each of the five components to boost overall well-being. For instance, therapy or activities can assist individuals in recognizing and fostering positive emotions, meaningful relationships, and personal goals.

Up to now, positive education has primarily been examined and formulated from philosophical or broad perspectives. These approaches tend to provide relatively generalized, morally driven definitions of character and often emphasize either abstract ideas or a relatively narrow set of desirable traits. (Brown et al., 2012; Peterson & Park, 2006). The goal of positive education also varies, ranging from developing moral values and critical thinking to avoiding risky behaviours (such as drug and alcohol abuse), and it may also help the promotion of service learning and social-emotional learning for students (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005, 2017).

Because a positive education strategy is measurable and theoretically driven, it is consistently used in educational settings to attain a flourishing life (Lee et al., 2021). It promotes healthy

development and improves people's capacity to manage stress and life's challenges.

Conceptualisations of character strengths within the context of positive psychology imply that each individual has strengths that are naturally more characteristic of him or her, but that all character strengths may be developed consciously. This development is best pursued in accordance with each individual's traits, aspirations, and environment (Linkins et al., 2015),

However, there is also some criticism of positive education. Azar (2011) has pointed out that the previous research findings on positive education seemed to be incomprehensive, and he was concerned about that research not reporting the negative impacts and exaggerating the positive ones, while other scholars have felt that positive psychology has ignored the contributions from traditional psychology. There is clearly a lack of empirical studies and a theoretical basis (Pang, 2017). In addition, in the book *Bright-Sided: How Positive Thinking is Undermining America*, written by Barbara Ehrenreich (2012), positive thinking has been criticised for inhibiting the actual thinking of a human. In the education sector, the pursuit of a short-term measured result has inevitably led to a neglect of the specificity of a student as an individual, and their all-around development has been limited. In summary, positive education focuses on enhancing the overall well-being and development of students, and positive education is an evidence based approach which is measurable. It is welcomed by some schools and education sectors.

The important result of what positive psychologists refer to as "positive education" is acceptance of its objectives head-on, and an offering of strategies for imparting "skills for happiness" (Noble & McGrath, 2008; Seligman et al., 2009).

### **2.2.2 VIA classification of character strengths**

The book *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (CSV; Peterson & Seligman, 2004), one of the most notable publications for the field of positive psychology, provided a comprehensive introduction to a new classification known as the VIA Classification of Strengths (see Table 2.2). Virtues are a core characteristic valued by philosophers and religious thinkers (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The 24 character strengths in the VIA classification are categorised into six virtues: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. The primary characteristics that moral philosophers and religious thinkers value are virtues, and virtues are also omnipresent in historical surveys (Dahlsgaard et al., 2005; Peterson et al., 2009).

The character-strength virtue *courage*, in particular, involves having strength in emotional traits such as persistence, bravery, zest, and integrity. The virtue *wisdom* includes creativity, curiosity, love of learning, judgement, and perspective. The *justice* virtue refers to teamwork, fairness, and leadership. The *humanity* virtue includes interpersonal strengths in the personality trait that comprises kindness, love, and social intelligence. The virtue *transcendence* comprises virtues that give our lives meaning and a connection to the greater universe. These virtues include a love of beauty and gratitude, excellence, humour, hope, and spirituality. Strengths that guard us against excesses, such as self-regulation, forgiveness, humility, and prudence, are included in the virtue of *temperance* (Kwok, 2021; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Table 2.2 describes the definition of each character strength.

Table 2.2 Classification of VIA (Peterson &amp; Seligman, 2004, pp.29-30)

Virtue	Character strength	Definition
Wisdom and knowledge - cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge	Creativity	Inventing new and efficient ways to conceptualize and execute tasks; encompasses artistic accomplishments but is not restricted to them.
	Curiosity	Showing interest in continuous experiences for their own sake; finding topics fascinating, and engaging in exploration and discovery.
	Open-mindedness	Considering all aspects and thoroughly examining them; avoiding premature conclusions; being adaptable to new evidence and fairly evaluating all information.
	Love of learning	Gaining proficiency in new skills, subjects, and areas of knowledge, either independently or formally; closely related to curiosity but extends to systematically organizing what one learns.
Courage - emotional strengths that involve	Perspective	Offering wise advice to others and having a broad, insightful view of the world that benefits oneself and others.
	Bravery	Facing threats, challenges, difficulties, or pain without hesitation; advocating for what is right even when opposed; following personal beliefs even if they are unpopular;



Virtue	Character strength	Definition
the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal	Perseverance/Persistence	includes physical courage but is not confined to it. Completing what one begins; continuing actions despite obstacles; finding satisfaction in finishing tasks.
	Honesty/Integrity	Telling the truth in a broader sense, presenting oneself sincerely; being genuine; taking responsibility for one's emotions and actions.
	Zest/Vitality	Engaging in life with enthusiasm and energy; avoiding half-hearted efforts; viewing life as an adventurous journey; feeling vibrant and invigorated.
Humanity - interpersonal strengths that involve tending and befriending others	Love	Valuing close relationships, especially those involving mutual care and sharing; feeling connected to others.
	Kindness	Performing good deeds for others, assisting them, and caring for them.
	Social Intelligence	Being aware of the motives and feelings of oneself and others; understanding what drives people and how to navigate social interactions effectively.
Justice - civic strengths that underlie healthy	Citizenship	Collaborating effectively as part of a group or team; showing loyalty to the group; fulfilling one's responsibilities.



Virtue	Character strength	Definition
community life	Fairness	Treating everyone equally based on principles of fairness and justice; not letting personal biases affect decisions about others; ensuring everyone gets an equal opportunity.
	Leadership	Motivating a group to accomplish tasks while maintaining positive relationships within the group; organizing and executing group activities.
Temperance - strengths that protect against excess	Forgiveness and mercy	Letting go of grudges against those who have wronged; accepting others' faults; offering second chances; not seeking revenge.
	Humility and modesty	Allowing achievements to stand on their own; not seeking attention; not viewing oneself as more important than others.
	Prudence	Making careful decisions; avoiding unnecessary risks; refraining from saying or doing things that might be regretted later.
Transcendence -	Self-regulation	Managing one's behaviour and actions; exercising discipline; controlling desires and emotions.
	Appreciation of beauty	Recognizing and valuing beauty, excellence, and skilled performance in various areas of



Virtue	Character strength	Definition
strengths that forge	and excellence	life, from nature and art to mathematics, science, and everyday experiences.
connections to the larger	Gratitude	Being conscious of and thankful for positive events; taking time to express appreciation.
universe and	Hope	Anticipating positive outcomes in the future and working towards achieving them;
provide meaning		believing that a favorable future is possible.
	Humour	Enjoying laughter and teasing; bringing joy to others; seeing the lighter side of life;
		making (but not necessarily telling) jokes.
	Spirituality	Holding consistent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe;
		understanding one's place within the broader context; having beliefs about life's
		meaning that guide behavior and offer comfort.



With support from positive psychology, the VIA Classification of Strengths developed by the VIA Institute is regarded as a pioneering classification that has operationalised character for the sake of empirical research, and that has the support of the positive psychology community (Karris & Craighead, 2012). The VIA classification of character strengths (Peterson & Seligman 2004) offers a practical, universally applicable road map of the elements of good character and the potential objectives of character education.

According to Berkowitz and Bier (2005), the predicted results of character education are a complex collection of psychological traits. The VIA classification can offer a conceptual framework for a particular group of character components, because there is not a strong consensus on them in character education. Furthermore, character and character development can be evaluated using the VIA Inventory of Strengths, which provides a reliable method for looking at the 24 VIA strengths.

### **2.2.3 Definition of happiness character strengths**

Character strengths are the entire collection of positive traits that have arisen throughout history and throughout cultures as being essential for living a good life (Park, 2004; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Character strengths are psychological ingredients—processes or mechanisms that define the virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Seligman & Peterson, 2009). Character strengths can be reflected in an individual's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours (Park et al., 2004).

Basing their work on previous studies in positive education, scholars have summarised a list of 24 character strengths (Diener et al., 2004). Seligman et al. (2005) also concluded that the character strengths of humans have 12 specific features—that they (a) are recognisable across

cultures, (b) contribute to various aspects of individual fulfilment, satisfaction, and happiness, (c) are morally valued in their own right, (d) produce admiration, not jealousy, (e) contain obvious antonyms that are “negative”, (f) are traitlike in nature, (g) can be assessed, (h) are distinct from other character strengths, (i) are embodied in some individuals, (j) are demonstrated by some individuals, (k) lack presence in some individuals, and (l) are a deliberate target of societal practices that try to cultivate them.

Character strengths in the VIA classification are “traitlike” (Karris & Craighead, 2012; Murrell, 2015). These characteristics, which are known as “predispositions for moral excellence”, are thought to have a genetic component and therefore to have evolved within humans as a result (Parks et al., 2004). However, they might also be changeable, given that character can be fostered and developed (Karris & Craighead, 2012).

In recent years, researchers have explored which character strengths appear to be most closely connected with well-being and happiness, and they discovered that love, hope, zest, and curiosity are the most substantially correlated with SWB (Lounsbury, 2009; Park et al., 2004). Diener (2004) also found that positive emotional content (gratitude, hope, and love) in early-life autobiographies was highly linked to lifespan six decades later (Diener, 2004). Those results together revealed that some particular character strengths have a relatively greater and more outstanding contribution to promoting SWB, and that different character strengths are associated with different components of well-being (e.g., Weber et al., 2013). In the adult population, Proyer and colleagues' research (2011, 2013) additionally indicated that traits such as gratitude, curiosity, humor, zest, and hope are linked to current life satisfaction among adults. Moreover, spirituality and hope were found to predict adults' future satisfaction with life. In particular, zest is regarded as a positive characteristic which reflects that a person

approaches life with eagerness, vigour, and enthusiasm (Peterson et al., 2009). Chesterton (1908) commented that “the test of all happiness is gratitude” (p. 35). For example, when receiving gifts from Santa Claus, children feel grateful. Hope is the belief-based emotion that the desired result will occur (Snyder, 1989). According to Park and Peterson (2009), love is defined as valuing close relations with others. Loewenstein (1994) defined curiosity “as an intrinsically motivated desire for information” (p. 81).

#### **2.2.4 Measurements of character strengths**

The psychological processes and mechanisms that define virtues are regarded as character strengths (Peterson et al., 2009). To contribute to the evaluation of character strengths, Park et al. (2006) developed the Value in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS) to measure these strengths. The scale is an empirical instrument which measures 24 character strengths in adults, and it has been shown to have good psychometric properties and to demonstrate strong cross-cultural consistency (Seligman et al., 2005). To further improve the original thinking and advance the science of character strengths, The VIA-IS was revisited by Dr Robert McGrath in 2017 (McGrath, 2019). The development and validation of a revised version of the VIA-IS, the VIA-IS-R, contains fewer items than the VIA-IS does, includes key-reversed questions, displays improved distinctions between the constructs, and represents a variety of item difficulties. The scales consists of the original six virtues developed by Peterson and Seligman (2004), supplemented by three virtues (i.e., caring, inquisitiveness, and self-control) developed by McGrath (2015).

Peterson and Park (2006) created the Inventory of Strengths for Youth (VIA-Youth), which is an adaptation of the VIA-IS for children and teenagers aged 10 to 17. The VIA-Youth has been subjected to extensive psychometric testing and has been proven to have satisfactory

internal consistency, stability, and validity (Peterson & Park, 2006). Using a self-report survey, the VIA-Youth enables the thorough assessment of the 24 character strengths in a single session (Peterson et al., 2009). Furthermore, the VIA-Youth has been modified for use with German (Weber et al., 2014) and South African (van Eeden et al., 2008) data, and the VIA Inventory of Strengths for Youth-Revised (VIA-Youth-1 and VIA-Youth-2), launched in July 2022, revises the VIA Youth (Jermann & McGrath, 2022) and includes modifications to all 24 scales. Except for teamwork, all scales include four items, for a total of 98 items. There are two versions: the VIA-Youth-1 (VIA-Y-1) is designed for ages 8 to 12, while the VIA-Youth-2 (VIA-Y-2) is designed for ages 13 to 17. This tool is recommended by the VIA Institute as the ideal measure of youth character strengths. Table 2.3 lists the representative instruments of VIA.

Table 2.3 List of VIA instruments

No.	Instrument	Author	Target population	Item
1	VIA Inventory Of Strengths-P (VIA-IS-P)	McGrath (2019).	Adult	96
2	Original VIA Inventory Of Strengths(VIA-IS)	Peterson & Seligman (2004)	Adult	120 72
3	Global Assessment of Character Strengths-72 (GACS-72)	McGrath (2017)	Adults	72
4	VIA-Youth-1/	Jermann & McGrath	Ages 8-12	98
5	VIA-Youth-2 (VIA-Y-R1/R2)	(2022).	Ages 13-17	
6	The VIA Youth Survey (VIA-Youth)	Park & Peterson (2006)	Ages 10-17	96

### 2.2.5 Direction of research on character strengths

The study of character strengths has evolved during the last few decades. In the beginning, scholars highlighted the benefits of character strengths applications. In early studies, the examination of character strengths began, with its impact on reducing mental health problems (Rashid et al. 2013). As Proyer and colleagues (2013) noted, the intervention of character strengths may have an impact on an individual's SWB. Early scholars also found that the symptoms of anxiety and depression could be reduced by a positive intervention based on character strengths (Seligman et al., 2006). More recently, in addition to reducing problematic behaviours, the scope of studies has been widened to the application of character strengths in multiple scenarios. In particular, the results of studies have indicated that such strengths are

efficient in promoting individual life satisfaction (Proctor et al., 2011), positive affect (Seligman et al., 2006), social skills, academic performance, and classroom engagement (Quinlan et al., 2015; Seligman et al., 2006).

In the past dozen years, studies have spotlighted how to utilise an individual's signature character strengths (Harzer & Ruch, 2013; Huber et al., 2020; Schutte & Malouff, 2019). People are driven by an inner, energetic need to utilise and cultivate innate strengths, and when people utilise their character strengths, they tend to feel better about themselves, achieve more, and fulfil their own potential (Linley & Harrington, 2006). Children and adults who endorse and utilise character strengths are associated with fewer psychological problems (Gillham et al., 2011), as well as greater happiness and engagement (Littman-Ovadia & Lavy, 2012; Peterson & Park; Park, 2004). Empirical evidence also suggests that the use of one's character strengths is highly correlated with favourable outcomes, such as positive behaviour, high academic performance, and a high level of well-being (Rashid et al., 2013).

In the last two decades, the relationship between SWB and character strengths has been further explored and applied in promoting an individual's well-being. The VIA classification has provided ways of talking about and measuring character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). In Park and colleagues' study, curiosity, hope, gratitude, and zest were regarded as the most highly related character strengths connected to SWB (Park et al., 2004). Based on the results of another study, the Zurich Strength Program was developed as a character-strengths-based intervention program intended to prompt participants' life satisfaction via character-strengths-based interventions (Proye et al., 2013). For example, for gratitude, participants were asked to prepare a letter thanking another person (Proyer et al., 2013). The Program has also been used in the educational field, because equipping students with life skills is one of

the goals of the current educational system (Mourshed et al., 2014; National Research Council, 2012). The use and promotion of character strengths in educational institutions, which mould the future citizens and leaders of our society, brings with it both distinct opportunities and notable challenges. Numerous studies have focused on the impact that character strengths have on adolescents, because good character is regarded as the core of moral competence for youths (Baumrind, 1998), and competence and character strengths are regarded as essential components of optimal individual development. Studies of adolescents' competence and character indicate their crucial importance in achieving successful lifetime development (Colby et al., 1998; Peterson & Park, 2006).

In summary, scientific studies have revealed that enhanced well-being, illness recovery, and perceived psychological growth following adversity are associated with character strengths (Park et al., 2004; Peterson et al., 2007; Peterson et al., 2008). According to previous studies, character strengths can be cultivated and nurtured by the application or endorsement of those strengths (Murrell, 2015). Character strengths can also be cultivated by designated interventions from multiple approaches, such as emotional, cognitive, and behavioural aspects (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). The application of character strengths in the field of education will benefit the development of adolescents in multiple respects.

### **2.2.6 Character strengths and subjective well-being**

Character strengths are a crucial component of well-being and can be utilised to cultivate and sustain happiness, in part because they permit pleasure and other positive experiences (Lambert et al., 2015). Diener and colleagues (1999) reviewed the factors that may influence an individual's SWB, which included temperamental predisposition, traits and cognitive

dispositions, variability, and personality-and-environment interactions. As previous studies have suggested, personality is one of the most powerful and reliable indicators of SWB (Diener & Lucas, 2015).

So-called “good character” is believed to be significantly important to human functioning (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). There are various focuses, levels, and patterns that can be used in investigating the relationships among the various components of well-being (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Numerous studies have shown that different components of well-being, such as positive affect, are associated with personality traits. A meta-analysis conducted by DeNeve and Cooper (1998) showed that SWB is associated with as many as 137 personality constructs. Scholars have begun investigating the effects of the various character strength virtues on SWB worldwide, due to the beneficial association between SWB and character strengths. The transcendence strengths (e.g., gratitude, spirituality) are regarded as the virtue most closely related to adolescents’ life satisfaction, quality of life, and well-being, as they can provide adolescents with a more profound feeling of meaning, purpose, and community, and can help improve their school adjustment skills (Froh et al., 2010; Sawatzky et al., 2009; Snyder et al., 2003). Two studies’ findings have revealed that transcendence was the most significant predictor of positive affect and life satisfaction in Israeli teenagers, from among the six high-order strengths (Shoshani & Slone, 2013; Weber et al., 2013). According to Gillham and colleagues’ (2011) study, transcendence was also a predictor of life satisfaction among secondary school students in the United States. Zappala’s (2007) study also provided evidence that ego-transcendence predicts an adult’s psychological well-being and SWB, and high ego-transcendent people tend to perceive more happiness in their daily life. Weber (2021) conducted a cross-cultural review of the relationship between character strengths and children’s and adolescents’ SWB and confirmed that character strengths are

clearly relevant correlates of all of the domains of SWB.

In a more in-depth look at character strengths, specific ones are believed to be especially closely related to SWB. In adolescents, a positive correlation between character strengths and SWB has been documented (Gillham et al., 2011; Grinhauz, 2015; Littman-Ovadia & Lavy, 2012; Ruch et al., 2014; Shoshani & Slone, 2013), and indeed, it is vital that we comprehend the solid association between character strengths and SWB in adolescents (Dametto & Noronha, 2019). In previous studies in Western countries, some particular character strengths, such as zest (Telef & Furlong, 2017), gratitude (Peterson et al., 2007), perseverance (Datu et al., 2016), and self-regulation (Baumeister & Vohs, 2003), have also been investigated in adolescent samples. In another cross-sectional study, Toner and colleagues (2012) suggested that temperance, vitality, and transcendence were independently associated with well-being and happiness. In that light, Proyer and colleagues recommended that the character strengths which correlate highly with SWB should be addressed in strengths-based interventions (Proyer et al., 2013). Other studies have indicated that interventions which raise individuals' knowledge of their character strengths appear to increase their life satisfaction and reduce psychological symptoms (Duan et al., 2014; Gander et al., 2013; Harzer, 2016). The dimensions of SWB are indicative of general health and have been shown to contribute to the support of healthy adolescent development (Salgado et al., 2019), and the role of character strengths in facilitating adolescents' positive development has been confirmed. Character strengths appear to predict adolescents' future well-being and help them in building connections with other people (Gillham et al., 2011).

In summary, the relationships between character strengths and the dimensions of well-being are direct (Lambert et al., 2015), making them essential resources for enhancing the SWB

(Diener et al., 1999; Diener et al., 2003).

### **2.2.7 Happiness character strengths and subjective well-being**

As mentioned above, some specific character strengths are especially closely related to an individual's SWB. From the results of previous studies, some particular character strengths are regarded as "happiness character strengths." Hope, zest, gratitude, love, and curiosity have been found to be more highly correlated with individuals' life satisfaction than other strengths (Park et al., 2004; Peterson & Park, 2006), and those results have persisted in multiple populations and studies (Proyer et al. 2015). In a cross-cultural study that investigated 24 character strengths' relationships with SWB, the results further showed that the character strengths related to happiness (such as zest, hope, curiosity, love, and gratitude) were more likely to be associated with adults' SWB (Hausler et al., 2017). A cross-sectional study of 826 high school students revealed that the character strengths of gratitude, hope, and zest were directly associated with SWB and could be regarded as the resources of an individual's happiness (Dametto & Noronha, 2019). In another study in China, Zhang and Chen (2018) found that hope, curiosity, zest, perseverance, and love showed the strongest associations with college students' SWB. In the child and adolescent population, Rashid et al. (2013) suggested that the character strengths of love, zest, and hope were significantly correlated with well-being.

#### *2.2.7.1 Zest*

Zest has been positively related to different aspects of SWB in multiple studies (Hausler et al., 2017; Chan, 2010; Glasberg et al., 2014). Assessments of zest have been found to predict overall life satisfaction in children, adolescents, and adults (Peterson & Park, 2006; Park et al., 2004). Furthermore, zest is evidenced to be associated with teachers' self-efficacy and job

stress levels (Sezgin & Erdogan, 2015). In the student population, zest for life affects students' depression through gratitude (Lam, 2021).

#### 2.2.7.2 *Gratitude*

In modern science, gratitude is regarded as a feeling of appreciation and happiness in reaction to receiving a gift, whether the gift is a physical benefit from a specific other or a moment of tranquil bliss produced by natural beauty. Gratitude derives from the Latin word *gratia*, which means “grace”, “graciousness”, or “gratefulness” (Diener, 2004). Gratitude can be thought of as a virtue that contributes to living well. According to B. Weiner (1985), people experience gratitude when they attribute their enjoyment to an outside factor, most notably the work of another person. Similarly, Ortony et al. (1987) proposed that gratitude is the outcome of a combination of admiration and happiness (one is delighted for having experienced a favourable life event, and the person judges the actions of his or her benefactor as praiseworthy). At the dispositional level, higher levels of positive emotions, life satisfaction, vitality, and optimism are reported by thankful people, along with lower levels of depression and stress (McCullough et al., 2002). It therefore appears that a disposition of gratitude enhances positive emotional states more than it lessens negative ones.

#### 2.2.7.3 *Hope*

Hope is the belief-based emotion that a desired result will occur (Snyder, 1989). Snyder's theory of hope (Snyder, 2002) suggests that hope leads to greater levels of SWB when we achieve our aims. Hope is fundamentally a strong desire that is actively pursued, even while its fulfilment is uncertain (Martin, 2011).

Hope refers to a belief-based emotion that one's desired outcome will be produced (Snyder,

1989), and empirical studies have suggested that hope is closely related to SWB (Lounsbury et al., 2009; Park et al., 2004). Snyder's theory of hope assumes that hope leads to higher levels of SWB when we experience success in pursuing our goals (Snyder, 2002). Hope is essentially a strong desire that is actively pursued, even though it is uncertain whether this desire will be fulfilled (Martin, 2011). According to the results of previous studies, hopeful persons are happier than others (Witvliet et al., 2019). In a study conducted by Pleegin and colleagues (2019), the results showed that cognitive and emotional hope were considerably associated with American adults' SWB. A positive relationship between happiness and hope has also been found in Asian college students (Kato & Snyder, 2005). Satici (2016) found that hope fully mediated the relationship between resilience and SWB in Turkish university students.

#### *2.2.7.4 Love*

Love represents a cognitive, behavioural, and emotional stance towards others that takes three prototypical forms (Diener, 2004), and love is another character strength that is associated with an individual's well-being (Lounsbury et al., 2009). Such individuals explore with tremendous enthusiasm and are more tenacious in problem-solving tasks, but they are also more likely to ask for assistance and seek contact comfort when they are in need (Londerville & Main, 1981). Children with secure attachment histories are better at interacting with their peers and evoke more positive responses (Pierrehumbert et al., 1989; Vandell et al., 1988). Also, people with love will have fewer psychosomatic symptoms when in a stressful situation and will experience lower negative affect (e.g., depression) (Carnelley et al., 1994; Mikulincer et al., 1993). A study by Diener (2004) of adolescents also showed that secure attachments helped teenagers and adults better manage life's stressors.

### 2.2.7.5 Curiosity

Curiosity entails the active recognition, pursuit, and management of one's experience in response to new and challenging opportunities (Diener, 2004). Curiosity is ubiquitous and manifests itself in the everyday pursuits that enrich our daily lives (e.g., reading a handwritten letter with eagerness) (Diener, 2004).

The personal growth facilitation model of curiosity postulates, on the basis of early research on cognitive development, that identifying and pursuing novelty, uncertainty, and challenge provides the foundation for developing personal and interpersonal capital (Kashdan & Fincham, 2002). Curiosity is associated with positive affect, and curiosity appears to promote positive emotions (e.g., excitement, enjoyment, and attentiveness) (Ainley, 1998; Kashdan & Roberts, 2007). In a long-term study of students from seventh to eleventh grades, those identified as being interested in the broad domain of learning reported that their school experience was more fulfilling (positive affect), that it was crucial to their future (opportunity), that they had positive relationships with teachers, and that they felt confident about their ability to succeed (achievement) (Ainley, 1998).

## 2.3 Social support—Peer support and teacher support

### 2.3.1 Definition

Social support comprises “social resources that persons perceive to be available or that are actually provided to them by nonprofessionals in the context of both formal support groups and informal helping relationships” (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 4). It is regarded as a multidimensional construct and has been categorised into different types (Tardy, 1985).

Positive social support may include the expression of standards and expectations for behaviour, positive communication, and the development of confidence in one's capacity to

complete coursework (Bandura, 1989; Connell & Wellborn, 1991). Usually, social support consists of both psychological and non-psychological support, and psychological support can be divided into emotional support and appraisal support (e.g., information and knowledge) (Cobb, 1976; Cohen & McKay, 1983). From the perspectives of interaction and development, social support may change over time, frequently as a result of an individual's characteristics and his or her surroundings (Newcomb, 1990; Sarason et al., 1986). Specifically, functional social support can include the following categories: (1) emotional support (e.g., showing positive affect, offering empathy, and encouraging others to express their feelings), (2) informational support (e.g., giving advice, direction, feedback, or information), (3) tangible support (e.g., offering material resources or behavioural assistance), (4) positive social interactions (e.g., being available to engage in fun with others), and (5) affectionate support (e.g., showing affection and love) (Sherbourne & Stewart, 1991). Affectionate support has been defined as "behavioral manifestations of love (e.g. hugging someone)". Even though it has not been emphasized in the previous literature as a distinct type of support, authors felt that this type of support would be very beneficial to health outcomes of patient.

In addition, Tardy (1985) categorised social support into emotional, appraisal, instrumental, and informational support, which can be appropriate for use in various situations and needs. Emotional support includes perceptions of trust and love, as well as communications of empathy and caring (e.g., "you are important to me"). Instrumental support includes the provision of tangible assistance, such as one's time, skills, services, or even money, in order to help someone in need. Appraisal support involves providing evaluative feedback on one's behavior—for instance, via a critical assessment of the positive and negative aspects of one's performance, as well as suggestions for improvement. Informational support is characterized by the provision of guidance, advice, or information that can provide a solution to a problem.

Every kind of support is essential and can work best when customised to meet the needs of the individual. Giving the appropriate assistance at the appropriate moment can greatly improve a person's capacity to handle challenges. Support can take many different forms, each of which has a special function in assisting people in managing stress and difficulties. The main difference between instrumental, appraisal, informational, and emotional support are as follows:

Table 2.4 The comparison of different kinds of support (Tardy, 1985)

	Definition	Example	Impact
Emotional Support:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Expressing of empathy, love, trust, and caring.</li> <li>● Making a person feel valued and understood.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Listening to a friend vent about their problems,</li> <li>● Offering words of encouragement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● It helps individuals feel less alone, reduces stress, and boosts emotional well-being.</li> </ul>
Informational Support:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● offering guidance, recommendations, or data that can assist someone in resolving an issue or improving their circumstances.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Giving someone advice on how to handle a work-related issue</li> <li>● Sharing resources for learning new</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● It empowers individuals by enhancing their knowledge and decision-making</li> </ul>

	Definition	Example	Impact
		skills,	capabilities.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Providing feedback on a project.</li> </ul>	
Appraisal Support:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Giving constructive feedback and affirmation that helps individuals evaluate themselves or their situations more accurately.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Helping a friend see the positive aspects of their performance</li> <li>● Guiding someone to Recognize their strengths and weaknesses.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● It aids in self-assessment and boosts confidence, enabling better personal growth and decision-making.</li> </ul>
Instrumental Support:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Providing tangible aid and services that directly assist a person in need.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Offering financial assistance</li> <li>● Helping with chores</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● It addresses practical needs and reduces the burden of everyday challenges, allowing individuals to focus on other aspects of their lives.</li> </ul>

From multiple perspectives, social support assists an individual's growth. Previous studies have demonstrated a relationship between social support and improved well-being and fewer symptoms of depression (e.g., Guerette & Smedema, 2011; Limbert, 2004; Southwick et al., 2005). In a meta-analysis, social support was also identified as the predictor of both retention and grade-point average (GPA) of college students (Robbins et al., 2004). In addition, according to Lakey and Cohen (2000), perceived social support decreases the perception that circumstances pose a threat to one's well-being, while simultaneously increasing the perception that essential resources are available. People show fewer signs of anxiety, depression, social withdrawal, and violent conduct when they perceive that they have social support, and it also seems to boost the effectiveness of their coping strategies (Calvete & Connor-Smith, 2006).

### **2.3.2 Social support and SWB**

The impact of social support on an individual's wellness and health should not be underestimated. Social support has been repeatedly associated with improved physical health outcomes (e.g., Berkman et al., 2000; Uchino et al., 2006) and lower mortality rates (e.g., Brummett et al., 2001; Rutledge et al., 2004). Social support has also been associated with better mental health during college and throughout an individual's lifespan (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Kawachi & Berkman, 2001). For example, Hefner and Eisenberg (2009) suggested that students who report lower levels of social support are more likely to suffer from mental health issues (e.g., depression and anxiety) than college students with high levels of social support are. Moreover, it has been established that the importance of social support increases throughout late adolescence (Newcomb, 1990).

There is also some debate about the direct relationship between social support and well-

being. Some prior research has confirmed positive associations between social support and SWB among different populations (Brajša-Žganec et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2020; Oriol et al., 2017). However, others have arrived at different opinions—for example, as suggested by Stice and colleagues (2004), low levels of social support do not directly predict future increases in negative emotions, such as depressive symptoms. A review conducted by Kawachi and colleagues (2001) also acknowledged that the correlation between social support and well-being is intricate and not consistently positive. In this case, there may be some indirect paths between the relationship. Stice and colleagues (2004) further suggested that the effects of social support may be moderated by both sex and the source of social support, because there is a negative association between depressive symptoms and social-emotional support. Moreover, children's peer relationships affect their SWB directly as well as indirectly, through their self-esteem (Yoo et al., 2015).

Furthermore, some studies have focused on a specific category of social support, such as emotional support. For example, empirical studies have provided evidence that peer emotional support predicts concurrent and longitudinal reductions in depression symptoms in adolescents (Helsen et al. 2000). Teacher emotional support, evaluated in a variety of ways, is a consistent predictor of vital positive developmental outcomes, such as social-emotional learning, motivation, engagement, and academic performance (Reyes et al., 2012; Roorda et al., 2011; Ruzek et al., 2016; Skinner et al., 2008).

Although most of the studies on the topic have indicated a positive relationship between social support and well-being, certain studies have reported inconclusive or inconsequential findings. These inconclusive results indicate that the advantages of social interaction do not apply to all and can be affected by different situational conditions. Therefore, the current

project also sought to explore whether social support from different sources (e.g. peers and teachers) may have a beneficial effect on adolescents' SWB, and whether mediators are also noteworthy.

### **2.3.3 Social support and the happiness character strengths**

Compared with the connection between social support and SWB, little attention has been paid to social support's impact on an individual's character or personality (Noroha et al., 2019). In a cross-cultural study, character strengths were found to predict social support in adults (Martínez-Martí & Ruch, 2017). The majority of research has investigated solely social support as a correlate or result of just one of the happiness character strengths (Mahat et al., 2002). For example, in Otis's (2017) study, support from both teachers and peers contributed a unique variance to adolescents' levels of hope, with emotional support contributing the most. According to Hagen et al. (2005), children and adolescents acquire hopeful attitudes and actions through social support from teachers and peers. Students have been found to show a higher performance in learning when they perceive greater emotional support from teachers (Hagenauer et al., 2015; Sakiz, 2012; Romano et al., 2021). Higher perceived teacher emotional support has been found to be related to more persistent learning behaviour on an individual level (Kikas & Tang, 2018). Social support always plays a mediating role between gratitude and well-being (Lin, 2016; Sun, 2014; You et al., 2018), and gratitude has been revealed to increase perceived social support (McCullough et al., 2004; Wood, 2008). However, studies exploring the relationship between curiosity or love and social support have been limited. Therefore, the current project tested the relationship between the happiness character strengths and SWB among Hong Kong adolescents and explored whether that relationship works with social support to exert an influence on the adolescents' SWB.

#### **2.4 Other factors: Demographics—socioeconomic status (SES), gender, age**

Demographic variables, such as age, gender, and socioeconomic status (SES), may also have an effect on the development of adolescents. Socioeconomic status is thought to be a condition that commonly has an essential impact on a person's development, and to have various effects on children's well-being, including their socioemotional and cognitive development. Numerous aspects associated with an individual's well-being have been investigated at the individual level. Gender, age, income, employment status, educational level, marital status, personality, health, individual behaviour, and social behaviour have been the most investigated variables (Brajša-Žganec et al., 2018). Children from high SES families are more likely to have their basic needs fulfilled and tend to be happier than their peers (Diener, 2000; Diener et al., 1995). Socioeconomic status has typically been measured by various indicators, such as parental education, occupational status, and family income (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Ensminger et al., 2003), but recent studies have examined the impact of people's subjective social status (i.e., subjective SES), such as a person's perception of his or her social standing relative to others, instead of the traditional indicators of SES (i.e., objective SES), such as educational level, salary, and occupational status. According to Kezer and Cemalcilar (2020), there is an additive effect between objective and subjective SES, with higher subjective and objective SES scores being positively connected with improved outcomes, such as people's perceptions of their general health, happiness, and life satisfaction (Kezer & Cemalcilar, 2020). The findings from a systematic review examining the relationship between SWB and SES (including subjective SES and objective SES) also have confirmed that family resources significantly impact SWB, whether objectively reported or subjectively perceived (Tan et al., 2020). Deckers and colleagues (2015) suggested that socioeconomic status (SES) is a powerful predictor of many facets of a child's personality. However, some research persists in claiming that a student's

socioeconomic situation is unrelated to his or her level of happiness (Anderson et al., 2012). In addition, socioeconomic status is difficult to improve quickly. Adolescents' socioeconomic level was therefore a covariate in the current project.

