

Optimism as a Correlate of Happiness among Working Women

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ABSTRACT

Promoting positive cognitions has been the quest for psychologists since the psychology has been pre-fixed with the very term positive. To be optimistic is one of the greatest strength for having positive cognitions which is expected to promote feeling of well-being within an individual. Thus, with positive thinking one can achieve the higher level of happiness. Particularly, working women is one of the groups which have been expected to perform multiple roles with efficiency. They have to meet expectations of each and every family member; even then, if they are working they are expected to be equally competent on professional front as well. Therefore it was worth full to conduct a study on working women to access their optimism and strength of its association with happiness for them. The study was carried out on a sample of 130 working females. The results from the statistical analysis revealed that happiness was strongly associated with optimism. Results also indicated that, working women those who scored high on happiness were also found high on optimism as compared to those who fall on the lower side on both the positive attributes.

Keywords: Optimism, Happiness, Working Women

Optimism is the belief that things will turn out well and it is a common belief that if good things come up in the way of an individual and if he holds the ability to control the direction of his life will result into optimism. The essence of the very term optimism has been captured by plenty of common phrases like "seeing the glass as half full," "making lemonade out of lemons," "every cloud has a silver lining." Each of these phrases are the representation of an individual's belief that positive cognitions can transform a negative situation into something positive, and those positive cognitions help in guiding the people to look for affirmative meaning in times of hardship.

How people think about their past and future often refer to optimistic or pessimistic thinking, specifically, the causes of the good and bad events in their lives. When something bad happens (having a fight with someone you love, or losing your job, or getting a bad grade on a test)

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optimistic thinkers believe that what caused the problem can be changed and they believe that problems in one area of their life won't necessarily lead to problems in all areas of their life. Pessimistic thinkers, in contrast, believe that they are the sole cause of their problems, that those problems are going to last forever, and that they are going to seep into every aspect of their lives. On the basis of common belief about optimism Scheier and Carver (1985) defined it as “the global generalized tendency to believe that one will generally experience good versus bad outcomes in life”. Further, in layman words the term has often been understood as a disposition to expect the best and view events and situations in a positive light. Whereas, in the context of resiliency, optimism refers to a sense of a positive future, to a tendency to find positive meaning in experiences, and a belief in one’s ability to impact positively on one’s environment and situation.

Optimism place a significant role in various ways in the life of every individual as numerous benefits are associated with it. Firstly, optimism naturally promotes a more positive mood, which helps to ward off depression and anxiety. Secondly, optimism also encourages greater persistence in the face of obstacles, which in turn is likely to result in greater success. Finally, there is evidence that optimists actually look after their health better than pessimists. They are more likely to seek out information about potential health risks and change their behavior to avoid those risks.

Furthermore, not only to be optimistic rather being happy is of great importance to most people, and happiness has been found to be a highly valued goal in most societies (Diener, 2000). Happiness, in the form of joy, appears in every typology of “basic” human emotions. Feeling happy is fundamental to human experience, and most people are at least mildly happy much of the time (Diener & Diener, 1996). Philosophers and social researchers have defined happiness in a variety of ways (Kesebir & Diener, 2008). The largest divide is between hedonic views of happiness as pleasant feelings and favorable judgments versus eudemonic views of happiness involving doing what is virtuous, morally right, true to oneself, meaningful and/or growth producing (Ryan & Desi, 2001).

In his earlier work Freud (1930/1961) had stated that there is no doubt that man sought happiness above all other goals in life and defined happiness as criteria excellence in the art of living. It has been proposed by Altson and Dudley (1987) that happiness is the ability to enjoy one’s experiences accompanied by degree of excitement. Similarly, Argyle, Martin and Crosland (1989) believed that happiness is composed of three related components- positive affects, absence of negative affects and satisfaction with life as a whole. The successful pursuit of happiness is vital to life satisfaction as it leads to meaningful and fulfilling lives.

The authentic happiness theory (Seligman, 2003) holds that there are three distinct kinds of happiness: the Pleasant Life (pleasures), the Good Life (engagement), and the Meaningful Life. The first two are subjective, but the third is at least partly objective, and lodges in belonging to

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and serving what is larger and more worthwhile than just the self's pleasures and desires. Seligman also offers a wealth of questionnaires in his books and websites. Considering one such authentic happiness questionnaire which is self-calculated, he provides an extremely simplified version of happiness equation:

$$\text{Happiness (Seligman)} = \frac{\text{Pleasure} + \text{flow} + \text{meaning}}{\text{Number of days considered}}$$

where:

Pleasure = Hours spent doing pleasant activities

Flow = Hours spent in total immersion

Meaning = Hours spent doing meaningful activities

Thus, in this way, authentic happiness synthesizes all three traditions: The pleasant life is about happiness in hedonism's sense; the good life is about happiness in desire's sense; and the meaningful life is about happiness in objective list's sense. To top it off, authentic happiness further allows for the "Full Life," a life that satisfies all three criteria of happiness.

