

Psychological Capital (PsyCap) and Mental Well-being among Medical Students

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ABSTRACT

Currently, PsyCap study has drawn the attention of many researchers in order to help the stressed persons to cope up with adverse environments. In light of PsyCap, present study was planned to examine the influence of PsyCap on the mental well-being of medical students pursuing either MBBS or BUMS form Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh. We have given an emphasis on PsyCap in order to visualize its influence on the well-being of undergraduates of the medical students. It was observed that medicos who were more hopeful, optimistic, efficacious, and resilient have had more ability to withstand against unfavourable environmental or in other words, they perceived academic environment as being less perturbing more than likely to see in their peers with lower PsyCap. This type of resilient adaptive characters and cognitive differences is considered to reconcile the effects of stress on well-being for medical students. It was, therefore, observed that PsyCap will mitigate the effects of stress on mental well-being of medical students. In this way, PsyCap were found to be positively correlated with mental well-being of the medical students. In order to impart PsyCap among the medical student there is urgent need of conveyance of a larger scale of consistent trainings, workshop, discussions on PsyCap which is particularly adaptive to medical students that will surely resolve the issues what they find challenging.

Keywords: *PsyCap (Psychological Capital), Mental Well-being, Students*

Being a student in today's world is the most challenging task and academic system has become more demanding nowadays than ever, it is becoming highly complex with increasing competition and subsequently leading to higher level of stress among students. Being a medical student just adds to the pressure, they have to work harder than students of any other field. The field of medicine education is perceived as highly stressful involving both physical and emotional exhaustive environment. Stressor may manifest in manifold and the impact of these

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stressors on student's well-being may negatively impact his/her personal and academic effectiveness leading to high levels of stress and other psychological and physical health hazards. In research studies psychological stress among university students was found to be significantly higher than among the general population (Adlaf, Gliksman, Demers, & Newton-Taylor, 2001; Stallman, 2010). College students face a number of stressors ranging from the demands of their academic coursework to challenges in managing interpersonal relationships (Houghton et al., 2012). Medical students are subjected to a range of assessments throughout their course of study like monthly tests, mid-semester, semester papers, practical and viva-voce examination which put the students in an extreme stressed environment. Students are in continuous stress round the clock in matching the academic demands and time available to meet those demands.

Academic stressors may contribute to the development of problems ranging from decreased concentration, fatigue, and anxiety, to eating disorders, and other physical and psychological problems. Whereas many young adults deal with psychological distress which often disrupts their normal functioning, others do not suffer such consequences (Riolfi, Savicki & Richards, 2012). Some students with more stress-resilient personalities suffer less health degradation in response to the same exposure. These individuals have "positive" traits and abilities (e.g., optimism, positive emotionality, hardiness, hope, ego resilience) which correlate negatively with physical and psychological health symptoms (Seligman, 1998; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004).

In another study Ciarrochi, Heaven and Davies (2007) examined the distinctiveness of three "positive thinking" variables (self-esteem, trait hope, and positive attributional style) in predicting future high school grades, teacher-rated adjustment, and students' reports of their affective states. It was revealed that each positive thinking variable was distinctive in some contexts but not others. Hope was a predictor of positive affect and the best predictor of grades and low self-esteem was the best predictor of increases in sadness (Hasnain, Wazid, & Hasan, 2014). Furthermore, Wellner and Adox (2000) have also reported that an optimistic attitude or positive thinking is the key to success and happiness and there are a number of other researches to support the claim. Studies have shown that positive thinking can reduce tension and enhance emotional well-being and cardiovascular health (Calabria, 2000).

The combination of these positive capacities have been proposed by Peterson et al. (2009) to comprise a dependable higher-order construct whose combination is a potentially stout predictor of coping with stress and health and that single composite of all these construct makes the concept of PsyCap (Psychological Capital). PsyCap has been studied in organisational settings mostly by Luthans et al (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007) and these initial research in the Industrial-organizational psychology field confirms a positive relationship between PsyCap and well-being (Culbertson, Mills, & Fullagar, 2010) as well as other important work attitudes, behaviours, and performance (Avey, Reichard, Luthans, & Mhatre, 2011).

