



Optimism and Spiritual Well-being amongst members of majority and a minority community

KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT *It is a general perception (particularly within the minority community itself) that a minority has to bear more pressure, stress, problems etc. in day to day life. This would eventually lead to the community having more pessimistic views about their future and life in general. They may feel that they are being dominated and discriminated against, by the majority community and have a feeling of insecurity, helplessness, injustice and even alienation. All these things may drive a person towards pessimism*

An exploratory research was done to answer basic question viz. how far being a minority or majority influences well being in the average social context? The study was done on sixty adults, both males and females with the age group of youngsters ranging between 18-25 years, out of which 30 were Hindus and 30 were Muslims. The sample was urban and educated. The tools for data collection were optimism-pessimism scale, to measure optimism/pessimism and a questionnaire for measuring spiritual wellbeing. The study shows that the majority community are more optimistic and have a better spiritual well being than the minority community and they significantly differ on both the scales. It seems that the minority community still think that there is disparity in opportunities.

The author concludes that there is a significant difference between the optimism and spiritual wellbeing of majority and minority community and a lot has to be done to develop better self concept, quality of life, wellbeing, positivity, in the minorities.

INTRODUCTION

Human society is formed out of various communities and cultures of all colours and hues. In a diverse country such as India these colours and hues are made up of an even wider gamut. A community can comprise of individuals belonging to different race, religion, caste, creed etc, subscribing to different ideologies and value systems. In any society there may exist a group of people that may be categorized as the majority constituent. These people may share the same beliefs, religion, ideologies etc. and if such a situation exists there is bound to be a minority constituent. In our country the most easily identifiable majority and minority communities are Hindus and Muslims who put together make up more than 90 % of the total population.

It is a general perception (particularly within the minority community itself) that a minority has to bear more pressure, stress, problems etc. in day to day life. This would eventually lead to the community having more pessimistic views about their future and life in general. They may feel that they are being dominated and discriminated against, by the majority community and have a feeling of insecurity, helplessness, injustice and even alienation. All these things may drive a person towards pessimism.

A study revealed that the Hindi have better outlook on a happy life rather than Muslims. The statistics are Hindus 56.78 optimism and Muslims 43.22 optimism. The Muslims do not expect a better future than the Hindus according to statistics which are 52% towards Muslims and 56.78% for Hindus.⁽¹⁾ (Q. Hasan ,1987)

The term 'Optimism' embraces two closely correlated concepts: the first is the inclination to hope, while the second more generally refers to the tendency to believe that we live in "the best of all possible worlds", as coined by the German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz

Over the last few years, a significant body of research has been carried out about the effectiveness of optimism as a psychological phenomenon, leading to various theoretical formulations of the same concept, understood as "disposition", "attributional style", "cognitive bias", or "shared illusion".

Scheier and Carver⁽²⁾ theorized the "disposition" towards optimism in their studies, called "dispositional optimism", considering it a trait of an equilibrated personality, in time and in various situations, that influences the way in which individuals come to terms with present, past and future events in life. Optimistic individuals are positive about events in daily life. In the research carried out regarding this perspective, positive correlations have been found between optimism and physical/mental well-being. Optimistic subjects tend to have more frequently protective attitudes, are more resilient to stress and are inclined to use more appropriate coping strategies.

In open contrast, studies carried out by Peterson and Seligman⁽³⁾, that were prevalently directed towards the understanding of the psychological bases of pessimism, lead to conception of its opposite, optimism, as an "attributional style", characterized by the tendency to believe that negative events are inconstant (the negative event will not repeat itself), external (I am not responsible for the event) and specific (the event is "specific", self-limiting and will not influence any other activities of mine and my life). Optimists believe that positive events are more stable and frequent than negative ones. They think that they can avoid problems in daily life and prevent them from happening, and therefore they cope with stressful situations more successfully than pessimists.

Referring to the viewpoint of *Social Cognition*, a third perspective sustains that optimism is the consequence of a

cognitive underestimation of risk, in other words, a “bias” for the Self. This bias reflects the optimist’s conviction that positive events are more likely to occur to him/herself while negative events prevalently affect others. Weinstein^(4,5) defined this phenomenon “unrealistic optimism”. The optimistic bias is not a personality trait like dispositional optimism but rather a systematic cognitive distortion of the consideration of one’s own probability of encountering negative events. The optimistic bias has been defined as the result of the joint efforts of two mechanisms. The first of these is related to cognitive factors such as lack of information and poor critical insight of one’s own cognitive skills. The second mechanism has a motivational nature, closely tied to defending one’s self-esteem and to defensive negation.

Quality of life refers to life conditions of an individual (health, wealth, social conditions) and satisfaction of personal desires.

There is evidence that optimistic people present a higher quality of life compared to those with low levels of optimism or even pessimists. It has been demonstrated that in the presence of severe pathological conditions, optimistic patients adapt better to stressful situations compared to pessimists, with positive repercussions on their quality of life. Many studies have outlined that optimistic persons have a better quality of life, better physical health and are able to face difficulties more easily as to identify new aims in life.

