



A Study of Relationship between Optimism and Well Being In Undergraduate students

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ABSTRACT

Positive psychology believes in finding what is right with people rather than what is wrong. It attempts to explore human virtues and its influence on one's well being. This study explored one of the human virtue called "optimism" and its influence on one's emotional, psychological and social well being. Optimism was measured in 160 undergraduate students via the Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ). Well being was measured using the Mental Health Continuum Long Form (MHC-LF). A Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was calculated to find out the association between optimism and well being. The correlation between Optimism and Psychological Well Being, Optimism and Emotional Well Being and Optimism and Social Well Being was positive and low but statistically significant ($p < 0.05$ in all cases). This study has implications in the field of counseling to create modules to train clients to think in an optimistic way to enhance one's all spheres of well being.

KEYWORDS : optimism, wellbeing, Attributional style questionnaire, psychological well being, emotional well being.

INTRODUCTION

According to Baumgardner and Crothers (2009), Positive Psychology is the scientific study of the personal qualities, life choices, life circumstances, and socio-cultural conditions that promote a life well lived, defined by criteria of happiness, physical and mental health, meaningfulness, and virtue. Gable and Haidt (2005) define Positive Psychology as "the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions". The field of Positive Psychology can be described as the science of positive subjective experience, which focuses on well-being, contentment, satisfaction, hope, optimism, flow, and happiness (Seligman and Csikszentmihayli, 2000).

Optimism

Optimism has been conceptualized in a number of ways. It is understood as *dispositional optimism*, or the global expectation that things will turn out well in the future (Scheier & Carver, 1987, 1992). It is also investigated as *hope*, or the belief that one's actions and perseverance will allow goals to be achieved (Snyder, 1994). Optimism in this study is studied as an *attributional style* or a way in which people explain the causes of events for themselves. Attributional or explanatory style refers to an individual's habitual way of explaining the causes of positive and negative events in their life (Peterson & Steen, 2002). The way an individual explains good and bad events is called an explanatory or attributional style. Abramson, Seligman & Teasdale (1978) maintained that there are three dimensions relevant to a person's causal attributions and that each dimension is associated with a particular aspect of adaptation to an uncontrollable event.

The first dimension is the *locus* of one's causal explanation: Did this event occur because of something about me (an internal attribution) or something about the situation (an external attribution)? The second dimension is the *stability* of the causal explanation: Did this event occur because of something that will persist (a stable attribution) or something that is transient (an unstable attribution)? The third dimension is the *globality* of the causal explanation: Will the cause of this event influence many aspects of life (a global explanation) or influence only the currently experienced event? To summarize, one can say that when people experience uncontrollable aversive events they become helpless and they attribute their helplessness to a cause, which can be stable or unstable, global or specific, and internal or external. Individuals with optimistic explanatory styles believe that the causes of bad events that happen to them are temporary (unstable), specific, and external, whereas individuals who have opposite explanations are likely to have a pessimistic style (Abramson, Seligman & Teasdale, 1978).

According to the Reformulated Learned Helplessness Theory (RLHT), pessimistic and optimistic explanations will lead to different expectations about the future. Individuals who attribute negative events to stable and global causes will expect outcomes to be uncontrollable in the future. These individuals will be vulnerable to helplessness in the face of adversity. In contrast, individuals who attribute negative events to unstable or specific causes will expect to exert control in the future and hence will be more resilient. The RLHT proposes that the stability of the cause is related to the duration of helplessness symptoms; the globality of the cause is related to the generalization of helplessness across situations; and the internality of the cause is related to self-esteem deficits in depression.

Subjective Well-Being (SWB)

It refers to people's evaluations of their lives – evaluations that are both affective and cognitive. People experience an abundance of Subjective Well Being (SWB) when they feel many pleasant and few unpleasant emotions, when they are engaged in interesting activities, when they experience many pleasures and fewer pains, when they are satisfied with their lives" (Deiner, 2000). Well-being, in Ryff's (1989) view, is more than happiness with life. Well-being should be source of resilience in the face of adversity and should reflect positive functioning, personal strengths, and mental health. In the three-part model of SWB is a conceptualization and assessment of positive functioning. Ryff (1989) argues that well-being and happiness are based on human strengths, personal striving, and growth. Drawing in theories of positive mental health within personality and clinical psychology, Ryff and her colleagues have developed a model they call "Psychological well-being" (PWB) based on descriptions of positive psychological and social functioning (Keyes, 1998; Keyes et al., 2002; Ryff and Keyes, 1995). Originally used to describe positive functioning across the life span, this conceptualization has been extended to describe positive mental health (Keyes, 1998, 2003). The goal of these researchers was to formulate and validate a description of SWB that would delineate positive aspects of mental health. That is, just as mental illness is defined in terms of symptoms that express underlying pathology, these researchers asked, "What markers express underlying mental health and well-being?"