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The study of psychological capital as a potential remedy for the negative effects of stress, suggests that this higher order concept may offer a boulevard to boost student immunity to stressors, or even to shape the way in which they appraise and define events to reframe them as motivational challenge rather than debilitating threats (Riulli, Savicki & Richards, 2012). The hope, self-efficacy, optimism and resiliency may not individually represent effective coping with stress, therefore their combining factor should be taken into consideration for combating the stress experienced by the students.

Psychological Capital (PsyCap)

Psychological capital (PsyCap) is defined as “An individual’s positive psychological state of development and is characterized by: 1) having confidence (self-efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks; 2) making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future; 3) persevering toward goals and, when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope) in order to succeed; and 4) when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resilience) to attain success.” (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007: p. 3).

Mental Well-Being

Mental well-being incorporates our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It exerts influence on our thinking, feelings, and action. It also helps to determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Mental health is important from the very childhood to adulthood through adolescence.

In its Mental Health Action Plan for Europe, WHO has recognised that: *‘Mental health and wellbeing are fundamental to quality of life, enabling people to experience life as meaningful and to be creative and active citizens. Mental health is an essential component of social cohesion, productivity and peace and stability in the living environment, contributing to social capital and economic development in societies.’* (WHO, 2005, p.1)

Previous studies on PsyCap in organisational/industrial setting have always been found to be an important factor in enhancing the productivity of an employee. They have proved positive correlations between well being and PsyCap (Culbertson, Mills, & Fullagar, 2010) as well as other important work attitudes, behaviours, and performance (Avey, Reichard, Luthans, & Mhatre, 2010). Psychological capital (PsyCap) is found to be an important resource for combating one’s stress in organizational context (Melody Ling-Yu Wen, 2014).

Few studies have been done on PsyCap in academic setting (Riulli, Savicki, Richards, 2012; Ling-Yu Wen, 2013). So the present study is another step forward to find out whether PsyCap has an equal importance in academic setting enhancing the potential of students so that they can cope with academic stress effectively and efficiently. In present study it was hypothesised that

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students who maintain higher PsyCap will perceive the academic environment as being less distressing. For example, in spite of an extremely stressful situation, an optimistic, hopeful, efficacious, and ego resilient person is likely to believe he or she has ample resources to prevent themselves becoming besieged and prey to deleterious effect of stress.

Objectives

The following objectives were formulated in the present study:

1. To assess PsyCap and mental Well-Being among medical students.
2. To determine the relationship between PsyCap and mental well being among male and female medical students.

Hypotheses

1. PsyCap will be positively correlated to mental well being.
2. Male and female students do not differ in terms of their mental well being and PsyCap. Student scoring high on PsyCap will score high on mental well being as well, irrespective of gender.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The sample consisted of 80 medical students from JNMC and Ajmal Khan Tibbiya College, AMU, Aligarh. Average age range of MBBS and BUMS students' was 19-22 years. Out of 80 respondents 38 were male students and 42 female students. Data was collected individually and informed consent was taken from each of them.

Measures

1. **Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS):** The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing scale was developed to enable the monitoring of mental wellbeing in the general population and the evaluation of projects, programmes and policies which aim to improve mental wellbeing. WEMWBS is a 14 item scale with 5 response categories, summed to provide a single score ranging from 14-70. The items are all worded positively and cover both feeling and functioning aspects of mental wellbeing. "The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale was funded by the Scottish Government National Programme for Improving Mental Health and Well-being, commissioned by NHS Health Scotland, developed by the University of Warwick and the University of Edinburgh, and is jointly owned by NHS Health Scotland, the University of Warwick and the University of Edinburgh."
2. **Psychological Capital Scale:** Scale prepared by Prof. Musaddiq Jahan (unpublished) was used for the purpose in the study. The measure used in this study is the sum of the scores of the items from several well-known instruments. These instruments have been used in a study by Riolli, Savicki and Richards (2012). *Efficacy* was drawn from the six (6) item