Spiritual wellbeing:

Spiritual wellbeing is about our inner life and its relationship with the wider world. It includes our relationship with the environment, our relationships with others and with ourselves. Spiritual wellbeing does not just reflect religious belief although for people of a religious faith it is obviously a central feature. Each person’s spirituality is greatly impacted by the community they are a part of and their relationships. To be spiritually well will mean a positive engagement with others, self and our environment.⁽⁶⁾

Benefits of spiritual wellbeing include:

- Feeling content with life
- Maintaining balance and control of life
- Building positive relationships
- Feeling a purpose and meaning in life

Results and Discussion:

Table 1.	Mean of Majority (Hindus)	Mean of Minority (Muslims)	SD of Majority (Hindus)	SD of Minority (Muslims)	df	T	P
Optimism	28.30	22.4	2.65	4.08	58	8.88	<.01*

Table 2.	Mean of Majority (Hindus)	Mean of Minority (Muslims)	SD of Majority (Hindus)	SD of Minority (Muslims)	df	T	P
Spiritual Wellbeing	10.5	8.83	1.58	1.6	58	4.07	<.01*

Table 1 shows the mean scores; S.D. and t value of the majority and minority community on the optimism scale and Table 2 shows the same with Spiritual wellbeing.

Result:

The present study shows that the majority community are more optimistic and have a better spiritual well being than the minority community and they significantly differ on both the scales. It seems that the minority community still think that there is disparity in opportunities, and that the government is not fair enough and don’t treat both

- Experiencing a connection with a power greater than oneself
- Accepting and growing from the challenges and changes in life.

Spiritual wellbeing is about wholeness, which encompasses the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual dimension. This doesn’t mean however that we must be well in every area to be spiritual well. For example, someone may be physically unwell yet have a positive spiritual wellbeing which helps them cope with their physical difficulties. Optimism and spirituality both are considered aspects of wellbeing.

By and large following positivistic model of research, mainstream psychology ignored the context in which individual are embedded. Non-positivistic approaches in psychology such as social constructionism, symbolic interactionism and social representations highlight the importance of context. It is in the given context and possible social interaction that they evaluate themselves. This is also true to the concept of well being. One’s own well being may be relative and not absolute as positive psychologists claim. In fact absolute concept of well being is the product of western individualism.

Objective: The main thesis of this exploratory research was to answer basic questions, how far the social context minority, majority influences wellbeing? A related question that can be raised to explore that the concept of wellbeing is absolute or relative.

Method:

Sample- The sample comprised of 60 adults, both males and females with the age group of youngsters ranging between 18-25 years, out of which 30 were Hindus and 30 were Muslims. The sample was urban and educated; the socio economic status of the sample was middle-middle class to upper middle-class. Out of the 60, half were male and half were female. The participants were selected on the basis of their agreement towards sparing time for this study.

Procedure- The tools for data collection were optimism-pessimism scale, to measure optimism/pessimism and a questionnaire for measuring spiritual wellbeing. The participants were asked to answer the questions honestly, frankly and without any religious bias.

the communities as equals and they feel discriminated and this feeling of negativity often erupts in riots and violent outbursts and can affect the entire community as a whole. From previous studies it is seen that Hindus perceive Muslims as more quarrelsome and aggressive and these perceptions by Hindus are internalized by Muslims.⁽⁷⁾ The Muslims then also develop a negative image of themselves

and have a comparatively poor self image. The relationship between religious and ethnic attitudes have been found to be mediated by the political ideology (Mahanta;1977)⁽⁸⁾ Tripathi and Shrivastava (1981)⁽⁹⁾ tested the hypothesis that muslims favourable attitude towards in group and unfavourable attitudes towards out group members are mediated by relative deprivation. Subjects high in relative deprivation felt that their group were perceived negatively by the Hindus. Another study showed that Muslims perceive that riots cannot be controlled effectively and this may lead to pessimism.⁽¹⁾

It is reported by Majeed and Ghosh 1981⁽¹⁰⁾ that Muslims had a favourable attitude towards high class Hindus but Hindus had more favourable attitude towards their own groups than outgroups. This may develop a negative self perception among the muslims.

The present author does not claim that the spirituality of any community is greater or lesser than others. The main intention was to compare the perceptions of spirituality between both the communities. The spiritual well being of majority community is better, perhaps because of the change in political scenario, that majority community is claiming to be more spiritual as compared to minority community. Maybe because of modernization the minority community thinks that they are not observing necessary rituals to develop spirituality

These are just exploratory studies with all its limitations and therefore these results cannot be generalized. Further explorations with different minority communities are needed.

Conclusion: The author concludes that there is a significant difference between the optimism and spiritual well-being of majority and minority community and a lot has to be done to develop better self concept, quality of life, well-being, positivity, in the minorities. Detailed research and steps for improvement is needed.

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