At a general level, well-being is conceived as involving the two broad dimensions of emotional well-being and positive functioning. Emotional well-being is defined by the three component view of SWB. It includes Life Satisfaction and Positive and Negative Affect. Psychological and social dimensions define positive functioning. All together, well-being is described as a global combination of emotional well-being, psychological well-being, and social well-being.

METHOD

Participants were randomly selected 160 undergraduate college students (Boys = 80 and Girls = 80) (Age range= 17 – 20 years). After obtaining the informed consent, participants completed the questionnaires described below.

Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ):

The Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ) was developed by Peterson, Semmel, von Baeyer, Abramson, Metalsky & Seligman (1982) and revised by Seligman (1984). The ASQ was designed to determine style of thinking; pessimistic or optimistic. The self-reporting questionnaire contains 12 hypothetical situations: 6 negative events and 6 positive events. Respondents indicate their response on a 7-point rating scale. It has reported reliabilities of 0.69 and 0.73 for positive and negative scores respectively.

The Mental Health Continuum-Long Form (MHC-LF) for adults

The MHC-LF form measures of social and psychological well-being have been created and validated by Keyes (1998) (Ryff, 1989, Ryff & Keyes, 1995). The MHC-LF consisted of 40 items, which consisted of seven items measuring emotional well-being, six 3-item scales (or 18 items total) that measured the six dimensions of Ryff's (1989) model of psychological well-being, and five 3-item scales (or 15 items total) that measure the five dimensions of Keyes' (1998) model of social well-being. The measure of emotional well-being in the MHC-LF included six items measuring the frequency of positive affect, and a single item of the quality of life overall. The estimates of internal consistency reliability for each of the three sets of measures -emotional, psychological, and social well-being—in the MHC - long forms have all been high (> .80; see e.g., Keyes, 2005a). The MHC-LF form measures of social and psychological well-being have been validated (see Keyes, 1998; Ryff, 1989, Ryff & Keyes, 1995). The 4-week test-retest reliability estimates for the long form scales ranging from 0.57 for the overall psychological well-being domain, 0.64 for the overall emotional well-being domain, to 0.71 for the overall social well-being domain (Robitschek & Keyes, 2009).

A Pearson Product Moment Correlation was calculated to find out the relationship between Optimism and Well Being.

RESULTS

The correlation between Attributional Style (AS) and Psychological Well Being (PWB) was $r(158) = 0.36$, ($p < 0.001$). The correlation between AS & Social Well Being (SWB) was $r(158) = 0.20$, ($p < 0.05$) and between AS & Emotional Well Being (EWB) was $r(158) = 0.35$, ($p < 0.001$). All these three correlations were positive and low but statistically significant. This demonstrated that as optimism increases even one's well being increases somewhat. However, the low correlation might indicate that there are other factors also apart from Optimism that can influence Well Being. The other factors influencing well being could view of oneself, positive interpersonal relationships, social and economic factors, ability to forgive, type and intensity of stressors and many more which could be considered along with optimism while counseling clients to experience wellness.

DISCUSSION

In a study by [Jinmoo](#) and [Youngkhil](#) (2010), it was found that dispositional optimism and perceived health were significant predictors of life satisfaction (which is considered to be one of the component of Emotional Well Being) among Senior Games Participants. Another study examined hope, optimism, self-esteem, social support, stress, and indices of subjective well-being (SWB) in adolescents. Results indicated that one's level of Hope, optimism, and self-esteem were found out to be significant factors foretelling one's subjective Well Being indices (Vacek, Coyle and Vera, 2010). Huda and Rayane (2007) examined personality constructs of self-esteem, optimism, and positive affect in relation to Subjective Well Being (SWB) in Middle Eastern Culture that is in Lebanon on a sample of 689 college youths. The results indicated that college youth's SWB was positively correlated with self-esteem, optimism, and positive affect. Pinquart, Fröhlich and Silbereisen (2007) studied the role of optimism, pessimism and psychological well-being in 161 newly diagnosed cancer patients. Over the course of 9 months following diagnosis, pessimism predicted negative change in affect balance, whereas no effect of optimism ap-

peared. This indicated that may be it is more important to be less pessimistic than to be optimistic when diagnosed with cancer. The study by Gallagher and Lopez (2009) found out whether hope and optimism can predict different aspects of well being (emotional well being, social well being). The analyses revealed that hope and optimism seem to be important markers to positive mental health and affected most of the components of well being. The study further revealed that hope and optimism both were equally important for maintaining social aspects of well-being too. However, optimism was found to be more important for maintaining the pleasurable aspects of well-being (emotional well being), and hope was found to be more important for maintaining the purposeful aspects of well-being (social well being).

The limitations of the present study were that the group was homogeneous; a larger and more representative sample from other cities of India would have allowed for more heterogeneity. That would have aided in getting a stronger correlation. The study has implications in the area of counseling where nowadays client approach counselors for experiencing emotional or social well being. Such clients can be trained to look at life events from optimistic perspective to experience wellness or happiness even after adversities.

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