

## Life Satisfaction Influenced by Optimistic and Pessimistic Attitude: A Study of Older Adults



### Psychology

**KEYWORDS :** life satisfaction, optimism, pessimism, old age.

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### ABSTRACT

*The present study attempts to investigate the role of optimistic and pessimistic attitude on life satisfaction in old age. The main objectives of the study were: to explore the role of optimistic-pessimistic attitude predicting life satisfaction among elderly; to investigate the relationship of optimism-pessimism with life satisfaction among male and female elderly; to investigate the role of gender on optimism, pessimism and life satisfaction. The data was collected on a sample of 300 older adults including 150 males and 150 females of Delhi. The prevalence of life satisfaction, optimism and pessimism was assessed using SWLS (Denier et al. 1985) and OPS (Dember et al. 1989) respectively. Regression analysis revealed that optimism and pessimism were significant predictors of life satisfaction among elderly specially males while pessimism was the only predictor of life satisfaction among females. t-test showed significant gender differences on optimism, pessimism and life satisfaction.*

**INTRODUCTION:** Life satisfaction is a major component of subjective well being which is generally defined as the cognitive evaluations of one's life assessed by specific domains or globally (Diener, 1984). It is an overall assessment of feelings about one's life at a particular point in time ranging from negative to positive. Life satisfaction has been defined as a person's subjective, global evaluation of the positivity of her/his life as a whole or with specific life domains (e.g. family life, school experiences) (Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999). They also include the following under life satisfaction: desire to change one's life; satisfaction with past; satisfaction with future; and significant other's views of one's life.

Two separate but related constructs that have received considerable attention in assessing and predicting life satisfaction are pessimism and optimism. Optimism has been defined as the stable tendency to "believe that good rather than bad things will happen" (Scheier & Carver, 1985, p. 219). Being optimistic, in the typical sense of the word, ultimately means one expects the best possible outcome from any given situation. This is usually referred to in psychology as dispositional *optimism*. Pessimists, conversely, are those people who have enduring propensities to believe the worst in life will happen, and they repeatedly expect that things will not turn out well. There have been many studies done on why people look at life in a certain way but it has not been established if it is purely biological or purely environmental factors that contribute to the development of this point of view. Nevertheless, it is a commonly observed phenomena that both optimism and pessimism have certain influences on an individual's life and personality and thus, on their attributes and behaviors.

A good amount of literature is available which states that there will be a correlation between life satisfaction with optimism and pessimism. It has been found that optimism is significantly associated with multidimensional life satisfaction and multidimensional structure of psychosocial problems among adolescents (Ho, Cheung, & Cheung, 2010; Lina, Chianga, Lic, & Liub, 2010). In some studies life satisfaction and optimism was verified and a moderate positive correlation was found between the two. This may be because both life satisfaction and optimism are components of psychological wellbeing; people who appraise their life satisfaction positively may have better coping abilities. For example, life satisfaction may reveal how well one has adapted or learned to cope with one's health status and environment (Folkman, 1997; Fredrickson, 2001). Higher life satisfaction can also be an indication of how easily an individual disengages from unattainable goals and re-engages in new, more attainable goals (Rasmussen, Wrosch, Scheier, & Carver, 2006). This strategy would be vital to coping with health conditions, such as restricted mobility or chronic disease, which may render valued life goals impossible.

Optimism is an important internal resource for adjusting psychological and physical health (Zhang et al., 2013; Geers, Wellman, & Fowler, 2013). Numerous studies have indicated that optimism is closely related to life satisfaction and psychological health. Schweizer and Koch revealed that individual optimism has a significant positive correlation with life satisfaction and a significant negative correlation with depression (Schweizer & Koch, 2001). The work performance of pressure optimists is better than that of pessimists because optimists and pessimists adopt different strategies for coping with problems; optimists use positive coping strategies, whereas pessimists apply negative coping strategies, such as denial (Compas et al., 2001). Lai and Wong investigated laid-off women in Hong Kong and reported that optimism is an important personal resource for dealing with unemployment crisis; women with high optimism separate themselves from the unemployment problem better than those with low optimism and prevent unemployment from damaging their self-concept and self-esteem, thus achieving job satisfaction (Lai & Wong, 1998).

