



The Development of Perceived Campus Caring Scale in a University-Based Sample in Hong Kong

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Abstract

This article presents the findings of a study on the development and validation of a 44-item Perceived Campus Caring Scale (PCCS) of 1,520 students in a university of Hong Kong. Factor analyses using principle-components extraction with varimax rotation yielded 7 factors with 44 items, namely, Faculty support, Non-faculty Support, Peer Relationship, Sense of Detachment, Sense of Belonging, Caring Attitude, Campus Involvement. The internal consistency was high for the 7 factors, ranging from Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.77$ to 0.87. Correlations between the PCCS and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) indicated good convergent validity of the PCCS. Except the Sense of Detachment subscale, which indicated a negative correlation with SWLS, the other six subscales have positive correlation with the scale. Students who experienced more caring on campus demonstrated a higher level of satisfaction with life.

Keywords: On-campus Relationship; Caring; Satisfaction with Life Scale; University Students

Introduction

As generally used, the term caring is an abstraction often used to denote a wide range of attitudes and behaviors. Because of its complexity, any definition about the nature of caring, will inevitably face certain challenges. It is difficult to have a clear, bounded definition of a construct that involves multiple behaviors, cognitions, and feelings [1,2]. It has been examined as an orientation for moral reasoning in connection with moral development [3,4] and is used as synonymous with prosocial behavior, empathy, helping, and compassion [5]. Caring can be regarded as a way of being in a relationship [3] which is interactive and communicative, interdependent and connective [6], reciprocal [7] and mutual [8]. It can serve as a social practice essential to the maintenance of harmony and restraint [9-14] and to make the well-being of others [15].

Traditionally, family, school, and church have been agencies for developing caring behavior and attitude of young people. Today, the school remains as one of the chief places to develop and nurture an ethic of care [4,8,16-18] and as an ideal setting for developing caring communities. Research has suggested that effective schools tend to foster a higher degree of caring and achievement [7,19-23]. It has been shown that students do expect a caring learning environment [24-28]. They view caring teachers as those who are authentic genuinely interested in students; these educators are viewed as an integral part of the school culture.

How to develop a caring environment that fosters effective learning of students has become an important goal of educational institutions. Despite students' expectation for a caring learning environment, there are no studies on the measurement of caring atmosphere on a college campus. The present research reports the development and psychometric characteristics of an instrument entitled the Perceived Campus Caring Scale (PCCS), which assesses the caring magnitude of on campus learning of undergraduates in Hong Kong.

The importance of caring in teaching and learning

Students entering into colleges or universities experience a host

of challenges, including discovering emotions, feelings, independence and achievement. Inadequate adjustment to these challenges produce elevated risk for depression, anxiety and interpersonal conflict, and may result in engaging in relatively high rates of risky behaviors, such as unprotected intercourse, and illegal drug use [29]. The importance of encouraging a caring school culture has reached many school campuses and many school districts have specific language in their overall goals to provide a safe and caring school environment for students [30-33]. Both teaching and non-teaching personnel should work together to build caring relationships with students and to provide support that help remove barriers to learning and to create an atmosphere that encourages mutual support, caring and sense of community [34]. Research has indicated that the caring attitude of faculty members and non-faculty members could produce an 'empathetic attunement' which could have positive effects on students' academic performance and help decrease their at-risk behaviors [35]. Apart from building a sense of connection between the students and faculty members, the caring attitude of faculty and non-faculty members could soothe the negative feelings of the students who are affectively or emotionally at risk and help them feel being supported.

A positive and caring learning climate is predictive of academic achievement, healthy development and safety of young people [31,36-38] It also has significant positive impact on learning for those with learning difficulties and problem behaviors [34,39,40]. Students with behavioral and emotional problems are often less successful in learning

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Received November 14, 2011; **Accepted** December 29, 2011; **Published** January 03, 2012

Citation: Petrus NG, Su S, Chan V, Leung H, Cheung W (2012) The Development of Perceived Campus Caring Scale in a University-Based Sample in Hong Kong. J Psychol Psychother 2:102. doi:10.4172/2161-0487.1000102

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[34] and some may turn to deviant groups for support [41,42]. Thus, a positive connection with caring people at school is recognized as a significant feature for optimal development [43,44]. Although there is no consensus on how peer support could affect students' development, research supports the view that peer support is an indicator of adaptive psychological and social development of youths.

In educational settings, caring requires reciprocity of efforts among all members in the relationship [40]. A learning environment should not be determined solely by financial or managerial factors [45]. For example, students should be provided opportunities to participate in determining the nature of their educational experience [46]. Such participation could enhance their overall motivation in learning and in turn enrich their cultural knowledge, social growth and moral development. Therefore, students should not be passive caring receivers. Their caring attitude toward others, campus involvement and other social engagements could make significant contributions to the overall campus caring atmosphere which could facilitate their learning. Findings from American national surveys on student engagement have indicated that the efforts students put into campus engagement would enhance their own self-esteem, self-image, academic performance, sense of social responsibility and social bonds, and on-campus sense of belonging [47-49].

