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Effect of Social Support on the Problem-Solving Ability of Secondary School Students

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Abstract: The present study investigates the effect of social support on the problem-solving ability of secondary school students. The study aims to examine levels of social support and problem-solving ability, compare them across gender, locality, and school type, and explore the relationship between these two variables. A quantitative research approach using the descriptive survey method was employed. The sample consisted of 400 students from classes IX and X in Haridwar district, selected through stratified random sampling. Standardized tools were used to measure social support and problem-solving ability. Statistical techniques such as mean, standard deviation, t-test, and Pearson correlation were applied for data analysis. The findings revealed that students generally possess moderate to high levels of both social support and problem-solving ability. Girls, urban students, and private school students scored higher in both variables compared to their counterparts. A significant positive correlation was found between social support and problem-solving ability, indicating that higher support from family, teachers, peers, and online sources enhances students' ability to solve problems. Among these, teacher support showed the strongest influence. Additionally, students with high social support demonstrated significantly better problem-solving skills than those with low support. The study concludes that social support is a crucial determinant of students' cognitive and emotional functioning and plays a vital role in enhancing problem-solving ability.

Keywords: Social Support, Problem-Solving Ability, Secondary School Students, Teacher Support, Family Support.

1. Meaning and Concept of Social Support

Social support is a broad psychological and educational concept which refers to the help, care, guidance, encouragement, protection, appreciation, and emotional security received by an individual from important persons and institutions in his or her social environment. In the context of secondary school students, social support generally includes support received from parents, family members, teachers, classmates, friends, school counsellors, neighbours, and community members. **Cohen and Wills (1985)** explain social support as a protective psychological resource that reduces the negative effect of stress and strengthens personal adjustment, while **Sarason, Sarason, and Pierce (1990)** consider it as a perception that one is loved, valued, and helped by others. In the middle of adolescent life, this support becomes highly meaningful because students begin to face academic competition, emotional confusion, social comparison, peer pressure, and future-related anxieties; therefore, social support works as a source of confidence and psychological safety. Indian educational thinkers and researchers have also emphasized that the child's development is not isolated but deeply connected with home, school, peer group, and social environment. In Indian school settings, support from family and teachers is especially important because students often depend on elders for emotional encouragement, discipline, study habits, and career direction. Thus, social support may be understood as a multidimensional system of human relationships that helps secondary school students feel secure, accepted, motivated, and capable of facing difficulties in academic and social life.

Social support is not limited only to emotional sympathy; it also includes informational support, instrumental support, appraisal support, and motivational support. Emotional support gives love, affection, care, and belongingness; informational support gives advice, suggestions, knowledge, and guidance; instrumental support

gives practical help such as books, time, financial help, and learning facilities; and appraisal support gives feedback, appreciation, correction, and evaluation. **House (1981)** classified support into emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal forms, and this classification is very useful for educational research because secondary school students require all these forms of support in different situations. For example, a student who is weak in mathematics may need informational support from the teacher, emotional support from parents, peer support from classmates, and motivational support from school counsellors. Wentzel's work on teacher and peer support shows that students' perception of care, help, advice, clear expectations, and emotional support from teachers and classmates contributes to their academic and social motivation. In Indian conditions, where academic achievement is often connected with family expectations, social support helps students reduce fear of failure and develop better self-confidence. Therefore, social support should be studied not merely as help from others but as a psychological climate that shapes the student's thinking, adjustment, motivation, and problem-solving approach.

In the present study, social support may be conceptually defined as the perceived emotional, academic, social, and practical assistance received by secondary school students from family, teachers, peers, and other significant persons. This concept is very important because adolescents do not always respond to objective support; rather, they respond to the support they perceive and experience. **Sarason, Sarason, & Pierce (1990)** emphasized that perceived support is often more powerful than actual support because it influences the individual's confidence, coping style, and emotional stability. Similarly, **Cohen and Wills (1985)** argued that support works both directly by improving well-being and indirectly by reducing the harmful effect of stress. In the Indian educational context, social support is closely linked with family bonding, teacher-student relationship, peer acceptance, school climate, and community values. When a secondary school student feels that parents listen carefully, teachers guide patiently, and friends cooperate positively, the student develops a stronger belief that problems can be solved. Hence, social support is an important independent variable in educational psychology because it influences students' self-confidence, adjustment, academic performance, decision-making, resilience, and problem-solving ability.

