

Conceptualization of Positive Social Functioning in Young Adults: A Scoping Review

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Social Functioning (SF) can be used as an indicator of individual role performance and function. The majority of existing health literature examines pathologies in SF. Little has been articulated as to what, specifically, is involved in positive or healthy non-impaired SF. This study examines conceptualizations of positive SF within the social science literature. A scoping review was conducted to map operationalizations of SF in young adults. A 2022 search of 10 social science databases yielded 1664 studies for screening following de-duplication. After an iterative process screening titles, abstracts, and full texts, a preliminary sample of 41 studies were included for analysis. Studies whose samples were aged 18 to 29 years and contributed findings or discussions of positive SF were included; SF was broadly operationalized by abilities to satisfy expectations of self, the social environment, and society at large. A consensus of at least two researchers was required for all phases of study screening, inclusion, and data extraction. Included studies were published from 1990 to 2021, with 66% originating from the United States. No studies articulated a definition of SF, 14 used the term SF, and 6 used the term psychosocial functioning instead of SF. Specific operationalizations of constructs measured and encompassed within positive SF were identified, of which 49% used both positive and negative characterizations of SF. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns in descriptions, measurements, and conceptualizations used in operationalizing SF. Four primary components of positive SF emerged: 1) social skills and expectations, 2) academic expectations and skills, 3) identity development, and 4) type and quality of relationships. Study findings synthesize extant conceptualizations contributing to positive SF that can be used to guide occupational therapy (OT) practice and research in fostering the positive SF that underpins occupational performance and well-being.

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