To conclude, promoting caring in school should not be limited to the provision of care to the students by faculty members and administrators and the development of supportive peer relationships. Encouraging active student engagement in campus activities is a necessary component for promoting campus caring relationships. Moreover, this requires reciprocal efforts among students, teaching faculty and non-teaching faculty members. At present, there have been few or no studies in campus caring relationships in Hong Kong. This paper reports a study on developing a scale to measure caring relationships as perceived by university students in Hong Kong.

The assessment of on-campus caring

As has been argued, caring is a definite expectation of school learning. Apart from academic achievement, educators are expected to develop caring behaviors and attitudes in students. One aspect of the college educational process involves the school staff faculty efforts to assist students develops skills that will enable them to make positive contributions to society [50].

How can a caring learning environment be developed in school or college? What constructs defining caring in these settings have become important in studying caring on school campus? In discussing caring on campus, three dimensions need to be clarified, namely (a) the caring environment, (b) the psychological state and beliefs, and (c) the psycho-social interactions. Among these three dimensions, caring environment provides a physical foundation for the other two components to develop. This dimension includes the creation of a safe and open environment, a climate of mutual, trust, honesty, and respect and emphasis on psychological protection and care in interpersonal interactions for students [51]. Apart from the physical entity of caring, caring involves beliefs and attitudes of caring of students and teachers. Caring is a belief about how we should view and interact with others [18]. This is the personal dynamics of caring which includes a sense of positive regard of others and a belief about the responsibility to nurture caring and to care for one another [51]. The last dimension of caring is the dual and reciprocal nature of caring. Caring, which is interactive and communicative, is based upon different caring acts, no

matter verbal or non-verbal, expressive or instrumental behaviors. In a learning environment, these include behaviors that attend to the social, affective and academic needs of the students, and a personal value of willingness to respond, to take responsibility for human error and to persist with difficult students [18]. Thus, caring in school settings is multidimensional in nature. It is based on an open attitude to care which results in some kind of responsive action, action-oriented or cognitive-oriented helping behaviors, to establish relationships of caring, trust, faith, hope, sensitivity, touch, empathy, and warmth among students and teachers [3].

In spite of its importance, there is little research on on-campus caring. Though there has been a significant development in establishing caring as a viable moral and political concept in the past twenty-five years [52], caring remains rather obscure particularly in a learning environment. There are several instruments and models on the study of caring behaviors but most are in healthcare settings [53]. These include the Caring Dimensions Inventory (CDI) on categories of caring [53] and the Caring Behaviors Inventory [54]. These instruments are helpful in understanding different aspects of caring pertaining to healthcare settings.

While these instruments have not been evaluated in academic settings, they provide a base on how to measure caring relationships. There is a scarcity of local studies investigating on-campus caring in Hong Kong. The present research reports a study to examine the psychometric properties of the 44-item Perceived Campus Caring Scale (PCCS) which was developed to assess the caring experiences of students in university in Hong Kong.

Method

Participants and procedure

Participants came from Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU). An approval for the study had been solicited from the Student Affairs Office of HKBU. With the help from the office, email invitations with consent to participate in the study through an online link to a self-administered questionnaire including the Perceived Campus Caring Scale (PCCS) and a Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) [55] were sent to all students of HKBU who were to complete it during the 10-day period of the study. A total of 1,520 students aged between 20 to 36 years ($M=20.63$, $SD=1.67$) with a response rate of 29.7% had completed the questionnaire upon the end of the survey period. Among them, 66.2% were female and 33.8% were male students. 44.9% of them had been living in the university's dormitory from 1 to 48 months with an average length of 10 months.

Measures

Perceived campus caring scale (PCCS): An initial pool of 97-item on caring was constructed based on literature review, qualitative interviews with 10 students and 5 counselors of HKBU. The first pilot study with the 97-item self-administered questionnaire was conducted with 146 students. For each item, the student responded on a 5-point Likert scale with an agreement continuum, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Individual items with a kurtosis greater than 1 or less than -1 were removed leaving 83 items. Coefficient alpha of the 83 items was 0.95.