2. Meaning and Concept of Problem-Solving Ability

Problem-solving ability refers to the mental capacity of an individual to identify a problem, understand its nature, analyse causes, generate possible alternatives, select the most suitable solution, apply the solution, and evaluate the result. It is a higher-order cognitive ability because it involves perception, reasoning, imagination, memory, judgment, decision-making, creativity, and evaluation. According to **Dewey (1933)**, reflective thinking begins when a person faces a difficulty and tries to solve it through systematic inquiry. **Polya (1957)** described problem solving as a process of understanding the problem, making a plan, carrying out the plan, and looking back at the result. In school education, problem-solving ability is not limited to mathematics or science; it is also needed in language learning, social relationships, classroom discipline, examination preparation, emotional control, career selection, and daily life adjustment. Indian researchers studying adolescent problem-solving have also emphasized that this ability helps students manage academic, emotional, and social problems in daily life. A study among adolescents noted that problem-solving skill is necessary to address daily-life problems during the period of physical, mental, and social development. Therefore, problem-solving ability is a central educational objective because it prepares students to become independent, rational, responsible, and socially competent individuals.

Problem-solving ability is a structured mental process that begins with problem awareness and ends with solution evaluation. A student with good problem-solving ability does not become confused immediately after facing a difficulty; rather, he or she tries to understand the problem logically, separates facts from emotions, identifies possible causes, compares alternatives, predicts consequences, and selects the most appropriate course of action. **D'Zurilla and Nezu (2007)** explained social problem solving as a cognitive-behavioural process

through which individuals identify effective ways of coping with problematic situations in everyday life. In Indian adolescent research, Sharma's study on urban Indian adolescents found a significant relationship between resilience and social problem-solving skills, and adolescents high on resilience showed better positive problem orientation and rational problem-solving approach. This finding indicates that problem-solving ability is closely related to emotional strength, confidence, and social adjustment. At the secondary level, students face many problems such as examination anxiety, subject difficulty, competition, peer conflict, parental pressure, career confusion, and emotional instability. If students possess good problem-solving ability, they are more likely to handle these challenges through planning, self-control, cooperation, and constructive decision-making.

In the present study, problem-solving ability may be defined as the ability of secondary school students to understand academic, personal, emotional, and social problems and to solve them through logical thinking, decision-making, adjustment, and practical action. It includes several dimensions such as problem identification, analysis, reasoning, planning, decision-making, flexibility, confidence, and evaluation of solution. Indian studies on secondary students have shown that problem-solving ability may vary according to gender, area, and type of school; for example, one study in Hamirpur district found differences in problem-solving ability among adolescents with reference to gender, locality, and school type. Such findings show that problem-solving ability is not only an individual mental trait but is also influenced by educational environment, family background, school facilities, teacher guidance, and social opportunities. Therefore, problem-solving ability is an important dependent variable in the present study because it may be affected by the quality and quantity of social support received by students from family, teachers, and peers.

3. Importance of Social Support in Adolescent Development

Adolescence is a transitional stage between childhood and adulthood in which students experience rapid physical growth, emotional changes, identity formation, social sensitivity, moral development, and increasing academic responsibility. During this stage, social support becomes very important because adolescents need acceptance, guidance, encouragement, emotional warmth, and a sense of belonging. **Erikson (1968)** described adolescence as the stage of identity versus role confusion, where young individuals try to understand who they are and what role they should play in society. In this process, support from family, teachers, and peers helps them develop a positive self-concept and stable identity. **Cohen and Wills (1985)** argued that social support protects individuals from the negative effects of stress, and this idea is highly relevant to adolescents who face examination pressure, peer comparison, emotional instability, and future uncertainty. In India, adolescence often occurs within a strong family and school-based value system, so parental expectations, teacher guidance, and peer relationships strongly influence personality development. When adolescents receive positive support, they feel valued and capable; when support is absent, they may experience loneliness, anxiety, low confidence, and poor adjustment.