In a study by Groot & van den Brink (2007) the results suggest that the realistic values of life satisfaction are closer to the pessimistic values than to the optimistic ones. It is further found that men are relatively more optimistic and less pessimistic than women. Furthermore, Wong and Lim (2009) reported in their study results indicating that hope and optimism predict approximately 17% of the variance in life satisfaction. The Optimists benefited greater problem-focused coping strategies compared to the pessimists. In addition, they had better general health ( $p < 0.001$ ) and life satisfaction ( $p < 0.001$ ). Regression analysis indicated that optimism pessimism accounted for a significant amount of variance ( $p < 0.001$ ) in coping strategies and psychological adjustments (Mousavi & Taghavi, 2007).

**Objectives:** following are the objectives of the study:

- To investigate the relationship of optimistic and pessimistic attitude with life satisfaction among older adults.
- To explore the relationship of optimistic and pessimistic attitude with life satisfaction among male and female elderly participants.
- To investigate the mean difference between male and female elderly persons on life satisfaction, optimism and pessimism.

**Hypothesis:** The following hypotheses were formulated to reach the objectives of the study:

Optimism and pessimism would be the significant predictors of life satisfaction among elderly persons.

Optimism and pessimism would be the significant predictors of

life satisfaction among male and female elderly participants.

There would be no significant mean difference between male and female elderly participants on life satisfaction, optimism and pessimism.

**Methodology**

**Participants:** The participants of the present study comprised of 300 elderly persons (age ranged from 60 to 80 years). The mean age of the sample population was 71.44 years. The total sample was further categorized into male (150) and female (150) elderly participants. The same social and economical background of the participants was taken into consideration. The sample was collected from different areas of Delhi through randomization. These elderly persons were contacted personally, and the questionnaires were administered to them.

**Measures**

**Optimism-Pessimism Scale (OPS)**

The optimism-pessimism scale or OPS (Dember et al., 1989) is a measure with 18 items reflecting optimism, 18 items reflecting pessimism and 20 fillers. Items are chosen based on a four point likert scale that ranges from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." The OPS is based on the view that a person can be both optimistic and pessimistic, but at varying degrees. Validity and reliability for the OPS have found alpha coefficients of  $r = .94$  for the optimism scale and  $r = .86$  for the pessimism scale.

**Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)**

SWLS by Diener et al. (1985) is a 5 item scale which allows individuals to rate their degree of agreement or disagreement on a 7 point likert type scale for the stated questions (1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree). Reliability has been demonstrated in terms of high internal consistency with a value of 0.87 and stability overtime with a test-retest coefficient of 0.82.

**Procedure**

Initially the participants were personally contacted and rapport was established with them. The participants completed the questionnaires given to them. Standard instructions were written on top of each questionnaire, and the participants were asked to rate themselves under the option they felt relevant to them. It was made clear to the participants that there were no right and wrong answers. If they had any difficulty, they were encouraged to ask questions. After finishing the entire set of questions, they were asked to return the questionnaires. The test administration took about 45minutes.

**Results & Interpretation**

To achieve the objectives of the study, linear regression analysis was used to establish the relationship between optimistic pessimistic attitude and life satisfaction and t-test was used to find out the mean difference between groups on variables using (SPSS version 16.0) software program. The following results were obtained:

**Table 1: Linear Regression of optimism and pessimism to predict life satisfaction among old age persons (N= 300):**

Table 1.a Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	R Square Change
1	.345 <sup>a</sup>	.119	.116	.119
2	.373 <sup>b</sup>	.139	.133	.020

**b. Predictors: (Constant), pessimism, optimism**

**Table 1.b Coefficients**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
2	(Constant)	37.740	3.781		9.982	.000
	Pessimism	-.258	.041	-.488	-6.378	.000
	Optimism	.142	.054	.202	2.639	.009

**Dependent variable: life satisfaction**

It can be observed from the above table that pessimism and optimism are the significant predictors of life satisfaction among older adults. The value of R square shows that predictor variable (pessimism) explained approximately 11.9% of the variance of criterion variable (life satisfaction) while predictor variable (optimism) explained approximately 13.9% of the variance of life satisfaction. The actual contribution of predictor variable pessimism and optimism to the criterion variable is .119 and .020 respectively. In the coefficient table the standard beta coefficient for pessimism and optimism are -.488 and .202 respectively which indicates that a unit change in the predictor variable pessimism has a negative effect on criterion variable life satisfaction while a unit change in the predictor variable optimism has a positive effect on life satisfaction.