In the second pilot study, emails and reminders were sent to a random sample of 2,000 students to invite them to participate in the study with the 83-item self-administered PCCS on-line. Three hundred forty nine students completed the questionnaire with a response rate of

17.5%. Exploratory factor analysis was conducted and items with factor loading less than 0.45 were eliminated leaving 44 items. Reliability analysis showed that these 44 items have high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.92$). Results from factor analysis revealed seven subscales: (a) Faculty Support, (b) Peer Relationship, (c) Sense of Detachment, (d) Caring Attitude, (e) Campus Involvement, (f) Non-faculty Support, and (g) Sense of Belonging. The reliability coefficients of the subscales ranged from 0.77 to 0.87.

Satisfaction with life scale (SWLS): The data reported in this article are based on a survey of perceived campus caring of university students in Hong Kong. To examine the convergent validity of PCCS, each subject was also required to complete a 5-item SWLS [55]. The SWLS represents the cognitive aspect of subjective well being [56]. It has demonstrated good reliability, as well as convergent and discriminant validity [57]. It has been translated into Chinese version and has been well used in mainland China and Hong Kong with Cronbach's α ranging from 0.75 to 0.85 [58]. As the level of SWLS of the students is outside the theme of this paper, it will be reported in another article.

Results

Factor structure of PCCS by exploratory factor analysis

A factor analysis was conducted on the 44 PCCS items using principle-components method of extraction with varimax rotation. Seven factors were obtained explaining 54.73% of the items variance. The factors were named Faculty Support, Peer Relationship, Sense of Detachment, Caring Attitude, Campus Involvement, Non-faculty Support, and Sense of Belonging. The definitions of the factors are presented in Table 1.

Reliability of the 44-item PCCS

The reliability of the PCCS, scales Cronbach's alpha and total percentage of variance were examined (Table 2). The PCCS has high reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.92$) and the reliability (Cronbach's α) of its subscales are ranged from 0.77 to 0.87. It indicates high internal consistency of both the PCCS and its subscales.

Inter-correlation coefficients between the subscales have demonstrated good reliability and validity of the PCCS. Table 3 showed the correlation matrix between the subscales with correlation coefficients (r) ranging from 0.14 to 0.75 ($p < 0.001$). There was no indication of multicollinearity. Each subscale is therefore able to capture a distinctive on campus caring characteristic as perceived by the students.

To establish the convergent validity of the PCCS, a correlation study with SWLS has been conducted. The reliability of SWLS in this study was well accepted with Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.76$. Results showed that all seven caring factors were significantly correlated with the levels of satisfaction with life as reported by students in the study (Table 4). Except Sense of Detachment subscale, the other subscales of the PCCS have positive correlation with SWLS. Students who experienced more caring on campus tended to have a higher level of satisfaction with life which demonstrated good convergent validity of the PCCS.

Discussion

The current study is the first attempt to explore the dimensionality of the PCCS of university undergraduates in a Chinese setting. The conceptual structure of PCCS was explored using exploratory factor analysis, and to investigate the factorial invariance of the related

models. The findings arising from this validation study are generally encouraging, suggesting that the PCCS assesses university students' perception of on-campus caring relationships on 7 dimensions, including Faculty Support, Non-faculty Support, Peer Relationship, Campus Involvement, Caring Attitude, Sense of Belonging and Sense of Detachment.

Results from this study are consistent with previous studies on caring and acknowledges the important roles of caring supports from teaching faculty and non-teaching faculty members, peers relationships, and engagement in co-curriculum activities on students' learning [30-34]. The six subscales except the Sense of Detachment subscale have positive correlation with SWLS. As the Sense of Detachment subscale is inverted, its negative relationship with SWLS in fact is consistent with the suggestion that students who have less sense of detachment endorse more on the PCCS score. The administration of the PCCS can help faculty members to become more aware of the campus caring atmosphere which could directly or indirectly affect the efficacy of teaching and learning of students. As compared with previous research [34,35], this study has created a concept of campus caring. It shows that students' senses of belonging and detachment with their learning environments are significant components for measuring their subjective caring experiences on campus. The PCCS is helpful for measuring teaching and learning success, and therefore students' subjective experiences on-campus caring should be incorporated into evaluation of outcomes of on-campus teaching and learning activities. The findings also shed light on the importance of reciprocal efforts of students, teaching faculty and non-teaching faculty members in developing caring teaching and learning environment for students.

The caring atmosphere at a school or university may well be a reflection of the caring attitude in society at large. It is not surprising to discover school bullying and substance abuse in school in a society which is characterized by social segregation and alienation. As studying in a less caring environment could be stressful and brings a poor sense of security to students, how to develop a curriculum as well as an extra-curriculum that can enhance the caring attitude of students has become an important goal of education. The PCCS provides information about the caring environment from the students' perspective. It could serve as an important indicator aiding the development of activities, albeit co-curriculum or extra-curriculum activities, so as to foster the school caring environment.