## 2.5 Educational context of Hong Kong

Educational policies in Hong Kong have recently placed greater emphasis on enhancing the SWB and happiness of adolescents. This change indicates a more comprehensive recognition of the significance of holistic education, which includes not just academic success but also the emotional, psychological, and social growth of students. Multiple policies and initiatives have been introduced in recent decades. In early 2000, moral and civic education (MCE) became an essential element of character education in Hong Kong. The emphasis of that effort is placed on principles such as respect, responsibility, national identity, and social peace. Schools now include MCE in a wide range of curricula, extracurricular activities, and the overall school atmosphere (EDB, 2017). National security education has also become increasingly significant in recent years, with the objective of cultivating a solid national identity and enhancing students' understanding of national security issues (EDB, 2024).

For example, the government has highlighted the importance of the holistic development of adolescents. The Hong Kong Education Bureau has introduced *Life Planning Education and Career Guidance for Secondary Schools* to assist students in cultivating their strengths, interests, and career ambitions. The objective of this initiative is to relieve academic stress from students by offering them a more comprehensive outlook on achievement and personal satisfaction. In addition, the initiative enhances students' school life by connecting their educational experiences with their personal goals and aspirations, resulting in a more balanced and enjoyable experience. Moreover, an environment that provides support in a

school setting promotes a sense of safety and worth among youths, thereby improving their emotional and psychological well-being (Kutsyuruba et al., 2015; WHO, 2003). The Education Bureau advocates a Whole School Approach to Guidance and Discipline initiative, in which guidance and discipline regulations are seamlessly integrated into daily school activities. This initiative promotes the establishment of a nurturing and compassionate atmosphere in schools that cultivates the students' overall well-being (EDB, 2011).

In summary, Hong Kong's educational policies increasingly acknowledge the significance of fostering the SWB and happiness of adolescents. The government and schools are collaborating to establish a more comprehensive and supportive educational environment through various initiatives, including Life Planning Education, the Whole School Approach to Guidance and Discipline, Positive Education, and "Happy School" campaigns. The objective of these efforts is to develop a harmonious equilibrium between academic success and emotional and psychological well-being, thereby cultivating a more comprehensive and satisfying educational journey for adolescents.

### **2.5.1 Current school environment**

With the highlight of promoting adolescents' SWB and the introduction of educational policies to address that promotion, local schools are employing multiple methods. Character education is widely welcomed by schools. The character education programme in Hong Kong's secondary schools aims to promote the comprehensive development of students, with a particular emphasis on their moral, intellectual, physical, social, and artistic advancement. The objective is to cultivate responsible, respectful, and holistic individuals who make constructive contributions to society. That said, although these components offer a general overview of character education in Hong Kong's secondary schools, the actual execution

differs among schools. Schools frequently customise their programmes to accommodate the distinct requirements of their students and local community. Life education is one of the trending approaches. Current life education includes personal development, emotional well-being, and social skills. These programmes facilitate the cultivation of resilience, empathy, and ethical decision-making skills in students (FHKPS, 2021; Zhou et al., 2021). Positive education, which is derived from positive psychology, is also adopted in some local schools—underlining the cultivation of character strengths and positive emotions and seeking to promote the overall well-being of individuals. Notably, the findings of this current project echo positive education, because the project’s results show that the cultivation of happiness character strengths (i.e., love, zest, hope, curiosity, and gratitude) helps adolescents develop a positive mindset and excellent emotion management skills. Eventually, more positive emotions will be instilled, and the overall happiness level will be promoted. Several schools also integrate service-learning initiatives into their academic programmes, promoting student engagement in community service, fostering the comprehension of social concerns, and cultivating a feeling of social responsibility (Ngai, 2006).

## 2.6 Summary

According to Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) ecological systems theory, individuals’ personalities and social environments can have a significant impact on their social and cognitive development via multiple paths (Wang et al., 2016). Adolescence is regarded as a “storm and stress” age (Hall, 1904), and children may experience significant developmental challenges, such as a crisis of identity and role confusion (Erickson, 1968; Steffof, 1990), making it meaningful to facilitate adolescents’ positive development from both the intrapersonal and interpersonal perspectives. The current project aimed to clarify the relationships between five happiness character strengths (hope, zest, gratitude, love, and curiosity), social support (peer

support and teacher support), and SWB, because previous research has indicated that these relationships are complicated and confusing. However, most of the previous studies focused on one aspect of SWB (i.e., life satisfaction). In addition, the studies on how these intrapersonal (i.e., happiness character strengths) and interpersonal factors (i.e., social support) would work together and contribute to the improvement of overall SWB, and the interactions between these factors, remain inconclusive because the existing studies are limited. In most of the extant studies, the target was adults or children in Western countries, and adolescents, especially in Eastern cultures, were neglected. This project sought to further explain the complexity of the link between these variables. In addition, to explore the relationships among the factors, the current project also sought to develop a localised conceptual framework for increasing adolescents' well-being and happiness.

The United Nations organisation has stated that personal growth and striving to realise one's potential are regarded as the primary obligation of education. In particular, in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, fulfilling children's potential through developing their personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities should be one direction of education (UN, 1990). In this case, plenty of studies have focused on an investigation of SWB. However, there are still some research gaps to be filled. First, in spite of the fact that adolescence is acknowledged to be a challenging time for youths and can therefore result in an increase in problematic behaviours, mental health issues, and declines in happiness and academic performance (Waters, 2012; Weiss & Baker-Smith, 2010), it is clear from a review of the previous literature that little attention has been paid to the subject of the impact factors of SWB in the context of junior secondary school education.

Second, whereas the literature on character strengths and SWB has explored and examined

them from a variety of angles, the literature on the interactions between the components of intrinsic effects (such as personality) and extrinsic effects (such as social support) has remained sparse. The relationships between particular character strengths or social-emotional support and SWB are direct, yet the majority of previous studies only paid attention to one part of SWB (i.e., the cognitive or affective component) and the existing studies were inconclusive. It is difficult to determine how these factors—namely, character strengths’ virtues, peer support, and teacher support—would interact together and help to improve overall SWB.

Third, education cannot be decontextualised from the local contexts (Fairbrother, 2007). The promotion of students’ SWB has also been underlined by schools. Both governmental (e.g., The Hong Kong Education Bureau, or EDB) and nongovernmental organisations strive diligently to promote the positive development of adolescents. Most of the extant studies were conducted in Western societies, and there is limited research that focuses on the relationship between SWB and character strengths, especially in the context of the Chinese and Hong Kong adolescent populations.

Diener (2000) stated that “psychologists’ knowledge of SWB is rudimentary; a stronger scientific base is necessary to make unequivocal recommendations to societies and individuals about how to increase happiness” (p. 40). Research must be conducted on particular populations in order to make educational recommendations that are based on their developmental requirements. The quantitative technique was the most widely used methodology for studying SWB in the existing literature. However, the qualitative technique, which includes focus groups and interviews, can obtain narrative and educational data and is preferable to the quantitative approach for addressing “why” and “how” questions (Pong,

2006). A quantitative study's findings can be enhanced by employing the mixed methods approach. The advantage of qualitative research to "understand the particular context within which the participants' act" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 30) also serves as a guarantee of the study's credibility in Hong Kong.

In summary, the interactions of character strengths, peer and teacher support, SWB, and the Hong Kong environment are understudied. The present scientific literature also emphasises adolescence as a crucial turning point in a person's development that is directly linked to their health outcomes. In this context, the aim of this study was to help bridge the gap in current research and to enhance our comprehension of the mechanisms linking happiness-related character strengths to the reasons some students in educational settings can foster well-being in their lives. These students manage to find internal and external resources to cope with personal challenges, whereas others struggle with the transitions and changes that come with moving to secondary school. Character strengths may enhance personal coping mechanisms and adaptive behaviors, which may lead to increased SWB. When individuals cultivate these strengths, they may experience a more profound sense of happiness that is independent of external factors like social support. In terms of positive psychology, happiness is often viewed as a result of personal attributes and strengths rather than solely external factors like social relationships. Character strengths can facilitate positive experiences and emotions, which can mediate the relationship between external supports (like social support) and overall happiness. So, while social support is critical for well-being, character strengths may serve as a more stable mediator because they directly influence individual attitudes, behaviors, ultimately leading to enhanced happiness. Therefore, the current project also sought to develop a localised conceptual framework for increasing adolescents' SWB, which would include both interior and exterior developmental assets and would provide new insights into

life and values education for the stakeholders (e.g., schools and policymakers).

In summary, this study aimed to test (1) the relationships among happiness character strengths, peer support, teacher support, and SWB, (2) the predictive ability of adolescents' happiness character strengths for their levels of SWB, (3) the mediating effect of the happiness character strengths on the association between peer/teacher support and adolescents' SWB, and (4) the factors associated with Hong Kong adolescents' SWB. In particular, this study tested three hypotheses: (1) Adolescents' SWB is positively associated with their happiness character strengths, peer support, and teacher support; (2) peer support predicts the level of adolescents' SWB directly and indirectly through their happiness character strengths, and (3) teacher support predicts the level of adolescents' SWB directly and indirectly through their happiness character strengths.

## **2.7 Research objectives**

In light of the problems stated, how to promote adolescents' SWB is a significant issue in Hong Kong society. The central goal of this study was to examine the associations that Hong Kong adolescents' SWB has with happiness character strengths, teacher support, and peer support, in a sample of junior secondary school students, and to develop an evidence-based conceptual framework for a future educational programme in Hong Kong that builds the character and values of adolescents. In addition to test the relationship between teacher support and SWB, and peer support and SWB, we also hypothesised that there might be additional potential mediators, such as happiness character strengths, that explain the process behind the connection between teacher support/peer support and SWB.

Specifically, the objectives of the present study were to test (1) the factors associated with

Hong Kong adolescents' SWB, (2) the relationships between adolescents' happiness character strengths, teacher support, peer support, and SWB, and (3) the mediating effect of happiness character strengths on the association between teacher support/peer support and SWB.

In particular, the present study had three hypotheses: (1) subjective well-being is positively associated with happiness character strengths, teacher support, and peer support; (2) happiness character strengths, teacher support, and peer support predict the level of SWB; and (3) teacher support and peer support predict the level of SWB directly and indirectly through happiness character strengths.

With the unfolding of different factors' effects on SWB, a more detailed understanding of relational aspects between SWB and happiness character strengths, teacher support, and peer support was achieved for tailoring future curriculum development and character strength interventions.

## **2.8 Research questions**

Basing my thinking on a literature review, in the current project I aimed to respond to the following two primary research questions following the research objectives:

- What are the factors associated with SWB contributing to improving adolescents' SWB?
- How do those factors affect adolescents' SWB?

In particular, there were four subquestions, the first three of which focused on the relationship between protective factors and SWB, and the last of which focused on the underlying mechanism.

RQ1: What is the relationship between Hong Kong adolescents' happiness character strengths and SWB? And how does it work?

RQ2: What is the relationship between perceived teacher support and Hong Kong adolescents' SWB? And how does it work?

RQ3: What is the relationship between perceived peer support and Hong Kong adolescents' SWB? And how does it work?

RQ4: What are the roles of Hong Kong adolescents' happiness character strengths in the relationships between perceived teacher support and SWB, and between perceived peer support and SWB? And how does it work?

## **2.9 Conceptual framework**

In the past, the majority of studies on the character strengths has concentrated on a single component at a time, leaving unresolved issues regarding the underlying structure of character strengths in an individual (Park, 2004). The current project focused on the role of social support and character strengths on SWB, and the interactions between them. In particular, the aim of the study was to investigate how happiness character strengths, peer support, and teacher support work together to affect Hong Kong adolescents' SWB, and to determine a potential psychological mechanism for enhancing adolescents' well-being. Figure 2.2 illustrates the potential relationships between the independent variables (i.e., happiness character strengths, peer support, and teacher support) and the dependent variables (i.e., SWB), based on the results of the existing studies. The positive relationships between happiness character strengths, peer support, teacher support, and SWB have been identified separately in Western contexts or populations. In this case, the current project attempted to reconceptualise the factors affecting adolescents' SWB and explore the underlying mechanism for that influence. In addition, the study sought to explore how intrapersonal and

interpersonal factors interacted in the process. This study advances our understanding of well-being and adolescent development, using the social-ecological model. Eventually, the current project results may be able to facilitate the formation of a new localised framework for Hong Kong adolescents.

Compared with the existing framework, this study's proposed framework has some unique specifications. A gap exists between positive psychology research and school-based implementation (Jackson, 2000)—positive psychology is a concept from Western societies; the current project sought to develop a framework that could facilitate the developmental needs of Hong Kong adolescents, and the project sought to provide empirical evidence on how to prevent the decrease of SWB during adolescence for HK adolescents.

First, the current study extends our knowledge of adolescents' well-being and social support. Through an integration of positive education, the results appear to have identified the underlying mechanism between adolescents' happiness character strengths and their SWB. Therefore, the study's results further add to the existing studies by illustrating that specific predictors are more influential than others on the level of Hong Kong adolescents' SWB. Moreover, this study provides solutions for promoting adolescents' SWB, from multiple perspectives. The Eastern cultures emphasise a high level of interdependent self-construal, which assumes the importance of the relationships between the individual and the society and the individuals' behaviours (Kitayama et al., 1997). Given the implications of SWB's impact on the positive development of adolescents, the current project explored the implications of two types of emotional support from multiple resources in school circumstances on adolescents' SWB. In addition, this study's approach provides a cost-effective way to promote SWB. The capacity to provide social support could be nurtured through training or a

designated curriculum. The current project's results should help stakeholders develop appropriate interventions to increase adolescents' SWB by providing emotional support and values, and character education, and by cultivating a supportive environment for Hong Kong students. Overall, it is hoped that the proposed model will set a new, ideal approach incorporating adaptability, localisation, and cost-effectiveness in promoting Hong Kong adolescents' SWB.

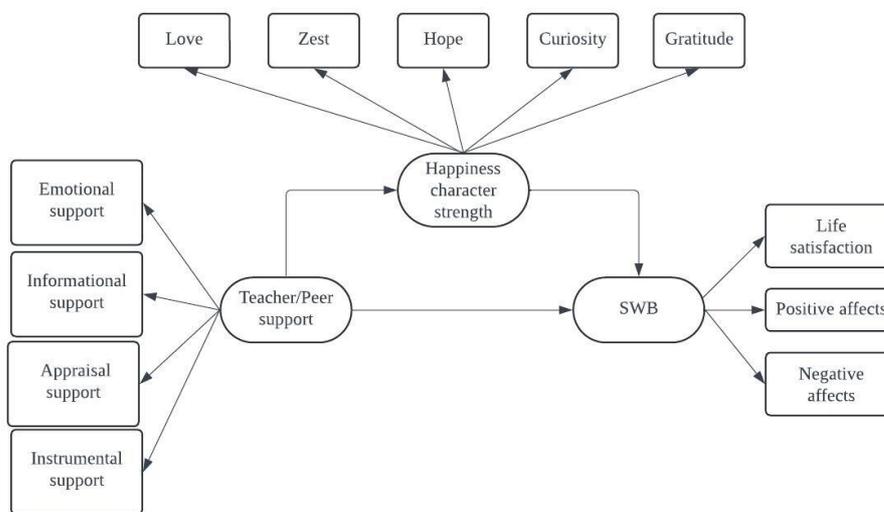


Figure 2.2 The project's conceptual framework.

### 3 Methodology

The current project sought to explore the factors that impact Hong Kong adolescents' SWB, and to identify the underlying mechanisms between the factors associated with SWB and SWB. The preceding chapter reviewed the existing studies regarding this topic. Now, this chapter illustrates the research design and methodology employed in this project to explore the factors associated with adolescents' SWB and the underlying mechanisms between them. The chapter details the rationalisations for using a mixed-methods design, and for the research site selection, procedures, ethical considerations, data storage, and data analysis plan.

#### 3.1 The research design

A vital and crucial part of any research process is choosing a suitable and effective research design. Step-by-step responses to the study questions are guided by the research design. A sequential explanatory mixed methods design was employed in this study. The mixed-methods approach is a relatively new method of research that dates back to the early 1990s. It is seen as being perfect for study in the social and human sciences disciplines, particularly in education, health sciences, and sociology (Creswell, 2014).

The mixed methods design incorporated both qualitative and quantitative data in response to the research questions. The results of quantitative research were analysed first, and then the results were interpreted in more detail through qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Ivankova et al., 2006). Mixed methods allow researchers to have a more comprehensive understanding of research questions and to explain the quantitative results with qualitative data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2014) (see Figure 3.1). Mixed methods research can provide a robust and comprehensive investigation into complex issues,

particularly in fields such as education. By combining the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative approaches, researchers can produce findings that are both generalizable and deeply insightful, offering valuable contributions to the understanding of educational phenomena. In the current project, the mixed methods provided an ideal research approach because the qualitative data helped explain the initial quantitative data. The initial phase of the research process of current project involved clearly and precisely defining the research questions that guided the entire investigation. These questions acted as a compass, directing the focus and methodology of the study. Depending on the specific aims and objectives of the research, the mixed method design was employed. The research design of current project was sequential explanatory mixed-method. During the data collection phase, quantitative method (I.E., surveys) was utilized to collect data from larger sample sizes. The primary aim was to achieve generalizability, allowing the findings to be applicable to a broader population. These quantitative methods were invaluable for identifying overarching trends and patterns that can inform the larger scope of the research. In the first stage of current study, quantitative data from a school-based survey were gathered. Subsequently, in the consolidation of survey findings, qualitative data from focus groups were also collected. In current project, focus groups were organized and used to collect data from more specific and representative sample size. The qualitative study provided rich, detailed insights that help to contextualize and explained the quantitative findings. By incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data, researchers ensure a more holistic understanding of the research subject, capturing both broad trends and nuanced perspectives. (see Figure 3.2). The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings was carried out in the latter stage. The qualitative insights can offer explanations or additional details that helped to illuminate the quantitative results. This integrated approach lead to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the research subject, providing a fuller picture than either method could achieve alone. At the end, the

quantitative and qualitative data were combined to help inform and answer the research questions. Results from both the quantitative and qualitative approaches were compared and together have provided the researcher with a comprehensive understanding of the underlying mechanisms driving the factors that contribute to the improvement of adolescents' SWB and happiness (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

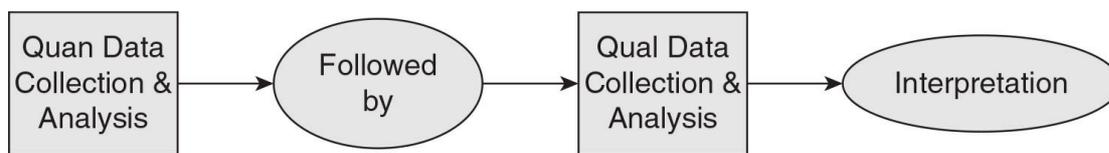


Figure 3.1 Sequential explanatory mixed methods design

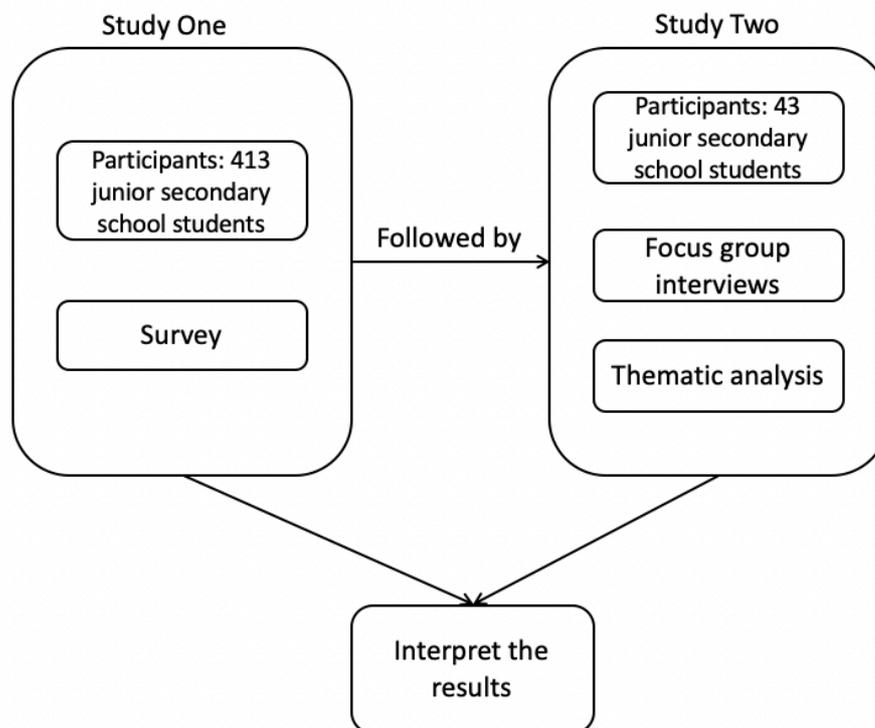


Figure 3.2 Research design

Following the rationale of a mixed methods study, the current project was separated into two parts, one of which was a quantitative study and the other a qualitative study. Study 1 explored the first research question: What are the factors contributing to improving adolescents' SWB? Study 2 then explored how those factors affected the adolescents' SWB.

1) Quantitative study: Administration of a self-reported questionnaire to 413 junior secondary school students (S1–S3) alongside an examination of school-related information. According to the record of Education Bureau of Hong Kong (2022), there are a total of 6,153 classes and 175,108 junior secondary school (i.e., S1-S3) students in Hong Kong. With 95% Confidence Level and 5% Margin of Error, the sample size should be 384. So I think it meets the minimum requirement.

2) Qualitative study: To establish a coherent justification of themes; follow-up focus group interviews with 43 students are conducted. The purpose of the focus group interview is to discover students' understanding of how social support and character strengths affect SWB. Focus group is preferable to address "why" and "how" questions. The group dynamics that emerged from the focus group are also a key factor in selecting to employ focus groups as a data collection strategy. In addition, due to the limitation of resources, focus group may collect qualitative data from different participants at the same time. So it is ideal to collect qualitative data. However, for further study, individual interview or case study may also be used to collect more in depth data.

### **3.1.1 Quantitative approach**

According to Creswell (2003), a quantitative technique can be used to investigate the relationships between variables. A quantitative approach investigates patterns and

connections and validates measurements (Watson, 2015). The current project's objective was to identify the associations between adolescents' SWB, their happiness character strengths, teacher support, peer support, and their SWB. Therefore, the relationships were first investigated using a quantitative technique.

The most popular strategy for gathering quantitative data is through questionnaires, which has several merits. The most obvious benefit of employing a questionnaire is the efficiency in gathering data from a sizable and representative group (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Moreover, when the variables cannot be directly observed, questionnaires are regarded as the most convenient way to collect data on unobservable phenomena (Seliger & Shahamy, 2000). In addition, a questionnaire can be provided to the participants in a variety of formats (such as an online survey or on paper). Furthermore, because surveys are anonymous, participant privacy is very well safeguarded. In this study, to learn more about the participants' opinions on the variables, a questionnaire was distributed to them.

#### *3.1.1.1 Limitations of the quantitative method*

The survey is a very effective and economical method of gathering plenty of data, and it enables the researchers to obtain comparative information (Johnson & Turner, 2003).

However, there are some potential disadvantages to using a quantitative approach—for example, the questions can bias the findings because they might inadvertently shape the responses towards the researcher's thinking rather than the respondent's perception of matters (Wright, 2020). In addition, the data collected may not be well described and explained by the quantitative technique. Thus, to analyse the data and consolidate them, a qualitative technique was also utilised.

### 3.1.2 Qualitative approach

In the current project, to increase accuracy and address the quantitative technique's limitations, a qualitative approach was also used. The qualitative method, which can include focus groups and interviews, can give narrative and educational data and is preferable to the quantitative approach for addressing “why” and “how” questions (Pong, 2016). Clearly, then, a qualitative research design has its own advantages. For example, the qualitative technique enables the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the data (Woods, 1999) and to record the viewpoints and opinions of the participants about values, behaviours, and processes (Fairbrother, 2007). Moreover, the model's flexibility and openness enable researchers to alter the model when new information emerges from the study's findings—in this case, regarding possible factors influencing the adolescents' SWB. In addition, local settings cannot be removed from the framework of education (Fairbrother, 2007). The researcher can “understand the particular context within which the participants act” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 30), and here, we could assure the study's reliability in Hong Kong with the help of a qualitative approach. For the current project, by the students sharing their own experiences, the qualitative approach helped in building an understanding of how the factors at different levels interacted and influenced the adolescents' SWB.

Instead of being employed as a stand-alone tool, focus groups typically are used as a supplement to other research techniques (Wilkinson, 1998). Focus groups are a type of qualitative data-collecting technique that seeks to comprehend and explain the meanings, cultures, and worldviews that influence a person's emotions, attitudes, and behaviours (Rabiee, 2004). According to Thomas and colleagues (1995), a focus group is a strategy that uses in-depth group interviews which are specifically tailored to a certain topic. For this study, the focus group members were chosen from a variety of grades to guarantee participant

representativeness. The interviews were semi-structured, and a list of interview questions were created in advance. The focus groups were led by the researcher, and members were welcome to share their opinions at any moment. Participants were asked to discuss how certain factors were associated with their SWB from their personal perspectives and experiences. Furthermore, the researcher clarified any misunderstandings with the participants and validated the outcomes of the quantitative results. Additional queries were also posed, such as the adolescents' profile of the ideal happy person and the pedagogy of teaching happiness in school. That said, it can be difficult to collect qualitative data from several participants at once due to time and staffing constraints (Kitzinger, 1995).

In this case, in the current project, therefore, the qualitative method was performed through focus groups, which are widely used in exploratory and qualitative education research (Barbour, 2005). Focus groups can easily explore the targeted participants' "understanding, feelings, experiences and perceptions about the topic" (Pong, 2016, p. 224).

The group dynamics that emerged from the focus groups were also a key factor in the selection to employ focus groups as a data-collection strategy. In a group setting, members are encouraged to reply to one another's opinions, which may lead to the generation of fresh ideas from a different perspective than would be possible in an individual interview. In addition, the procedure can assist in clarification and exploration of the participants' points of view, which are activities that are less likely to be possible in a one-on-one interview (Kitzinger, 1995). Attending such focus groups was helpful for the adolescents, who had less experience, and it assisted researchers in gathering useful information. To guarantee representativeness, participants in the focus group for the current project were chosen from a variety of grades in an equal distribution. The focus group interviews aimed to investigate the

adolescents' views on the factors influencing their SWB, in line with the research objective. Based on the preceding literature analysis and suggested model, specific interview questions were prepared, and in accordance with those research questions, data analysis was carried out.

### *3.1.2.1 Limitations of the qualitative approach*

Even though qualitative results are an ideal way to explain the results of quantitative studies, disadvantages also exist. In addition to the limitation of available human resources, it is also believed that it is difficult to generalise the results to other populations, as the method is conducted in a specific context and the information is provided in a designated place rather than a natural setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Moreover, the role of the researcher is vital—the researcher must facilitate discussion among the participants actively. However, the answers from the participants may be misinterpreted or ignored by the facilitator, and they also may also be biased by the researcher (Creswell, 2014).

In summary, the insights into the secondary school students' ideas and opinions on the key factors impacting their SWB and how it functioned were gathered by the researcher with the help of focus groups. The results augmented the previous findings and offer a fresh perspective for the proposed framework.

### **3.1.3 Triangulation**

Triangulation is a powerful research technique that enhances the validity, comprehensiveness, and credibility of a study by integrating both quantitative and qualitative data. Triangulation refers to the method of examining various information sources in an effort to create a cogent explanation for observations (Creswell, 2014). Methodological triangulation, which includes

data from two different methodologies, is regarded as the most common type of triangulation (Bryman, 2006). By cross-verifying findings from these distinct methods, researchers can achieve more reliable and valid results. Quantitative data, which includes numerical and statistical information, addresses questions of 'what' and 'how many,' providing a clear, measurable understanding of the research problem. On the other hand, qualitative data offers rich, descriptive insights that explain 'why' and 'how,' giving depth and context to the findings. The advantages of triangulation are very apparent—it provides a more comprehensive picture of results, it is less likely to have the limitations or the disadvantages of a single approach (Heale & Forbes, 2013), and it also helps to confirm suggested findings. Combining these two types of data allows researchers to construct a more holistic view of the issue at hand. This comprehensive approach not only confirms the results but also enriches the overall analysis. Additionally, triangulation plays a crucial role in reducing bias. Relying solely on one method or data source can introduce various biases, potentially skewing the results. By employing multiple methods, researchers can cross-check and mitigate these biases, thereby enhancing the study's credibility. In summary, triangulation leverages the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research, ensuring robust, well-rounded, and trustworthy conclusions. In the current project, the results from the qualitative study (i.e., Study 2) helped to inform those of the quantitative study (i.e., Study 1), and together they provide a full picture of how happiness character strengths, teacher support, and peer support have an impact on the subjective well-being of Hong Kong adolescents (Figure 3.3). In summary, employing triangulation can further enrich research results and deepen research inquiries.

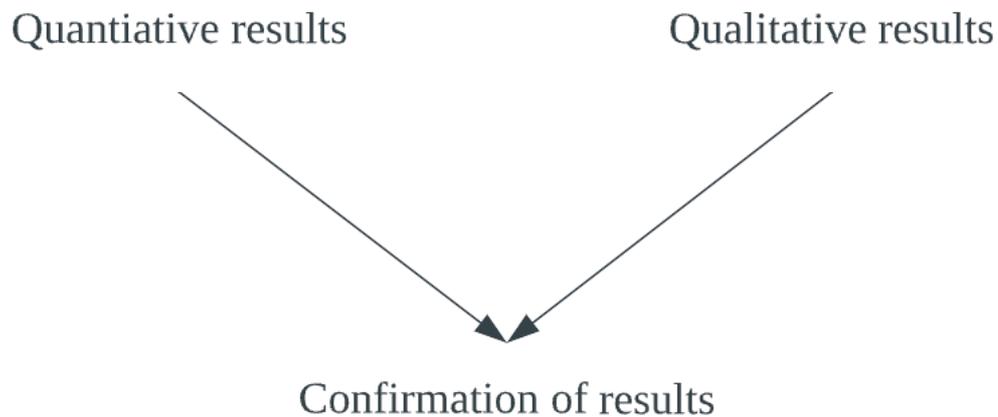


Figure 3.3 Triangulation

### 3.2 Selection of the research site

The research was conducted in four local secondary schools in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China. To ensure the sample's representativeness, the four secondary schools selected were located in different regions in HKSAR. Four hundred thirteen students from S1 to S3 were recruited, by inviting students from different grades. Data collection activities were carried out from September 2023 to January 2024.

### 3.3 Study 1: A quantitative study

For the first part of the research, Study 1, a questionnaire was used. The objective was to establish the impact-factor structure and validate the hypotheses.

#### 3.3.1 Participants

In order to ensure that the sample contained people from a variety of backgrounds, the four

participating schools were located in three districts in Hong Kong (i.e., Tuen Mun, Kowloon City, and Kwai Tsing). Convenience sampling was used. The potential participating classes were recommended by their school principals or teachers, and students from different grades were invited.

According to the records of the Education Bureau of Hong Kong (2024), at the time of the study there were a total of 6,095 classes and 173,011 junior secondary school (i.e., S1-S3) students in Hong Kong. With informed consent from school leaders, 413 junior secondary school students (S1-S3) (211 boys and 202 girls) in four schools were invited to participate in the study. All of the participants completed a survey questionnaire consisting of five standard scales. Please refer to section 4.1 for the demographic information of the participants.

### **3.3.2 Procedures**

The researcher contacted school principals to recruit participants. An ethics application to EdUHK's Ethics Committee for Human Research was made before the official launch of the project. Written consent was collected from the schools, parents, and students before they joined the research. A pen and paper questionnaire was prepared for the students to fill out for the survey. Before distributing the questionnaire, the researcher trained student assistants, who were to help with distributing the questionnaire, via a meeting to ensure the quality of questionnaire's administration. The purpose of the study, the guidelines, and the procedures for distributing the questionnaire were introduced. Schools were asked to have the students fill out the questionnaires, which took 30 minutes to complete. After the students had completed the questionnaire, their completeness was checked immediately by the researchers (Cohen et al., 2007).

### 3.3.3 Instruments

A typical technique used in educational research studies is the questionnaire approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2005). The goal of the current project was to gather information from Hong Kong secondary school students, and to make it easier to gather data from a large target sample (i.e., 413 students) at once and ensure accurate results, a questionnaire was designed. The questionnaire was delivered with clear instructions. Table 3.1 contains a list of the scales employed in the current research. Permission to use the scales was obtained from the original developers.

#### 3.3.3.1 Demographic characteristics

The participants' demographic information, such as age, gender, grade, birthplace, academic performance, satisfaction with academic performance, moral conduct, religious beliefs, Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) status, and marital status of the parent with whom the student was living were collected.

#### 3.3.3.2 Chinese version of the VIA Inventory of Strengths for Youth (VIA-Youth)

The original Values in Action Inventory of Strengths for Youth (VIA-Youth) (Peterson & Park, 2006) consists of 24 subscales and 96 items. The VIA Institute also provides a Traditional Chinese version of VIA Youth-96. In our study, hope, love, gratitude, curiosity, and zest were selected as the happiness character strengths. A five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ("not like me") to 5 ("very much like me"), was employed for the students to use to rank their responses.

#### 3.3.3.3 International Positive and Negative Affect Schedule Short Form (I-PANAS-SF)

The International Positive and Negative Affect Schedule Short Form (I-PANAS-SF) is a self-

report questionnaire comprising two separate subscales. One measures positive affect, and one measures negative affect (Watson et al., 1988). The scale was translated by Liu et al. (2020), and the Chinese version of the I-PANAS-SF is suitable for use among Chinese adolescents in Hong Kong. The scale includes nine adjectives that relate to different affective states, such as “hostile”, “upset”, “nervous”, or “afraid”. Participants ranked their answers using a five-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (never) to 5 (always).