Social support is important in adolescent development because it contributes to emotional stability, academic motivation, self-esteem, social adjustment, moral behaviour, and decision-making. Family support provides security, values, discipline, and encouragement; teacher support provides guidance, feedback, learning confidence, and academic direction; peer support provides belongingness, companionship, cooperation, and social learning. **Wentzel (2010)** reported that young adolescents who receive positive teacher and peer support tend to show better social and academic competence at school. This indicates that social support helps adolescents develop not only emotionally but also academically and socially. Indian school students, especially at the secondary level, often experience pressure related to board examinations, career choices, family expectations, and social comparison. In such situations, social support becomes a psychological shield that reduces tension and increases confidence. For example, a student who fails in a test may become discouraged, but if parents encourage, teachers guide, and friends cooperate, the student may learn from failure and try again

with better preparation. Thus, social support develops resilience, optimism, self-regulation, and constructive coping among adolescents.

Social support also plays an important role in preventing maladjustment, emotional disturbance, aggression, withdrawal, low achievement, and negative peer influence. When adolescents do not receive proper support, they may develop feelings of rejection, inferiority, insecurity, and helplessness. The Ministry of Education's mental health guidance in India emphasizes that school climate and classroom programs should improve students' social skills, problem-solving skills, assertiveness, and anger management. This shows that social support is directly connected with mental health and life skills development in Indian school education. Foreign researchers such as **Bowlby (1969)** emphasized attachment and emotional bonding as the foundation of secure development, while **Bronfenbrenner (1979)** explained that the child develops within interconnected systems such as family, school, peer group, and community. Indian educational thinkers such as Radhakrishnan and Kothari Commission also emphasized the role of value-based education, teacher influence, and social environment in student development. Therefore, social support is essential for adolescent development because it creates a supportive environment in which students learn to think positively, solve problems rationally, develop healthy relationships, and prepare for responsible adulthood.

4. Importance of Problem-Solving Ability among Secondary School Students

Problem-solving ability is highly important among secondary school students because this stage is academically demanding, emotionally sensitive, and socially challenging. Students of classes IX and X have to manage subject difficulty, examination preparation, time management, competition, peer relationships, parental expectations, and future career planning. If they lack problem-solving ability, even small academic or social difficulties may create fear, stress, confusion, or avoidance. Dewey's concept of reflective thinking suggests that education should train students to think critically and solve real-life problems rather than merely memorize information. Similarly, Polya's method of problem solving emphasizes understanding, planning, execution, and review, which are useful not only in mathematics but also in everyday decision-making. Indian research on adolescents has also recognized that problem-solving skill is necessary for handling daily-life problems during adolescence. Therefore, problem-solving ability is not simply an academic skill; it is a life skill that enables students to face challenges with confidence, logic, and responsibility.

At the secondary level, problem-solving ability helps students improve academic achievement, classroom participation, self-confidence, emotional control, peer adjustment, and career readiness. Students with better problem-solving ability are more likely to analyse questions properly, plan study time, seek help when needed, use feedback constructively, and overcome failure. **D'Zurilla and Nezu (2007)** argue that effective problem solving includes positive problem orientation and rational problem-solving style, while ineffective styles include impulsivity, avoidance, and negative problem orientation. In an Indian study, Sharma found that adolescents with higher resilience showed better social problem-solving skills and a more rational approach towards solving problems. This is important for secondary education because students who solve problems rationally are less likely to become hopeless or impulsive. For example, when a student faces low marks, a problem-solving approach helps him identify weak areas, improve study strategy, consult teachers, and manage time. Without such ability, the student may blame others, lose confidence, or avoid studies.

Problem-solving ability is also important because modern education aims to prepare students for a complex, changing, and competitive society. The 21st-century learner must be able to think critically, make decisions, cooperate with others, solve academic and social problems, and adjust to new situations. Indian education policy and mental health guidance increasingly emphasize life skills, critical thinking, creativity, social skills, and problem-solving among students. The Ministry of Education's guidance notes that school-level programs should aim at improving students' social and problem-solving skills along with assertiveness and anger management.

Research from India also indicates that problem-solving ability among adolescents may differ according to gender, area, and school type, suggesting that schools and families have a role in developing it. Therefore, problem-solving ability is essential for secondary school students because it strengthens their academic performance, social adjustment, mental health, self-reliance, and future success. It helps them move from dependency to independence and from emotional reaction to logical action.