**Table 2: linear regression of optimism and pessimism to predict life satisfaction among male old age participants (N= 150):**

Table 2.a Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	R Square Change
1	.236 <sup>a</sup>	.056	.049	.056
2	.354 <sup>b</sup>	.125	.113	.070

**b. Predictors: (Constant), pessimism, optimism**

**Table 2.b Coefficients**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
2	(Constant)	47.671	6.206		7.681	.000
	Pessimism	-.504	.114	-.404	-4.418	.000
	Optimism	.218	.064	.313	3.419	.001

**Dependent variable: life satisfaction**

The table 2.a predicts that optimism and pessimism are the significant predictors of depressive symptoms among male older adults. The value of R square shows that predictor variable (pessimism) explained approximately 5.6% of the variance of criterion variable (life satisfaction) while predictor variable (optimism) explained approximately 12.5% of the variance of satisfaction with life. The actual contribution of predictor variable pessimism and optimism to the criterion variable is .056 and .070 respectively. In the coefficient table the standard beta coefficient for pessimism and optimism are -.404 and .313 respectively which indicates that a unit change in the predictor variable pessimism has a negative effect on life satisfaction but optimism have a positive effect on criterion variable life satisfaction.

**Table 3: Linear Regression of optimism and pessimism to predict satisfaction with life among female old age persons (N= 150):**

**Table 3.a Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R Change	Square
1	.547 <sup>a</sup>	.299	.295		.299

**Predictors: (Constant), pessimism**

**Table 3.b Coefficients**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
2	(Constant)	31.412	1.093		28.752	.000
	Pessimism	-.208	.026	-.547	-7.953	.000

**Dependent variable: life satisfaction**

The model summary table clearly indicates that pessimism is the only significant predictor of depressive symptoms among female elderly participants. The value of R square shows that predictor variable (pessimism) explained approximately 29.9% of the variance of criterion variable (life satisfaction). The actual contribution of predictor variable to the criterion variable is in a form of R square change which is .299. The coefficient table is providing the details of the results. The t and sig (p) values give a rough indication of the impact of predictor variable. The standard beta coefficient for pessimism is -.547 which indicates that a unit change in the predictor variable pessimism has a negative effect on criterion variable life satisfaction.

**Table-4: Showing means difference between male and female old age participants on life satisfaction, pessimism and optimism:**

Test variable	Groups	N	Mean	SD	T (298)
Life Satisfaction	Male	150	19.673	6.182	5.228*
	Female	150	23.400	6.163	
Pessimism	Male	150	34.386	4.957	3.012*
	Female	150	38.560	16.230	
Optimism	Male	150	48.873	8.877	1.914**
	Female	150	46.853	9.396	

\*significant at .01 level, \*\*significant at .05 level

The above table is showing that male and female elderly people differ significantly on life satisfaction, pessimism and optimism variables. The statistical value given in the table is t= 5.228 which is showing a significant difference (p<.01) between the male and female groups on life satisfaction. The mean value for female participants (M= 23.400) is greater than the mean value of male participants (M= 19.673) which presents the idea that females are more satisfied with their life than the male participants in their old age. On the variable pessimism we can see females score higher mean value (M= 38.560) than the male participants (34.386) on a significant level (p<.01) which is indicating towards the pessimistic nature of female elderly persons. While male participants score higher on optimism (M=48.873) than the females (M= 46.853) with t value of 1.914 (p<.05) which represents the idea that males are more optimistic than the females in their old age.