#### *3.3.3.4 Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)*

Diener and colleagues (1985) developed the Satisfaction with Life Scale, which has as its goal the quantification of one’s general cognitive assessments of life satisfaction. Bai and colleagues translated the scale into Chinese in 2011 (Bai et al., 2011). The measure asks respondents to score their agreement with five items on a seven-point scale, with the centre category denoted as “neither agree nor disagree”, and ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Example items are “In most ways, my life is close to my ideal”.

#### *3.3.3.5 Peer support and teacher support*

Peer support and teacher support were separately measured with 12 items from the peer social support subscale of the Child and Adolescent Social Support Scale (Malecki et al., 2000).

Peer support and teacher support were each divided into four categories: emotional, informational, instrumental, and appraisal support. A sample item is, “My classmates treat me nicely”. Participants responded using a six-point scale, ranging from 1 = never, 2 = almost never, 3 = some of the time, 4 = most of the time, 5 = almost always, to 6 = always. The original scale was in English and was translated into Chinese by two well-trained researchers.

Table 3.1 List of instruments used in the project

Variable	Instrument	Number of items	Origin	Scale
Happiness character strengths	The Chinese version of the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths for Youth (VIA-Youth)	20 items (hope, zest, gratitude, love, and curiosity were selected)	Peterson & Park, 2006	5-point Likert-scale
	International Positive and Negative Affect – Short form (I-PANAS-SF)	9 items	Watson et al., 1988; Liu et al., 2020	5-point Likert scale
Subjective well-being	Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)	5 items	Diener et al., 1985; Bai et al., 2011	7-point Likert scale
Peer support	Child and Adolescent Social Support Scale	12 items	Malecki et al., 2000	6-point Likert scale
Teacher support	Child and Adolescent Social Support Scale	12 items	Malecki et al., 2000	6-point Likert scale



### 3.3.4 Data analyses

Two statistical packages, SPSS 29 and R, were used for the data analyses. The software SPSS 29 was used to show the descriptive statistics and correlation relationships between variables, while R was used to investigate the relationships and then confirm the relationships among the variables by conducting a structural equation modelling (SEM) analysis.

Specifically, in the beginning, correlation analyses of happiness character strengths, teacher support, peer support, and SWB were examined and a descriptive analysis of each scale was reported (e.g., mean scores, standard deviations, and Cronbach's alpha coefficients (internal consistencies)).

A two-step structural equation analysis approach was used to investigate the mediating role of happiness character strengths. In order to determine whether latent variables were represented by their indicators, the measurement model first had to be calculated. If a model performed satisfactorily, the structural model was evaluated in R using maximum likelihood estimation. To investigate the overall fit of the model, several indices were calculated—such as  $\chi^2/df$  ratio, SRMR, RMSEA, CFI, GFI, and TLI, and it was also reported in order to find the best model (Bollen, 1989).

### 3.4 Study 2: A qualitative study

The purpose of the interviews was to provide in-depth interpretations of the questionnaire results by focusing additionally on the underlying mechanisms of the relationships. This was done to support the viewpoints suggested by the survey responses and expand our understanding of the relationships between the variables.

### 3.4.1 Participants

In the qualitative study, the interview participants were selected purposively with convenience sampling (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). With informed consent from school leaders, participants from four schools who had completed the questionnaires were invited. Participants were boys and girls from three grades, seeking the best range of five to 10 participants per focus group (Wilkinson, 1998). Forty-three students volunteered to join the second stage of the study and attended eight in-depth focus group interviews. Every group had five to six students. Participants were informed of the objectives of the study and the procedures of data collection. For example, the interviews were audio-recorded, with the expectation that the data that were collected would be published in the forms of an article and a dissertation, following proper confidentiality measures and data storage (Denscombe, 2010).

### 3.4.2 Design of the interviews and protocols

The researcher prepared the agenda and goals of the interviews in advance, staying flexible in developing ideas, moving in related directions, and explaining points of interest (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Semi-structured focus groups were employed. The researcher prepared self-developed interview questions prior to the focus group meetings, and participants were encouraged to explore relevant issues about their perspectives on SWB, even when the researcher utilised the prepared questions as a guide.

Creswell and Poth (2016) developed an interview protocol which includes the significant components of a successful interview, such as basic information (e.g., date and time of the interview), introduction (e.g., self-introduction, purpose of the study), opening questions,

content questions, using probes, and closing question. The current project was structured based on Creswell's protocol in order to build a comprehensive understanding of how happiness character strengths, teacher support, and peer support influence SWB, by using participants' sharing of their own experiences. Please refer to Table 3.2 for sample questions.

Table 3.2 Interview protocol (Creswell &amp; Poth, 2016)

Type of question	Content	Sample questions
Basic information	Date, time, location, participants	NA
Introduction	Self-introduction of the interviewer, purpose of the study, general structure of the interview	What is your name? Please make a brief self-introduction.
Opening questions	Ice-breaking questions	What is the daily routine of your school life?
Content questions	Ask about different facets of the central phenomenon	Whom will you turn to, seeking help when you face challenges? Describe your personality with three words.
Using probes	Ask for more information and explanation	Could you explain in more detail?
Closing questions	Thank interviewees, raise any uncovered points, ensure confidentiality	NA

### 3.4.3 Data collection

The focus groups were conducted in the participating schools in a face-to-face mode, and each one ran between 60 and 90 minutes. The discussions in each focus group were recorded, then transcribed. Seven focus group interviews were conducted in Cantonese and one interview was conducted in Mandarin, as requested by school teachers. At the start of each

interview, the researcher briefly introduced the topic by outlining the purpose and methodology of the present study. Participants were given instructions on how to respond to questions spontaneously and honestly.

#### **3.4.4 Data analyses**

The purpose of the focus group interviews was to discover the students' understanding of how social support and their own character strengths affected their SWB. They were questioned about how they viewed the factors that influenced the development of their SWB. The study's quantitative findings served as the foundation for the questions' design. The outcomes solidified the survey's findings and provided the suggested model with a new direction.

The focus group discussions were audiotaped and transcribed. Data analyses used NVIVO. The qualitative software helped the researcher in data organising, searching, and storing (Guest et al., 2017). Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data, because patterns in data can often be categorized using thematic analysis, and the resulting themes can then be presented (Alhojailan, 2012, p. 40). The procedures used for collecting the qualitative data were suggested by Creswell and Creswell (2017) (See Figure 3.4). The researcher familiarized herself with the scripts before coding the key texts, and once all of the scripts had been coded, she summarized the codes and generated the themes in accordance (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 87). In addition, the researcher needed to validate the accuracy of the information throughout the entire process. In the end, the results of Study 1 and Study 2 were compared and integrated to inform the project's overall results.

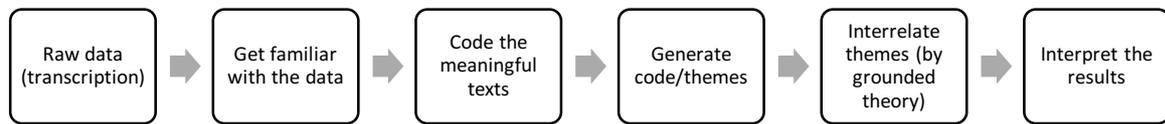


Figure 3.4 Steps of the data analyses (c, p.194)

### 3.5 Ethical considerations

In this study, it was essential to protect the research participants, because the study required collecting data from human beings. This meant ensuring respect for the individuals, obtaining informed consent, exercising deliberate beneficence, and weighing the potential benefits and risks (Vollmer & Howard, 2010). This research project was conducted with full compliance with research ethics norms and, more specifically, the codes and practices established by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of the Education University of Hong Kong. The research study caused no harm or damage to the participants. Prior to the research starting, details about the study's goals, the potential benefits for the participants, and confidentiality protections were provided to the ethics committee. The nature of the involvement was well explained to the participants, and it was made clear that participation was entirely a choice and that choosing not to take part would also be respected.

The research team initially made phone calls to school principals to explain the goals and methods of the study before inviting them to participate. After receiving verbal approval from the schools, the researcher sent a consent form to each one, asking the principal or other designated contact person or representative to sign it and return it to the researcher as authorization for the researcher to conduct study. Then, the informed consent form and an informed consent sheet were sent to the participants' parents or legal guardians to request their signed assent to their child's participation in the study and to outline its goals and methods. The researcher contacted the chosen participants to confirm their participation before the study began.

### **3.6 Data storage**

The sites for data collection were the participating schools, using a face-to-face mode. All questionnaires were coded, input into a computer, and encrypted for the use of the researcher only. Audiotapes were made of the focus group interviews, and with the participants' permission, the audiotapes were transcribed. All transcripts included a self-selected pseudonym that ensured each participant's anonymity. After three years from the conclusion of the study, the hard/soft copies of the questionnaire and audio clips will be fully destroyed.

### **3.7 Trustworthiness of the data**

To ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative data, multiple measures were also applied. According to Creswell and Clark (2004), the steps below were taken in order to ensure separately that the interviewees' representations of reality and the data that were recorded were accurate, both during and after the interviews.

During the interviews:

- The researcher used transparency to make sure that she correctly understood the interviewees' statements.
- Peer debriefing was used to increase the accuracy of all statements.

After the interviews:

- The transcripts were double-checked by the interviewees to ensure the accuracy of the statements.
- The coding was conducted by two researchers to avoid bias from a single researcher.
- The spoken words' content was examined, as was its social appropriateness in the situation and the truthfulness with which it was presented, to determine authenticity.



## 4. Results

### 4.1 Quantitative results

This section of the Results chapter presents the results of the quantitative data collection, which came from the self-reported questionnaire. The structure of the chapter is aligned with the research questions.

The findings from the quantitative data analyses comprise four parts. First are the narrative results, which are presented next. Those results illustrate the psychometric properties of the measurements used in the study. In addition, the demographic information of the participants is shown. Second, this section presents the correlations between the independent and dependent variables and the structural relationships among all of the variables. Fourth, we explore the mediating relationships between the variables.

#### 4.1.1 Narrative results

In this section, the demographic information of participants will be presented. The psychological properties of the measurements employed in the study are also shown.

##### *4.1.1.1 Demographic information*

This section describes the characteristics of the sample population, including the participants' gender, age, grade in school, academic performance, satisfaction with their academic performance, moral conduct, religion, marital status of parents, and birthplace.

Four hundred thirteen questionnaires were collected. Of those 413 participants, 211(51.1%) were boys, while 202 (48.9%) were girls. All of the participants were S1 to S3 students in

local secondary schools, with 121 (29.3%) participants coming from S1, 133 (32.2%) from S2, and the remaining 159 (38.5%) from S3. The ages of the participants ranged from 11.86 years old to 17.48 years old, and the mean age was 13.88 years old. Three participants did not provide their date of birth. More than half (62.0%) of the participants had no religious beliefs, whereas approximately one-fifth (22.6%) did hold religious beliefs, 66 (15.3%) were unsure about their beliefs, and two did not provide relevant information. Notably, the Comprehensive Social Family economic status was reflected by whether the family participated in the Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme, which is government funded and provides financial support for underprivileged families to meet their basic needs (Social Welfare Department, 2022). Fifteen percent (65) of the participants' families were receiving CSSA, and 46.2% (191) of the participants were unsure about whether their family received the aid. Approximately 73.4% of the students were living with married parents, whereas the remaining participants apparently were living with remarried, separated, or divorced parents. Regarding the birthplace of the participants, more than four-fifths (81.6%) of the participants were born in Hong Kong, while 18.4% were born elsewhere. One participant did not provide relevant birthplace information.

Table 4.1 Demographic information for the sample (N=413)

Grade	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
S1	121	29.3	29.3	29.3
S2	133	32.2	32.2	61.5
S3	159	38.5	38.5	100.0

#### 4.1.1.2 Psychometric properties

Cronbach's alpha coefficients represent the internal consistency of a study's measurements. Usually, an alpha coefficient of less than .50 is regarded as unsatisfactory, values between 0.60 and 0.70 can be regarded as acceptable, greater than .80 is good, and greater than .90 is rated as excellent (Mat Daud et al., 2018; Nunally & Bernstein, 1994). Demetriou and colleagues (2015) recommended a minimum internal consistency alpha coefficient value of .70 for questionnaires.

Table 4.2 shows the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the scales used in the study to measure character strengths, life satisfaction, positive and negative affect, and peer and teacher support. Four of the six scales showed good internal consistency ( $\alpha > .80$ ) or excellent internal consistency ( $\alpha > .90$ ), while the measurements for Positive affect and Negative affect showed acceptable internal consistency ( $\alpha > .60$ ). The overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient was  $-.96$ , which is satisfactory. Therefore, the measurement instruments used in the study could be considered reliable tools for the adolescent population.

Table 4.2 Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the measurement scales (N=413)

Scale	Cronbach's alpha
Character strengths	0.92
Life satisfaction	0.82
Positive affect	0.60
Negative affect	0.76
Positive and negative affect	0.67
Peer support	0.93
Teacher support	0.94
Overall	0.96

#### 4.1.2 Descriptive statistics

##### 4.1.2.1 Academic performance and satisfaction with academic performance

Descriptive statistics of the participants' self-evaluations of their academic performance and their satisfaction with their academic performance are provided in Tables 4.3 and 4.4.

Participants were asked to rate their academic performance relative to that of their student peers, and also their satisfaction with their academic performance. Of the 413 participants, 80.1% scored their academic performance as average or above average (i.e., average, above average, and good) compared with that of their peers (See Table 4.3). However, only 20.7% of the students were satisfied/very satisfied with their current academic performance (See Table 4.4).

Table 4.3 Self-rated academic performance (N=413)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Bad	21	5.1	5.1	5.1
Below average	61	14.8	14.8	19.9
Average	194	47.0	47.0	66.8
Above average	125	30.3	30.3	97.1
Good	12	2.9	2.9	100.0
Total	413	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.4 Satisfaction of academic performance (N=412)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very Unsatisfied	26	6.3	6.3	6.3
	Unsatisfied	126	30.5	30.6	36.9
	Neutral	175	42.4	42.5	79.4
	Satisfied	79	19.1	19.2	98.5
	Very satisfied	6	1.5	1.5	100.0
	Total	412	99.8	100.0	
Missing		1	.2		
Total	413	100.0			

#### 4.1.2.2 Moral conduct

Behaviour that is thought to be in line with particular standards of morality or righteousness is referred to as moral conduct (Johnson, 2003), and it is frequently directed by the moral

standards and ideals that a person or a society embraces (Held, 1993). A person's acts and attitudes that fall under the category of moral conduct include justice, honesty, compassion, integrity, respect for others, and accepting accountability for one's own actions (Grigoropoulos, 2019). Moral conduct includes avoiding harm and making decisions that have a beneficial impact on the welfare of individuals and society as a whole. In Hong Kong, the moral conduct of students is influenced by a variety of sources, including peer pressure, the media, the educational systems, family values, and cultural norms (Huang et al., 2013). However, moral and civic education has always been prioritised highly in Hong Kong's educational system. Curriculum-integrated programmes and subjects that attempt to inculcate values such as respect, responsibility, national identity, and community commitment are frequently seen in schools. The participants were asked to rate their own moral conduct in their schools, and 91.0% of them rated their moral conduct as average, above average, or good (See Table 4.5).

Table 4.5 Self-rated moral conduct

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Bad	9	2.2	2.2	2.2
Below average	28	6.8	6.8	9.0
Average	190	46.0	46.0	55.0
Above average	145	35.1	35.1	90.1
Good	41	9.9	9.9	100.0
Total	413	100.0	100.0	

#### 4.1.2.3 Importance of teacher support and frequency of perceived teacher support

Teacher social support can be divided into four categories: emotional, informational, appraisal, and instrumental support (Cohen & McKay, 1984; Malecki et al., 2000). The participants were required to rate the importance of the types of social support they received from teachers and the frequency of that social support. As is shown in Table 4.6, the participants regarded emotional support as the most significant type ( $M=2.24$ ,  $SD=.55$ ), and in contrast, they rated instrumental support as the least important ( $M=2.13$ ,  $SD=.55$ ). As was the case with the scores of importance, the students perceived emotional support to be given most often by teachers ( $M=4.31$ ,  $SD=1.06$ ), while they perceived instrumental support to be given least often by teachers ( $M=3.94$ ,  $SD=1.19$ ) (See Table 4.7).

Table 4.6 Importance of teacher support

	Emotional	Informational	Appraisal	Instrumental
Mean	2.25	2.21	2.17	2.13
N	407	405	406	406
Std. Deviation	0.55	0.54	0.57	0.55

Table 4.7 Frequency of teacher support perceived

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Emotional	413	4.31	1.06
Informational	413	4.31	1.08
Appraisal	413	4.10	1.15
Instrumental	413	3.94	1.19
Valid N (listwise)	413		

#### 4.1.2.4 Importance of peer support and frequency of perceived peer support

Participants were also asked to rate the importance of peer support and the frequency of perceived peer support they received at school. As with teacher support, peer support can also be categorised into emotional, informational, appraisal, and instrumental support (Cohen & McKay, 1984; Malecki et al., 2000). As is shown in Table 4.8, instrumental support was regarded as the most crucial type ( $M=2.11$ ,  $SD=.56$ ), and informational support was considered the least essential type of peer support ( $M=2.06$ ,  $SD=.50$ ). For the peer support perceived, as with the case of teacher support, participants received emotional support most often from peers at school ( $M=4.03$ ,  $SD=1.02$ ), whereas they seldom received appraisal support from their peers ( $M=3.45$ ,  $SD=1.16$ ) (See Table 4.9).

Table 4.8 Importance of peer support

	Emotional	Informational	Appraisal	Instrumental
Mean	2.08	2.06	2.01	2.11
N	400	406	406	406
Std. Deviation	0.55	0.50	0.58	0.56

Table 4.9 Frequency of peer support perceived

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Emotional	413	4.03	1.02
Informational	413	3.64	1.02
Appraisal	413	3.45	1.16
Instrumental	413	3.82	1.16
Valid N (listwise)	413		

#### 4.1.3 Main research question 1: Exploring the factors affecting adolescents' SWB (MRQ1)

The relationships between the three components of the adolescents' SWB (life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect) and their socioeconomic status factors (SES—i.e., gender, age, religion, family income, birthplace, and marital status of parents), satisfaction with academic performance, and moral conduct, were very interesting. The results showed that there were gender differences in terms of both positive affect and negative affect. The life satisfaction of the adolescents decreased as their age increased. Adolescents who were living

with married parents showed higher life satisfaction and lower negative affect. The other SES factors (religious beliefs, family income, and birthplace) did not have a significant impact on any of the three components of the students' SWB.

#### 4.1.3.1 Gender

An independent samples *t*-test was conducted to compare the SWB levels for the girls and boys. As is shown in Table 4.10, the means of life satisfaction ( $M=4.42$ ,  $SD=1.22$ ) and positive affect ( $M=3.36$ ,  $SD=.72$ ) of the boys were higher than those for the girls ( $M=4.18$ ,  $SD=1.32$ ;  $M=3.16$ ,  $SD=.68$ ), while the mean scores of negative affect ( $M=2.57$ ,  $SD=.79$ ) were lower for the boys than for the girls ( $M=2.82$ ,  $SD=.83$ ). The differences in positive affect and negative affect were significant ( $t=2.97$ ,  $p=.003$ ;  $t=3.25$ ,  $p=.001$ ). In other words, the girls experienced significantly lower positive affect and higher negative affect than the boys did.

Table 4.10 *t*-test results of the three SWB components across gender

SWB Component	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	<i>t</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)
Life Satisfaction	Male	211	4.42	1.22	0.08	1.91	.057
	Female	202	4.18	1.32	0.09		
Positive Affect	Male	211	3.36	0.72	0.05	2.97	.003
	Female	202	3.16	0.68	0.05		
Negative Affect	Male	211	2.57	0.79	0.05	3.25	.001
	Female	202	2.82	0.83	0.06		

#### 4.1.3.2 Age

The correlations between age and the three components of SWB were tested, and age was significantly correlated with life satisfaction ( $p < 0.05$ )—with an increase in age, overall life satisfaction declined. At the same time, life satisfaction significantly correlated with the individual's positive affect and negative affect ( $p < 0.001$ ) (Table 4.11)—high life satisfaction was associated with higher positive affect and lower negative affect.

Table 4.11 Relationships between age and the three components of SWB

		Age	LS	PA	NA
Age	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	1	-.126*	.034	.033
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.011	.495	.500
	N	410	410	410	410
LS	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	-.126*	1	.395**	-.311**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.011		.000	.000
	N	410	413	413	413
PA	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	.034	.395**	1	-.101*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.495	.000		.041
	N	410	413	413	413
NA	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	.033	-.311**	-.101*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.500	.000	.041	
	N	410	413	413	413

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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



#### 4.1.3.3 Marital status

Participants were asked to provide the marital status of the parents with whom they were living. Adolescents living with married parents had significantly higher life satisfaction ( $t=-2.96$ ,  $p<.005$ ) than the students did who were living with parents of other marital statuses. However, there were no significant differences in their positive or negative affect (See Table 4.12).

Table 4.12 Comparison of SWB of participants with different marital status of parents

				<i>Std.</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig. (2-</i>
	Marriage	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Deviation</i>	<i>Mean</i>		<i>tailed)</i>
LS	Other	110	4.00	1.29	0.12	-2.95	0.004
	Married	303	4.42	1.25	0.07		
PA	Other	110	3.15	0.71	0.07	-.1.85	0.066
	Married	303	3.30	0.71	0.04		
NA	Other	110	2.66	0.79	0.08	-0.47	0.649
	Married	303	2.70	0.83	0.05		

#### 4.1.3.4 Other SES factors—Religion, family income, and birthplace

The participants were also asked to report about other SES factors, such as religious beliefs, family financial status, and birthplace, and none of those factors were significantly correlated with any aspects of their SWB. In terms of religious beliefs, even though adolescents with religious beliefs showed higher life satisfaction, higher positive affect, and lower negative affect, no significant correlation was found between students with or without religious beliefs and their SWB (See Table 4.13). Participants also provided information about whether their

family participated in The Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme, and as is shown in Table 3, no significant differences were found between those whose families did receive assistance and those whose families did not. Finally, no significant differences were found in any of the adolescents' three components of SWB and different birthplaces (See Tables 4.13 to 4.15).

Table 4.13 Comparison of SWB of participants with different religions

	Religion	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	t	Sig.(2-tailed)
LS	Yes	93	4.42	1.16	0.12	0.84	0.402
	No	255	4.30	1.28	0.08		
PA	Yes	93	3.35	0.71	0.07	0.85	0.400
	No	255	3.28	0.71	0.04		
NA	Yes	93	2.61	0.82	0.09	-1.11	0.269
	No	255	2.72	0.81	0.05		

Table 4.14 Comparison of SWB of participants with different family backgrounds

	Receiving		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	t	Sig.(2-tailed)
	CSSA?	N					
LS	Yes	65	4.23	1.34	0.17	-0.54	0.587
	No	157	4.33	1.20	0.10		
PA	Yes	65	3.40	0.62	0.08	1.34	0.183
	No	157	3.27	0.70	0.06		
NA	Yes	65	2.62	0.73	0.09	-1.16	0.249
	No	157	2.75	0.77	0.06		

Table 4.15 Comparison of SWB of participants with different birthplaces

	Birthplace	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	t	Sig.(2-tailed)
	Other places	76	4.08	1.38	0.16		
PA	Hong Kong	336	3.23	0.69	0.04	-1.54	0.127
	Other places	76	3.38	0.76	0.09		
NA	Hong Kong	336	2.67	0.81	0.04	-1.21	0.230
	Other places	76	2.80	0.83	0.09		

#### 4.1.3.5 Satisfaction with academic performance

The participants' satisfaction with their current academic performance was categorised into a high-satisfaction group (very satisfied, satisfied, and neutral) and a low-satisfaction group (unsatisfied and very unsatisfied). After comparing the means of the three components of

SWB, there were significant differences in their life satisfaction ( $t=4.98, p<0.001$ ) and negative affect ( $t=-2.9, p<.001$ ) (See Table 4.12). Participants who had higher satisfaction with their academic performance demonstrated higher life satisfaction as well as lower negative affect. In addition, to test whether the participants' actual academic performance affected their SWB, the participants were again divided into two groups: a high academic performance group (very good, above average, and average) and a low academic performance group (below average and bad). A dependent sample  $t$ -test was conducted to compare their SWB levels, and as is shown in Table 4.16, there were significant differences between the two groups. Participants with high academic performance had higher life satisfaction ( $M=4.40, SD=1.25$ ), higher positive affect ( $M=3.31, SD=.70$ ) and lower negative affect ( $M=2.65, SD=.81$ ) than the participants with low performance did. Overall, the participants' academic performance was a significant impact factor for their SWB.

Table 4.16 Comparison of SWB of participants with different levels of satisfaction with academic performance and different academic performance

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	Sig.(2-tailed)
<b>Satisfaction with academic performance</b>							
LS	High	260	4.54	1.20	0.07	4.98	0.000
	Low	152	3.90	1.30	0.11		
PA	High	260	3.31	0.71	0.04	1.95	0.052
	Low	152	3.17	0.70	0.06		
NA	High	260	2.60	0.77	0.05	-2.90	0.004
	Low	152	2.85	0.88	0.07		
<b>Academic performance</b>							
LS	High	331	4.40	1.25	0.07	3.13	0.002
	Low	82	3.91	1.31	0.14		
PA	High	331	3.31	0.70	0.04	3.16	0.002
	Low	82	3.04	0.71	0.08		
NA	High	331	2.65	0.81	0.04	-2.03	0.045
	Low	82	2.86	0.83	0.09		

#### 4.1.3.6 Moral conduct

The participants also rated their moral conduct in daily life, and those who rated themselves as having high moral conduct had a significantly higher level of life satisfaction (i.e., average, above average, very good) compared with their lower moral conduct counterparts (i.e., very

bad, below average) ( $t=2.16, p<0.05$ ). No significant differences were found in the other two components we measured (See Table 4.17).

Table 4.17 Comparison of SWB of participants with different levels of moral conduct

				<i>Std.</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig. (2-</i>
	Moral Conduct	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Deviation</i>	<i>Mean</i>		<i>tailed)</i>
LS	$\geq 2$	376	4.36	1.24	0.06	2.16	0.037
	$< 2$	37	3.80	1.52	0.25		
PA	$\geq 2$	376	3.28	0.69	0.04	1.51	0.139
	$< 2$	37	3.07	0.83	0.14		
NA	$\geq 2$	376	2.68	0.82	0.04	-0.99	0.329
	$< 2$	37	2.81	0.73	0.12		

*Note* “ $\geq 2$ ” represents “average”, “above average”, and “very good”; “ $< 2$ ” represents “below average”, and “very bad”

#### 4.1.4 Sub-research question 1: What is the relationship between happiness character strengths and SWB? (RQ1)

Sub-research question 1 focused on the relationship between participants’ happiness and their character strengths (i.e., love, zest, hope, curiosity, and gratitude). All of the happiness character strengths were significantly correlated with life satisfaction (.57 to .38,  $p<.001$ ), positive affect (.54 to .46,  $p<.001$ ), and negative affect (-.30 to -.14,  $p<.01$ ). In other words, adolescents with greater happiness character strengths had higher life satisfaction and experienced higher positive affect and lower negative affect (See Table 4.18).

Table 4.18 Relationships between happiness character strengths and life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect

Happiness character strengths		LS	PA	NA
Love	Pearson Correlation	.57**	.47**	-.22**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
	N	413	413	413
Zest	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	.56**	.54**	-.30**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
	N	413	413	413
Hope	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	.50**	.45**	-.28**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
	N	413	413	413
Curiosity	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	.38**	.46**	-.15**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.002
	N	413	413	413
Gratitude	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	.43**	.46**	-.14**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.005
	N	413	413	413

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

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

#### 4.1.5 Sub-research question 2: What is the relationship between teacher support and SWB? (RQ2)

Sub-research question 2 focused on the relationship between teacher support and the adolescents' SWB levels. Table 4.19 shows a statistically significant association between the various SWB components and the four different forms of teacher support. With age controlled for, the four kinds of perceived social support from teachers were significantly correlated with the three components of SWB. Table 4.14 indicates that all four forms of teacher support had a statistical significance of  $p < .01$ , suggesting that the three components of the students' SWB were significantly associated with the frequency of their teachers' emotional support, informational support, appraisal support, and instrumental support.

Table 4.19 Relationships between the four types of teacher support and the components of the students' SWB

Control Variables	Types of Teacher Support		LS	PA	NA
Age	Emotional	Correlation	.35	.35	-.17
		Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
		df	407	407	407
	Informational	Correlation	.32	.33	-.17
		Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
		df	407	407	407
	Appraisal	Correlation	.34	.33	-.19
		Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
		df	407	407	407
	Instrumental	Correlation	.40	.31	-.18
		Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
		df	407	407	407
	Overall teacher support	Correlation	.39	.37	-.20
		Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
		df	407	407	407

#### 4.1.6 Sub-research question 3: What is the relationship between peer support and SWB? (RQ3)

Table 4.20 shows the correlation relationships between the four kinds of peer support and overall peer support, with age as a control variable. As is indicated in Table 4.20, which

reflects the correlations between the four kinds of peer support and the three components of SWB, most of the relationships between each pair of the observed variables were statistically significant ( $p < .05$  and  $p < .01$ ). However, significant correlations were not found between the adolescents' perceived peer informational support and their level of negative affect, nor for their perceived peer appraisal support and their level of negative affect ( $t = -.096, p = 0.052$ ;  $t = -.022, p = .652$ ).

Table 4.20 Correlations between peer support and SWB

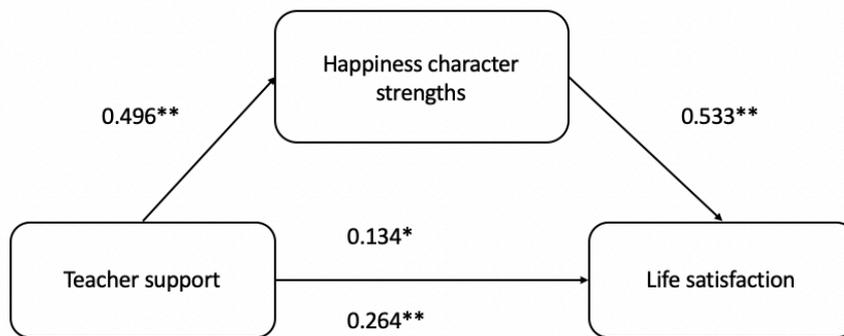
Control	Type of Peer				
Variables	Support		LS	PA	NA
		Correlation	.46	.33	-.14
	Emotional	Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.003
		df	407	407	407
		Correlation	.42	.31	-.10
	Informational	Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.052
		df	407	407	407
		Correlation	.36	.24	-.02
Age	Appraisal	Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.652
		df	407	407	407
		Correlation	.39	.30	-.12
	Instrumental	Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.019
		df	407	407	407
		Correlation	.47	.34	-.11
	Overall peer support	Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.030
		df	407	407	407
		Correlation	.47	.34	-.11

#### 4.1.7 Sub-research question 4: What are the roles of happiness character strengths in the relationship between teacher/peer emotional support and SWB? (RQ4)

4.1.7.1 *The roles of happiness character strengths in the relationship between teacher support and SWB*

Sub-research question 4 explored the role of happiness character strengths in the relationships between teacher support, peer support, and the adolescents' SWB. Both of the support factors had an impact on the individuals' SWB. Higher teacher support was associated with higher life satisfaction, higher positive affect, and lower negative affect. Path analysis was employed to explore the underlying mechanism.

Using path analysis, the indirect effect from teacher support on life satisfaction through happiness character strengths was significant (estimate = 0.333,  $p < .001$ , 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval of unstandardised indirect effect = [0.251, 0.423], standardised estimate = .264). Students who received more teacher support tended to have higher happiness character strengths, which in turn predicted higher life satisfaction (Figure 4.1). The direct effect of teacher support on life satisfaction was significant, after controlling for happiness character strengths (estimate = 0.169,  $p = 0.003 < .05$ , standardised estimate = .043).

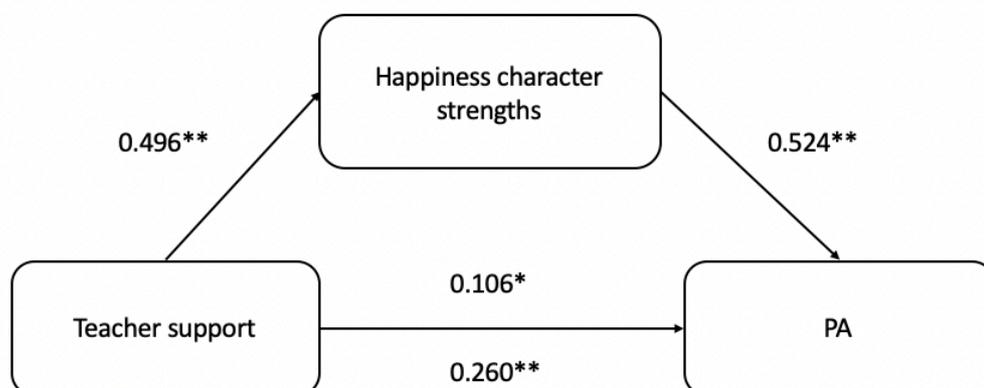


*Note\**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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

Figure 4.1 The relationships between teacher support, adolescents' happiness character strengths, and their life satisfaction

As is shown in Figure 4.2, happiness character strengths partially mediated the relationship between teacher support and the students' positive affect (estimate = 0.182,  $p < .001$ , 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval of unstandardised indirect effect = [0.142, 0.234], standardised estimate = .260).