5. Relationship between Social Support and Problem-Solving Ability

Social support and problem-solving ability are closely related because a supportive environment strengthens the confidence, motivation, emotional balance, and cognitive readiness required for solving problems. When students receive support from parents, teachers, and peers, they are more likely to believe that problems are manageable and solutions are possible. **Cohen and Wills (1985)** proposed that social support reduces the harmful effects of stress and improves coping capacity. This theory is directly related to problem-solving because students under stress often lose clarity of thought, but students who feel supported can think more calmly and logically. For example, a secondary school student who is anxious about an examination may not solve academic problems effectively if he feels alone or criticized; however, if parents encourage, teachers guide, and friends cooperate, the same student may prepare systematically and solve difficulties step by step. Thus, social support works as an emotional and cognitive resource that helps students develop problem-solving ability.

The relationship between social support and problem-solving ability can be understood through several psychological mechanisms. First, emotional support reduces anxiety and fear, which allows students to think clearly. Second, informational support provides knowledge, advice, and strategies for solving problems. Third, instrumental support provides resources such as books, tuition, time, and learning materials. Fourth, appraisal support provides feedback and correction, which helps students improve their methods. Wentzel's research shows that teacher and peer support contribute to students' social and academic motivation, and students who experience positive support from teachers and classmates show better school adjustment. This school adjustment is important for problem solving because motivated and socially adjusted students are more willing to ask questions, accept feedback, and try alternative solutions. Indian adolescent research also shows that resilience is related to positive problem orientation and rational problem-solving style. Since social support is one of the important sources of resilience, it may indirectly improve students' problem-solving ability.

In the present study, it may be assumed that students with higher social support will show better problem-solving ability than students with lower social support. Family support may help students develop confidence and patience; teacher support may develop academic reasoning and structured thinking; peer support may improve cooperation and social problem solving. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory explains that child development occurs through interaction with family, school, peer group, and community, which means that problem-solving ability is also shaped by the social environment. In India, where family and teacher influence remain strong in educational decision-making, social support may have a powerful effect on how students face academic and personal problems. A student who receives repeated criticism may avoid challenges, while a student who receives constructive support may treat problems as opportunities for learning. Therefore, the relationship between social support and problem-solving ability is theoretically and educationally significant. It provides the foundation for studying whether social support can be considered a positive predictor of problem-solving ability among secondary school students.

6. Need and Justification of the Study

The study entitled "Effect of Social Support on the Problem-Solving Ability of Secondary School Students" is needed because secondary school students pass through an important stage of adolescence in which they face many academic, emotional, social, and personal problems. At this stage, students are expected to make decisions, adjust with classmates, handle examination pressure, manage expectations of parents and teachers, and solve day-to-day difficulties in school and family life. Problem-solving ability is therefore an essential life skill that helps students think logically, analyse situations, select suitable alternatives, and take appropriate decisions. However, this ability does not develop in isolation; it is strongly influenced by the support students receive from their family, teachers, friends, and school environment. When students get proper encouragement, emotional security, guidance, appreciation, and cooperation from others, they become more confident and capable of facing problems positively. On the other hand, lack of social support may create fear, hesitation, stress, low self-confidence, and poor decision-making among students. Therefore, it becomes necessary to study how social support affects the problem-solving ability of secondary school students.

The justification of this study lies in its educational, psychological, and social importance. In the present educational system, students are not only required to gain knowledge but also to develop thinking skills, adjustment skills, decision-making skills, and life skills. Social support can play a meaningful role in developing these abilities because supportive parents, helpful teachers, and cooperative peers provide students with motivation, emotional balance, and guidance during difficult situations. This study will help teachers understand the importance of a supportive classroom environment, parents understand their role in strengthening students' confidence, and school counsellors identify students who lack proper support and face difficulty in solving problems. The findings of this study may also help schools plan guidance programmes, counselling activities, peer-support groups, and parent-teacher cooperation programmes. Thus, this research is justified because it can contribute to improving students' problem-solving ability, mental strength, academic adjustment, and overall personality development at the secondary school level.

7. Objectives of the Study

1. To study and compare the level of social support among secondary school students.
2. To study and compare the level of social support among secondary school students of rural and urban area.
3. To study and compare the level of social support among secondary school students of government and private schools.
4. To study and compare the level of problem-solving ability among secondary school students.
5. To study and compare the level of problem-solving ability among secondary school students of rural and urban area.
6. To study and compare the level of problem-solving ability among secondary school students of rural and urban area.
7. To find out the relationship between social support and problem-solving ability and its dimensions among secondary school students.
8. To compare the problem-solving ability of students with high and low social support.

8. Hypotheses of the Study

1. There is no significant difference in the level of social support among secondary school students.
2. There is no significant difference in the level of social support among secondary school students of rural and urban area.
3. There is no significant difference in the level of social support among secondary school students of government and private schools.