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Professional Efficacy scale of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Student Survey, MBI-SS) The MBI-SS was constructed by Schaufeli, Martinez, Marques-Pinto, Salanova, and Bakker (2002). It measures students' feelings while they study. Dispositional *optimism* was measured using the 6 item optimism sub-scale of the Life Orientation Test (LOT) (Scheier & Carver, 1985). *Psychological resilience* was measured using the Ego-Resiliency Scale (Block & Kremen, 1996) which assesses the capacity to respond effectively to changing situational demands, especially frustrating or stressful encounters. This scale consists of 14 items. *Hope* was measured using Agency(four items) and Pathways(four items) components of hope developed by Snyder and his colleagues (Snyder, Cheavens, & Sympson, 1997): All the 34 items in the scale were rated using a six point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree(1) to Strongly agree(6). Total score was used for assessing Psychological Capital.

Statistical Analysis

Statistical analysis was done by using SPSS 16.0. Protocols were scored and mean and SD of both the scales were calculated. Correlation was calculated to find out the relationship between PsyCap and Mental Well Being.

RESULT

Table 1: Showing the descriptive statistics of Psychological Capital and Mental Well-Being among Medical Students.

		N	MEAN	SD
Total	PsyCap	80	136.20	8.46
	Mental Health		148.80	10.51
Male	PsyCap	38	134.4737	7.65
	Mental Health		147.7895	10.23
Female	PsyCap		137.76	8.94
	Mental Health	42	149.71	10.81

Table 2: Showing relationship between PsyCap and Mental Well-Being among Male and Female Medical students

Subject		PsyCap/MH (r)	P
Total	80	.915*	<.01
Male	38	.887*	<.01
Female	42	.944*	<.01

*Correlation is significant

DISCUSSION

Academic stress can have deleterious impact on mental and physical health of student, and in turn, their performance gets hampered too. Stress has profound impact on both psychological and physiological well being of student. Various stressors may cause “impaired judgment, reduced concentration, lack of self esteem and greater anxiety and depression” that can influence academic performance (Shaikh and Deschamps, 2006, p.47). Furthermore, of all the stressor that students come across, academic often comes as a primary stressor; research has found that exams, homework, time management and grades were the primary stressors for a representative sample of students (Monk, 2004).

It is important for medical educators to know the prevalence, causes and levels of stress among students which not only affect their health but also their academic achievements at different point of time of their study period special care must be taken to find out obvious psychiatric problems or psychological stress among them.

Psychological Capital can be effectively used with students to lower their level of academic stress through various programs specially designed to enhance the hope, optimism, resilience and self efficacy among them. Helping students to develop and sustain these feelings in them will enhance their mental capacities to its peak which will help them to deal with daily hurdles effectively and efficiently without becoming prey to anguish and weary.

Researchers have established that PsyCap is not merely an arbitrary collection of positive sounding buzzwords. Collectively, because all can be enhanced in individual, they prove to be important as an intervention to improve well- being of the person (Weyhrauch and Seltoris S. Culbertson, 2010). In academic setting too PsyCap can be used to enhance the potentiality of the students keeping their aspirations high and increased positive attitude towards them and towards the stressful environment.

Developing and sustaining the four construct of Psycap among the students is important and tedious task. Various studies have shown that these construct can be instilled in students to make them psychologically and academically healthy. Self efficacy is the foremost important characteristic of an individual, it refers to the belief a person holds about their capabilities. It has been found that self efficacy beliefs are connected to other beliefs about the self, including academic achievement, academic choices and motivation (Pajares, 1996). Bandura (1977, 1982) hypothesized that perceived self-efficacy affects choice of activities, effort expenditure, and persistence. People holding low sense of efficacy for completing a task try to avoid it and those who believe they are capable, participate more eagerly. Particularly, when encountered with obstacles, person who feel efficacious work harder and persist longer than whose who doubt their capabilities. Research shows that self-efficacy is impacted by performance-based treatments (e.g., role playing), as well as by the use of models. Thus improving feelings of self efficacy

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using these techniques among students can actually lead to better performance and greater achievement.