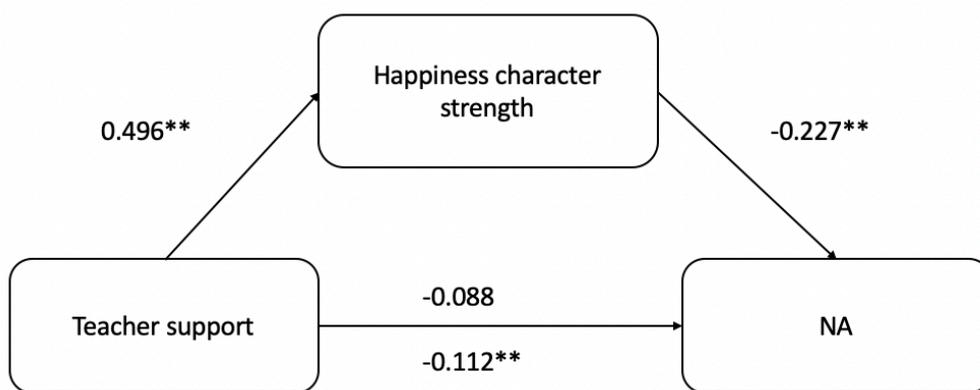


*Note\**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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

Figure 4.2 The relationships between teacher support, adolescents' happiness character strengths, and their positive affect.

In addition, happiness character strengths fully mediated the relationship between teacher support and the students' levels of negative affect (estimate =  $-.091$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval of unstandardised indirect effect =  $[-.136, -.045]$ , standardised estimate =  $-.112$ ). That result shows that with greater happiness character strengths, adolescents' negative affect will be decreased when they receive higher teacher support (See Figure 4.3).



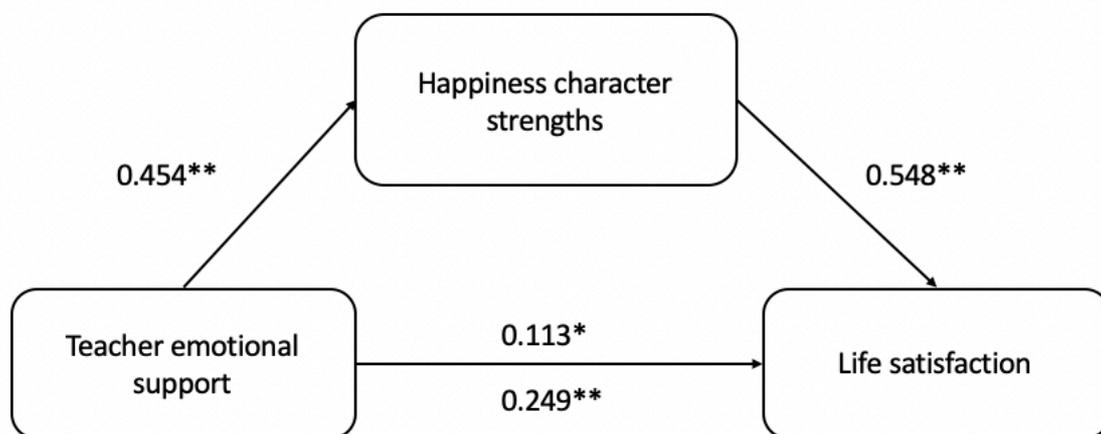
Note\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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

Figure 4.3 The relationships between teacher support, adolescents' happiness character strengths, and their negative affect

Teachers' emotional support was regarded as the most essential support by the students. Therefore, path analysis was also used to explore the relationships between teacher support, happiness character strengths, and the components of SWB. Again, happiness character

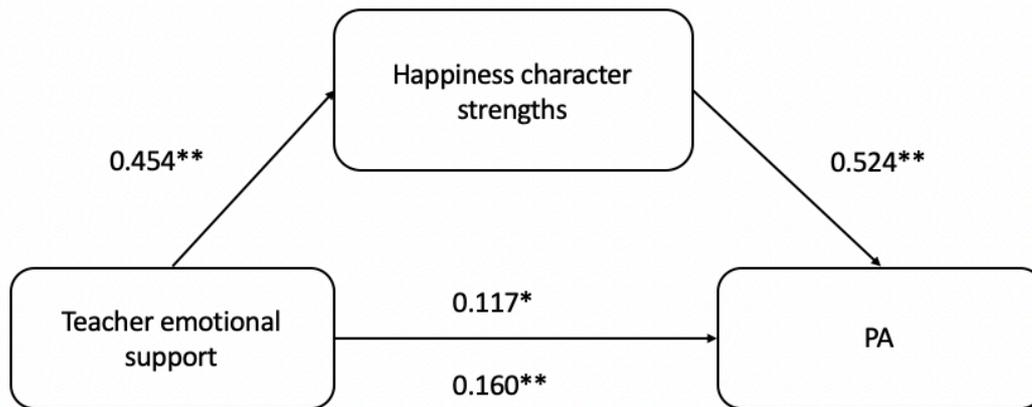
strengths partially mediated the relationship between teachers' emotional support and the students' life satisfaction (estimate = .301,  $p < .001$ , 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval of unstandardised indirect effect = [.232, .386], standardised estimate = .249) or positive affect (estimate = .160,  $p < .001$ , 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval of unstandardised indirect effect = [.122, .204], standardised estimate = .238). This result shows that greater happiness character strengths and teacher emotional support significantly impact adolescents' life satisfaction (See Figure 4.4 and Figure 4.5).



*Note\**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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

Figure 4.4 The relationships between teacher emotional support, adolescents' happiness character strengths, and their life satisfaction.

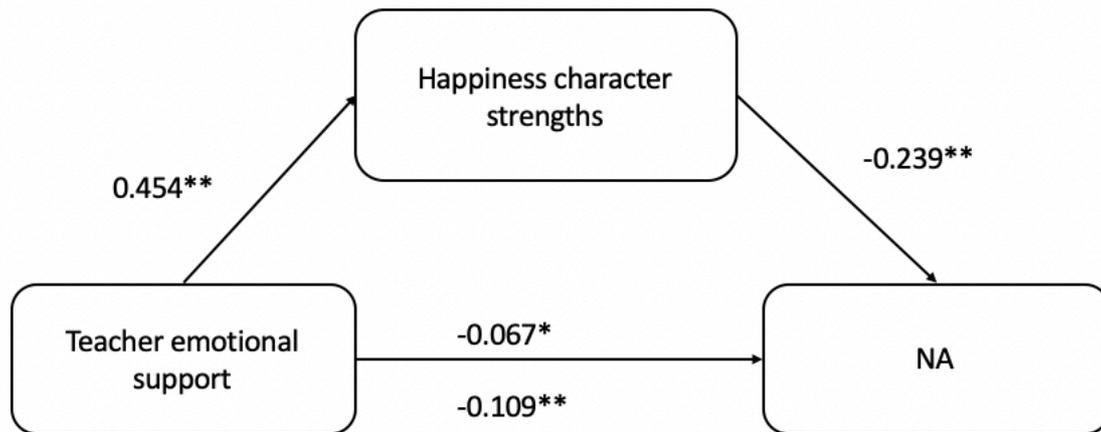


Note\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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

Figure 4.5 The relationships between teacher emotional support, adolescents' happiness character strengths, and their positive affect.

Happiness character strengths fully mediated the relationship between teachers' emotional support and the students' negative affect (estimate =  $-0.084$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval of unstandardised indirect effect =  $[-.127, -.045]$ , standardised estimate =  $-.109$ ). Therefore, it appears that with greater happiness character strengths, teachers' emotional support plays a positive role in decreasing adolescents' negative affect (See Figure 4.6).



*Note\**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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

Figure 4.6 The relationships between teacher emotional support, adolescents' happiness character strengths, and their negative affect.

The relationships among all of the variables are presented in Figure 4.7. Structural equation modelling analysis was applied to explore the relationships among all of the variables. Chi-square and other goodness-of-fit indices were checked. The model showed an acceptable goodness of fit, with CFI=0.96, TLI=0.95, RMSEA=0.08, SRMR=0.04, the chi-square value was still significant ( $\chi^2 = 170.301$ ,  $df = 51$ ,  $p < .001$ ), 90% confidence interval = [0.06, 0.09] (Hu & Bentler, 1995).

The SEM results revealed that the indirect effect of teacher support on the students' SWB through their happiness character strengths was significant (unstandardised estimate = 0.45,  $p < .001$ , 95% BCCI = (0.41, 0.86), standardised estimate = 0.05). Because the residual direct effect from peer support to SWB remained significant after controlling for happiness character strengths, the result suggested that happiness character strengths partially mediated

the association between teacher support and the students' SWB. Figure 4.7 shows the standardised parameter estimates of the hypothesised model.

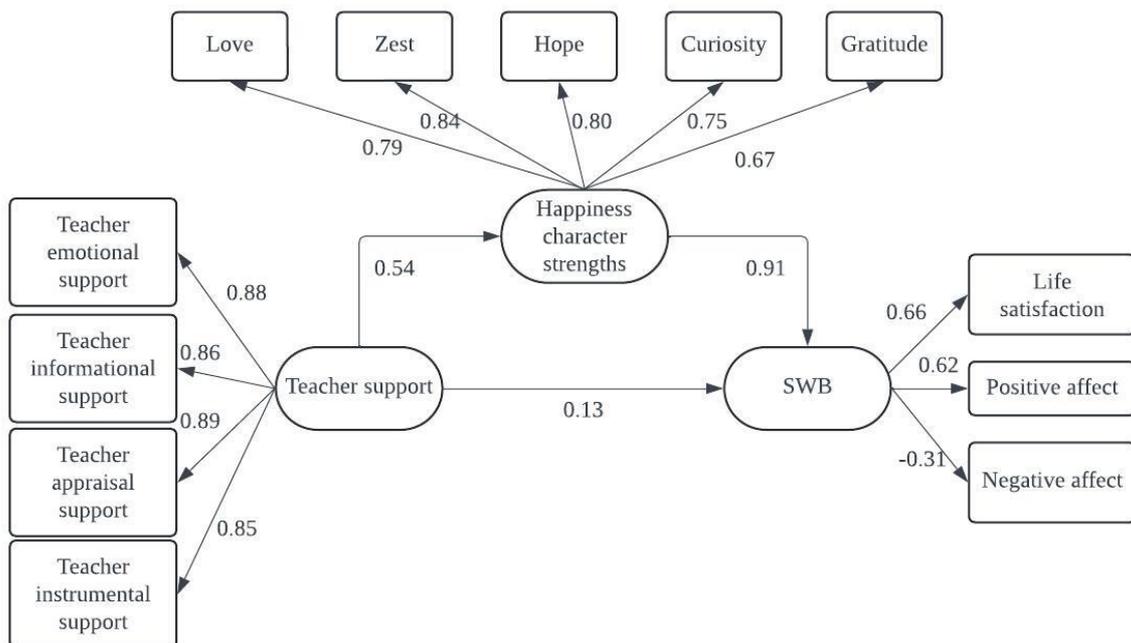
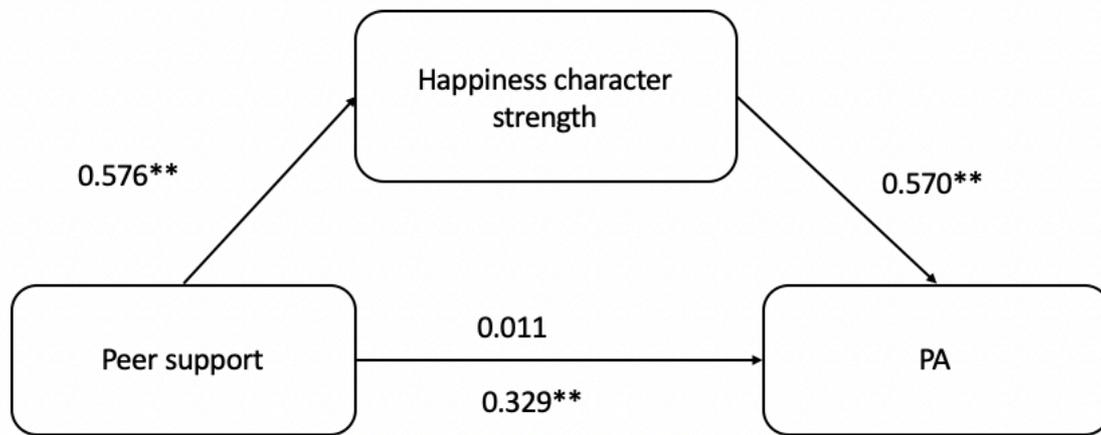


Figure 4.7 The relationships between the four kinds of teacher support, happiness character strengths, and the three components of SWB.

#### 4.1.7.2 The roles of happiness character strengths in the relationships between peer support and SWB (RQ4)

Path analysis was also conducted to evaluate the effects of peer support on the three different components of the students' SWB with their happiness character strengths. As is shown in Figures 4.8 and 4.9, the relationships between peer support and positive affect (estimate = .25,  $p < .001$ , 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval of unstandardised indirect effect = [.193, .311], standardised estimate = .03)/NA(estimate = .247,  $p < .001$ , 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval of unstandardised indirect effect = [-.136, -.045], standardised estimate = -.112) were fully mediated by happiness character strengths. In other

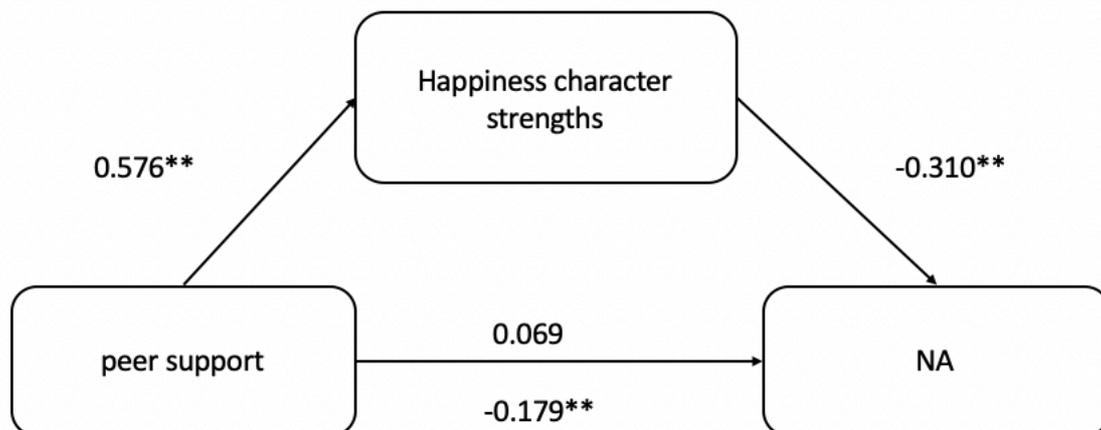
words, when adolescents have greater happiness character strengths, peer support appears to help to increase their levels of positive affect and decrease their levels of negative affect.



*Note\**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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

Figure 4.8 The relationships between peer support, adolescents' happiness character strengths, and their positive affect.

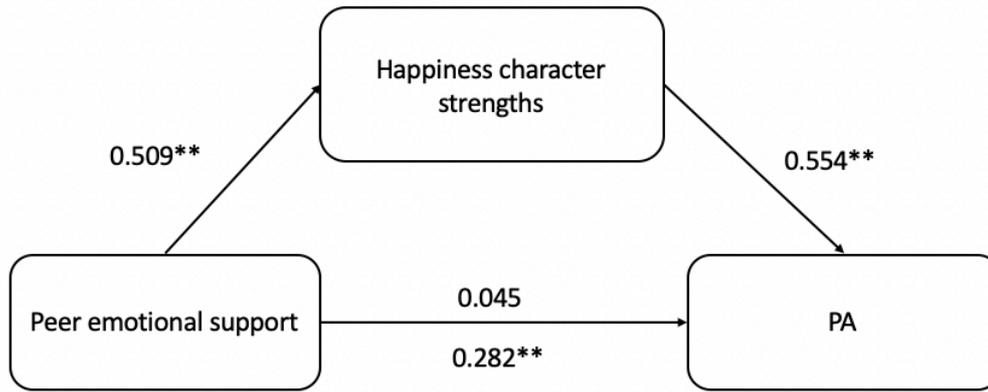


Note\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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

Figure 4.9 The relationships between peer support, adolescents' happiness character strengths, and their negative affect.

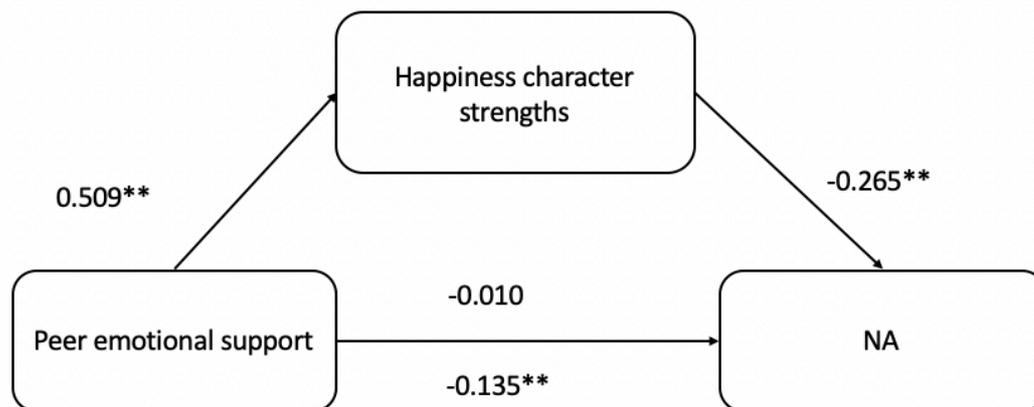
Peer emotional support was reported to be the most important form of peer support for the adolescents. The relationship between peer emotional support was also fully mediated by the adolescents' happiness character strengths. The direct effects of peer emotional support on positive affect and negative affect were significant after controlling for happiness character strengths (estimate = .20,  $p < .001$ , 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval of unstandardised indirect effect = [.154, .245], standardised estimate = .02; estimate = -.11,  $p < .001$ , 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval of unstandardised indirect effect = [-.156, -.064], standardised estimate = .02) (See Figure 4.10 and Figure 4.11).



*Note\**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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

Figure 4.10 The relationships between peer emotional support, adolescents' happiness character strengths, and positive affect.



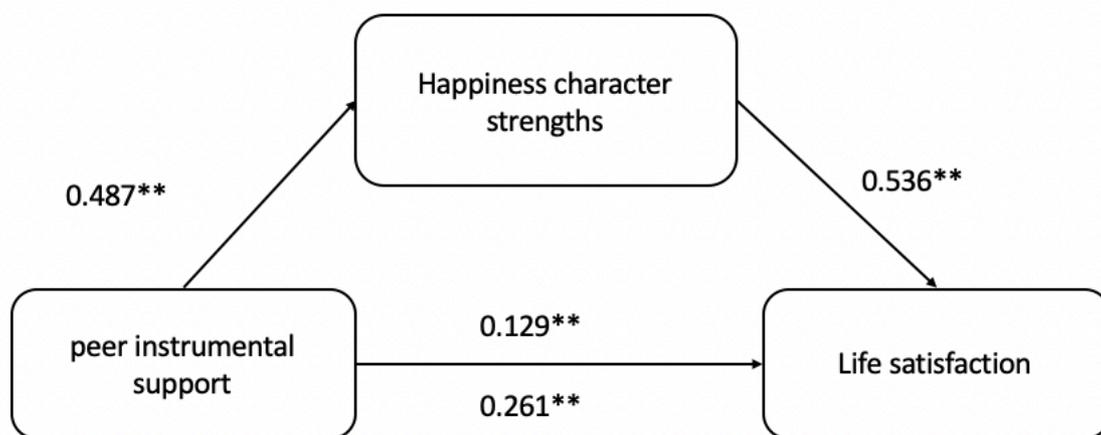
*Note\**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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

Figure 4.11 The relationships between peer emotional support, adolescents' happiness character strengths, and their negative affect.

Peer instrumental support was the type of peer support the participants perceived they encountered at school. As is shown in Figure 4.12, the effects of peer instrumental support on

the adolescents' life satisfaction was still significant after controlling for happiness character strengths—thus indicating that happiness character strengths partially mediated the relationship between peer instrumental support and the adolescents' life satisfaction (estimate = .29,  $p < .001$ , 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval of unstandardised indirect effect = [.209, .369], standardised estimate = .04). Cultivating happiness character strengths helps strengthen the positive effect that peer emotional support has on promoting adolescents' life satisfaction.



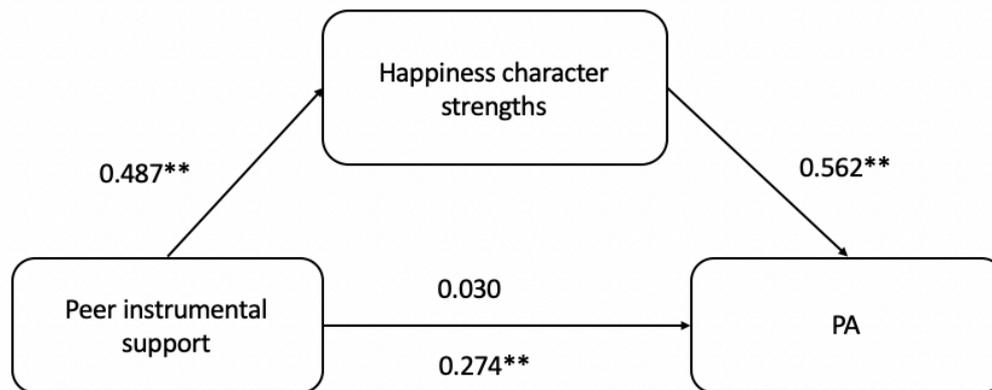
Note\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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

Figure 4.12 The relationships between peer instrumental support, adolescents' happiness character strengths, and their life satisfaction.

The direct effect of peer instrumental support on the adolescents' emotional state (i.e., their PA and NA) was insignificant, but happiness character strengths fully mediated the relationship (estimate = .17,  $p < .001$ , 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval of unstandardised indirect effect = [.127, .213], standardised estimate = .10; estimate = -.11,  $p < .001$ , 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval of unstandardised indirect effect =

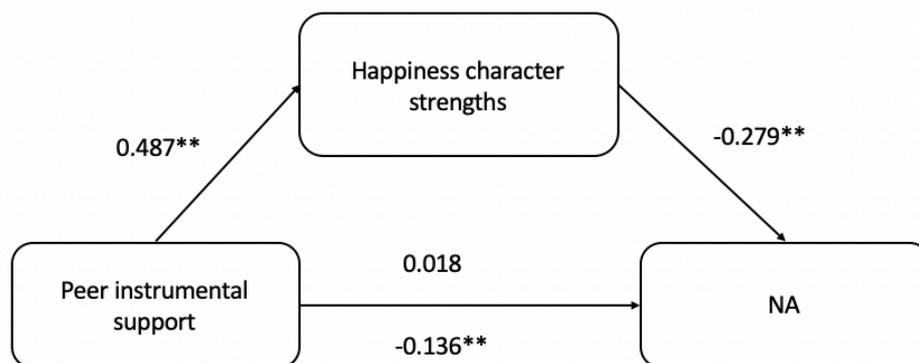
[-.142, -.055], standardised estimate = .02). In other words, it appears that when adolescents have good happiness character strengths, and they perceive that they have peer instrumental support, they will experience higher positive affect and lower negative affect (See Figure 4.13 and Figure 4.14).



*Note\**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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

Figure 4.13 The relationships between peer instrumental support, adolescents' character strengths, and their positive affect.



*Note\**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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

Figure 4.14 The relationships between peer instrumental support, adolescents' happiness character strengths, and their negative affect.

Structural equation modelling analysis was applied to explore the relationships between all of the variables. Chi-square and other goodness-of-fit indices were checked. The model showed an acceptable goodness of fit, with CFI=0.96, TLI=0.95, RMSEA=0.09, SRMR=0.04, the Chi-square was still significant ( $\chi^2 = 204.57$ ,  $df = 51$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and 90% confidence interval = [0.07, 0.10] (Hu & Bentler, 1995).

The SEM results revealed that the indirect effect of peer support on the adolescents' SWB through happiness character strengths was significant (unstandardised estimate = 0.67,  $p < .001$ , 95% BCCI = (0.52, 0.83), standardised estimate = 0.08). Because the residual direct effect from peer support to SWB was significant after controlling for happiness character strengths, the results suggested that happiness character strengths fully mediated the association between peer support and SWB. Figure 4.15 shows the standardised parameter estimates of the hypothesised model.

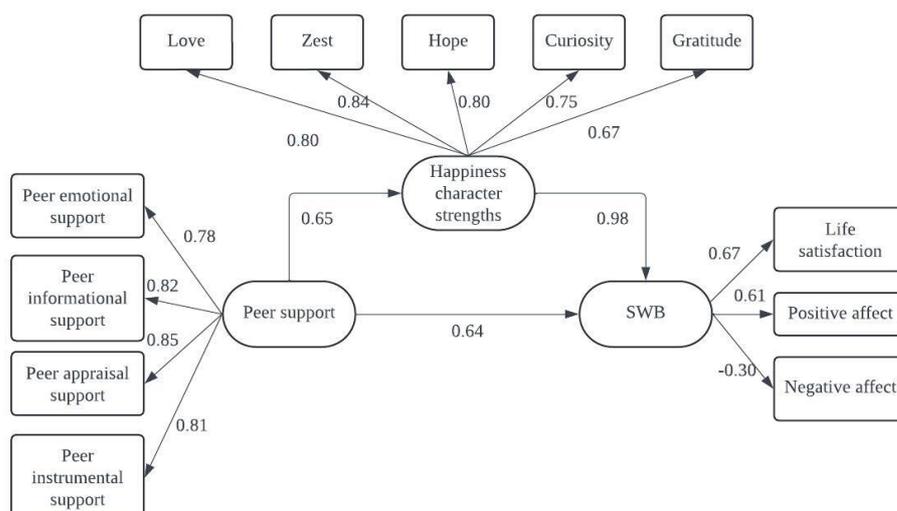


Figure 4.15 The relationships between peer support, adolescents' happiness character strengths, and their SWB.

#### 4.1.7.3 *The relationships among happiness character strengths, peer support, teacher support, and SWB*

Structural equation modelling analysis was also applied to explore the relationships between all of the variables (i.e., the happiness character strengths, types of peer support and teacher support, and the components of the adolescents' SWB). Figure 4.16 illustrates the relationships between the four different types of peer support, the five happiness character strengths, and the three components of adolescents' SWB. The arrows indicate the direction of influence, and the numbers next to the arrows represent the strength of the relationships, with higher numbers indicating stronger relationships. Chi-square and other goodness-of-fit indices were checked. The model showed a satisfactory goodness of fit, with CFI=0.95, TLI=0.94, RMSEA=0.07, SRMR=0.04, and the Chi-square was still significant ( $\chi^2 = 4223.65$ ,  $df = 120$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and 90% confidence interval = [0.06, 0.08] (Hu & Bentler, 1995). Peer support and teacher support each appeared to have a direct positive effect on happiness character strengths, with coefficients of 0.50 and 0.24, respectively. Happiness character strengths had a strong positive effect on SWB, with a coefficient of 0.96.

The SEM results revealed that the adolescents' happiness character strengths fully mediated the relationship between peer support and their SWB (unstandardised estimate = 0.52,  $p < .001$ , 95% BCCI = (0.36, 0.67), standardised estimate = 0.08). In addition, there was a significant indirect effect of teacher support on SWB through happiness character strengths (unstandardised estimate = 0.21,  $p < .001$ , 95% BCCI = (0.10, 0.31), standardised estimate = 0.05). In summary, happiness character strengths appear to play a mediating role between the different types of peer support and teacher support and SWB, thus showing that the influences of peer support and teacher support on SWB are delivered partly via happiness

character strengths, which transmit the positive effects of both peer and teacher support to the students' SWB. This mediation suggests that the positive impacts of support systems on adolescents' well-being are primarily explained by improvements in their happiness character strengths (i.e., love, zest, hope, curiosity, and gratitude). Furthermore, the direct effects that receiving support had on SWB were relatively small compared with these indirect effects through happiness character strengths. Figure 4.16 The standardised parameter estimates of the hypothesised model.

It is noted that peer support and SWB exhibit a negative relationship in the SEM analyses (Figure 4.16), while the direct relationship between them is usually positive. There could be several reasons for this phenomenon. As character strengths act as mediators, the student's personality or the way they cope with problems may affect the way they interpret the support they receive from their peers. Perceived judgment may sometimes increase their stress and have a negative impact on their well-being. In this case, not every adolescent can benefit from a specific peer support. Also, the causal relationship could be explored further.

Adolescents with lower SWB may tend to seek more peer support rather than high peer support, causing low SWB. In addition, with high academic stress, contextual factors (e.g., competitive school environment) may also be associated with peer support and lead to low SWB. Further studies on the other mediators or the causal relationship should be explored.

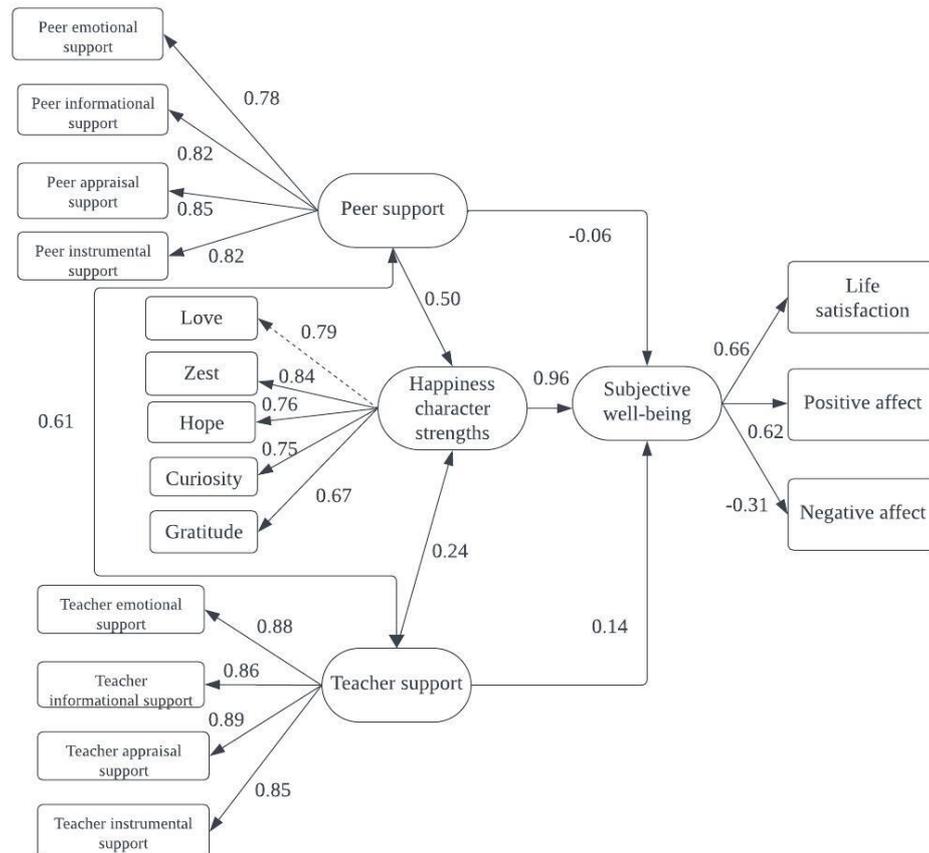


Figure 4.16 The relationships between peer support, teacher support, adolescents' happiness character strengths, and their positive affect.

*4.1.7.4 What types of specific support do adolescents with different levels of happiness character strength need?—Comparison of the SWB of adolescents with high and low happiness character strengths*

The relationships between the different types of teacher support and peer support and adolescents' SWB were next compared in two groups of students—students with low happiness character strengths and those with high happiness character strengths—and the correlation relationships are shown in Table 4.21 and Table 4.22. For students with low levels of character strengths, peer emotional support and peer informational support positively influenced their positive affect. At the same time, peer emotional support also helped reduce

the negative affect of students with high levels of character strengths. In addition, teacher support had a more significant role in the high-character-strengths group, because teacher instrumental support only helped promote the students with low character strengths' positive affect. However, all four types of teacher support helped to decrease the negative affect in the students with high levels of character strengths.

Table 4.21 The relationship between SWB and different kinds of social support in adolescents with low character strength

		Peer			Teacher				
		PeerEmotio nal	Information al	Peer Appraisal	Peer Instrumental	Teacher Emotional	Information al	Teacher Appraisal	Teacher Instrumental
LS	Pearson Correlation	.30**	.25**	.15*	.23**	.24**	.17*	.16*	.29**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.032	.001	.000	.011	.021	.000
	N	213	213	213	213	213	213	213	213
PA	Pearson Correlation	.17*	.16*	.02	.16*	.25**	.23**	.20**	.23**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.016	.022	.803	.023	.000	.001	.004	.001
	N	213	213	213	213	213	213	213	213
NA	Pearson Correlation	.03	.08	.14*	.010	-.06	-.02	-.03	-.07
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.690	.246	.044	.899	.407	.733	.693	.341
	N	213	213	213	213	213	213	213	213



Table 4.22 The relationship between SWB and different kinds of social support in adolescents with high character strengths

		Peer	Peer	Peer	Peer	Teacher	Teacher	Teacher	Teacher
		Emotional	Informational	Appraisal	Instrumental	Emotional	Informational	Appraisal	Instrumental
LS	Pearson	.37**	.30**	.29**	.32**	.25**	.22**	.28**	.31**
	Correlation								
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.002	.000	.000
	N	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200
PA	Pearson	.12	.08	.10	.14*	.19**	.15*	.18*	.08
	Correlation								
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.082	.238	.179	.043	.008	.030	.013	.257
	N	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200
NA	Pearson	-.17*	-.11	-.02	-.11	-.17*	-.22**	-.23**	-.18*
	Correlation								
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.015	.134	.724	.121	.015	.002	.001	.011
	N	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200



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Peer	Peer	Peer	Peer	Teacher	Teacher	Teacher	Teacher
Emotional	Informational	Appraisal	Instrumental	Emotional	Informational	Appraisal	Instrumental

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

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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#### **4.1.8 Conclusions from the Quantitative Results**

This chapter outlined the quantitative results following an analysis of self-reported questionnaires. The findings presented above provided insights into this study of SWB and its relationships to adolescents' age, gender, academic performance, satisfaction with their academic performance, moral conduct, religion, parents' marital status, and birthplace. Both peer support and teacher support played significant roles in promoting the adolescents' SWB. In addition, the significance of happiness character strengths was clarified, and character strengths were found to act as a mediator in the relationships between teacher support or peer support and adolescents' SWB.

## 4.2 Qualitative results

This project's qualitative study focused on a deeper understanding of Hong Kong adolescents' SWB, and the factors associated with adolescents' SWB and how they influenced the changes in the participants' SWB were investigated. The relationships between peer support and SWB and between teacher support and SWB were also studied. The qualitative approach was employed to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives previously derived from the quantitative results, and to improve the study's trustworthiness on the basis of the results of the quantitative study.