4. There is no significant difference in the level of problem-solving ability among secondary school students.
5. There is no significant difference in the level of problem-solving ability among secondary school students of rural and urban area.
6. There is no significant difference in the level of problem-solving ability among secondary school students of rural and urban area.
7. There is no significant relationship between social support and problem-solving ability and its dimensions among secondary school students.
8. There is no significant difference in the problem-solving ability of students with high and low social support.

9. Delimitations of the Study

The study was delimited to secondary school students of classes IX and X. The study was delimited to selected government and private schools. The study was delimited to the variables of family support, teacher support, peer support and online social support and problem-solving ability. The study was delimited to a selected district Haridwar.

10. Research Methodology

- **Nature of the Study:** The nature of the study is quantitative.
- **Research Design:** The present study is based on the descriptive survey method.
- **Population of the Study:** The population of the study includes all secondary school students of district Haridwar studying in classes IX and X.
- **Sample of the Study:** The sample of the study consist 400 students from classes IX and X of secondary schools of district Haridwar. Stratified random sampling technique was used for selecting the sample.
- **Variables of the Study:** Social support is considered the independent variable and problem-solving ability has been considered the dependent variable in the present study.
- **Tools for Data Collection:** Social Support Scale developed by Prof. Indra Dhull and Ms. Sangeeta Godara and Problem-Solving Ability Scale developed by Prof. L.N. Dubey and Dr. C.P. Mathur has been used.
- **Statistical Techniques:** Mean, Standard Deviation, t-test, Pearson Product Moment Correlation have been used for data analysis.

11. Analysis and Interpretation

Objective 1 "To study and compare the level of social support among secondary school students".

Table-1: Gender-wise Mean, SD and t-test of Social Support and its Dimensions

Dimension of Social Support	Group	N	Mean	S.D.	t-value	Level
Family Support	Boys	200	22.10	4.20	3.03	Significant
	Girls	200	23.35	4.05		
Teacher Support	Boys	200	21.45	4.10	2.84	Significant
	Girls	200	22.60	4.00		
Peer Support	Boys	200	22.80	3.90	2.35	Significant
	Girls	200	23.70	3.75		

Dimension of Social Support	Group	N	Mean	S.D.	t-value	Level
Online Social Support	Boys	200	20.65	4.30	2.01	Significant
	Girls	200	21.50	4.15		
Total Social Support	Boys	200	87.00	12.30	3.44	Significant
	Girls	200	91.15	11.85		

Table 1 show that girls have obtained higher mean scores than boys on all dimensions of social support. In family support, girls obtained a mean score of 23.35, while boys obtained 22.10. In teacher support also, girls scored 22.60, whereas boys scored 21.45. In peer support, girls scored 23.70, while boys scored 22.80. In online social support, girls scored 21.50, while boys scored 20.65. The total social support score of girls is 91.15, while that of boys is 87.00. The obtained t-values for all dimensions are significant. Therefore, it may be interpreted that girls have a higher level of social support than boys among secondary school students. Thus, the hypothesis that 'there is no significant difference in the level of social support among secondary school students' is rejected.

Objective 2 "To study and compare the level of social support among secondary school students of rural and urban area".

Table-2: Locality-wise Mean, SD and t-test of Social Support and its Dimensions

Dimension of Social Support	Group	N	Mean	S.D.	t-value	Level
Family Support	Rural	200	21.85	4.35	4.21	Significant
	Urban	200	23.60	3.95		
Teacher Support	Rural	200	21.20	4.25	4.09	Significant
	Urban	200	22.85	3.80		
Peer Support	Rural	200	22.35	4.05	4.70	Significant
	Urban	200	24.15	3.60		
Online Social Support	Rural	200	19.75	4.40	6.37	Significant
	Urban	200	22.40	3.90		
Total Social Support	Rural	200	85.15	12.90	6.47	Significant
	Urban	200	93.00	11.30		

Table 2 indicates that urban students have obtained higher mean scores than rural students on all dimensions of social support. In family support, urban students scored 23.60, while rural students scored 21.85. In teacher support, urban students scored 22.85, whereas rural students scored 21.20. In peer support, urban students scored 24.15, while rural students scored 22.35. The difference is highest in online social support, where urban students scored 22.40, while rural students scored 19.75. The total social support mean score of urban students is 93.00, whereas the mean score of rural students is 85.15. All t-values are significant. Therefore, it may be

concluded that urban secondary school students possess a higher level of social support than rural secondary school students. Thus, the hypothesis that 'there is no significant difference in the level of social support among secondary school students of rural and urban area' is rejected.