Another important construct of the PsyCap is 'Hope' which needs special attention among the students as it is directly related to psychological disturbances if not attended. Snyder and colleagues (1991) concept of hope has been studied in many context and several positive correlates to this construct have been found in youth. Enhancement of hope within students can assist in development in areas of personal/social, academic and career development (ASCA, 2005). Studies have also shown that low hope is predictive of depression (Kwon, 2000), and higher hope has been found to be related to lower levels of depression in children (Snyder et al, 1997).

Optimism is an important construct of PsyCap which needs to be taken care of among students as they easily get negative and become pessimistic when faced with negative life events or environment. Martin Seligman (1991) in his book 'Learned Optimism' describes that pessimism can be turned into optimism through changing the explanatory style i.e. perceiving the adverse situation in different way and changing the reactions to these adversity in a more positive way. Thus training students to develop more optimistic explanatory styles, lower levels of distressed thinking and more constructive envisioning of their future may help them to better deal with the stress they come across during their studies and help them become more positive and constructive being.

Fourth construct of PsyCap i.e. Resiliency, is an important concept in mental health and is defined as "the capability of individuals to cope successfully in the face of significant change, adversity or risk. This capability changes over time and is enhanced by protective factors in the individual and environment" (Stewart et al, 1997). Resilient person develop proper coping strategies that makes them strong enough for easily and effectively deal with the adverse conditions and they reflect more optimistic attitude towards the catastrophe than others.

Studies have found that people who score high on self efficacy tend to be optimistic because they believe that they can solve problems, overcome adversity and take control over events that occur in their lives. Self efficacy and optimism both are important elements in resilience, and resilience, in turn, bolster hope (Reivich & Shatte, 2002).

Above discussion has provided sufficient evidences that PsyCap can help students to gain highly satisfied academic life effectively dealing with the day to day hurdles that may hinder with their psychological as well as physiological health. There is a need to provide training among students to develop these construct of PsyCap. Abdulghani, H M.(2011) studied high levels of stress among students of the medical college of King Saud University and pointed out the need for establishing counselling and preventive mental health services as an integral part of routine

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clinical services being provided to medical students. His study provides insight into that medical students need preventive measure to keep their stress at bay.

University educators must focus on aspects of PsyCap within the academic curriculum. Psychological capital may prove to be a valuable resource for students, it helps students persevere in their studies, in a psychologically and physically healthier manner so it is necessary to help develop these among them (Riolfi, Savicki, Richards, 2012).

Several resources can be used by the counsellors and educators to help students to become aware of these constructs and their importance in academic as well as personal life. Snyder's (2000a) Handbook of Hope is an important resource to understand about hope and its importance for students. Other books that provide strategies and examples for how to instil hope in students include Making Hope Happen: A Workbook for Turning Possibilities into Realities (McDermott & Snyder, 1999), Learned Optimism (Seligman, 1991). Apart from these books few award winning movies based on biography of real legends may also be used as a resource to instil hope and positivity and courage to survive through adversities, like The Pursuit of Happyness (Muccino, 2006). Meditation is another effective intervention that can be used to change the student's perception toward life. Meditation helps in promoting a positive mental state that enables them to be free from negativity. Daily practice can help a student to bloom into a strong personality. (Pedrotti, Lisa M. Edwards and Shane J. Lopez, 2008). It is hoped that through these means counsellors and educators may have the resources they need to assist students in enhancing their hope (Pedrotti, M. Edwards & J. Lopez, 2008) and overall PsyCap.

The present study may provide an insight into the usefulness of the application of PsyCap to the medical students. Medicos are somewhat different from other students in terms of their hard work, emotional and psychological states as they have to deal with the real life problems that may be emotionally and mentally draining. They may need greater support and better cognitive skills to deal with the vexatious situation. Medical students may easily fall for negativity and pessimism due to the heavy burden of the subject matter and delicacy and perfection needed in the profession. So in view of the results found in the present study, PsyCap seems to be extremely needed among the students as it has a positive relationship with the mental health and previous researches has also confirmed that for combating academic stress PsyCap constructs have proved to be extremely important.

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