The qualitative study was conducted through focus group interviews. Eight focus groups were organised, with each group comprising five or six students. The participants were recommended by teachers, using convenience sampling. The interviews were semi-structured, which enabled the participants to share and develop new ideas freely, and the questions were aligned with the quantitative results. In addition, the qualitative results significantly enriched the quantitative results by providing a more comprehensive understanding of the research questions. All of the respondents remained anonymous, and all of the names shown are pseudonyms.

The first section below reviews the research design and the participants' demographic information, while the second section illustrates the adolescents' overall satisfaction with their life. The third section discusses the two main research questions, which focused on the factors affecting the adolescents' SWB and how these factors influenced their SWB. The fourth section discusses the sub-research questions, which explored the relationships between teacher support or peer support and the adolescents' SWB. The fifth section demonstrates the adolescents' understanding of a person with high SWB and whether schools' teaching

programmes could help promote SWB. The last section summarises the themes derived from the interviews and draws conclusions from the findings.

#### 4.2.1 Interview findings

Forty-three students (20 girls and 23 boys) from four schools from three districts of Hong Kong joined the interviews. Ten to 12 students from each school attended eight focus groups. There were two students from S.1, 26 students from S.2, and 15 students from S.3. The students' demographic information is presented in Tables 4.23 through 4.25.

Table 4.23 Gender and grade of participants

Grade	Total	F	M
S.1	2	1	1
S.2	26	13	13
S.3	15	6	9

Table 4.24 Number of participants from each school

School Code	Region	No.
S01	Tuen Mun	12
S02	Kwai Tsing	10
S03	Kowloon City	10
S04	Tuen Mun	11

Table 4.25 Name list of participants

No.	School No	Pseudonym	Grade	Gender	No.	School No	Pseudonym	Grade	Gender
1	S01	Jessica	3	F	23	S03	Isla	2	F
2	S01	Lily	3	F	24	S03	Emily	2	F
3	S01	Bethany	3	F	25	S03	Poppy	2	F
4	S01	Elizabeth	3	F	26	S03	Ava	2	F
5	S01	Joanne	3	F	27	S03	Isabella	2	F
6	S01	James	3	M	28	S03	Jacob	2	M
7	S01	William	3	M	29	S03	Charlie	2	M
8	S01	Jake	3	M	30	S03	Thomas	2	M
9	S01	Connor	3	M	31	S03	George	2	M
10	S01	Joe	3	M	32	S03	Oscar	2	M
11	S01	Reece	3	M	33	S04	Sophie	2	F
12	S01	Rhys	3	M	34	S04	Margaret	2	F

No.	School No	Pseudonym	Grade	Gender	No.	School No	Pseudonym	Grade	Gender
13	S02	Tracy	1	F	35	S04	Samantha	2	F
14	S02	Michael	1	M	36	S04	Megan	2	F
15	S02	Amelia	2	F	37	S04	Victoria	2	F
16	S02	Olivia	2	F	38	S04	Lauren	2	F
17	S02	Oliver	2	M	39	S04	Callum	2	M
18	S02	Jack	2	M	40	S04	Kyle	2	M
19	S02	Harry	2	M	41	S04	Damian	2	M
20	S02	Michelle	3	F	42	S04	Noah	2	M
21	S02	Mason	3	M	43	S04	Liam	2	M
22	S02	Ethan	3	M					

#### 4.2.2 Overall satisfaction with life

As mentioned in previous studies, adolescents' satisfaction with life has declined in recent years. In this part of the project, participants were asked to evaluate whether they were satisfied with their current lives and why, and as expected, they illustrated their overall evaluation of their lives. Most of the participants were satisfied with their current lives, although a small number had opposite opinions. Several factors were mentioned that impacted their life satisfaction—for example, whether their basic material needs were satisfied. For example, one S.3 student, Lily, said she did not have to worry about food or clothing because her parents always left the best for her. Some other participants indicated that the reason for a satisfactory life was having a good relationship with family members or friends. One S.2 student, Sophie, mentioned the importance of family atmosphere and the

relationships with family members. In addition, some participants evaluated their life satisfaction using multiple factors. One S.2 student, Margaret, reported her life as satisfactory because she was satisfied with her academic performance and had good interpersonal relationships. Table 4.26 shows the reasons the adolescents gave for their levels of satisfaction with their current lives.

Table 4.26 Reasons for why participants are satisfied with life

Quotes	Interviewee
“Worry-free food and clothing. Mom and Dad tried to keep the best stuff for me.”	(Lily, S.3)
“I think I'm quite satisfied and happy overall. First of all, the family and the whole atmosphere of my house are really harmonious, and there are really rare quarrels or conflicts between family members.”	(Sophie, S.2)
“I think I'm happy with everything overall. I think, whether it's in terms of family or academic performance, it is stable. At least that's on the right track. And I think now I meet a lot of friends. So, I think I'm satisfied (with life).”	(Margaret, S.2)

At the same time, some participants were not very satisfied with their current lives. Some lacked ideal interpersonal relationships or a positive academic performance, as S.2 students Emily and Damian indicated were their situations. Adolescents sometimes have conflicts with their parents, and there are some challenges in parental relationships. Moreover, academic performance was also one of the most significant criteria. An unsatisfactory academic performance and other setbacks led to a less-than-ideal life for some students (See Table 4.27).

Table 4.27 Reasons for why participants are not satisfied with life

Quotes	Interviewee
<p>“Not very satisfied...Mainly the family situation there, especially my relationship with my mom. You can't say (the relationship is) not good, but can only say, sometimes it's good, sometimes it's not...It's always because of small things that there is a quarrel. But it may not be intended to be a conflict at first. And sometimes I will be dysphoric in front of her for no reason.”</p>	(Emily, S.2)
<p>“I don't think I'm satisfied with my current life. Because there seem to be a lot of setbacks, it seems that the grades are not as good as expected. It seems to be there are a lot of checkpoints to be passed.”</p>	(Damian, S.2)

### 4.2.3 Main research question 2: How do the factors associated with SWB affect adolescents' SWB? (MRQ2)

The quantitative study identified the factors which impacted the adolescents' SWB. In response to the quantitative results, participants were expected to explain how these factors affected their SWB in different respects. Even though the adolescents had different opinions on their satisfaction with their lives, they raised a variety of factors which influenced their SWB in terms of life satisfaction or emotions. Multiple factors were mentioned, such as their SES factors, academic performance, and interpersonal relationships. Compared with the results of the quantitative study, the participants mentioned additional factors (e.g. physical health and life goals). However, the participants insisted there were no gender differences.

#### 4.2.3.1 Socioeconomic status factors

Socioeconomic status is defined as “the relative position of a family or individual in a social system in which individuals are ranked according to their access to or control over wealth, power and status” (Mueller & Parcel, 1981, p. 14; Avvisati, 2020). In the current project, the participants mentioned that multiple SES factors could be affecting their life satisfaction—in addition to factors such as age, their living environment, religious beliefs, and family income may have been affecting their levels of happiness. In the quantitative study, the adolescents’ overall life satisfaction declined as they grew older. One S.3 student, Ethan, commented that was because “what you worry about will also increase.” The participants further indicated that, at this life stage, stress from study troubled them the most, while in childhood, they had felt carefree.

The adolescents also regarded their living environments as a leading factor affecting their SWB, and they mentioned that their living environment, as well as their neighbourhood, affected their emotions. As Kyle said, if they had a friendly neighbour, daily greetings may “make me feel humane”. Some cross-border students in the schools lived separately from their parents, and they mentioned that the separation decreased their life satisfaction.

In the quantitative results, family income and personal religious beliefs were not significantly correlated with the adolescents’ SWB, but in the focus groups their influence could not be ignored. Even though participants were junior secondary school students, they were aware of the importance of income. Their own income was mainly pocket money from their parents, but they insisted on the importance of having the freedom to buy what they wanted and mentioned that with less pocket money, they were unable to buy what they wanted, and that decreased their life satisfaction. Furthermore, some students had a sense of financial management, and they saved money to buy gifts for friends or family. One, S.2 student

Olivia, commented that in order to buy Christmas gifts, she “won’t buy unnecessary things”.

Religion showed no direct association with SWB in the quantitative study, but again, it was found to indirectly affect the adolescents’ emotions via religious activities. One S.2 student, Lauren, shared that her religious activity helped her to be more optimistic and make additional friends, which in turn increased her level of happiness. Thus, overall the qualitative results indicated that the factors associated with SWB varied from case to case. There may be some common factors, but unique and significant factors may also exist in every adolescent (See Table 4.28).

Table 4.28 SES factors and SWB

Factor	Quotes	Interviewee
Age	“Maybe when you grew up, what you worried about also increased. It's not like when I was a kid when the world was carefree. Now, what I care about the most is my academic performance...However, when you grow up, you must also worry about your job, etc.”	(Ethan, S.3)
Living environment	“The living environment can also affect your mood. For example, in addition to your family, your neighbours also matter. When you come out, your neighbours say “hello”, which makes me feel humane. But if you open the door, everyone is latching the door, and they don't care about anything, then you may feel a little bit lonely”.	(Kyle, S.2)
Living environment	“Because my mom and dad don't live here. If they were here, I might be more satisfied.”	(Michelle, S.3)
Income	“Not satisfied, but only in terms of money. Materially not very satisfied.”	(Liam, S.2)
Income	“I also have a concern about money...maybe spend less in December, because I have to buy Christmas gifts... I will spend less and won't buy unnecessary things.”	(Olivia, S.2)

#### 4.2.3.2 Physical health

In addition to the SES factors, the adolescents raised other factors, such as physical health, that were expected to be among the factors identified in the quantitative study. According to the results of previous research, when adolescents have a higher level of SWB, they become

healthier (Shaffer-Hudkins, 2010; Steinberg, 2004, 2005), and physical health brings positive outcomes to the psychological well-being of young people (Aston, 2018). In this project, both the adolescents' own physical health and that of their family members affected their life satisfaction. For example, one S.3 student, Ethan, stated the pressure of exams affected his physical health and then decreased his life satisfaction. Another S.3 student, Lily, also mentioned, "If I don't have enough sleep, I'm going to be sleepy, and it affects my mental health", so insufficient sleep affected her emotions. Not only did the adolescents' own health affect their emotions, but also that of their family members affected the adolescents' emotions, and especially their negative emotions were increased. As Callum commented, it "affects your life and your satisfaction with life. Because you will worry about them" (See 4.29).

Table 4.29 Physical health and SWB

Quotes	Interviewee
"When it comes to exams, basically, I don't go to bed until two or three o'clock every night. It affects my physical health. It makes me unhappy."	(Ethan, S.3)
"For example, if your family member has some health problem or something unexpected happened, it also affects your life and your satisfaction with life. Because you will worry about them."	(Callum, S.2)

#### 4.2.3.3 Basic needs

Several participants mentioned the importance of basic needs, such as sufficient food, clothes, and a place to live. For example, S.2 student Charlie commented, "In terms of food,

clothing, housing and transportation, all are fulfilled”. S.3 students Ethan also agree that he defined satisfied life as “there is food to eat, there is a house to live in, and there is time to play”. Participants indicated that their basic needs were fulfilled, such as sufficient food, clothes, and a place to live, thus allowing them to have a satisfactory life (See Table 4.30).

Table 4.30 Basic needs and SWB

Quotes	Interviewee
“I’m satisfied because I feel like there is no lacking in my life...(for example) the quality of life, money... I like eating, and the material aspect is okay with me.”	(Jacob, S.2)
“I’m very satisfied with the situation of the family; at least, in terms of food, clothing, housing and transportation, all are fulfilled.”	(Charlie, S.2)
“Let’s talk about the definition of satisfaction. Simply speaking, there is food to eat, there is a house to live in, and there is time to play.”	(Ethan, S.3)

#### 4.2.3.4 School environment

In this study, the school environment referred to the building and hardware facilities, and poor facilities appeared to bring the students negative emotions. Students are always required to study and live in school for a long time. In one school, because of its construction, there was limited space for the students to play sports, and S.3 student James complained that at his school they “can only play basketball with S.1 students”. Also, experimental equipment for science study experiments was obsolete in some schools (See Table 4.31).

Table 4.31 School environment and SWB

Quotes	Interviewee
“Because the school is under renovation, we don’t have enough space to play basketball, so we can only play basketball with S.1 student.”	(James, S.3)
“Talking about the school environment. For example, it is under renovation, and (the classroom is) surrounded by something (Bamboo scaffolding). In addition, in science class, take biochemistry, for example. When I was doing the experiment, I could actually see a lot of equipment that was, in fact, already too old to use. So, I think the school environment is what influences our life satisfaction.”	(Joe, S.3)

#### 4.2.3.5 Interpersonal relationships

Among adolescents, their relationships with stakeholders, such as friends, teachers, and parents, also affect their life satisfaction—especially their relationships with classmates and teachers, which are regarded as two of the most significant types of interpersonal relationships that affect their emotions. As S.2 student Isabella said, “The social interaction can actually affect my emotions”. Some participants thought communicating with parents could bring both positive and negative affect. For example, Ava and Callum enjoyed sharing life with family, but it brought negative emotions for Emily because she considered her mother to be emotional. Teacher-student relationships also play an important role in adolescents’ school life, and a good relationship with their teachers will benefit students in multiple ways. For example, both S.2 students Damian and Noah believed a good relationship with their teacher would enable them to receive more advice in their studies. Moreover, Noah felt that individuals’ relationships with teachers could affect their impressions of those teachers.

Some participants mentioned that they enjoyed chatting and spending time with friends. Poppy, George, Oscar, and Emily all agreed that communicating with friends made them happy and relaxed and increased their positive emotions. Friends were the ones “who can understand me the most”, according to Emily (S.2). As S.1 Michael said, friendly classmates promote life satisfaction.

Therefore, the results of the focus groups indicated that adolescents’ relationships with parents, teachers, and classmates can bring changes in their SWB, especially in their emotions (See Table 4.32).

Table 4.32 Interpersonal Relationship and SWB

Relationship with	Quotes	Interviewee
Family	<p>“When I talk with my family, I also have a lot of fun. Then this fun can last all day. All day long, I can remember how happy I was talking to him and what we were talking about. And then I can also share with family who I talked to today, and I was super happy.”</p>	(Ava, S.2)
Family	<p>“I think I'm quite satisfied (with life) and happy. First of all, the family and the whole atmosphere of my home are really harmonious, and it's scarce to quarrel with family members and have different opinions.”</p>	(Callum, S.2)
Family	<p>“And then on the aspect of family, actually, I can't say that I don't have a good relationship with my parents. But there is one thing. Once you communicate (with her), you are prone to quarrels, especially with my mom. Then she is emotional, and I'm more rational. Then, she doesn't like to listen to herself, and she wants to begin the fight. That's why I often avoid talking to her. And my parents always like to complain about my grades and my moods.”</p>	(Emily, S.2)
Teacher	<p>“If the teachers are nice to you, they will give you more advice.”</p>	(Damian, S.2)



Relationship	Quotes	Interviewee
with		
Teacher	<p>“I think the teacher-student relationship is still significant. I think I'm the student who's favoured by my teachers. It's like if the teacher likes you, they may give you more advice. But if they don't like you, they might secretly bad-mouthing you in the office. Then, the other teachers who don't even know you, their first impression of you will be bad. Then you will have a tough time at school.”</p>	(Noah, S.2)
	<p>"I feel satisfied (with life). Because my classmates are very friendly when I go to school."</p>	(Michael, S.1)
	<p>“I'll send a WeChat message. Because WeChat can only send 60 seconds of voice messages. She'll send three messages. I was very happy at that time when we were making audio calls.”</p>	(Poppy, S.2.)
	<p>"I'm so happy every day. Because I was accompanied by my classmates, we could laugh and play together."</p>	(George, S.2)
Classmate	<p>"My classmates are getting acquainted, and we can play together. It's fun and happy to play, and sometimes you can talk to a friend about something sad. If you have something happy to share,</p>	(Oscar, S.2)



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Relationship	Quotes	Interviewee
with	you can go out to eat or go shopping (with them)."	
Classmate	"Because I think subjectively, regarding my own ideas, emotions and values, it's rare to have a good friend. And I enjoyed playing with them. Although sometimes they love to gossip. But I'm not going to correct them. Because I don't think these things can affect my emotions. Actually, I think it's really nice to be with them. Because they are the person who can understand me the most."	(Emily, S.2)

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Table 4.33 Other factors and SWB

Factors	Quotes	Interviewee
Life goal	<p>“Because they're (friends) the ones who know me best. And then, we, several people, can work together towards the same direction we like. I think it's also a point to increase my happiness.”</p>	(Poppy, S.2)
	<p>“For example, both of us like painting. Then, she would share with me some of her drawings, her steps, or what she likes to draw. I also like to share it with her. I like to share the happiness with good friends. I think it's actually quite rare to be happy like this. Because not everyone thinks in the same way, I even think I am a weird person, and only my friends can understand me...for example, I will share the steps of drawing and my most recent works (with friends)...(and my friends) will compliment me. She may also give me advice. For example, she is good at sketches. And then I'm going to learn it. She would take the initiative to help me. If I have some problems, she will be willing to help me solve them.”</p>	(Ava, S.2)
	<p>“I have a friend who doesn't study that hard, but when she plays volleyball, she works hard. Because of volleyball, she changed a lot and even attended a volleyball club after school. I asked her why she loves volleyball so much. She said she wants to be a coach or professional player.”</p>	(Michelle, S.3)



Factors	Quotes	Interviewee
Personality	"I've mentioned it before that I'm an optimistic person. So nothing is unhappy."	(Noah, S2)
	"I'm happy because I'm an optimistic person. So I always laugh and rarely cry."	(Oscar, S.2)
	"I consider myself to be a very cheerful and outgoing person. But sometimes, I'm very emotional and empathetic. It is easy for me to empathise and feel the emotions of the people around me, and the emotions of them can easily affect me. For example, if my friend is unhappy, I will also be unhappy. It's strange that my emotion is easily implicated and driven ups and downs by others."	(Sophie, S.2)
	"Because actually, when I was a kid. My mom has said it since I was a child. I think much more than other children. Maybe you can say a word, and I'll come up with ten translations. I'm not so open-minded."	(Lauren, S.2)
	"I am actually a rational person, just like Joanne... I will play different roles in front of different people. If I am in front of rational people, I offer rational solutions. But if they are emotional. I'll provide emotional solutions."	(Elizabeth, S.3)
Academic performance	"The first factor (affects my emotions) is study pressure, and my study pressure is relatively high. I'm naturally afraid of English. Because I am not good at English and I can't remember the	(Jacob, S.3)



Factors	Quotes	Interviewee
	words...this is study pressure."	
	"Let's say I got first place in the math exam this time, but I didn't get in the same place next time; my classmates and teachers would be surprised. So, there will be invisible pressure there."	(Ethan, S.3)
	"Improvement in academic performance (makes me happy). In the last test, my scores have improved a lot. In addition, my English also improved when I came to secondary school, as I had very poor English when I was a child. My math scores have improved by more than ten points. Regarding Chinese, It's also better than before."	(Tracy, S.1)
	"The results are not as imagined...I just feel like "why" when I see it...Sometimes, I feel I spend more time on this subject than on other subjects, and I feel frustrated when I see the results."	(Damian, S.2)



#### *4.2.3.6 Other factors associated with SWB: Life goals*

Beyond the SES factors and interpersonal relationships, additional factors, such as life goals, were mentioned by some of the participants. Identify personal values and set meaningful goals that align with those values. According to previously published research, goals are among the most crucial elements for helping people control and adapt to their lives (Diener & Seligman, 2002; Kasser & Ahuvia, 2002; Sheldon & Bettencourt, 2002; Synder & Lopez, 2007). People engage in various ways to accomplish different goals (Emmons, 1999; Yetim, 2001). Some of the students mentioned that having the same goal with friends provided them with a sense of happiness. It has been shown that when people establish goals and then follow up on them, their SWB improves (Eryilmaz, 2011). As student Ava said, because both she and her friend love painting, they can learn from each other, and she “likes to share the happiness with good friends”. In addition, the adolescents’ life goals provide them with the motivation to work hard. For example, the goal of being a volleyball coach or professional player made student Michelle’s friend feel positive towards life.

#### *4.2.3.7 Other factors associated with SWB: Personality*

Adolescents have different self-evaluations of their personalities. As mentioned in the quantitative study, the positive relationship between specific character strengths and SWB has been confirmed. The participants from all grades indicated that a positive personality brings adolescents more positive emotions and fewer negative emotions. In the qualitative study, the responses from the participants further enriched those results. Noah and Oscar mentioned that an optimistic personality brought them a satisfying life. Sophie thought that she was an empathetic person who was easily influenced by others’ emotions. Another two girls, Lauren and Elizabeth, considered themselves to be rational people.

#### *4.2.3.8 Other factors associated with SWB: Academic performance*

Academic performance was one of the most significant factors that was mentioned quite frequently by the adolescents, especially the senior students. Successful students, according to the OECD (2018), not only perform well academically but also feel happy in the classroom. In fact, schools and higher education settings help young people develop their academic skills and also help them form relationships with others, explore many aspects of society, and develop their personalities—all of which can have an impact on their SWB (Bücker et al., 2018). In previous quantitative studies and also this one, academic performance was found to have a highly significant impact on students' SWB. In the qualitative study, according to the responses from the focus group participants, the impact that academic performance had on their SWB was mainly because it brought about the emergence of different emotions. As one S.3 student, Ethan, stated, the expectations of academic performance that he felt from classmates and teachers put pressure on him. One's improvement in academic performance brings happiness, whereas in contrast, anxiety usually arises from a gap between expectations and reality. In other words, if adolescents don't meet expectations, they tend to suffer from huge feelings of disappointment. Furthermore, in addition to the impact factor of academic performance on their SWB, some participants also mentioned other, related factors such as school policy (See Table 4.33).

#### **4.2.4 Sub-research question 2: What is the relationship between teacher support and SWB? (RQ2)**

The relationship between teacher support and students' SWB was one of the focuses of the current project. In the focus group interviews, the adolescents expressed opposing attitudes

towards seeking help from teachers. Some of the students confirmed a positive relationship between teacher support and trust, and some trusted teachers and liked to seek help from their teachers because the teachers were familiar with the school environment and were happy to provide constructive suggestions. As Joe and Reece expressed, “Because he/she is a teacher and an adult, compared with friends, he/she usually gives constructive or rational suggestions”.

However, not every student liked support from the teachers. Jake felt “there is a sense of oppression (when talking with the teacher)” (Jake, S.3). Bethany had a concern about the teachers having different attitudes towards different students, which she felt was unfair to the students with poor academic performance. Some students also indicated that ordinary emotional support did not help, and they expected a specific solution. As Callum and Kyle commented, teachers may only provide some one-sided advice, which is not necessarily useful (See Table 4.34).

Table 4.34 Reasons for seeking/not seeking help from teachers

Quotes	Interviewee
<p>“Talk to someone (teacher) who knows a bit because family members may not be very familiar with the school environment. Maybe you talk with them, and they don't know much about it. But the teachers work here.”</p>	(Joe, S.3)
<p>“Take the grades of exams, for example. I prefer talking with someone who is really a friend or can be trusted, and teachers are also one of them... I believe other students have similar problems in interpersonal relationships. I'll talk about it with the teacher who is a friend of mine...It's because he/she is a teacher and an adult; compared with friends, he/she usually gives constructive or rational suggestions.”</p>	(Reece, S.3)
<p>“Because I don't think teachers can help me at all. Sometimes, what they say is one-sided. Very ordinary comfort, which didn't work for me.”</p>	(Callum, S.2)
<p>“(When I have pressure) The teacher said, 'Yes, it's normal to be stressed. Proper pressure is good.' It seems to be very one-sided.”</p>	(Kyle, S.2)
<p>“The teachers have different attitudes towards different students. For example, they are good to us. However, they are going to change their attitude towards students who don't get good grades. It's really a big change, which is unfair.”</p>	(Bethany, S.3)

As we discussed in Chapter 2, social support comprises “social resources that persons perceive to be available or that are actually provided to them by nonprofessionals in the

context of both formal support groups and informal helping relationships” (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 4), and functional social support can be divided into the four categories of emotional support, informational support, appraisal support, and instrumental support (Malecki et al., 2000). In this project, emotional support was the type of support the adolescents received most frequently from their teachers, and the results of the focus group interviews aligned with those of the survey. Teachers provided emotional support in multiple ways, such as by encouraging academic performance, encouraging students to use their talents, and comforting students when they were meeting challenges. In addition, the students sought informational support from teachers. In one focus group, Lauren said, “I love the geography teacher, and I don’t want to disappoint him”. A teacher’s impressive teaching skills and personality may motivate students, and emotional support may decrease the adolescents’ negative affect.

The informational support the teachers provided in this study was primarily to aid the students in studying, such as by provided the students with ways to improve their academic performance. As Margaret commented, a subjective teacher “will give me advice which will make me improve”. Most of the adolescents felt happy with that support. However, some students felt “stunned” because it rarely happened.

Appraisal support and instrumental support were seldom mentioned by the participants. Still, some students stated that teachers’ appraisals made them feel happy, whereas instrumental support provided solutions for the students when they faced problems or challenges. As S.3 student Michelle indicated, “I’m actually used to telling them about what I’ve been struggling with recently ...They will help me to find the solutions” (see Table 4.35).

Table 4.35 Different kinds of teacher support received

Support	Quotes	Interviewee
<i>Teacher informational support</i>	<p>“One teacher helped me find another teacher and gave me some advice. Then, the teacher passed my examination paper to the second teacher. That teacher looked at my examination paper, gave me some advice based on my mistakes, and taught me how to improve...Actually, it's the teacher took the initiative to come to me and ask me how I was doing. After I answered him/her, he/she felt that there was room to improve, and then he/she took the initiative to help me and talk about it with another teacher...I was stunned because I think teachers rarely paid so much attention to me, and it never happened before.”</p> <p>“In fact, that teacher who gave me advice was actually my subject teacher last year. He/She will look at my examination papers, and he/she will pay attention to my performance in class or my homework. He/She will tell me which aspect I fall behind or where I can improve. He /she will give me advice which will make me improve.”</p> <p>“I also seek help from my math teacher. Because the math is starting to get harder...I don't know where to start. I feel challenged when I start a new lesson. I will do your homework right after school. Once I</p>	<p>(Sophie, S.2)</p> <p>(Margaret, S.2)</p> <p>(Emily, S.2)</p>



Support	Quotes	Interviewee
	find I have difficulty with homework, I will seek help from the teacher immediately.”	
	“I seek help from English or Chinese teachers. Also, I will seek help from Chinese and Western history teachers as I understand the importance of the subjects. ...I seek help from Chinese and Chinese and Western History teachers because I like the subjects so much, So I tried to find a way to improve my academic performance.”	(Liam, S.2)
<i>Teacher emotional support</i>	"I am familiar with the Physical Education teacher. We will chat from time to time. Sometimes, he asks me how I've been doing and tells me not to give up my talent."	(Olivia, S.2)
	“Teachers will talk with you whatever test results you get...for example, if I did a good job this time, the teacher will say “good job and keep on working hard next time”. If I don't do well on the test, the teacher will say "Review more and do more test papers”, mainly about encouragement...Because they are teachers, there is a sense of oppression.”	(James, S.3)
	“I talked with my teacher about the study pressure when I was in S.1, and they comforted me sincerely.”	(Samantha, S.2)
	“When you're going back home alone after a party with friends, you will feel very lonely during that	(Ethan, S.3)

Support	Quotes	Interviewee
	<p>time. Then I'll ask the teacher, 'How do you think you will solve this problem?'. In fact, he also has the same feeling. But he also says that he loves reading. So he will read books to numb his negative emotions.”</p>	
	<p>“Most of the teachers are asking me about studying. It's like giving me advice. However, one teacher pays attention to my advantages. Because he thinks I have a good capacity for understanding. Then, he would talk about some of my strengths. And I think it's quite impressive.”</p>	(Poppy, S.2)
	<p>“Regarding geography, I love the geography teacher, and I don't want to disappoint him. He has excellent teaching skills and is nice. If he knows we're not happy or we are worried about exams, he will come and unravel us. He will take the initiative to ease our emotions. Last year, there was no quiz. However, when he knew we needed the quiz to improve the scores, he immediately sought advice from us. He also provides us with different ways to improve our grades.”</p>	(Lauren, S.2)
	<p>“I will seek help from the two teachers. They are teachers who are friends of mine...(I will tell them) I think I did well in this exam. They will give me encouragement.... I'll also talk with them about my personal issues and emotions or just chat when I see them.”</p>	(Damian, S.2)



Support	Quotes	Interviewee
<i>Teacher instrumental support</i>	“I like teachers more than classmates...I'm actually used to telling them about what I've been struggling with recently. I take the initiative to talk to several teachers. ...They will help me to find the solutions.”	(Michelle, S.3)
<i>Teacher appraisal support</i>	“The happy moment may be the moment that it was praised by the teacher.”	(Ava, S.2)



#### **4.2.5 Sub-research question 3: What is the relationship between peer support and SWB? (RQ3)**

Relationships with friends were mentioned by many participants as one of the factors of their emotions. Some students preferred sharing with their peers over sharing with their teachers and families, for two primary reasons. First, for example, S.2 student Ava said she would be touched: “If there is someone who contradicts me, they [peers] are willing to step up and help me” (Ava, S.2). Second, they have common interests with friends. Just as S.3 student Ethan said, he enjoyed sharing interesting topics with friends. The main reason students have for sharing with friends is that friends have a clear understanding of the school circumstances and can empathise with fellow adolescents. Sharing brings adolescents happiness (See Table 4.36).

Table 4.36 Reasons for seeking help from peers

Quotes	Interviewee
<p>“I just want to share (with classmates), and there aren't that many people I can share with. When I went home, I didn't really want to share it with my family. There will be some bad consequences if I share it with my family. Also, it's impossible to ask the teacher why this subject is so difficult to learn at school.”</p>	(Emily, S.2)
<p>“Once unhappy things happen, I'll share it with my friend. .... We will also talk about philosophy, such as “What is life?” “Why do people need to die?” “What is death?”. On one hand, it seems that we are terrified of death. On the other hand, death cannot be avoided. It's going to be a little scary. So, I talk to him. We exchange ideas. That's happy for me.”</p>	(Ethan, S.3)

As was discussed in Chapter 2, and as was the case with teacher support, peer support can also be categorised into emotional support, appraisal support, informational support, and instrumental support. According to the participants' statements, they received all four types of peer support, and of the four, peer emotional support was mentioned the most often by the adolescents. That also aligned with the quantitative results. The emotional support from their peers provided the adolescents with good moods and positive affect. Some participants also took the initiative to provide emotional support to their own friends, and even though classmates may not have provided specific suggestions to the adolescents, the emotional support they gave also helped in promoting happiness. Peer informational support usually focused specifically on studying, with classmates sharing their study methods with their peers, which then could help improve their academic performance. Notably, compared with emotional and informational support, however, the other two kinds of support, peer

instrumental support and peer appraisal support, were seldom mentioned by the adolescents (See Table 4.37).



Table 4.37 Different kinds of peer support received

Peer support	Quotes	Interviewee
<i>Peer emotional support</i>	"If we are a real friend, I'll tell him. Because I think we're all students. He should understand how I'm feeling right now. My classmates mainly provide emotional support rather than specific instrumental support."	(Callum, S.2)
	"(I will) Try not to say anything to make her unhappy. For example, I will talk about what she likes or feels happy about. I will also think from her point of view and then comfort her."	(Margaret, S.2)
	"I will definitely talk to good friends about it (something unhappy). After chatting, although my friends won't give me any suggestions, it's just like tree-hole talk. Well, in fact, I will feel better after talking with friends."	(Bethany, S.3)
<i>Peer informational support</i>	"You're not good at some subject. It's stressful, and then you have to pass the exams. So, you're going to ask for help. For example, you will seek help from a friend of yours who is good at this subject or a teacher who is willing to help. They will tell him about your problems."	(Kyle, S.2)



Peer support	Quotes	Interviewee
<i>Peer instrumental support</i>	<p>“I usually keep my academic performance stable, but why does it go up? My solution is to learn from the people around you who have good academic performance. Learn how they study, how they attend class, and what they usually do to study. Also, I will ask them about the learning method when chatting.”</p>	(Tracy, S.1)
<i>Peer appraisal support</i>	<p>“They will state the questionable points in this matter and what can be or cannot be accepted...They are usually very rational. Help me to analyse and digest different things.”</p>	(Rhys, S.3)
<i>Peer appraisal support</i>	<p>“The math test is difficult this time, but I got a higher score... I share it with my classmates...(My classmate said) ‘You're amazing’ ...I'm happy about it.”</p>	(Jacob, S.2)



Even though the participants received multiple types of peer support, they also had some expectations from the peer support provided by their classmates, especially in terms of appraisal support and instrumental support. Again, those results aligned with the quantitative results. As Damian said, “I hope that my friends will praise me, like ‘Wow, you did a great job’” (Damian, S.2). For his part, George expected more specific instrumental support, as currently his friend “just gives a general description. Tell me to find a way to solve it. There is no specific method” (George, S.2). Ethan, an S.3 student, also agreed, as he expected more specific suggestions when he was stressed about his academic performance. In addition, some students mentioned that usually when they had trouble or experienced negative affect, they would resolve the problems by themselves. As with some of the S.3 students, Rhys said that he would digest (negative emotions) by himself. Some other students also agreed (See Table 4.38).

Table 4.38 Expectation of peer support

Quotes	Interviewee
<p>“Nine out of ten times, I got first place on the exam. So, if I got second place, my self-esteem would immediately decrease. I will think, am I not working hard enough? Or any other reason. Sometimes, I am also suspicious of my own capacity. (I got the first place) because of good luck? (And then how do we solve it?) If I find a friend, they are usually the ones who are comforted. But for me, I don't like to be comforted by people very much. I like to be given more suggestions.”</p>	(Ethan, S.3)

#### 4.2.6 Other findings

In addition to exploring the research questions, certain other findings regarding the adolescents' SWB emerged. The participants provided insights into the teaching of happiness in schools and described the profile of a happy person.