Objective 3 "To study and compare the level of social support among secondary school students of government and private schools".

Table-3: School Type-wise Mean, SD and t-test of Social Support and its Dimensions

Dimension of Social Support	Group	N	Mean	S.D.	t-value	Level
Family Support	Government	200	22.00	4.25	3.51	Significant
	Private	200	23.45	4.00		
Teacher Support	Government	200	21.10	4.35	4.58	Significant
	Private	200	22.95	3.70		
Peer Support	Government	200	22.60	4.10	3.33	Significant
	Private	200	23.90	3.70		
Online Social Support	Government	200	20.05	4.45	4.93	Significant
	Private	200	22.10	3.85		
Total Social Support	Government	200	85.75	13.10	5.50	Significant
	Private	200	92.40	11.00		

Table 3 shows that private school students have obtained higher mean scores than government school students on all dimensions of social support. In family support, private school students obtained a mean score of 23.45, while government school students obtained 22.00. In teacher support, private school students scored 22.95, while government school students scored 21.10. In peer support, private school students scored 23.90, whereas government school students scored 22.60. In online social support, private school students scored 22.10, while government school students scored 20.05. The total social support mean score of private school students is 92.40, whereas government school students obtained 85.75. The obtained t-values are significant in all dimensions. Therefore, it may be interpreted that private school students have a higher level of social support than government school students. Thus, the hypothesis that 'there is no significant difference in the level of social support among secondary school students of government and private schools' is rejected.

Objective 4 "To study and compare the level of problem-solving ability among secondary school students".

Table-4: Gender-wise Mean, SD and t-test of Problem-Solving Ability among Secondary School Students

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Level of Problem-Solving Ability	Significance
Problem-Solving Ability	Boys	200	12.85	3.10	3.46	Moderate	Significant
	Girls	200	13.90	2.95		High	

Table 4 shows the gender-wise comparison of problem-solving ability among secondary school students. The mean score of boys is 12.85, while the mean score of girls is 13.90. It indicates that girls have obtained a higher

mean score than boys in problem-solving ability. The standard deviation of boys is 3.10, and the standard deviation of girls is 2.95, which shows that the scores of both groups are moderately distributed around their mean values. The obtained t-value is 3.46, which is significant. Therefore, it may be interpreted that there is a significant difference between boys and girls in their problem-solving ability. Girls show a slightly higher level of problem-solving ability than boys. Boys fall under the moderate level, while girls fall near the high level of problem-solving ability. Thus, the hypothesis that 'there is no significant difference in the level of problem-solving ability among secondary school students' is rejected.

Objective 5 "To study and compare the level of problem-solving ability among secondary school students of rural and urban area".

Table-5: Locality-wise Mean, SD and t-test of Problem-Solving Ability among Secondary School Students

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Level of Problem-Solving Ability	Significance
Problem-Solving Ability	Rural	200	12.40	3.25	5.06	Moderate	Significant
	Urban	200	14.00	3.07		High	

Table 5 presents the locality-wise comparison of problem-solving ability among secondary school students. The mean score of rural students is 12.40, whereas the mean score of urban students is 14.00. It shows that urban students have a higher level of problem-solving ability than rural students. The standard deviation of rural students is 3.25, and the standard deviation of urban students is 3.07, which indicates that both groups have moderate variability in their scores. The obtained t-value is 5.06, which is significant. Therefore, it may be concluded that there is a significant difference between rural and urban secondary school students in their problem-solving ability. Urban students show a high level, while rural students show a moderate level of problem-solving ability. Thus, the hypothesis that 'there is no significant difference in the level of problem-solving ability among secondary school students of rural and urban area' is rejected.

Objective 6 "To study and compare the level of problem-solving ability among secondary school students of rural and urban area".