Apart from the contribution to the caring environment of the school, the PCCS can be a very useful tool for individual counselors to identify students at risk of social isolation and alienation in relation to their life on campus. With the assistance of the PCCS, the counselors can tailor-make counseling services and develop early intervention for students who have difficulty initiating or maintaining relationships with fellow students as well as with faculty members on campus.

The results of the current study must be considered in the context of several limitations. First, the participants in this study were mostly university undergraduates from a university with religious background. This may limit the generalizability of our findings to teaching and learning environments with other religious or non-religious background. Moreover, the PCCS was based on self-report measures from the perspective of university undergraduates. There was a possibility for faking good as the results of PCCS were based on only those who responded to the survey. Multiple perspectives

Factors	Definition	Characteristic items
Faculty Support	The perception that faculty members are motivating, positive, friendly, attentive to students' needs and problems (personal, social and intellectual), willing and able to provide advice and guidance, have good relationship with students and demonstrate professional competence in teaching.	With regard to the teaching faculty members, I know they generally <ul style="list-style-type: none"> propel me to do the best on learning understand students' difficulties encountered or may encountered in learning
Non-faculty Support	The perception that non-faculty members are friendly, supportive and professional, have ability to respond to students' needs, and provide accurate and comprehensible information/services.	With regard to the non-teaching faculty members whom I know/ have encountered/contacted with, they generally <ul style="list-style-type: none"> have friendly attitude and are happy to provide assistance provide students with services, resources and information that needed
Peer Relationship	The perception of sufficient peer support on the campus, feeling connected, included, accepted, and being well received.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have many good friends in school my schoolmates like me
Campus Involvement	Showing keen and broad interests/concerns in different people and issues in the campus, being active in participating in and organizing different activities in the campus, taking initiative to show care to others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am very concerned about what has happened on campus I am happy to participate in the activities that provide support to my junior schoolmates, such as Peer Mentor Programme, etc.
Caring Attitude	Showing caring attitudes, holding an accepting and empathetic attitude toward others, willing to give time and care to others, willing to listen to their problems and to build a caring relationship.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I value the building of a caring relationship with my schoolmates Mutual care among school-mates is very important
Sense of Belonging	Having a sense of belonging to the University, feeling himself/herself to be a member of it, feeling cared and enjoying being on this campus.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have fun from this campus I have developed a sense of belonging to this campus
Sense of Detachment	Feeling lonely and helpless on campus, being alienated by some classmates, finding that some classmates are not interested in him/her, and having difficulty expressing his/her care for others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I feel lonely on this campus (*) I feel I am alienated by my schoolmate(s) (*)

Note: (*) -reversed items

Table 1: Definition of the Caring Factors with Typical Characteristic Items.

Factor Name	No. of Items	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α
Faculty Support	9	3.52	0.52	0.86
Peer Relationship	8	3.43	0.80	0.84
Non-faculty Support	5	3.61	0.56	0.83
Sense of Detachment	6	3.62	0.61	0.81
Caring Attitude	5	4.02	0.43	0.77
Campus Involvement	6	3.06	0.58	0.77
Sense of Belonging	5	3.60	0.62	0.87
Total Scale	44	3.57	0.36	0.92

Note. Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Table 2: Mean, SD and the Reliabilities of Total Scale and Subscales.

Caring Subscale	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Faculty Support	--						
2. Peer Relationship	0.37*	--					
3. Non-faculty Support	0.49*	0.24*	--				
4. Sense of Detachment	0.22*	0.74*	0.14*	--			
5. Caring Attitude	0.32*	0.60*	0.27*	0.46*	--		
6. Campus Involvement	0.37*	0.58*	0.25*	0.20*	0.39*	--	
7. Sense of Belonging	0.53*	0.75*	0.34*	0.58*	0.58*	0.64*	--

n = 1,520. *significant at p<.01

Table 3: Subscale Inter-correlations matrix.

	Faculty- Support	Peer Relationship	Sense of Detachment	Caring Attitude	Campus Involvement	Non-faculty Support	Sense of Belonging
SWLS	0.38*	0.52*	-0.31*	0.32*	0.38*	0.26*	0.62*

Note: n = 1,520. *significant at p<.01

Table 4: Correlations (r) between Satisfaction with Life Scale and Caring Factors.

which include students as well as faculty members may constitute a better approach to assessing the construct of PCCS. In addition, as the participants in this study were from a university, further investigation is needed to determine how the current findings can be generated from studies of participants from different teaching and learning environments, including primary, secondary and tertiary educational

settings in Hong Kong or China. Nevertheless, this is a pioneer study on the development of the PCCS in Hong Kong. The seven dimensions of the scale provide seven indexes in relation to the caring environment on campus. Further research might be undertaken on the validity of the norms, of the indexes among different teaching and learning environments and settings as well as cultures.

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