##### *4.2.6.1 Teaching of happiness in schools*

Success in relationships, marriage, lifespan, health, productivity at work, and money have all been linked to happiness (Chida & Steptoe, 2008; Harter et al., 2010). A well-crafted happiness curriculum can contribute positively to a child's holistic growth, because happy environments and possessing a high level of well-being are conducive to learning (Boniwell et al., 2016). Furthermore, there are many distinct ways to experience happiness, and education plays a significant role in highlighting some of the alternatives.

To a certain extent, happiness is clearly teachable. Although a person's happiness can be impacted by multiple internal and external factors, people can use a number of techniques and methods to develop and improve their level of happiness and promote their well-being. In order to explore the ways to improve adolescents' well-being, the participants were invited to share their ideas about the teaching of happiness. To begin, they were asked to indicate whether they thought happiness could be taught in schools, and why. In the interviews, the participants expressed differing opinions in response to that question; some students also suggested that happiness can be guided. As student Elizabeth said, happiness could be guided by helping adolescents pursue their dreams or goals. For his part, S.3 student Ethan remarked that even though a course cannot include everything that suits everyone's values, it could provide a direction for adolescents to follow in their pursuit of happiness (See Table 4.39).

Table 4.39 Possibility of teaching happiness

Quotes	Interviewee
<p>“I think it can be guided, but whether it is teachable or not is a very subjective question...Now we know that there are actually many people who do not have dreams or have the motivation to move forward. And then you can actually guide them on how to find your own happiness, goals or dreams. You can tell them how to find the way.”</p>	<p>(Elizabeth, S.3)</p>
<p>“I think it can be taught, but very difficult. First of all, as they said, everyone has different values. Some people feel that this is wrong, but others may think it's right. Of course, you can't teach everything in one course. If students have an interest in it, they may try to absorb as much as possible. If it matches his/her value, then it's teachable...So I think it can be taught.”</p>	<p>(Ethan, S.3)</p>

Even though happiness can be a significant educational goal and its importance has been well recognised (Noddings, 2003a, p. 74), most of the students thought that happiness would be complicated to teach, and they listed two reasons: (1) everyone has a different definition of what happiness is, and (2) happiness can only be learned through experience. Other participants thought it could be guided by teachers. For example, they felt that the way to find one's goals or chase one's dream could be taught. However, students are likely to have different understandings of the content that would be taught. One's experience and personality will affect one's definition of happiness. Moreover, teachers may not be able to fulfil everyone's needs, because of individual differences.

The diversity of the definitions of happiness was regarded as the most significant reason to

expect difficulties in teaching it. As S.2 student Sophie indicated, “There is no model for happiness”, and everyone has their own understanding, which may be related to their past experiences and their personality—thus making it difficult to teach happiness in traditional education settings. However, it has been recommended that happiness be taught via experiential learning, and that was the method for learning happiness suggested by some of the students. As Elizabeth and Bethany said, “You can only understand it after you experience it” (See Table 4.40).

Table 4.40 Teaching of happiness - Different definition

Quotes	Interviewee
<p>“Everyone has their own definition of happiness. I wouldn't say that happiness has to be like this or that. There is no model for happiness which tells you what happiness is. Look at your own heart. I feel that no one can define it. Because you have a clear understanding of your character. Maybe people do a tiny thing. You can be happy too. That's why I think happiness shouldn't be taught, as everyone's definition is different.”</p>	(Sophie, S.2)
<p>“I don't think it can be taught. I mean, everyone has different experiences and their thoughts are different. In fact, there is no standard answer. For example, I think that I will be happy only if I have a happy family. However, others think having lots of friends. Everyone's definition of happiness is different. There is no standard answer to the question ‘What is true happiness?’”</p>	(Reece, S.3)
<p>“Character is essential for happiness. That is, everyone's personality is different, and personality influences your definition of happiness. Each of you has a different personality and a different definition of happiness. So it is impossible for the teacher to teach you one by one. If he could teach the whole class, maybe he would teach based on the book, or he would teach based on the teacher's own personality.”</p>	(Rhys, S.3)
<p>“Maybe I defined my feelings of happiness. But others will not feel the same. Because there are lots of labels for happiness, and it is hard to talk about everyone's happiness. People actually have different standards.”</p>	(Mason, S.3)

Children learn most effectively when they and their surroundings are delightful.

Consequently, an evidence-based happiness curriculum can significantly contribute to students' overall growth and development (Boniwell et al., 2016; Boniwell, 2012). In Hong Kong, schools are categorised into public, subsidised, and private institutions, all of which must adhere to curriculum guidelines set forth by the Education Bureau (EDB) of the Hong Kong government. *The Basic Education Curriculum Guide: To Sustain, Deepen and Focus on Learning to Learn (Primary 1-6)* suggests that, in addition to fostering students' comprehensive development, schools should promote seven core values: perseverance, respect for others, responsibility, national identity, commitment, integrity, and caring about others (EDB, 2014). A curriculum reform guide emphasises the holistic development of students rather than solely their academic achievements, with the aim of enhancing the students' well-being, and integrating happiness teaching into the curriculum could further support this focus on well-being. Indeed, currently some schools already have a curriculum that promotes students' well-being. This study's participants stated that schools provide some courses promoting their well-being, but usually, the courses are about career planning or releasing the pressure they feel about studying. However, the participants also criticised the courses and activities for not being relevant to their current life, and for not having an interactive format, such as anti-smoking and anti-drug-use talks. Furthermore, sometimes such kinds of activities increased the students' stress on the country (See Table 4.41).

Table 4.41 Current curriculum in school

Quotes	Interviewee
<p>“Actually, there is some course, but the theme is not to find happiness. They just called it Career planning. The course helps us to find our interest .... helps us to know the job features of some position...something like that.”</p>	(Elizabeth, S.3)
<p>“The class teacher class will talk about decompression. Sometimes, they talk about their emotions and the ways to release pressure. We'll be asked to discuss this in a group. Write something and discuss it within the group. Make a presentation with the poster in class on how to release pressure. However, it creates pressure.”</p>	(Kyle, S.2)
<p>“The class is about the characteristics of occupations. Then make a booklet on which subject you will take...I don't think it's useful for the time being. Because I think I might have to look at my own academic performance and select the subjects I want. It's a little early to make a decision now. You might be able to talk about your dream right now. But in fact, when you go to senior secondary school, you will find out one realistic thing: whether you can do such a thing with your academic performance. The second and most realistic thing is whether this dream can fulfil your material needs.”</p>	(Callum, S.2)
<p>“It's better than those anti-drugs and anti-tobacco class... I think some of the topics are not related to me at all. ... He spoke, and I listened. There is no interaction, and I have nothing to do. And I quickly fall asleep when I listen. ”</p>	(Kyle, S.2)

#### *4.2.6.2 Profile of a happy person*

According to Michalos (2012), a happy person exhibits both social and individual traits and has low levels of negative emotions and psychological emotions, such as tension, anxiety, stress, anger, and guilt. Along with having an emotionally stable personality, a strong social orientation, and a lifestyle filled with healthy, loving relationships with others, such an individual will also exhibit relatively high levels of energy, positivity, and self-esteem (Michalos, 2017). The participants in the current project were asked to describe, in their opinion, “What is a happy person like?” Multiple factors were mentioned, such as harmonious family relationships, positive emotions, and having life goals and values. The participants further described their idea of a “happy person” in their own words. Ultimately, the standards of their happy person could be summarised in terms of family, basic needs, positive emotion, academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and life goals.

First, the participants mentioned that their basic living needs would need to be fulfilled.

Second, the senior students stated that happiness would require having a satisfactory academic performance to achieve their own goals. Moreover, the participants agreed that setting personal goals (including short-term and long-term life goals) is important for a happy person, as “you will work hard to achieve a goal” (Lily, S.3), which brings you satisfaction when achieving something. In addition, having positive emotions was mentioned by some students as one of their standards. One S.2 student, Emily, described a happy person as “confident and optimistic” with positive affect. As another S.2 student Samantha mentioned, if you have a satisfactory family relationship, “You’ll be optimistic about everything and have few negative emotions”. Furthermore, in addition to the importance of family relationships, “having some true friends” was underlined by the participants (Amilie, S.2); a happy friend can “experience everything with you” and help you to get through the inevitable

difficulties (Olivia, S.2). Senior students tended to mention the need for more autonomy than the juniors did, and one S.3 student mentioned that having the freedom to make life choices was also regarded as one of that individual's criteria. Table 4.42 lists the participants' criteria for a happy person.

Table 4.42 Criteria of a happy person

Criteria	Quotes	Interviewee
<i>Happy family</i>	“There are dad and mom in the family. They are good to you. The family is fulfilled with harmony.”	(Oliver, S.2)
	“I hope that a person who is full of happiness at home won't have a lot of conflicts. They will respect each other, and we don't just think about paying the house rent.”	(Amelia, S.2)
	“Have good parents. It's already a happy family. Good parents will talk to you with patience when you're doing something wrong rather than being angry.”	(Harry, S.2)
	“I think happiness is related to family relationships. If you get along with other people happily, then you will also be happy. You'll be optimistic about everything and have few negative emotions.”	(Samantha, S.2)
	“Being with family is happy.”	(Michelle, S.3)
<i>Basic needs fulfilled</i>	“Basic needs of life fulfilled. The family should not be too poor. But don't need to be too rich. Very normal family with a normal income.”	(Thomas, S.2)
<i>Have positive emotion</i>	“Laugh every day, be happy, have good relations with people, be confident and optimistic, and	(Emily, S.2)



Criteria	Quotes	Interviewee
	have everything. Overall, positive emotions.”	
	“He/she will have a few troubles. It's difficult to see him/her to be sad. He/she presents with a happy, positive, optimistic image.”	(Callum, S.2)
<i>Good academic performance</i>	“In terms of academic performance, I hope at least all the subjects are passed. Achieve my own goals.”	(Charlie, S.2)
	“No matter career or study. What you achieved makes you satisfied.”	(Joe, S.3)
	“Achieve the goal of academic performance. Then, have your own goals. Because I'm in S. 3.”	(Elizabeth, S.3)
<i>Freedom to make life choices</i>	“You go out to buy something. Go out at night with friends. When you do something risky, such as bungee jumping, you can make the decision and won't be influenced by others.”	(Ethan, S.3)
<i>Good interpersonal relationship</i>	“You have some true friends.”	(Amelia, S.2)
	“A good friend. It's okay to be unhappy, or to laugh at you, or whatever. He/she grows up and	(Olivia, S.2)



Criteria	Quotes	Interviewee
	experiences everything with you rather than framing you. ”	
	“You can tell him/her everything. And there are a lot of older friends. You can talk to them about any problems, and they can help you.”	(Sophie, S.2)
	“Even if you have troubles, people around you will understand. They won't blame you.”	(Mason, S.3)
<i>Have goals and dreams.</i>	“Goals are also critical... Life goal and study goal. I think you need to have a certain degree to get a job. For the goal of life, to make a happy life, the income should be high.”	(George, S.2)
	“Be demanding on yourself...Because some people will say that they have too much to do after being demanding of themselves. Because if there is no demand, there will be no motivation to do one thing. When you have a demand, you will work hard to achieve a goal.”	(Lily, S.3)
	“People have many thoughts, dreams, and ideals, but sometimes I think if you have already achieved your goal, you are satisfied. If you have surpassed your goals, you must be more happy.”	(Bethany, S.3)
	“Just a normal person. A normal person lives for the sake of living and studying for the sake of studying. He/she will have his own emotions, and it is also normal to have both negative or	(Kyle, S.2)



Criteria	Quotes	Interviewee
	positive emotions.”	



#### 4.2.7 Descriptions of the themes

Table 4.43 below provides an overview of the issues that emerged from the interviews and demonstrates the main factors associated with Hong Kong adolescents' SWB and their understanding of a person with high life satisfaction and level of happiness.

Table 4.43 Overview themes from the focus group interviews

Code	Theme	Example quote
Material needs	Impact factor of adolescents' SWB	"I'm very satisfied with the family situation, at least in terms of food, clothing, housing, and transportation."  (Charlie, S.2)
Age	Impact factor of adolescents' SWB	"Maybe when you grew up, what you worried about also increased. It's not like when I was a kid when the world was carefree. What I care about most is academic performance... However, when you grow up, you also need to worry about your job, etc."  (Ethan, S.3)
Religious belief	Impact factor of adolescents' SWB	"Actually, I really think (I need to) thank God. I go to church. So I'm relatively optimistic, and, in terms of the social aspect, I've gotten to know a lot of friends."  (Lauren, S.2)
Living environment/Neighbourhood	Impact factor of adolescents' SWB	"The living environment can also affect your mood; for example, in addition to your family, your neighbours also matter. When you come out, your neighbours say

Code	Theme	Example quote
influence		<p>“hello”, and it makes me feel a bit humane. But if you open the door, everyone is latching the door, and they don't care about anything, then you may feel a little bit lonely”.</p> <p>(Kyle, S.2)</p>
Physical health	Impact factor of adolescents' SWB	<p>“When it comes to exams, basically, I don't go to bed until two or three o'clock every night. It affects my physical health. It makes me unhappy.”</p> <p>(Ethan, S.3)</p>
School environment	Impact factor of adolescents' SWB	<p>“Because The school is under renovation, we don't have enough space to play basketball, so we can only play basketball with S.1 student.”</p> <p>(James, S.3)</p>
Academic performance	Impact factor of adolescents' SWB	<p>"The first factor (that affects my emotions) is study pressure, and my study pressure is relatively high. I'm naturally afraid of English. Because I am not good at English and I can't remember the words...this is study pressure."</p> <p>(Jacob, S.3)</p>



Code	Theme	Example quote
Life goal	Impact factor of adolescents' SWB	<p>"I have a friend who doesn't study that hard, but when she plays volleyball, she works hard. Because of volleyball, she changed a lot and even attended a volleyball club after school. I asked her why she loves volleyball so much. She said she wants to be a coach or professional player."</p> <p>(Michelle, S.3)</p>
Positive personality	Impact factor of adolescents' SWB	<p>"I consider myself to be a very cheerful and outgoing person. But sometimes, I'm very emotional and empathetic. It is easy for me to empathise and feel the emotions of the people around me, and the emotions of them can easily affect me. For example, if my friend is unhappy, I will also be unhappy. It's strange that my emotion is easily implicated and driven ups and downs by others."</p> <p>(Sophie, S.2)</p>
Family relationship	Impact factor of adolescents' SWB	<p>"I think I'm quite satisfied (with life) and happy. First of all, the family and the whole atmosphere of my home are really harmonious, and it's rare to quarrel with family members and have different opinions."</p>



Code	Theme	Example quote
		(Callum, S.2)
Teacher relationship	Impact factor of adolescents' SWB	<p>“There are teachers who are good for you. And then they will give more advice to you.”</p> <p>(Damian, S.2)</p>
Peer relationship	Impact factor of adolescents' SWB	<p>“I'll send a WeChat message. Because WeChat can only send 60 seconds of voice messages. She'll send three messages. I was delighted at that time when we were making audio calls.”</p> <p>(Poppy, S.2.)</p>
Peer support received	Peer support and SWB	<p>"If we are a real friend, I'll tell him. Because I think we're all students. He should understand how I'm feeling right now. My classmates mainly provide emotional support rather than specific instrumental support."</p> <p>(Callum, S.2)</p>
Teacher support received	Teacher support and SWB	<p>“In fact, that teacher who gave me advice was actually my subject teacher last year. He/she will look at my examination papers, and he/she will pay attention to my</p>



Code	Theme	Example quote
		<p>performance in class or my homework. He/she will tell me which aspects I don't do as well as before or where I can improve. He will give me advice which will make me do better.”</p> <p>(Margaret, S.2)</p>
Happiness can be guided	Teaching of well-being	<p>“I think it can be guided, but whether it is teachable or not is a very subjective question...Now we know that there are actually many people who do not have dreams or have the motivation to move forward. Then, you can actually guide them on how to find their own happiness, goals, or dreams. You can tell them how to find the way.”</p> <p>(Elizabeth, S.3)</p>
Different definitions of happiness	Teaching of well-being	<p>“I think this is impossible to teach, like Chinese or Western History, which could be learned directly. You can't do that. It's personal, and everyone has a different definition.”</p> <p>(Noah, S.2)</p>



Code	Theme	Example quote
Experiential learning	Teaching of well-being	<p>“It may be a happy family. Everyone, when you think of happiness, must remember those words. There are no models. Actually, how do you get happiness? Maybe you don't know how you can feel it. You can only understand it after you experience it.”</p> <p>(Bethany, S.3)</p>
Having both positive and negative affects	Profile of a happy people	<p>“Just a normal person. A normal person lives for the sake of living and studying for the sake of studying. He/she will have his own emotions, and it is also normal to have both negative or positive emotions.”</p> <p>(Kyle, S.2)</p>



#### **4.2.8 Conclusions of the qualitative study**

The themes generated from the interviews address the factors associated with the adolescents' SWB and how these factors (e.g., SES, interpersonal relationships, and personality) influenced the participants' happiness, positive affect and negative affect, and life satisfaction. In addition, the participants provided examples to illustrate how each kind of peer support or teacher support helped promote their SWB. The participants also elaborated upon their definition of a happy person and how they expected the future school curriculum could help. The narrative data derived from the interviews further strengthened those of the quantitative study.

#### **4.3 Conclusions of the entire project's results**

The study provides a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the impact of support systems on the well-being of adolescents, and proposes effective solutions to enhance SWB in Hong Kong. The results contain both the quantitative and qualitative findings. Regarding the factors associated with Hong Kong adolescents' SWB, quantitative analysis identified consistently important factors, such as age, gender, academic performance, and peer support and teacher support. Qualitative insights from the focus groups further uncovered other important aspects and factors, such as physical health and life goals. Participants emphasised that for them, solid interpersonal relationships and having goals were crucial factors for achieving happiness. Both peer support and teacher support were previously proven to have a considerable effect on SWB, with emotional and instrumental help being the most beneficial, and the qualitative study's participants stated that receiving emotional support from peers had a favourable impact on their emotions and positive affect. Similarly, receiving emotional support from teachers increased the adolescents' academic achievement and overall life satisfaction. The qualitative findings provided additional clarity, adding that the participants'

happiness was influenced by their character strengths, and that their character strengths served as a mediator for the positive impacts of both kinds of support.

While there may be differing views on the subject of teaching happiness, it is widely accepted that happiness is a subjective and individualised encounter. Comparing this project's quantitative and qualitative results, the results were found to be highly consistent between the quantitative and qualitative studies, and the qualitative study's findings complemented the quantitative ones. Data analyses included the utilisation of statistical techniques to examine the quantitative data in order to uncover patterns and relationships, as well as the application of coding and thematic analysis to extract significant insights from the qualitative data. The qualitative study complemented the quantitative findings by offering more profound insights and explaining the questionnaire's results. Finally, the overall results echoed the research questions. The mixed-methods approach brought numerous benefits, such as extensive data, validation by cross-method triangulation, flexibility, and profound discoveries.

First, the key quantitative findings were the identification of the factors associated with Hong Kong adolescents' SWB—their age, gender, academic performance, family income, marital status of their parents, living environment, physical health, the frequency of peer and/or teacher support received, and their happiness character strengths—which were consistent with previous studies. In addition to those findings from the quantitative analysis, some participants pointed out extra factors that they considered important, such as physical health and life goals.

The qualitative study provided a deeper understanding of the results from the questionnaire and helped to explain the results of the quantitative study. New insights into the research

questions were also provided. For example, having a life goal was mentioned by several participants in the focus groups as being a crucial factor influencing their SWB. Interestingly, there were also some discrepancies in the results. For example, the relationship between the marital status of their parents and the adolescents' SWB was not statistically significant. However, in the focus group interviews, one student mentioned that the poor relationship between her parents significantly influenced her emotions and she felt neglected as she was growing up. Table 4.44 lists the factors associated with SWB discovered in the quantitative and qualitative studies.

Table 4.44 List of the factors associated with adolescents' SWB

Impact factor	Quantitative result	Qualitative result
Gender	√	×
Age	√	√
Academic performance	√	√
Religious beliefs	×	√
Family income	×	√
Marital status of parents	√	×
Basic needs	×	√
Living environment	×	√
Physical health	×	√
School environment	×	√
Relationship with teacher	×	√
Relationship with classmate	×	√
Relationship with family	×	√
Life goal	×	√
Character Strength/Personality	√	√
Teacher social support	√	√
Peer social support	√	√

*Note:* √ indicates the item was supported as a impact factor, × indicates the item was not supported as an impact factor

Second, both peer support and teacher support positively influenced the adolescents' SWB, with the different types of peer support and teacher support having varied influences.

Nevertheless, it seems clear that emotional and instrumental support should be further

promoted in schools. Among the four kinds of peer support, peers provided the most emotional support in school life, while peer instrumental support was expected to be important in the future. Similarly, teachers provided emotional support and informational support with the highest frequency, and again, emotional support was the type that students held to be of the highest importance. With the exceptions of peer appraisal and informational support, the other types of peer and teacher support had a significant positive effect on the adolescents' life satisfaction and their positive affect, and a negative effect on their negative affect. The participants stated in the focus group interviews that the reason for those findings was that a teacher's emotional support can serve as a catalyst for improving academic performance, which improves the student's overall life satisfaction. Regarding peer support, the adolescents benefited from their peers' emotional support, which improved their moods and increased their positive emotions. In addition, some gender differences appeared in the findings. For instance, girls perceived more peer support, while boys felt more teacher support.

Third, this project's findings make it possible to understand the process of how peer support and teacher support exert an impact on adolescents' SWB, and of how to provide further solutions for promoting their SWB. Structural equation modelling analysis showed that both peer support and teacher support contributed positively to the adolescents' SWB, and that relationship was mediated by the students' happiness character strengths. In addition, in the qualitative study, the participants provided their insights into a profile of what constitutes a happy person. Multiple standards for happiness were raised, such as positive interpersonal relationships and having dreams or goals. Furthermore, suggestions for teaching happiness in schools in the future were discussed. Although the participants had opposing opinions on the question of whether happiness can be taught, most of the students agreed that because

individuals have various definitions of happiness, the phenomenon can only be experienced by the individual him/herself. The study also elucidates the processes of how peer support and teacher support affect Hong Kong adolescents' SWB, thus offering a delicate, nuanced understanding and suggesting strategies for promoting adolescents' well-being in Hong Kong.

In summary, employing a mixed methods research approach enabled a robust and comprehensive investigation of the research goals and led to a more comprehensive and nuanced knowledge of the research subject.



## 5 Discussion

This chapter is divided into five parts that discuss in detail both the quantitative and qualitative findings according to the research questions. The first section, major findings, reviews the results of the current project. The second section compares those results with the related existing literature and identifies the alignments and divergences between them. The third part illustrates the educational context of Hong Kong in terms of promoting adolescents' SWB. The fourth section discusses some interesting questions that were outside the research scope but which need further research. The fifth section provides suggestions for future educational programmes in Hong Kong that are designed to promote adolescents' SWB.

The discussion includes an overview of the literature on the topic. Then, the results from both quantitative and qualitative studies will be consolidated to explore the research questions. Based on the discussion, future research directions will also be suggested, and suggestions for school education will be proposed.

### 5.1 Major findings

Adolescence is a very critical period in life, with significant changes occurring in the hormonal, neurobiological, physical, psychological, and social aspects of an individual's life (Sawyer et al., 2018). In addition, individuals' SWB and emotional health during childhood are regarded as significant predictors of their adult life satisfaction (Coffey et al., 2015).

However, Hong Kong adolescents currently suffer from decreasing happiness in conjunction with their increasing age. In the World Happiness Report 2024, Hong Kong ranked 86th, which was a decrease in ranking from 82nd in 2023 (Helliwell et al., 2024). Why are adolescents unhappy? What kinds of support could we provide to promote their happiness?

To address these questions, the current project sought to understand the factors associated

with adolescents' SWB, whether peer support and teacher support help promote adolescents' SWB, and whether character education helps promote their SWB.

As a multidimensional scientific concept that is linked to happiness, subjective well-being (SWB) indicates one's satisfaction with life or pleasure (Diener et al., 2003) and is composed of two parts: life satisfaction (the cognitive component), and positive affect and negative affect (the affective component) (Diener, 2000). Positive affect and negative affect relate to experiencing both pleasant emotions and moods (positive affect) and unpleasant emotions and moods (negative affect), whilst satisfaction with life relates to an overall assessment of life as a whole (Diener, 2000). Youths with excellent mental health, good adaptability, prosocial behaviours, high levels of self-efficacy and self-reliance, and adequate positive social interactions are thought to have a high level of life satisfaction (Gilman 2001; Greenspoon & Saklofske 2001; Park, 2004). In the case of this project, exploring ways to promote adolescents' SWB was an attempt to undertake an urgent task in Hong Kong society. Social support was found to be a significant impact factor for adolescents' SWB, in the forms of peer support and also teacher support, and each of those can be divided into four more-specific types of support: emotional support, informational support, appraisal support, and instrumental support. The relationships of those types of support with the different components of SWB were also investigated. In addition, the role of the adolescents' character strengths in the relationships between social support and SWB was addressed in the study. There is a rich body of existing literature that has investigated the impacts of efforts to influence SWB all around the world. However, studies targeting Hong Kong adolescents' SWB have been limited.

This project's findings are based on a multi-stage cluster sampling of adolescents attending

four local secondary schools in different districts of Hong Kong. The participants were from 11.86 to 17.48 years of age. The data analysis and discussion were designed to highlight the study's research questions.

A mixed methods approach was employed in the current project. For the quantitative study, the Values in Action Youth Survey (VIA-Youth Survey), which is adapted for children and teenagers aged 10 to 17, was used to evaluate the participants' happiness character strengths (Park & Peterson, 2006). Peer support and teacher support were measured with 12 items from the peer social support subscale and the teacher social support subscale of the Child and Adolescent Social Support Scale (CASSS) (Malecki et al., 2000). To assess the cognitive and affective components of SWB, the International Positive and Negative Affect Schedule–Short Form (I-PANAS-SF) (Watson et al., 1988) and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener et al., 1985) were employed to assess the positive and negative affect and life satisfaction of the participants. For the qualitative study, semi-structured focus groups were employed. Self-developed interview questions were utilised as a guide for the interviews, and the participants were also allowed to share and explore the related issues. The major findings could be illustrated from the following aspects.

### **5.1.1 Profile of Hong Kong adolescents' SWB and the factors associated with their SWB**

Adolescents' subjective well-being shows a complex trend worldwide. In most countries, life satisfaction decreases gradually from childhood through adolescence and into adulthood (Orben et al., 2022). Furthermore, in the global population youths aged 15 to 24 show a higher level of life satisfaction than adults do. However, life satisfaction during adolescence has dropped since 2019 in Western countries, whilst that of East Asian adolescents has increased gradually (Helliwell et al., 2024). After the COVID-19 epidemic, a “positive

regional trend” of the level of happiness in adolescents was noted when comparing the figures from 2019 to those from 2022 in East Asia (Helliwell et al., 2024). In the latest World Happiness Report, however, Hong Kong was ranked in 97<sup>th</sup> place out of all 143 countries/regions, in the rankings of youth happiness, which reflected a decrease in overall life evaluation since 2006-2010 (Helliwell et al., 2024). The results for the subjective well-being of Hong Kong adolescents in the current project echoed the worldwide trend, to some degree—in the current project, even though most of the participants were satisfied with their current life in terms of fulfilled material needs, their overall SWB decreased with their increasing age. Specifically, junior students showed decreased life satisfaction, higher negative affect, and lower positive affect than the seniors. As stated by the participants, with the increase in age, they can face enhanced stress from different sources (e.g., academic performance, interpersonal relationships). Gender differences have also been found in previous studies—as revealed by Aymerich and colleagues (2021), girls reported lower life satisfaction than boys from the time they were approximately 12 years old, and the gap even expanded with increasing age. A gender difference was also noted in the current project—boys showed higher life satisfaction and lower negative affect than the same-age girls did. Those results align with the developmental needs of boys and girls, and therefore girls need more attention to detect their emotions or mental issues (Chaplin, & Aldao, 2013).

In previous studies, adolescents’ SWB was found to be influenced by multiple internal and external factors, such as genetic predisposition, personality, and religion (DeFries & Fulker, 1992; Dilmaghani, 2018; Telef & Furlong, 2017; Tellegen et al., 1988; Witter et al., 1985). In examining the SWB factors associated with Hong Kong adolescents, this project found some factors in common with the previous studies (e.g., gender, age, and personality), while other factors were unique to the Hong Kong adolescents (e.g., life goals, and neighbourhood). To

provide a more comprehensive understanding of adolescent well-being, the results could be combined with previous theories, such as Seligman's PERMA model of well-being or Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. Bronfenbrenner's (1977) Social-ecological Model offers a comprehensive framework for explaining the diverse factors that impact an individual's SWB, positing that human beings' behaviour is determined by a complex interaction of factors. Using that social-ecological model, Jacobs and colleagues (2020) found that the impact factors can be divided into intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, community, and policy levels, which respectively overlie the Individual, Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, and Macrosystem levels. In the case of this project, the factors associated with SWB retrieved can also be categorised into six levels, which are listed in Table 5.1. Factors associated with SWB on the individual level included the adolescents' skills, characteristics, and attitudes, such as their age, gender, physical health, and personality/character strengths. Specifically, age was significantly correlated with the participants' level of life satisfaction, which means that older students showed lower life satisfaction. Moreover, gender differences were noted in the current project, as described above—boys presented greater life satisfaction and lower levels of negative emotions than their counterpart girls did. The physical health of adolescents is also located at the individual level. Furthermore, it has been postulated that students with high academic performance will show higher levels of SWB, and in this project the students with high academic performance did indeed indicate higher positive affect and higher self-confidence among peers, which in turn brought them higher satisfaction with life. In response to another impact factor, an effort could also be made to help students set their goals. As the adolescents stated, having goals can help them find the direction and motivation for moving forward and can influence their behaviours, which in turn improves their life satisfaction.

The microsystem level included the adolescents' immediate environment, such as their friends, family, schools, and neighbourhoods. As the participants stated, most of the factors were related to the contexts of their family and school. To improve their SWB, therefore, it is suggested that efforts be made using two approaches. The current project focused on the school context and explored the influences of peer support and teacher support.

The mesosystem level refers to the interrelationships among different microsystems, such as the adolescents' connections between family and school or peer groups. Positive and caring connections to family can improve overall well-being, whereas problematic or neglectful relationships can have a negative impact. The participants also stated that beneficial friendships and social support from peers had a beneficial effect on their SWB, while bullying and exclusion had a negative impact on it (Varela et al., 2021). Positive connections and communication between teachers and students, such as teachers providing constructive, specific suggestions to students when they encounter difficulties, can further augment adolescents' well-being.

The exosystem refers to broader social systems that have an indirect impact on the well-being of adolescents (Daniels, & Moos, 1988). Socioeconomic status, which encompasses both social and economic aspects, is a multidimensional measure that is commonly used by researchers instead of poverty status (Alkire & Santos, 2013). Previous studies also have shown that the SES factor has an impact on the development of adolescents' SWB.

Adolescents who come from low-income families tend to have high rates of school dropout and poor academic performance (Leung & Shek, 2011). Factors at this level provide a more comprehensive understanding of an individual's overall well-being, despite the challenges of defining and measuring them. Moreover, the presence of community resources, such as

mental health services and extracurricular activities, might contribute to the enhancement of adolescents' well-being. An environment that is helpful and engaging in a school setting also enhances students' well-being, whereas a school environment that is stressful or hazardous might impede it (World Health Organization, 2003). In this project, the adolescents mentioned that schools need to have sufficient space in which students can relax or play sports with friends, because those activities can help relieve their daily life stresses and reduce negative emotions. In addition, the marital status of their parents can have an impact on the well-being of adolescents (Grossman & Rowat, 1995). Generally, students who live with married parents tend to have higher levels of SWB than do those who do not, because they tend to have more time and opportunities to communicate with their parents. However, in this project, factors such as religious beliefs and birthplace did not demonstrate a significant correlation with SWB. That finding was not aligned with the results of some Western studies.

The macrosystem encompasses the individual's broader cultural and societal framework, which includes norms, beliefs, laws, and regulations (Ryan, 2001), and at this level, the factors that impact the well-being of adolescents encompass cultural values and financial realities. For instance, an adolescent's self-perception and overall well-being can be influenced by societal attitudes about adolescence, mental health, and well-being. Moreover, one's socioeconomic standing can have an effect on one's ability to obtain resources and opportunities, which in turn can affect overall well-being. For example, ample research has shown that poverty also leads to poor psychological well-being, including low self-esteem and self-mastery (Shek, 2008; Rosenberg & Pearlin, 1978). That said, the expected relationship between family income and SWB was not found in the Hong Kong sample.

Again, the results of the current project can be explained by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, and the factors associated with SWB can be divided into five levels according to that theory. Bronfenbrenner's Social-ecological Model demonstrates that the SWB of adolescents is determined by a complex interaction of several elements, encompassing both the young people's immediate surroundings and their broader social circumstances. The model implies that the effort of promoting adolescents' SWB could therefore be made from multiple levels, meaning that in order to be effective, interventions targeting the enhancement of well-being should also take into account the many levels of influence (See Table 5.1).

Table 5.1 Categories of the factors influencing the Hong Kong adolescents' SWB

Level	Factor
<b>Individual</b>	Gender, Age, Physical health, Life goals, Personality/Character strengths, Religious beliefs, Academic performance
<b>Microsystem</b>	Relationships with classmates, with teachers, and with family, School environment, Living environment, Teacher support, Peer support
<b>Mesosystem</b>	Interaction between family and school
<b>Exosystem</b>	Marital status of parents, Community resources, Family income
<b>Macrosystem</b>	Culture issues
<b>Chronosystem</b>	Life goals

In addition, Barbara Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory posits that positive emotions have the unique ability to expand individuals' thought-action repertoires, thereby contributing to the development of enduring personal resources (Fredrickson, 2004). According to this theory, when people experience positive emotions, they are more likely to engage in a wider range of thoughts and actions, which in turn helps them build valuable personal assets over time. This is illustrated in the accompanying diagram, which indicates that happiness and character strengths—closely associated with positive emotions—have a significant impact on adolescents' SWB. In addition, the self-determination theory (SDT) emphasises the importance of autonomy, competence, and relationships in promoting well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and suggests that social support (e.g., teacher support) in an educational environment can boost students' intrinsic motivation and overall well-being by meeting these fundamental requirements (Deci & Ryan, 2012). The SDT also echoes this study's participants' statement that, with a supportive teacher, their motivation in learning will be improved gradually and will eventually increase their life satisfaction.