Table-6: School Type-wise Mean, SD and t-test of Problem-Solving Ability among Secondary School Students

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Level of Problem-Solving Ability	Significance
Problem-Solving Ability	Government	200	12.60	3.20	4.71	Moderate	Significant
	Private	200	14.05	2.95		High	

Table 6 shows the school type-wise comparison of problem-solving ability among secondary school students. The mean score of government school students is 12.60, while the mean score of private school students is 14.05. This indicates that private school students have obtained a higher mean score than government school students. The standard deviation of government school students is 3.20, and the standard deviation of private school students is 2.95, which shows that both groups have moderate variation in their scores. The obtained t-value is 4.71, which is significant. Therefore, it may be interpreted that there is a significant difference between government and private school students in their problem-solving ability. Private school students show a high level, whereas government school students show a moderate level of problem-solving ability. Thus, the hypothesis that 'there is no significant difference in the level of problem-solving ability among secondary school students of rural and urban area' is rejected.

Objective 7 "To find out the relationship between social support and problem-solving ability and its dimensions among secondary school students".

Table-7: Correlation between Social Support and Problem-Solving Ability among Secondary School Students

Dimension of Social Support	N	Correlation with Problem-Solving Ability	Nature of Relationship	Level of Relationship	Significance
Family Support	400	0.42	Positive	Moderate	Significant
Teacher Support	400	0.48	Positive	Moderate	Significant
Peer Support	400	0.36	Positive	Low to Moderate	Significant
Online Social Support	400	0.29	Positive	Low	Significant
Total Social Support	400	0.53	Positive	Moderate	Significant

The table 7 shows the relationship between social support and problem-solving ability among secondary school students. The correlation between family support and problem-solving ability is 0.42, which indicates a positive and moderate relationship. It means that students who receive better emotional guidance, encouragement, care, and support from their family are more likely to develop better problem-solving ability.

The correlation between teacher support and problem-solving ability is 0.48, which is positive and moderate. This shows that teacher support has a meaningful relationship with students' problem-solving ability. Therefore, students who receive more teacher support may show better academic problem-solving ability.

The correlation between peer support and problem-solving ability is 0.36, which shows a positive but low to moderate relationship. This means that peer support also contributes to students' problem-solving ability, but its relationship is slightly weaker than family and teacher support.

The correlation between online social support and problem-solving ability is 0.29, which indicates a positive but low relationship. It means that online support through digital platforms, educational groups, online friends, and learning communities may help students to some extent, but it is not as strong as direct support from family, teachers, and peers.

The correlation between total social support and problem-solving ability is 0.53, which shows a positive and moderate relationship. This indicates that students who receive higher overall social support are more likely to have better problem-solving ability. Therefore, it may be concluded that social support plays an important role in developing the problem-solving ability of secondary school students. Thus, the hypothesis that 'there is no significant relationship between social support and problem-solving ability and its dimensions among secondary school students' is rejected.

Objective 8 "To compare the problem-solving ability of students with high and low social support".

Table-8: Comparison of Problem-Solving Ability of Students with High and Low Social Support

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	t-value	Significance
Problem-Solving Ability	High Social Support	200	15.10	2.65	3.35	11.35	Significant
	Low Social Support	200	11.75	3.22			

The table 8 shows the comparison of problem-solving ability between students having high social support and students having low social support. The mean score of students with high social support is 15.10, while the mean score of students with low social support is 11.75. The mean difference between both groups is 3.35, which indicates that students having high social support possess better problem-solving ability than students having low social support. The standard deviation of the high social support group is 2.65, whereas the standard deviation of the low social support group is 3.22. This shows that the scores of students with low social support are slightly more scattered in comparison to students with high social support. The obtained t-value is 11.35, which is significant. Therefore, it may be interpreted that there is a significant difference in the problem-solving ability of students having high and low social support. On the basis of the above analysis, it may be concluded that students with high social support have a higher level of problem-solving ability than students with low social support. Thus, the hypothesis that 'there is no significant difference in the problem-solving ability of students with high and low social support' is rejected.

12. Major Findings

- It may be concluded that the level of social support among secondary school students is generally moderate to high. Girls show higher social support than boys, urban students show higher social support than rural students, and private school students show higher social support than government school students. The highest differences are found in online social support and total social support, especially between rural and urban students and between government and private school students. Therefore, the findings indicate that gender, locality, and school type may influence the level of social support among secondary school students.
- On the basis of the above statistical analysis, it may be concluded that secondary school students possess a moderate to high level of problem-solving ability. Girls show better problem-solving ability than boys, urban students show better problem-solving ability than rural students, and private school students show better problem-solving ability than government school students. Therefore, gender, locality, and school type appear to influence the problem-solving ability of secondary school students.
- It may be concluded that there is a positive relationship between social support and problem-solving ability among secondary school students. All dimensions of social support-family support, teacher support, peer support, and online social support-are positively related to problem-solving ability. Among these dimensions, teacher support shows the highest correlation with problem-solving ability, followed by family support, peer support, and online social support. Thus, social support may be considered an important factor in improving the problem-solving ability of secondary school students.
- There is a significant difference in problem-solving ability between students having high and low social support. Students with high social support show better problem-solving ability than students with low social support.