**Discussion**

We conducted the present study to examine the utility of optimistic and pessimistic attitude in predicting satisfaction of life among older adults. Linear regression analysis was performed to evaluate the relationship between the optimistic and pessimistic attitude with life satisfaction. Consistent with previous findings associated with optimism-pessimism and life satisfaction, we predicted that optimism and pessimism would be related to life satisfaction and in our results we found optimism and pessimism are significantly associated with life satisfaction. Results show that optimism is positively related to life satisfaction among elderly while pessimism is negatively related. Both optimism and pessimism are found the significant predictors of life satisfaction among male elderly while pessimism is the only significant predictor of life satisfaction among female elderly. The findings are supported and are consistent with many of the studies in literature (Stanley, Sethuramalingam & Sathia, 2013; Jiang et al. 2014; Lim, 2009; Schweizer & Koch, 2001). In the study by Jiang (2014), the results showed that optimism was positively correlated with life satisfaction (r=0.476, p<0.01), and was negatively correlated with pessimism (r=-0.402, p<0.01). This study confirmed that among the Chinese college students evaluated, those with higher scores on optimism were more likely to have higher life satisfaction.

The study by Stanley, Sethuramalingam, & Sathia (2013) explored the life satisfaction of HIV positive persons (N= 309) in India along with the extent of hopelessness (pessimism) manifested in them. Respondents were compared on the basis of gender and marital status. The results showed a significant correlation between life satisfaction and overall hopelessness score (r=-0.47, p< 0.001). This negative correlation indicates that increase in pessimistic feelings about future is associated with decrease in life satisfaction. Data analysis revealed that female respondents and those who were 'single' showed a significant difference from male respondents and those married and scored higher on pessimism and lower on life satisfaction.

Contrary to our findings, Chang (2002) found no relationship of optimism and pessimism on life satisfaction. An interactive model of optimism-pessimism and stress was examined in predicting psychological symptoms and life satisfaction in a group of younger (n = 340; M = 20.4 years) and a group of older adults (n = 316; M = 46.6 years). A series of regression analyses indicated that no significant interaction was found in predicting life satisfaction in older adults (Chang, 2002).

To verify the differences between means t-test was performed. The results showed significant differences between the means of the two groups for optimism, pessimism and life satisfaction. It was found that females are more pessimistic and males are more optimistic. The findings are in supports of the results by Stanley, Sethuramalingam, & Sathia (2013). They found a significant gender differences on hopelessness scores as well as for "feelings about the future". Female respondents have obtained higher mean score indicating greater pessimism than male counterparts.

In our study the results show a significant mean difference between male and female elderly on life satisfaction. Females are more satisfied with their life than the males. It was observed that females were satisfied with their life even if they don't have a good life to enjoy; the life was not up to their expectations. This aspect of life satisfaction among females can be explained in Indian context only for the reason that from the very beginning of their childhood females in India are taught to live peacefully and to be satisfied with what they get from their lives. No matter if it is less or more but they should be happy and satisfied and should keep their life and family members happy.

Opposite to our findings Clench- Aas et al. (2011) and Balamurugan & Malik (2015) found in their study that no gender difference was observed at the level of factors affecting the level of life satisfaction. It is gender invariance. The data obtained didn't show much variation in the satisfaction level of boys and girls. In other word the satisfaction with life is not biased with the gender i.e. it does not matter what the gender of the person is to see his/her satisfaction with life. Life satisfaction is based on experiences with life and also the level of optimism in people.

### Conclusion

The following conclusion can be made for the study:

- Optimism and pessimism are significant predictors of life satisfaction among elderly persons.
- Optimism is positively related to life satisfaction while pessimism is negatively related to life satisfaction among elderly.
- Optimism and pessimism are significant predictors of life satisfaction among male elderly while pessimism is the only significant predictor of life satisfaction among female elderly participants.
- Optimism is positively related to life satisfaction and pessimism is negatively related to life satisfaction among male elderly participants.
- Pessimism is negatively related to life satisfaction among female elderly participants.
- Female participants are more pessimistic and more satisfied with their life than the male elderly participants.
- Male elderly persons are more optimistic than the female elderly persons

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