### **5.1.2 Peer support and teacher support and their significant impacts on adolescents'**

#### **SWB**

Among adolescents, both social support and loneliness have an impact on happiness, with social support typically exerting a more significant influence (Lee & Goldstein, 2016). Social interactions of various types contribute to happiness, because they result in enhanced social support and decreased feelings of loneliness (Helliwell et al., 2024), and research has shown that adolescents who receive adequate social support tend to experience higher levels of SWB (Clark, 2008; Wu & Lee, 2022). The World Happiness Report's survey of 143 nations also found a strong correlation between positive and negative emotions and happiness (Helliwell et al., 2024). Perceived social support is regarded as a substantial impact factor in both East Asia and Western European countries, on a global scale, while conversely, social support is lowest in South Asia, particularly in the intermediate age groups. Both peer support and teacher support are regarded as significant resources of SWB (Helliwell et al., 2024; Kumar et al., 2012). In the current project, participants perceived different types of peer support and teacher support in their daily lives. Overall, the relationships between peer support and teacher support and the adolescents' SWB were generally positive. Both peer support and teacher support included the four categories of support that the adolescents were likely to receive: emotional support, appraisal support, instrumental support, and informational support (Malecki & Demaray, 2003). Peer and teacher support can be provided in various ways, such as by offering companionship, showing empathy, giving encouragement, or providing understanding (Cooper, 2004; Cowie & Wallace, 2000). The results of the current project support the idea that peer and teacher support contribute to adolescents' SWB in several ways. In this project, both peers and teachers provided emotional support, and teachers offered informational support for the adolescents in most situations. The participants

also agreed that teacher emotional support was the most significant of the four kinds of teacher support, whereas less peer appraisal support and teacher instrumental support were received. There was a discrepancy with the indicated importance of the specific types of peer support, as the participants ranked instrumental support as the most important kind of peer support.

Further regarding peer support, it is essential to note that peers offer adolescents a feeling of inclusion and approval within their peer circles, and that is crucial for their social and emotional growth (Carter et al., 2015; Kiefer et al., 2015). Students derive pleasure from socialising with their classmates (Hastie & Pickwell, 1996), and having a network of supportive peers enhances their sense of value and connection, thereby providing relief from loneliness and alienation. Moreover, peer support has the potential to bolster adolescents' self-esteem and self-confidence, particularly when the support is in the forms of emotional and appraisal support. Receiving encouragement, positive feedback, and validation from peers increases a young person's likelihood of developing a positive self-image and experiencing high positive affect, which in turn can enhance that person's overall well-being. Furthermore, peer support can provide adolescents with both emotional and instrumental support in managing difficulties and stress. Having a supportive social network can aid individuals in managing challenges more efficiently, thereby diminishing negative feelings and improving their general state of well-being (Berkman & Glass, 2000). In addition, peer support can enhance the acquisition of crucial social competencies, including empathy, communication, and problem-solving proficiencies (Øzerk et al., 2021). In this project, the participants also expressed their willingness to offer emotional support to their friends in return. These abilities can enhance an individual's SWB by fostering more robust connections and promoting more favourable interactions with others. Nevertheless, it is

crucial to acknowledge that the characteristics of peer support might differ. Adolescents' well-being can be significantly harmed by negative or unsupportive peer connections (Joronen, 2005). Hence, it is imperative for adolescents to actively pursue and sustain positive and healthy relationships with their peers, in order to fully capitalise on the advantages of peer support for their overall emotional and mental well-being.

Similarly, teacher support also has a positive effect on adolescents' SWB (Suldo, 2009; Park, 2004). The results from both the quantitative and qualitative studies showed that teacher support could have a positive impact on the adolescents' SWB in several specific ways. Teacher emotional support, including a teacher showing understanding, empathy, and concern, can significantly improve the SWB of adolescents. Adolescents who experience a sense of being valued and encouraged by their teachers are more prone to possess enhanced self-regard and reduced levels of depression and anxiety (Eccles et al., 1999). Teacher informational support, particularly in terms of academic help and constructive suggestions, also can have a positive influence on adolescents. When students receive adequate assistance in their educational pursuits, such as help with study methods or guidance regarding mistakes in exams, they are more inclined to reach high academic achievements, which in turn leads to an enhancement in their SWB.

Furthermore, certain students experience a sense of isolation inside the school setting, due to the lack of autonomy they have in decision-making in school issues. In fact, adolescents need increasing autonomy in that stage of their life. In this regard, too, teacher support can enhance a student's feeling of inclusion in the educational setting. Being a member of the school community can result in heightened enjoyment, diminished feelings of loneliness, and a more robust sense of identity. Supportive teachers can also assist adolescents in cultivating

effective coping mechanisms for managing stress and overcoming problems. As the students mentioned in the focus groups, teachers may communicate with them about how to cope with negative affect, such as loneliness, and ways to improve academic performance, which the students highlighted. This comprised such activities as teachers' instructions for problem-solving abilities, reinforcement of resilience, and provision of mental health services. Indeed, the level of support provided by teachers has a direct correlation with the motivation and involvement of students. Adolescents who receive enough support are more likely to possess an inherent drive to study and engage in school activities, thus leading to an improvement in their overall sense of fulfilment and SWB. Moreover, in the long-term, teacher support can have enduring positive benefits that extend beyond adolescence. Nurturing teacher-student interactions during these vital developmental years can establish the foundation for future academic and personal achievements, thereby enhancing the individual's long-term welfare. The cultivation of a positive learning atmosphere and promotion of interpersonal engagement among students can facilitate the enhancement of adolescents' social aptitude. Quite simply, adolescent SWB dramatically depends on having positive peer and teacher relationships.

### **5.1.3 The role of happiness character strengths in the relationship between adolescents' SWB and support from teachers and peers**

The character strength characteristics associated with happiness also play a vital role in boosting the SWB of adolescents. Adolescents can experience heightened positive emotions by cultivating character strengths, and especially those of love, curiosity, gratitude, zest, and hope. These beneficial character strengths motivate individuals to value the positive aspects of their lives, overcome challenges with enthusiasm and confidence, and sustain an optimistic mindset for what lies ahead (Bachik et al., 2021; Peterson et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2021).

Adolescents who utilise their talents have a tendency to develop stronger relationships with their peers and family members (Chase-Lansdale, 1995). Robust, caring relationships play a crucial role in enhancing life contentment and overall welfare. Adolescents who possess character strengths such as curiosity, creativity, and a love of learning are more likely to fully immerse themselves in things that they are passionate about, and such a heightened level of involvement can result in enhanced satisfaction and a feeling of achievement. These strengths contribute to the development of pleasant emotions, increased life satisfaction, and the ability to bounce back from challenges. The present study demonstrates well that peer support and teacher support have a favourable impact on happiness character strengths, thereby significantly improving SWB. Therefore, happiness character strengths serve as mediators in the connections between peer support and SWB and between teacher support and SWB. This finding indicates that a portion of the influence that peer support and teacher support have on adolescents' SWB is conveyed through its effect on their happiness character strengths.

The results of this project can therefore provide us with another approach to increasing adolescents' SWB—promoting character education in schools. Adolescents' SWB can be significantly improved by educational programmes and treatments that specifically target the identification and development of specific character strengths (Bird & Markle, 2012). The participants indicated that their current activities and curricula may not have entirely fulfilled their developmental needs, and they affirmed the necessity of self-understanding and exploration activities. By being provided with these kinds of activities, they may be able to develop their character strengths further. By engaging in activities that foster these positive strengths, such as keeping gratitude diaries, participating in community service, and practising mindfulness, adolescents could further augment their overall sense of happiness

and contentment with life. Again, that input echoes the results of the project's quantitative results, which showed that an emphasis should be put on the five specific happiness character strengths.

## **5.2 Comparison with previous studies**

The results of the current project suggest that the educational effort could be made from various approaches. The present study's findings emphasise the significance of social support (e.g., peer support and teacher support) and happiness character strengths in increasing adolescents' SWB by adopting positive psychology and social support theories. The findings also emphasise the adolescents' need to receive support from social networks, including peers and teachers. Peer and teacher support, especially in the forms of emotional and instrumental support, are crucial for developing positive character strengths that contribute to adolescents' overall well-being.

The study also highlights the profile of Hong Kong adolescents' SWB and the factors associated with those adolescents' SWB, which overlaid different individual and system levels. This dynamic is consistent with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1995), which emphasises the impact of many individual and environmental factors, such as interpersonal relationships and social support, on the development of adolescents. At the same time, the cultivation of happiness character strengths, and especially those of love, zest, hope, curiosity, and gratitude, also serve as mediators to enhance overall well-being. The study therefore proposes that by implementing educational and social policies that prioritise these factors, a substantial improvement in overall development and well-being can be facilitated.

A considerable number of studies in the fields of psychology and education have concentrated on examining the relationships between teacher support and the SWB of adolescents, as well as peer support and their SWB. Some recent studies have explored the impact of social support on adolescents' and children's development (Bokhorst, 2010; Chu et al., 2010; Kerres et al., 2002;). It has been confirmed that social support, especially emotional support, is associated with positive outcomes in adolescents (Camara et al., 2017; Rueger et al., 2016). In the current project, a positive correlation between peer support, teacher support, and SWB was confirmed in a Hong Kong sample, in alignment with the existing studies. Research has also discovered a direct relationship between peer support and adolescents' SWB (Forrester et al., 2024; Tian et al., 2015; Wu & Lee, 2022). For example, Rueger and colleagues (2010) discovered that adolescents who indicated they received more significant levels of peer support also expressed higher levels of life satisfaction and positive affect. The results of the current project confirmed the positive relationship between social support and SWB, and the four kinds of peer support positively correlated with two of the three components of SWB, negative affect being the exception. Indeed, peer support has been found to frequently offer positive outcomes for the development of adolescents both emotionally and socially, because it can augment sentiments of inclusion, self-worth, and general well-being (Coleman et al., 2017; Hardy et al., 2019; Kef & Dekovic, 2004). Previous studies also have indicated that peer support enhances social integration and fosters a sense of belonging, both of which are essential for SWB. A study conducted by Jose and colleagues (2012) found that peer acceptability and close connections were strong indicators of life happiness among adolescents. Adolescents who perceive acceptance and appreciation from their peers have been shown to be more inclined to encounter happy emotions and achieve life happiness, and acceptance and appreciation are known to be highly important during adolescence in particular (Csibi & Csibi, 2011; Hayes & Ciarrochi, 2015). The participants of

the current project also showed that peer appraisal and peer emotional support played significant roles in promoting their SWB, which eventually enhanced their self-esteem and level of happiness. In fact, cultural issues may be an important reason for the strong emphasis on social support in adolescents. In a diverse society, cultural issues also play an essential role in the development of adolescents' well-being (Grob, 2020). The cultural norms in Hong Kong exert a significant impact on bonding, social interaction, and emotional expression, and consequently, these factors play a crucial role in shaping the character and effectiveness of peer support and teacher support in secondary schools. Hong Kong's culture greatly values collectivism, which means that teamwork, loyalty, and relationships are deeply important (Leung, 2014). This cultural emphasis leads naturally to heightened levels of social support for mutual help and effective teamwork.

Previous studies also have emphasised the substantial beneficial influence of teacher support on the SWB of adolescents. Longitudinal research, such as the study published in Piko (2023), suggests that constant teacher support is associated with long-term enhancements in life satisfaction and emotional well-being. A recent study conducted by Jiang and colleagues (2022) has demonstrated that positive teacher-student interactions significantly impact school engagement, and this, in turn, acts as a mediator between teacher support and overall well-being. Another study has validated that teacher support consistently indicates well-being across different cultures. However, the influence may differ depending on the cultural environment (Zhang et al., 2023). In addition to academic support, the participants in this Hong Kong project also valued teacher support, which provided solutions for relieving stress and dealing with negative emotions (e.g., loneliness). This highlights the multiple advantages of fostering supportive teacher-student interactions. Together, this suite of studies jointly emphasises the vital importance of teacher support in promoting adolescents' emotional and

academic well-being. Thus, that beneficial relationship has been confirmed and aligns with the current project. Moreover, some students tend to prioritise seeking assistance from teachers, believing that adult advice is more dependable.

As mentioned before, social support can be conveniently divided into the four categories of emotional, informational, appraisal, and instrumental support (Tardy, 1985). Commonly, positive emotional support is associated with positive behavioural outcomes (Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997), and peers and teachers are two significant resources of social-emotional support for adolescents in the school context. The source of social support has also been associated with the child's or adolescent's developmental outcomes (Demaray et al., 2002, 2005). Peer emotional support can include communication about peer expectations for compliant behaviour (e.g., abiding by rules) and prosocial behaviour (e.g., providing academic help), as well as receiving emotional caring from peers. Teacher emotional support also takes on various forms, such as teachers' genuine concern for and care for their students, respect for their students, willingness to recognise their students' feelings and viewpoints, and trustworthiness (Patrick et al., 2004; Pianta & Hamre, 2009). The specific influence from each kind of support was also explored in the study. Emotional support is known to be closely associated with psychological outcomes and is prominent when facing life challenges (Cohen & Wills, 1985; House & Kahn., 1985). For example, teacher emotional support has been proven to have a positive impact on both students' overall life happiness and their academic achievement (Leung et al., 2021). In addition, from the viewpoint of adolescents, emotional support from peers or teachers is regarded as the most significant of the four types of support. The advantages of emotional support include its flexibility and the low cost (Kelly et al., 2020; Zeytinoglu et al., 2019). For Hong Kong adolescents, this project's participants also shared the same idea, as they indicated that their motivation for learning improved when

they received enhanced emotional support from their teachers. Emotional support includes the demonstration of positive affect, empathy, and encouragement to express one's feelings (Lumley et al., 2011). Classmates may share their feelings with each other or accompany their friends when they are experiencing difficulties in life (e.g., interpersonal relationships). By giving that support, the recipient's negative affect will be diminished. Teachers may also encourage students in daily life, thus providing the students with a sense of understanding. Classrooms are crucial venues for promoting the social and emotional health of students (Gueldner et al., 2020). By creating an emotionally supportive classroom atmosphere, classrooms can contribute to the promotion of the students' social and emotional well-being (Schenke et al., 2018). In particular, another empirical study indicated that support provided to students on a daily basis by peers and teachers could significantly enhance their social capacities, such as their motivation and learning (Wentzel et al., 2010). Here too, this project's participants agreed with those findings, indicating that encouragement from their teachers enhanced their self-confidence and motivation to study. In addition, compared with social support from family members, which is stable, peer support is more flexible and may reflect the process of peer relationship development in adolescence (Newcomb, 1990). Interestingly, Ruzek and colleagues (2016) observed that teachers demonstrated more emotional support at the beginning of the school year, and in response, adolescents reported increases in their behavioral engagement and mastery motivation.

Mediating and moderating constructs, such as self-esteem, social skills, and familial environment, have the ability to either mediate or regulate the connection between peer support and well-being (Arslan, 2018; Mota & Matos, 2013; Poudel et al., 2020). For instance, having a solid sense of self-worth might expand the beneficial impacts of receiving social support on one's overall well-being. In a study conducted by Helsen and colleagues

(2000), it was discovered that self-esteem acted as a mediator in the connection between peer support and well-being. This implies that supportive relationships with peers might improve self-esteem, subsequently enhancing overall well-being. In the current project, happiness character strengths (i.e., hope, zest, gratitude, curiosity, and love) were proved to be another significant mediator between peer and teacher support and SWB. By cultivating these specific character strengths, therefore, the effects of any peer or teacher support received on SWB is enhanced at the same time. This dynamic provides a new insight for teachers and schools to guide them in promoting adolescents' overall SWB.

Although many of the results of this project are consistent with those of previous research, the differences are also noteworthy. For Hong Kong adolescents, there were also significant differences between the SWB of boys and that of girls. Girls showed higher negative affect, lower life satisfaction, and lower positive affect than boys did. In addition, comparing the means of the perceived support from teachers and peers, girls were more sensitive to support from peers (except for teacher informational support), while boys perceived receiving more teacher support. There were also some gender differences in the impact of social support on the adolescents' SWB. Girls have been found to be more likely to seek, provide, and receive social support than boys, and, in particular, peer emotional support has been shown to have a different influence on boys than it does on girls (Colarossi & Eccles, 2003; Helsen et al., 2000). In addition, Slavin and Rainer (1990) reported that peer support had predicted a reduction in negative affect exclusively among females. In contrast, in the Hong Kong sample, no gender differences were found, and peer support also predicted SWB in boys. Compared with the categories of support, the reasons for seeking help have been found to depend more on the characteristics of the person. Students have tended to seek help from their close friends or teachers.

Regarding the teaching of happiness, too, there is some uniqueness among Hong Kong adolescents. First, the question of whether happiness can be taught is controversial. In a study on Hong Kong pre-service and in-service teachers' opinions on this question, pre-service teachers were found to possess a positive and open perspective about their ability to teach happiness. In contrast, in-service teachers expressed concerns over practical difficulties, such as constraints in the curriculum, insufficient resources, and the burden of achieving academic requirements (Lee & Xie, 2019). The participants of current project had opposing views on whether happiness can be taught. However, even though some of them did not believe that happiness can be taught, they appreciated activities that promote self-understanding because students might be able to find goals based on individual characteristics and advantages. This is because adolescents are generally influenced by current educational ideas and practices that prioritise holistic education and the adolescents' comprehensive development. In addition, a variety of curricula exists for promoting adolescents' SWB in Hong Kong schools—such as life education, values education, and career planning (Chen et al., 2021). In order to enhance the level of their happiness, the participants raised the ideas of multiple approaches that would be based on their developmental needs. Experiential learning was regarded as one of the most efficient approaches, because they believed that happiness can only be experienced by each individual him/herself, and everyone has an individualised definition (Kolb, 2014). Therefore, schools and teachers may wish to provide more activities or classes for experiential learning. For example, because having a life goal was mentioned as one of the critical factors, assisting individuals in recognising and pursuing the goals that are in line with their beliefs and interests could give them a sense of purpose and satisfaction and result in increased happiness. From the positive education perspective, schools may wish to teach students to reframe negative thoughts and focus on positive aspects of situations, which

can help shift their mindset towards happiness (Alam, 2022; Boniwell, 2012).

Furthermore, practicing mindfulness and meditation can be employed in schools; students can learn to be present in the moment, and the development of mindfulness skills can help individuals reduce stress, increase self-awareness, and find greater contentment (Meiklejohn, 2012; Weare, 2013). Moreover, schools may choose to provide gratitude practices to cultivate students' expressions of gratitude in life and promote their overall well-being (Bono, 2022; Chan, 2010). Consistent practice of mindfulness meditation and gratitude journaling can enhance awareness and appreciation of the positive elements in life. It is crucial to acknowledge that although teacher support and peer support can have a substantial positive influence, the factors mentioned in the current project are merely a part of the much larger elements that contribute to adolescents' SWB. Family support, peer relationships, individual attributes, and social and environmental factors are all significant contributors.

To summarise, ample data indicate a strong positive correlation between peer support and adolescents' SWB. The dynamics of this relationship are shaped by multiple elements, such as the nature of the support provided, and the adolescent's gender, cultural environment, and individual attributes such as self-esteem. Peer support not only improves immediate well-being but also boosts long-term mental health and life happiness.

## 6 Implications

This chapter primarily illustrates the theoretical and practical implications of the study's findings and the policy recommendations for future education.

### 6.1 Theoretical implications

Based on the theoretical model derived from this project's results, the theoretical implications focus on the influence that different forms of social support, such as support from peers and teachers, and the cultivation of happiness character strengths, exert on adolescents' SWB (see Figure 4.16). These implications are based on theories derived from positive psychology and the social support theory, and they provide valuable insights into practical ways to enhance young people's SWB. Specifically, the theoretical implication could be illustrated from several aspects. Firstly, research on this area may advance our theoretical knowledge of how peer and teacher support affect adolescents' SWB. It could look at the ways in which different types of support improve wellbeing and how they work together. The notion of social support suggests that the support provided by social networks, such as peers and teachers, is crucial for the overall well-being of individuals. The study investigates how the relationship between social support and well-being is mediated by happiness-related character strengths (such as zest, hope, and gratitude). Integrating character strengths into the framework of adolescent development could improve positive psychology theoretical models. Peer support in the form of emotional, informational, appraisal, and instrumental support appears to play a vital role in the cultivation of adolescents' happiness character strengths. These strengths, in turn, lead to the enhancement of the SWB. Likewise, the provision of emotional, appraisal, informational, and instrumental support by teachers also has beneficial effects on adolescents' development of happiness character strengths, but to a slightly lesser degree compared with the influence of peer support. The findings imply that solid support systems in social environments can

cultivate the growth of character strengths that are crucial for high SWB, and these findings indicate that interventions focused on bolstering social support networks (e.g., peer support and teacher support) can effectively improve overall student well-being. Also, the findings could be integrated with existing theories: To provide a more comprehensive understanding of adolescent well-being, the results could be combined with previous theories, such as Seligman's PERMA model of well-being or Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. For example, the findings echo Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which highlights the impacts of many environmental layers on an individual, with teacher and peer support playing vital roles in the exosystem that directly influences adolescents' well-being and development (Ryan, 2001). In addition to the social support theory, the project's results have an impact on developmental psychology theories—teacher and peer support are also crucial in multiple psychological approaches. Moreover, the study contributes to developmental psychology by examining how the relationships between support, character strengths, and well-being evolve during adolescence, a critical period for identity formation and social development. Positive psychology is regarded as a constructive intervention that improves some components of well-being, such as positive emotions and building social relationships (Benoit & Gabola, 2021; Meyers, 2013). Developmental psychology posits that during adolescence, the establishment of supportive teacher-student connections plays a pivotal role in shaping psychological and emotional development (Engels et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2013). That thinking, and the findings of this project, therefore have important implications for teacher preparation and educational policies. Moreover, positive psychology states that developing positive traits and strengths enhances overall well-being (Ghielen et al., 2018; Quinlan et al., 2012), and the framework derived from the current project emphasises the distinct character strengths that contribute to happiness— particularly those of love, zest, hope, curiosity, and gratitude—and their significant influence on adolescents' SWB. In this

case, the project may provide theoretical insights into educational psychology, including how schools might use character development programs and support networks to build environments that promote well-being. Interventions and programmes that focus on cultivating these character strengths have the potential to greatly enhance SWB.

The broader implication of this theory is that by actively cultivating positive emotions and character strengths, individuals can develop more expansive cognitive and behavioural strategies. This not only enhances their immediate sense of well-being but also contributes to their long-term personal growth and resilience. In essence, fostering positive emotions can lead to a virtuous cycle of growth, where increased well-being promotes the development of resources that further enhance happiness and resilience. This theory underscores the profound long-term benefits of nurturing positive emotions for overall personal development. This approach is consistent with the ideas of positive psychology, which promotes the proactive cultivation of positive characteristics and strengths rather than a sole focus on deficiencies or difficulties. The results of the current project identify social support as a key element of relatedness and the development of character strengths, which are related to competence and are crucial for enhancing SWB. In this regard, therefore, promoting autonomy, competence, and relatedness through peer and teacher interactions can greatly improve well-being. To promote comprehensive development and well-being, therefore, educational and social policies should prioritise these characteristics. Last but not least, the study's focus on Hong Kong adolescents may shed light on how cultural background influences the connection between well-being, character strengths, and social support. This could aid in improving existing knowledge to take cultural differences in the significance and influence of these aspects into consideration.

In summary, the results of the study can be explained by well-being theories, such as the Ecological Systems Theory and the Self-Determination Theory (SDT). The theoretical implications from the findings of the current project highlight the significance of social support and the cultivation of happiness character strengths in improving adolescents' SWB. By utilising these observations, interventions and policies can be designed to establish conducive surroundings and cultivate favourable character traits, thus ultimately enhancing young people's well-being and life fulfilment.

## **6.2 Practical implications**

In order to enhance subjective well-being, a comprehensive strategy that takes into account several theoretical perspectives must be adopted. Adolescents can work towards a more meaningful and satisfying life by including strategies that improve positive affect, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievements. Building from this project's results, the promotion of adolescents' well-being could be achieved using multidimensional approaches. The practical implications can be illustrated from the perspectives of different stakeholders.

First, to promote peer support, peer support programmes could be established in schools. Implementing peer support programmes would provide students with support and direction from classmates or senior students who have received proper training, and that would benefit the improvement of their SWB. The highly competitive atmosphere in schools, marked by demanding academic standards, can place a strain on peer relationships, as students may prioritise their individual success over the overall well-being of the group, thus impeding the development of robust peer support networks. Mentorship is an evidence based approach in implementing character education. Since adolescents frequently learn behaviour and values

from their teachers, it is necessary to encourage them to set a good example. In this case, creating mentorship programs where senior students or alumni can advise freshmen, encouraging character growth via positive relationships. Nevertheless, the shared encounters with academic pressure can also cultivate a sense of unity among students that could result in reciprocal assistance and comprehension. Senior students in numerous schools could assume the responsibility of mentoring younger students, hence fostering peer support. This arrangement would allow adolescents to feel at ease while seeking guidance from their older counterparts. However, from the interviews, it was learnt that such a type of mentoring is lacking, and the peer relationships are usually within each class. In fact, in addition to promoting mental health, earlier research has demonstrated that social support, especially from peers, is particularly critical for college students' academic adjustment (Dennis et al., 2005; Hurtado et al., 1996). Students tend to share their thoughts with their peers, and the emotional support and instrumental support they receive from their peers help them navigate life's challenges. The social support activities could also cultivate a nurturing community and diminish the social disapproval associated with seeking assistance. Furthermore, from an academic perspective, academic performance has a considerable effect on adolescents' SWB, especially on senior students.

At the same time, the significance of teacher support was also underlined in the current project. In order to provide additional academic assistance to students, it will be necessary to create personalised learning plans for those who require it. These plans should include various resources, such as tutoring, peer study groups, and academic counselling. Schools should implement initiatives to cultivate supportive environments as part of their educational interventions. An essential strategy would involve providing teacher training to enable educators to identify indicators of stress, anxiety, and other factors that could impact

children's and adolescents' overall welfare. In addition, promoting involvement in extracurricular activities, such as athletics, fine arts, organisations, and associations, could offer adolescents the opportunity to cultivate cooperation, leadership, and other vital life skills. These activities tend to have a substantial impact on character education and contribute significantly to the holistic growth of students.

Third, schools could work to provide comprehensive psychological support. The PERMA Model which is developed by Martin Seligman addresses five key elements of well-being: Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment (Seligman, 2018). Interventions derived from the theory also highlights improving overall well-being should by concentrating on enhancing each of the five key elements. This holistic approach ensures a comprehensive boost in an individual's mental and emotional health (Peterson, 2006). For instance, engaging in therapy sessions or participating in coaching programs can be highly beneficial. Through these methods, individuals can gain the tools and insights needed to identify and nurture positive emotions, which are crucial for a happier life. Additionally, therapy and coaching can assist in building and maintaining meaningful relationships, providing a strong support system that is essential for emotional stability. Furthermore, these interventions can help individuals set and pursue personal goals, giving them a sense of purpose and direction. By addressing all these aspects, interventions can lead to a significant improvement in an individual's overall well-being. In addition, The Hong Kong government has increased funding and resources for student mental health support, hiring more school social workers, counsellors, and educational psychologists to provide timely and professional assistance to students in need (Chun et al., 2022; Lai et al., 2022). Establishing or enhancing school counselling services with trained professionals is essential for addressing mental health issues. Schools should offer guidance and counselling services

that support students' emotional and psychological well-being, helping them to navigate personal challenges and encouraging positive behaviour and attitudes. Moreover, integrating mental health education into the curricula teaches students about stress management, emotional regulation, and overall mental well-being. Providing resources and workshops for both students and teachers would be crucial, and access to these mental health resources would help students manage their stress, anxiety, and other emotional challenges, thus promoting better mental health and overall well-being within the school environment. In addition, character education is frequently integrated with the academic curriculum, such as Chinese, religion, and liberal studies in current schools. Since 2021, the EDB has encouraged the promotion of values education and carried out the Value Education Curriculum Framework (Pilot version, 2021) (EDB, 2022). Schools have a unique ability to actively encourage and instil moral principles and beliefs. School education aims to cultivate students' 12 priority values and attitudes: "Perseverance", "Respect for Others", "Responsibility", "National Identity", "Commitment", "Integrity", "Benevolence" (optimised in December 2023), "Law-abidingness", "Empathy", "Diligence" (newly added in November 2021), "Unity", and "Filial Piety" (newly added in December 2023). Of the five happiness character strengths, hope, curiosity, and gratitude should be further promoted in schools' curricula.

From the perspective of curriculum and pedagogy, to assist students in developing their self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relational skills, and responsible decision-making abilities, incorporate social-emotional learning (SEL) into the curriculum. This would entail establishing explicit standards for conduct, acknowledging commendable behaviours, and offering exemplars, in an effort to cultivate a nurturing and unified educational environment. In order to give context and significance, include character education topics into current subjects like literature, history, and social studies. Schools are suggested to

develop specialised character education classes or programs that emphasise core values like zest, love, and hope. Encourage students to think critically about moral decisions and ethical dilemmas by facilitating frequent dialogues and introspective exercises. Teachers may utilise current affairs, movies, and tales as conversation starters to examine morals and personal characteristics in an accessible setting. Schools can create support groups and activities that foster character development, like debate clubs, ethical bowls, and volunteer groups. Additionally, schools may promote students' involvement in the arts and athletics, which can provide discipline, perseverance, and teamwork.

Fourth, a safe school environment is also crucial. To engage students more fully and decrease the stress that comes with traditional rote learning methods, promote experiential and project-based learning. As the significance is also mentioned by adolescents, it is also suggested that school may create areas in the school, like quiet zones or relaxation rooms, where students can relax and decompress. From a perspective that focuses on the school environment, it will be of utmost importance to establish secure and pleasant areas within educational institutions, where students can relax and contemplate. Resolving issues such as obsolete equipment and current construction barriers could significantly enhance students' overall experience at school. Furthermore, resolving those issues would be crucial for engaging students in the decision-making processes pertaining to school policies and programmes, as those issue resolutions would grant the students an important feeling of autonomy and ownership. Schools may give students a forum to voice their worries and recommendations about their academic experience and general well-being. Autonomy was requested by the junior secondary school students in the current project, especially in regard to school decision-making. Ultimately, then, it is crucial that we establish a comprehensive character education programme in schools, involving all staff members, including teachers, administrators, and

support personnel in a collaboration that fosters a positive school atmosphere.

Additionally, multiple projects and activities are provided by schools, the evaluation of the projects and activities need to be addressed to review the effectiveness and make adjustment by involving the professional research team. It emphasises continuous evaluation and feedback by develop evaluation instruments to gauge character development and inform students of their strengths and weaknesses. Students can take charge of their own character development when they are encouraged to assess themselves and set goals. Provide educators continual chances for professional development focussing on the mental health and well-being of their students.

### **6.3 Policy recommendations**

This project's findings suggest policy modifications at the educational or community level to augment peer and teacher support and increase the well-being of adolescents. A comprehensive strategy that takes into account all facets of adolescents social, emotional, and intellectual lives is needed to improve their well-being in Hong Kong educational environments. The following are specific recommendations for educational decision-makers . The objective of the healthy school policy would be to enhance the physical and mental well-being of students by advocating the implementation of programmes and activities in schools that support healthy lifestyles, including physical education, nutritious eating, and campaigns to raise awareness about mental health. Advocating for physical health and well-being would enhance students' overall satisfaction and mitigate the likelihood of health-related problems that can detrimentally affect their academic experience. In addition, cultivating a healthy school culture through the promotion of life and character education, including qualities such as enthusiasm and benevolence, could greatly improve the overall school atmosphere. It is crucial to promote cultural sensitivity and tolerance by organising activities that encourage

understanding and respect among students from all origins. Moreover, the implementation of policies that augment peer and teacher support networks, such as peer mentorship programmes and teacher-student advising systems, could significantly advantage children. Engaging students in decision-making processes concerning school policies and programmes would grant them a sense of autonomy and would guarantee that their needs and preferences are taken into account. Since teachers' well-being has a direct impact on their capacity to support kids, it is important to foster a supportive work environment for them. To promote technology and digital well-being among adolescents in Hong Kong schools, it is crucial to educate students on responsible digital citizenship and the importance of balancing screen time with offline activities. Implementing programs that address cyberbullying and promote online safety is also essential. By adopting a holistic and collaborative approach, educational decision-makers and practitioners can create a supportive environment that enhances students' overall well-being. Additionally, integrating character education is vital for developing well-rounded individuals who are not only academically proficient but also ethical, responsible, and empathetic members of society. By implementing these policy ideas, schools and communities can establish a more nurturing and all-encompassing atmosphere that improves the overall well-being of adolescents.

#### **6.4 Community involvement**

Using the current project's findings, efforts to enhance adolescents' SWB could be executed from several different avenues. In addition to schools, other stakeholders of adolescents' SWB exist, such as families and communities. In this project, the students stated that their relationship with their parents was an important factor impacting their SWB, and ideally, parental relationships will increase their adolescent children's positive affect, and sufficient home resources will also provide them with life satisfaction. In order to underscore the

importance of parental and community involvement in fostering healthy relationships, it is essential to offer concrete guidance to parents regarding how to promote positive peer and teacher connections. In addition, students who don't live with their parents show higher negative affect than their counterparts do who live with a parent. Communities need to be aware of new immigrant children's or cross-border students' psychological health. In fact, the Hong Kong Education Bureau emphasises the significance of parental education and involvement in enhancing students' well-being by providing programmes and workshops aimed at assisting parents in fostering their children's emotional and intellectual growth (EDB, 2024). Parents who are actively involved and well-informed can provide more effective support for their children's well-being at home through such efforts as establishing a more comprehensive support system for adolescents (Jack, 2006; McAuley, 2011). To that end, schools could involve parents and the community in frequent character education programmes by organising workshops, seminars, and collaborative projects, thus helping establish a multi-layered supportive network for adolescents' character development. In addition, due to the widespread use of digital communication, students may find it more convenient to seek and provide peer support through online platforms and social media, thus creating a more comfortable environment for expressing their emotions and for playing online games as a way to make friends. In such scenarios, however, it is important to note that the lack of personal identification on digital platforms can also result in cyberbullying, which weakens the efficacy of peer assistance and presents supplementary obstacles. Adolescents are highly sensitive to the opinions of other internet users, and they often lack internet literacy and sophistication. To promote the young people's well-being, therefore, schools and communities should acknowledge and address both the positive and negative affect that can result from technological influence. That awareness, and appropriate safeguards, will help create an environment that fosters healthy peer and teacher interactions.