13. Educational Relevance

The findings of the study are educationally relevant because they show that social support is an important factor in developing problem-solving ability among secondary school students. The study indicates that students who receive support from family, teachers, peers, and online sources are more confident, emotionally secure, and capable of solving academic, personal, and social problems. Teacher support was found to be the strongest factor, which means that teachers have a very important role in developing students' problem-solving ability. Supportive teachers can help students understand difficult concepts, remove learning difficulties, encourage logical thinking, and motivate them to face academic challenges positively.

The study is also relevant for parents because family support was found to have a significant effect on problem-solving ability. Parents can help students by providing emotional security, encouragement, proper guidance,

study facilities, and a peaceful home environment. Peer support was also positively related to problem-solving ability, which shows that healthy peer relationships can improve students' confidence, cooperation, communication, and social adjustment. Online social support also had a positive effect, though comparatively lower, indicating that digital learning platforms, online study groups, and educational communities may support students' academic growth when used properly.

The findings are especially important for secondary education because students at this stage face examination pressure, emotional changes, career confusion, peer influence, and social adjustment problems. Therefore, schools should not focus only on academic achievement but should also develop social support systems and problem-solving skills among students. The study supports the need for counselling services, teacher guidance, peer-support programs, parent-teacher cooperation, and life-skills education in secondary schools.

14. Suggestions for Improvement

On the basis of the findings, it is suggested that schools should create a supportive and student-friendly environment where students feel free to share their academic, emotional, and social problems. Teachers should provide regular academic guidance, motivational support, feedback, and personal attention to students, especially those who show low problem-solving ability. Since teacher support was found to have the highest effect on problem-solving ability, teacher-training programs should include methods for developing students' reasoning, decision-making, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. Parents should also be made aware of the importance of family support. Schools should organize parent-orientation programs to guide parents about how to support their children emotionally and academically. Parents should avoid excessive criticism and comparison and should encourage students to discuss their problems openly. They should provide a peaceful home environment, proper study facilities, and positive motivation.

Peer-support programs should be encouraged in schools. Group activities, cooperative learning, peer tutoring, classroom discussion, and group problem-solving tasks should be organized so that students can learn cooperation, communication, and social problem-solving. Since online social support showed a positive but lower effect, students should be guided to use online platforms in a disciplined and educational manner. Schools may create supervised online academic groups where students can receive guidance from teachers and peers. Special attention should be given to boys, rural students, and government school students because their mean scores in social support and problem-solving ability were comparatively lower than girls, urban students, and private school students. Counselling services, remedial teaching, mentoring, and motivational programs should be arranged for these groups. Life-skills education, emotional development activities, decision-making exercises, and problem-solving workshops should be included in the school program.

15. Scope for Future Research

The present study was limited to secondary school students and selected variables of social support and problem-solving ability. Future researchers may conduct similar studies on students of primary, higher secondary, college, and university levels. The study may also be conducted on larger samples from different districts, states, and regions so that broader conclusions may be drawn. Future research may compare students on the basis of gender, locality, school type, socio-economic status, parental education, academic achievement, emotional intelligence, mental health, self-confidence, adjustment, and resilience.

Future researchers may also study the separate and combined effects of family support, teacher support, peer support, and online social support on different educational and psychological variables. Experimental studies may be conducted to see whether social-support intervention programs improve problem-solving ability among students. Longitudinal studies may also be conducted to examine how social support influences problem-solving ability over time. Qualitative research may be useful to understand students' personal experiences of support from family, teachers, peers, and online sources.

The present study opens further possibilities for developing support-based educational programs in schools. Future researchers may design and test counselling modules, peer-support programs, teacher-support strategies, parent-involvement programs, and digital-support systems for improving problem-solving ability. Thus, this study provides a useful base for further research in educational psychology, adolescent development, counselling, school education, and student support services.

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