In addition to teachers and schools, the other stakeholders (e.g., family and community) also played a important role. To enhance student education and well-being, it's important to improve communication between schools and families, ensuring parents are actively involved in their children's learning and development. Collaborating with community organizations can provide valuable resources and programs that support students outside of school. Additionally, engaging parents in character education through resources and workshops can help them reinforce these values at home. Establishing partnerships with community leaders and organizations can offer students diverse perspectives and role models, further enriching their educational experience. Include service-learning projects that link community engagement with education in school, giving students the chance to develop their social responsibility and empathy. Collaborate with neighbourhood groups to provide students with chances to perform community service and learn about their responsibilities as engaged citizens.

## 7 Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter is to cover three final topics. The first part offers a thorough review of the findings. The second part illustrates the limitations of the current project and the recommendations for future research. The third part summarises the overall conclusions that can be drawn from the findings of the thesis.

### 7.1 Principal findings of the study

The findings of this project include the current situation of Hong Kong adolescents' SWB, the factors associated with adolescents' SWB, the relationships between the different kinds of peer support and teacher support and adolescents' SWB, and the role of happiness character strengths in the relationships between both peer support and adolescents' SWB and teacher support and adolescents' SWB.

First, the findings provide a profile of Hong Kong adolescents' SWB. The overall SWB of the Hong Kong adolescents in this study decreased with their increasing age. Gender differences exist in Hong Kong society, as the boys showed significantly higher life satisfaction and higher positive affect than girls of the same age did. In terms of the factors associated with Hong Kong adolescents' SWB, living with married parents enhanced the adolescents' SWB. In addition, adolescents with better academic performance and higher satisfaction with their own academic performance showed higher life satisfaction and lower negative affect than their counterparts did. Character strengths also played a significant role in the promotion of the adolescents' SWB. Those with better happiness character strengths (i.e., love, zest, hope, curiosity, and gratitude) showed a higher overall SWB, higher life satisfaction, higher positive affect, and lower negative affect. In terms of the relationships between different kinds of peer support and teacher support and the adolescents' SWB, overall peer support and

teacher support were significantly associated with all three components of the participants' SWB. Precisely, all four kinds of peer support predicted the adolescents' life satisfaction and positive affect, whereas emotional and instrumental support predicted their negative affect. Similarly, the four kinds of teacher support predicted the three components of SWB. In addition, happiness character strengths acted as a mediator in the relationships between peer support/teacher support and adolescents' SWB.

In the qualitative study, the students further confirmed the results of the quantitative study and raised their suggestions for future character educational programmes that would seek to promote SWB. For example, experiential learning was suggested, and emotion management was expected in future curricula. All in all, the results of the current project provided many new insights into promoting Hong Kong adolescents' SWB, on the basis of their developmental needs. The results can contribute to the development of mental health initiatives in educational environments by emphasising the significance of teacher-student connections. Schools can adopt initiatives to equip instructors with the skills to offer enhanced emotional and social assistance to youngsters. The study's results can provide guidance for educational policies and programmes that focus on enhancing teacher-student relationships, and the findings indicate that prioritising teacher support in educational environments is a crucial element for promoting students' well-being.

The research presented in this thesis highlights the essential influence of peer and teacher support on the subjective well-being of adolescents in Hong Kong. The data clearly show that positive relationships and interactions with peers and educators play a pivotal role in enhancing the emotional and psychological health of young people. In the context of Hong Kong's competitive and high-stress environment, having a strong support network within

schools can mitigate stress and anxiety, promoting resilience and a sense of belonging among students. These findings emphasize the importance for educational institutions to focus on creating nurturing environments where students feel supported and valued. By adopting policies and practices that strengthen peer connections and foster empathetic, approachable relationships between teachers and students, schools can greatly improve students' overall well-being. This, in turn, can lead to better academic outcomes, improved mental health, and a more positive school atmosphere. Thus, investing in initiatives that enhance peer and teacher support is not only advantageous but crucial for the comprehensive development of adolescents in Hong Kong. Future research should continue to explore these relationships, providing deeper insights and practical recommendations to further support the well-being of young people in educational contexts.

## **7.2 Limitations of the study**

The current research contains limitations. First, the generalisability of the results of the current project may have been limited because of the sample size (Boddy, 2016). With the study's limited resources, the participants came from certain regions only, and schools and participants located in different regions could have different characteristics, thus affecting the generalisability of the results. In other words, the extent to which the findings can be generalised to other populations or settings may be compromised. Second, the data were collected via self-reported questionnaires, which could have caused response bias.

Participants may have provided invalid answers or may have responded in a socially conventional way (Choi & Pak, 2005; Demetriou et al., 2015), thus affecting the impartiality of the study. Third, the current project investigated the relationships between the variables. However, no causal relationships can be interpreted due to the limited resources.

Because of the limitations of the current project, recommendations for future research are offered. First, regarding the generalisability of the results, future research on adolescent well-being in Hong Kong should prioritise expanding the study to a larger population, taking into account socioeconomic, ethnic, and educational differences. In addition, performing cross-cultural comparisons with other locations would improve the generalizability of the findings. Second, because only data from adolescents were collected, a bias was created. The perspectives from other stakeholders, such as parents and teachers, were not obtained and should be considered for future research. Third, it is imperative to utilise experimental studies—specifically, randomised controlled trials (RCT) (Siddiqui et al., 2018)—to assess the efficacy of curricula and training for cultivating peer and teacher support. These studies should focus on curriculum creation, the quality of relationships, and interventions at several levels. Fourth, longitudinal studies are crucial for monitoring the long-term effects of social support—analysing changes in development, maintaining well-being, and identifying critical moments for intervention (Hill et al., 2016; Hogan et al., 2002). By using these research methodologies, future studies can offer a more thorough understanding, guarantee cultural awareness, and enhance therapies, thereby further promoting the well-being of adolescents.

#### **7.4 Closing remarks**

Hong Kong is a metropolis in which an extensive amount of information and number of viewpoints spread swiftly through many media and information platforms. Promoting adolescents' SWB is a crucial foundation for them to have a proper perspective on life. “Happy School” initiatives have been implemented to foster a more positive and relaxed educational atmosphere (Chin & Wong, 2024), typically offering activities, workshops, and events to foster strong relationships, manage stress, and maintain a balanced lifestyle. The Happy School programme contributes to the establishment of a favourable school

environment in which students experience increased happiness and engagement.

Furthermore, these attempts are in alignment with the findings drawn from the present study.

Facilitating a nurturing educational environment can enhance the augmentation of SWB among students. The Hong Kong Education Bureau could work to further promote a positive and supportive school environment. Evaluations of the initiatives should also be emphasised to match the developmental needs of the students, because different schools implement different activities and programmes, and some students are not satisfied with their content—indeed, students in this project stated that some of the current programmes did not fit their learning needs. Notably, in the current project, the significance of cultivating character strengths and promoting a supportive environment was confirmed. That said, students with different levels of character strengths have various developmental needs. Social-emotional support is one significant component of social support and has been defined as "the extent to which personal relationships are perceived as close, confiding, and satisfying" (Slavin & Rainer 1990, p. 409). Peer emotional support and peer informational support have favourable impacts on the positive affect of adolescents who have low character strength.

Simultaneously, peer emotional support also helps in reducing the negative outcomes experienced by adolescents with a high level of character strength. Furthermore, teacher support plays a crucial role for students with high character strength, and it specifically helps in fostering positive outcomes for adolescents who have poor character strength. In addition, the findings showed that tailor-made teacher support is suggested to be provided on the basis of adolescent students' developmental needs.

In summary, to enhance adolescents' subjective well-being, it is crucial to take a holistic approach that incorporates different theoretical perspectives. By combining strategies that boost positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishments,

individuals can strive for a more fulfilling and satisfying life. The current project provides a comprehensive overview of Hong Kong adolescents' SWB and suggests how peer and teacher support can help with the promotion of SWB, given the analytic results regarding the various developmental needs of adolescents for specific teacher and peer support. In addition, the exploration of the role of happiness character strengths provides a new approach to enhancing adolescents' SWB. By including these theories and factors, the research offers a thorough understanding of the significance of peer and teacher support in adolescents' SWB, and it provides significant perspectives for educators, policymakers, and mental health experts.

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## Appendix A: School Consent



香港教育大學

國際教育學系

參與研究同意書(學校)

### 香港中學生性格特質與主觀幸福感的研究: 朋輩與教師情緒支持的作用

本校同意參加由陳君君博士負責監督謝夢女士執行的研究項目。他們是香港教育大學的教員及學生。

本校將會協助研究團隊收集研究計劃的相關資料(學生問卷和訪問等等), 並負責徵得相關人士的參加同意和使用授權。本校同意授權研究團隊運用是次計劃所搜集得來的數據和資料於是次研究計劃。本人理解此研究所獲得的資料可用於未來的研究和學術發表, 然而本人有權保護本校學生的隱私, 其個人資料將不能洩漏。

研究者已將所附資料的有關步驟向本人作了充分的解釋, 本人理解可能會出現的風險。本人是自願讓本校學生和教師參加這項研究。

本人理解本人及本校學生皆有權在研究過程中提出問題, 並在任何時候決定退出研究, 更不會因此而對研究工作產生的影響負有任何責任。

簽署:

\_\_\_\_\_ (教授/博士/先生/女士/小姐\*)

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\_\_\_\_\_

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日期:

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## 有關資料 (學校)

### 香港中學生性格特質與主觀幸福感的研究：

#### 朋輩與教師情緒支持的作用

誠邀 貴校參加由陳君君博士負責監督謝夢女士執行的研究項目。他們是香港教育大學的教員及學生。

是次研究計劃目的為探討香港中學生性格特質與主觀幸福感之間的關係，以及朋輩及教師情緒支援在其中的作用，希望研究結果能夠為本港青少年的主觀幸福感提升提出具有理論基礎的策略。本計劃將採用混合研究方法 (包括量化和質化的方法)，從而達至多角度分析，提出具綜合性的分析。研究所得有助將來學校及社會提升學生主觀幸福感提供建議與策略 (如，政策倡議、教師培訓、學校支援和教材發展等)。整個計劃約為兩年，由 2023 年 6 月 26 日至 2025 年 5 月 31 日。

研究團隊希望邀請 貴校參加是次研究計劃，希望藉著了解貴校學生對主觀幸福感及相關範疇的看法，從而為將來推行相關教育提供具體的建議。

本計劃將會邀請大概 6 所中學的 384 位學生參與。每所學校中一至中三的學生都會是本計劃邀請的對象。研究團隊將會根據校方的推薦作出初步邀請，並得到閣下初步同意後，發出正式邀請。受訪者(學生)，將會獲邀參加一個約 30 分鐘的問卷調查，而部份受訪者更獲邀參加一個約 1 小時的小組(約 4-6 人)或個人訪問。問卷調查和訪問時間地點會盡量配會受訪者的需要，我們亦會將整個訪問內容進行錄音。兩者收集的得來的數據會作出深入分析和限於是次研究計劃使用。整項研究計劃所得可能會透過研討會/會議、學位論文和學術論文等形式並刊登於本地和國際性的學術刊物。本計劃不存在潛在風險。

貴校的參與純屬自願性質。所以參加者享有充分的權利在任何時候決定退出這項研究，更不會因此引致任何不良後果，凡有關 貴校的資料將會保密，一切資料的編碼只有研究人員得悉。

如閣下想獲得更多有關這項研究的資料，請與陳君君博士 (電郵: [jjchen@eduhk.hk](mailto:jjchen@eduhk.hk)) 或者謝夢女士聯絡 (電郵: [\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_@s.eduhk.hk](mailto:_____@s.eduhk.hk))。如閣下對這項研究的操守有任何意見，可隨時與香港教育大學人類實驗對象操守委員會聯絡 (電郵: [hrec@eduhk.hk](mailto:hrec@eduhk.hk); 地址: 香港教育大學研究與發展事務處)。

謝謝閣下有興趣參與這項研究。

謝夢  
教育博士候選人  
國際教育學系  
香港教育大學

The Education University of Hong Kong

Department of International Education

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH (SCHOOLS)

**Adolescents' character strengths and subjective well-being: the role of  
social-emotional support from peers and teachers**

My school hereby consent to my child participating in the captioned research project supervised by Dr. Chen Junjun and conducted by Ms. Xie Meng, Joanne, who are staff and student of The Education University of Hong Kong.

My school will support the research team in collecting relevant information about the study such as student questionnaires and interviews. My school will also be responsible for obtaining the consent and use authorization of relevant people. Our school agrees to authorize the research team to use the data and information collected in this project. I understand that information obtained from this research may be used in future research and may be published. However, our right to privacy will be retained, i.e., the personal details of my students will not be revealed.

The procedure as set out in the attached information sheet has been fully explained. I understand the benefits and risks involved. The participation students in the project are voluntary.

I acknowledge that we have the right to question any part of the procedure and can withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

Signature:

---

Name of Principal/Delegate\*:

(Prof/Dr/Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss\*)

Post:

---

Name of School:

---

Date:

---

(\* please delete as appropriate)

## INFORMATION SHEET (SCHOOLS)

### **Adolescents' character strengths and subjective well-being: the role of social-emotional support from peers and teachers**

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Your school is invited to participate in this study for better understanding for your point of view towards the subjective well-being of secondary school students and related disciplines.

384 students from 6 secondary schools will be invited to join the study. We will follow the nominations of your school and initial consent for making formal invitation. Participants (i.e., Students) will be invited for a survey for about 30 minutes. Some of them will be invited for a one-hour individual or group (4-6 people) interview. Time and place for survey and interview are at your convenience. The interviews will be audiotaped. All data will be adopted for scientific analysis and used in this study only. No potential risks will be involved in this study. The finding of this research project will be disseminated in different ways, including conferences/seminars, thesis, articles and publications with local and international impacts.

The participation of your school is voluntary. Your school and all participants have every right to withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences. All information related to your school and all participants will remain confidential, and will be identifiable by codes known only to the researchers.

If you would like to obtain more information about this study, please contact Dr. Chen Junjun

(email: [jjchen@eduhk.hk](mailto:jjchen@eduhk.hk)) or Ms. Xie Meng, Joanne (email: [@s.eduhk.hk](mailto: @s.eduhk.hk)). If you have any concerns about the conduct of this project, please do not hesitate to contact the Human Research Ethics Committee by email at [hrec@eduhk.hk](mailto:hrec@eduhk.hk) or by mail to Research and Development Office, The Education University of Hong Kong.

Thank you for your interest in participating in this project.

Xie Meng, Joanne  
Doctor of Education candidate  
Department of International Education  
The Education University of Hong Kong

## Appendix B: Parental Consent



香港教育大學

國際教育學系

參與研究同意書(家長)

**香港中學生性格特質與主觀幸福感的研究: 朋輩與教師情緒支持的作用**

茲同意敝子弟\_\_\_\_\_同意參加由陳君君博士負責監督謝夢女士執行的研究項目。他們是香港教育大學的教員及學生。

本人理解此研究所獲得的資料可用於未來的研究和學術發表，然而本人有權保護敝子弟和本人的隱私，其個人資料將不能洩漏。

研究者已將所附資料的有關步驟向本人作了充分的解釋，本人理解可能會出現的風險。本人同意敝子弟參加這項研究。

本人理解敝子弟和本人皆有權在研究過程中提出問題，並在任何時候決定退出研究，更不會因此而對研究工作產生的影響負有任何責任。

學生姓名及班別: \_\_\_\_\_

學校名稱: \_\_\_\_\_

父母姓名或監護人姓名: \_\_\_\_\_

父母或監護人簽名: \_\_\_\_\_

日期: \_\_\_\_\_

## 有關資料 (家長)

### 香港中學生性格特質與主觀幸福感的研究: 朋輩與教師情緒支持的作用

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貴子女的參與純屬自願性質。你們享有充分的權利在任何時候決定退出這項研究，更不會因此引致任何不良後果，凡有關你們的資料將會保密，一切資料的編碼只有研究人員得悉。

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謝夢  
教育博士候選人  
國際教育學系  
香港教育大學

The Education University of Hong Kong

Department of International Education

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH (PARENTS)

**Adolescents' character strengths and subjective well-being: the role of  
social-emotional support from peers and teachers**

I \_\_\_\_\_ hereby consent to my child participating in the captioned research project supervised by Dr. Chen Junjun and conducted by Ms. Xie Meng, Joanne, who are staff and student of The Education University of Hong Kong.

I understand that information obtained from this research may be used in future research and may be published. However, our right to privacy will be retained, i.e., the personal details of my child will not be revealed.

The procedure as set out in the attached information sheet has been fully explained. I understand the benefits and risks involved. The participation of my child in the project are voluntary.

I acknowledge that we have the right to question any part of the procedure and can withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

Name of Student & Class: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of School: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Parents: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Parents: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## INFORMATION SHEET (PARENTS)

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The participation of your child is voluntary. Your child has every right to withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences. All information related to yours will remain confidential, and will be identifiable by codes known only to the researchers.

If you would like to obtain more information about this study, please contact Dr. Chen Junjun (email: [jjchen@eduhk.hk](mailto:jjchen@eduhk.hk)) or Ms. Xie Meng, Joanne (email: [@s.eduhk.hk](mailto:@s.eduhk.hk)). If you

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Thank you for your interest in participating in this project.

Xie Meng, Joanne  
Doctor of Education candidate  
Department of International Education  
The Education University of Hong Kong

## Appendix C: Student Consent



香港教育大學

國際教育學系

參與研究同意書(學生)

**香港中學生性格特質與主觀幸福感的研究：朋輩與教師情緒支持的作用**

本人\_\_\_\_\_同意參加由陳君君博士負責監督謝夢女士執行的研究項目。他們是香港教育大學的教員及學生。

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參加者簽名:

\_\_\_\_\_

參加者姓名與班別:

\_\_\_\_\_

學校名稱:

\_\_\_\_\_

日期:

\_\_\_\_\_

## 有關資料 (學生)

### 香港中學生性格特質與主觀幸福感的研究：

#### 朋輩與教師情緒支持的作用

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閣下的參與純屬自願性質。閣下享有充分的權利在任何時候決定退出這項研究，更不會因此引致任何不良後果，凡有關閣下的資料將會保密，一切資料的編碼只有研究人員得悉。

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謝謝閣下有興趣參與這項研究。

謝夢  
教育博士候選人  
國際教育學系  
香港教育大學



The Education University of Hong Kong

Department of International Education

## CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH (STUDENTS)

### **Adolescents' character strengths and SWB: the role of social-emotional support from peers and teachers**

I \_\_\_\_\_ hereby consent to participate in the captioned research project supervised by Dr. Chen Junjun and conducted by Ms. Xie Meng, Joanne, who are staff and student of The Education University of Hong Kong.

I understand that information obtained from this research may be used in future research and may be published. However, my right to privacy will be retained, i.e., my personal details will not be revealed.

The procedure as set out in the attached information sheet has been fully explained. I understand the benefits and risks involved. My participation in the project is voluntary.

I acknowledge that I have the right to question any part of the procedure and can withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

Name of Participant & Class: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

School Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date : \_\_\_\_\_

## INFORMATION SHEET (STUDENTS)

### **Adolescents' character strengths and SWB: the role of social-emotional support from peers and teachers**

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Xie Meng, Joanne  
Doctor of Education candidate  
Department of International Education  
The Education University of Hong Kong



## Appendix D: Questionnaire

## 香港中學生性格特質與主觀幸福感的研究問卷

親愛的同學：

為了解青少年的社會情緒支援與主觀幸福感之間的關係，現懇請你完成本問卷。本問卷並非用於評估你的能力，而問卷內的問題亦沒有所謂對或錯的答案，所以請你憑着你對自己的感受和想法作答。你所提供的一切資料將絕對保密。負責的工作人員、校長、老師及你的父母是絕對不會在日後知道個別參與者的資料分析結果。當你完成這份問卷後，請你直接將問卷交給有關的工作人員。若你對此項研究有任何問題，請與香港教育大學陳君君博士（電郵：jjchen@eduhk.hk）或者謝夢女士聯絡（電郵：

@s.eduhk.hk）。所有的資料只會供研究人員作整體分析之用。如有任何疑問，請詢問在場的工作人員。謝謝你的幫忙！

一、請根據你的實際感受，圈出一個最符合的選項。

		完全不 像我	少許 像我	有點像 我	很像我	非常像 我
1	當我有問題時，有人願意聽我說	1	2	3	4	5
2	我認為生活充滿興奮	1	2	3	4	5
3	我通常精力充沛	1	2	3	4	5
4	我期待會有好事發生在我身上	1	2	3	4	5
5	我總是對於發現更多的事物感興趣	1	2	3	4	5
6	我確信我能夠渡過難關	1	2	3	4	5
7	我通常不會對人感到感恩	1	2	3	4	5
8	即使當事情看起來很糟時，我依然保持希望	1	2	3	4	5
9	我保有十足的熱情	1	2	3	4	5
10	我感到我是受關愛的	1	2	3	4	5
11	我喜歡探索新穎與各式各樣的事物	1	2	3	4	5
12	我經常會主動發問	1	2	3	4	5

		完全不 像我	少許 像我	有點像 我	很像我	非常像 我
13	我時常為我生活中發生的事感到 幸運	1	2	3	4	5
14	對於我的家人與朋友，我會坦率 地表達我的感受	1	2	3	4	5
15	我是個會感恩的人	1	2	3	4	5
16	我是一個讓人開心的人	1	2	3	4	5
17	我總是對事物充滿疑問	1	2	3	4	5
18	我十分感謝我的家人	1	2	3	4	5
19	我對於我的未來有積極的願景	1	2	3	4	5
20	我會毫不猶豫地告訴我的家人與 朋友我愛他們	1	2	3	4	5

二、請根據你的實際感受，圈出一個最符合的選項。

		非常 不同意	不 同意	有點 不同 意	很難 說	有點 同意	同意	非常 同意
1	在許多方面，我的生活接近我的 理想。	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2	我的生活狀況非常好。	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3	我對我的生活感到滿意。	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4	到目前為止，我已經擁有了我 一生中想要擁有的重要事物。	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5	如果生命可以再來一次，我不 會改變生活中的任何事情。	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

三、以下是九個描述個人情感/情緒的形容詞，請根據過去七日日常生活中你的感受，圈出最適合你的數字 (1 = 從來沒有, 5 = 經常)。

		從來沒有				經常
1	沮喪的	1	2	3	4	5
2	敵意的	1	2	3	4	5
3	羞愧的	1	2	3	4	5
4	受鼓舞的	1	2	3	4	5
5	緊張的	1	2	3	4	5
6	堅定的	1	2	3	4	5
7	專注的	1	2	3	4	5
8	害怕的	1	2	3	4	5
9	活躍的	1	2	3	4	5

四、請根據你的實際感受，圈出一個最符合的選項 (請分別圈出「頻率」及「重要性」)。

	我的同學們	頻率						重要性		
		從不	幾乎從不	有些時候	多數時候	幾乎總是	總是	不重要	重要	非常重要
1	很友善地對待我。	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
2	喜歡我的大多數想法或觀點。	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
3	給我關注。	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3

	我的同學們	頻率						重要性		
		從不	幾乎 從不	有些 時候	多數 時候	幾乎 總是	總是	不重 要	重要	非常 重要
4	在我不知道 怎麼做的時 候給我出主 意。	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
5	給我資訊使 得我可以學 習新事物。	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
6	給我好的建 議。	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
7	在我做某件 事做得不錯 時會告訴我 做得好。	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
8	在我犯錯時 會友善地告 訴我。	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
9	注意到我的 努力。	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
10	邀請我參加 活動。	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
11	花時間和我 一起做事 情。	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
12	在課堂中幫 助我完成小 組工作。	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3

五、請根據你的實際感受，圈出一個最符合的選項（請分別圈出「頻率」及「重要性」）。

	我的老師們	頻率						重要性		
		從不	幾乎從不	有些時候	多數時候	幾乎總是	總是	不重要	重要	非常重要
1	關心我。	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
2	公平對待我。	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
3	令我感到可以向她/他提問。	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
4	向我解釋我不懂的事情。	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
5	向我展示如何做事。	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
6	透過向我提供信息來幫助我解決問題。	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
7	在我做某件事做得不錯時會告訴我做得好。	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
8	在我犯錯時會友善地告訴我。	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
9	告訴我我的表現有多好。	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
10	確保我在學校得到所需。									
11	花時間幫助我學習做好某事。									
12	當我需要幫助時，花時間陪伴我。									

## 六、個人資料

以下是問及一些有關你個人和家庭現況的資料，請填寫/剔選合適的答案。我們再一次向你保證，你提供的資料會絕對保密。

1. 出生日期

如：2008年1月1日，請填寫：

2	0	0	8	0	1	0	1
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2. 學生證號碼（最後三個號碼）：

X	X	X	X	X			
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3. 年級：

 中一 中二 中三

4. 性別：

 男 女

5. 你有沒有宗教信仰？

 有 沒有 不知道

6. 與一般同年級的學生比較，你覺得自己現時的學業成績如何？

 非常差 比一般差 普通 比一般好 非常好

7. 你滿意自己現時的學業成績嗎？

 非常不滿意 不滿意 普通 滿意 非常滿意

8. 你覺得自己在學校的操行如何？

 非常差 比一般差 普通 比一般好 非常好

9. 你的家庭現在是否接受綜合社會保障援助金（即綜援）？

 是 否 不知道

10. 與你同住的父母現時的婚姻狀況是怎樣？

 已婚 再婚 分居 離婚 其他

11. 你是否在香港出世？

 是 否

(問卷完) 謝謝你的幫忙!

## The Subjective Well-being and Character Strengths of Hong Kong adolescents

Dear students,

To understand the relationship between adolescents' social-emotional support and subjective well-being, we kindly ask you to complete this questionnaire. This questionnaire is not used to assess your ability, and there are no right or wrong answers to the questions in the questionnaire, so please answer based on your feelings and thoughts. All information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. Responsible staff, principals, teachers and your parents will never know the results of the analysis of individual participants' data in the future. After you complete this questionnaire, please hand it directly to the relevant staff. If you have any questions about this study, please contact Dr. Chen Junjun of the Education University of Hong Kong (email: [jjchen@eduhk.hk](mailto:jjchen@eduhk.hk)) or Ms. Joanne Xie (email:

[@s.eduhk.hk](mailto:@s.eduhk.hk)). All information will only be used by researchers for overall analysis. If you have any questions, please ask our colleagues. Thanks for your help!

1. Please circle the way you feel about the following statements.

		Not Like Me at All	A Little Like Me	Somewhat Like Me	Mostly Like Me	Very Much Like Me
1	There is someone who will listen to me when I have a problem.	1	2	3	4	5
2	I think that life is very exciting.	1	2	3	4	5
3	I am usually full of energy.	1	2	3	4	5
4	I expect good things to come my way.	1	2	3	4	5
5	I am always interested in discovering more.	1	2	3	4	5
6	I am certain I can get through bad times.	1	2	3	4	5
7	I often don't feel thankful.	1	2	3	4	5
8	Even when things look bad, I stay hopeful.	1	2	3	4	5
9	I have a lot of enthusiasm.	1	2	3	4	5
10	I feel loved.	1	2	3	4	5
11	I love exploring new and different things.	1	2	3	4	5
12	I frequently ask questions.	1	2	3	4	5

		Not Like Me at All	A Little Like Me	Somewhat Like Me	Mostly Like Me	Very Much Like Me
13	I often feel lucky for things in my life.	1	2	3	4	5
14	I openly express my feelings to my family and friends.	1	2	3	4	5
15	I am a thankful person.	1	2	3	4	5
16	I am a cheerful person.	1	2	3	4	5
17	I am always full of questions.	1	2	3	4	5
18	I am very grateful for my family.	1	2	3	4	5
19	I have a positive outlook about the future.	1	2	3	4	5
20	I do not hesitate to tell my family and friends that I love them.	1	2	3	4	5

2. Please circle the way you feel about the following statements.

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	In most of my life is close to my ideal	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2	The conditions of my life are excellent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3	I am satisfied with my life	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4	So far I have gotten the important things I want in life	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5	If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

3. The following are nine adjectives that describe personal feelings/emotions. Please review your feelings in your daily life over the past seven days and circle the number that best suits you. (1 = Never, 5 = Always).

		Never				Always
1	Upset	1	2	3	4	5
2	Hostile	1	2	3	4	5
3	Ashamed	1	2	3	4	5
4	Inspired	1	2	3	4	5
5	Nervous	1	2	3	4	5
6	Determined	1	2	3	4	5
7	Attentive	1	2	3	4	5
8	Afraid	1	2	3	4	5
9	Active	1	2	3	4	5

4. Please read each sentence carefully and respond to them honestly.

		<i>How often?</i>						<i>Importance?</i>		
		Never	Almost never	Some of the time	Most of the time	Almost always	Always	Not important	Important	Very important
1	Treat me nicely	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
2	Like most of my ideas and opinions	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
3	Pay attention to me	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3

	My classmates	<i>How often</i>						<i>Importance</i>		
		Never	Almost never	Some of the time	Most of the time	Almost always	Always	Not important	important	Very important
4	Give me ideas when I don't know what to do	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
5	Give me information so I can learn new things	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
6	Give me good advice	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
7	Tell me I did a good job when i've done something well	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
8	Nicely tell me when I make mistakes	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
9	Notice when I have worked hard	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
10	Ask me to join activities	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
11	Spend time doing things with me	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
12	Help me with projects in class	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3

5. Please read each sentence carefully and respond to them honestly.

	My teachers	<i>How often?</i>						<i>Importance?</i>		
		Never	Almost never	Some of the time	Most of the time	Almost always	Always	Not important	important	Very important
1	Cares about me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
2	Treats me fairly.	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
3	Makes it okay to ask questions	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
4	Explains things that I don't understand.	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
5	Shows me how to do things.	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
6	Helps me solve problems by giving me information.	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
7	Tells me I did a good job when i've done something well.	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
8	Nicely tells me when I make mistakes.	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
9	Tells me how well I do on tasks.	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
10	Makes sure I have what I need for school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
11	Takes time to help me learn to do something well.	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
12	Spends time with me when I need help.	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3

## 6. Personal information

The following asks for information about your personal and family's current situation. Please fill in/check the appropriate answers. Once again, we assure you that your information will be kept strictly confidential.

1. Date of birth

Example: 1 Jan 2008, please fill in:

2	0	0	8	0	1	0	1
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2. Student ID number (The last three digits):

X	X	X	X	X			
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3. Grade: S1  S2  S3 4. Gender: Male  Female 5. Do you have any religious beliefs? Yes  No  I don't know 

6. Compared with other students of the same grade, how do you feel about your current academic performance?

Very bad  Below average  Average Above average  Very good 

7. Are you satisfied with your current academic performance?

Very unsatisfied  Unsatisfied  Netural Satisfied  Very satisfied 

8. How do you feel about your conduct at school?

Very bad  Below average  Average Above average  Very good 

9. Does your family currently receive Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA)?

Yes  No  I don't know 

10. What is the current marital status of your parents who live with you?

Married  Remarried  Separated  Devoiced  Other 

11. Were you born in Hong Kong?

Yes  No 

-End of the questionnaire-

Thank you!

## Appendix E: Sample Interview Questions

## Interview questions

## 主觀幸福感的定義

- 當談起幸福感，你腦子裡首先出現的是什麼？有那些詞讓你聯想起幸福感？
- 你對自己現時的生活感到滿意嗎？為什麼？
- 你最近有哪些開心的時刻？有哪些發生在校園裡？
- 過去的生活中你有什麼感到開心的瞬間？
- 最近有什麼感到難過或者沮喪的時刻？

## 主觀幸福感的影響因素

- 有哪些因素會影響你的幸福感？（必要時提供關鍵詞卡片協助）
- 你怎樣形容你自己的性格？
- 你覺得性格和幸福感有關係嗎？
- 你開心的時候，會和誰分享喜悅？為什麼？
- 當你感到難過或者沮喪的時候，你會尋求誰的幫助？為什麼？

## 老師支援

- 當你遇到困難時或者感到不開心時，老師會怎樣幫助你？/為什麼不尋求老師的幫助？
- 你覺得老師現時的幫助有效嗎？為什麼？
- 你希望得到老師哪一些方面的支持？為什麼？

## 朋輩支援

- 當你遇到困難時或者感到不開心時，同學會怎樣幫助你？/為什麼不尋求同學的幫助？
- 你覺得同學現時的幫助有效嗎？為什麼？
- 你希望得到同學哪一些方面的支持？為什麼？

## 學校環境

- 你覺得幸福感可以被教授嗎？學校是否有提供相關的課程/計劃？
- 你認為這些活動有什麼需要改善的地方？
- 你覺得校園生活及老師和同學的幫助與支持能否提升你的幸福感？

## 總結

- 你認為怎麼樣的人才是一個充滿幸福感的人？

## Interview questions

## Definition of SWB

- What are the first words that come to your mind when you talk about happiness? What are the words that remind you of happiness?
- Are you happy with your current life? Why?
- What are your recent happy moments? Which ones happened on campus?
- Have you had any happy moments in your past life?
- Have you had any sad or frustrating moments recently?

## Factors associated with SWB

- What factors affect your sense of happiness? (Provide keyword cards to help if necessary)
- How would you describe your own personality?
- Do you think there is a relationship between personality and happiness?
- When you are happy, who do you share your happiness with? Why?
- When you feel sad or frustrated, who do you turn to for help? Why?

## Teachers' support

- How do teachers help you when you are having a hard time or feeling unhappy? /Why don't you seek help from teachers?
- Do you think that teachers' support are helpful? Why?
- In what ways would you like to receive support from your teachers? Why?

## Peers' support

- How do your peers help you when you are having a hard time or feeling unhappy? /Why don't you seek help from your peers?
- Do you think that classmates' support are helpful? Why?
- In what ways would you like to receive support from your classmates? Why?

## School environment

- Do you think happiness can be taught? Does the school offer any relevant courses/programmes?
- What do you think could be improved about these activities?
- Do you think that school life and the support from teachers and classmates can improve your sense of happiness?

## Conclusion

- What kind of person do you think is a happy person?