Whereas, according to the construal model of human happiness (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2004), determinants of happiness and well-being include a genetic set-point (50%), one's circumstances such as demographic variables (10%) and intentional activities (40%). Intentional activities are the cognitive efforts such as adopting an optimistic attitude, behavioral practices such as being kind to others, or volitional intentions, such as striving for meaningful goals.

Thus, the interpretation of one's circumstances plays an integral role in determining well-being. Furthermore, Lyubomirsky offers an equation:

$$\text{Happiness} = \begin{array}{l} \text{Genetic Set Point} \\ + \\ \text{Life Circumstances} \\ + \\ \text{Intentional Activities} \end{array}$$

Sheldon and Lyubomirsky (2005) stated that "intentional activities have the potential to create sustained positive change, because of their more dynamic and varying nature and because of their capacity to produce a steady stream of positive and rich experiences." They also stated that circumstances (e.g., winning a lottery, getting married or a good job) are not as likely to change your happiness level.

In a series of studies, Fordyce (1977) sought to improve well-being by teaching students in his classes what happy people do and then have these students practice those behaviors in their everyday lives. Results showed that students assigned to practice 14 different happiness-

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enhancing activities (e.g., spend more time socializing, become more active, and develop optimistic thinking) once daily over a 6-week period reported improved well-being for more than 2 months, relative to a comparison group.

From the conceptual clarity it could be interpreted that optimism and happiness are interwoven positive attributes in the life of an individual. Even though, literature review is necessary to extent the knowledge of nature and strength of association among the said variables under any empirical research. Thus, on the basis of their empirical findings Scheier and Carver (1987) reported that optimists were more likely to use active (problem-focused) coping strategies, especially those who felt that the stressful situation was potentially controllable. They also proposed that the causal link between optimism and physical health or well-being may be due to the use of more effective coping strategies by optimists when dealing with stress.

Similarly, Lipkus et al. (1993) indicate that optimists believe that negative events are less likely to occur in the near future, may serve a vital function. By doing so, optimists tend to engage in activities, which will increase their chances of experiencing positive outcomes. Further, McKenna (1993) reported that a “positive orientation to events can result in greater effort and persistence with resulting greater success”.

Extending their work on optimism Scheier et al., (1994) concluded that in situations where problem-focused coping is not possible, optimists tend to use adaptive emotion-focused strategies, such as acceptance, humor, and positive reframing of the situation. However, optimism has also been reported to “moderate the deleterious effects of daily hassles on physical health (Fry, 1995).

Smith (cited in Fry, 1995) in his empirical research found that optimism moderated and predicted coping responses to stressful events. Other researchers have found that chronically stressed subjects are less optimistic than controls and that both optimism and pessimism are “influenced by environmental circumstances and life experiences” (Robinson-Whelan, et al., 1997).

A positive relationship of optimism with life satisfaction, positive physical and mental health, lower frequencies of mental disorders, and self-esteem has been explained in these terms (Strassle, McKee, & Plant, 1999). Supporting the previous findings Schweizer et al. (1999) pointed to another possibility and argued that optimism can influence an individual’s sense of well-being. A relationship can be predicted between the nature of a person’s future expectations and his/her evaluation of own life, and their study supports this assumption.

In the similar line of research Wellner and Adox (2000) reported that an optimistic attitude or positive thinking is the key to success and happiness- and there is plenty of research to back the claim up. Studies have shown that positive thinking can reduce tension and enhance emotional well-being. Further, on the basis of their findings Reivich and Shatte (2002) concluded that part

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of what enables people to thrive despite setback, failure, and hardship is the ability to think optimistically in the face of adversity. Optimistic thinking motivates people- adults and children- to continue to persist and work to find solutions, even when situations look bleak. Thus, optimism shines light where it is dark.

In their empirical work on organizational setup Shahnawaz and Jafri (2009) explored psychological capital (which includes psychological capacities of self-efficacy, optimism, resilience, and hope) as a predictor of organizational commitment between public and private sector organization. Results revealed that all psychological capacities; self-efficacy, optimism resilience and hope were not predicting organizational commitment in both types of organizations.

Conducting studies with regard to career decision making Peterson (2010) explored the relationship between career maturity with vocational identity and optimism for the future in a sample of male and female high school students. Females were found to have high scores on measures of competency for career decision-making than males. These findings are important as they suggest that there may be different trajectories or paths in the career development of females and males (Hassan, 2010).

Similar work with organizational employees was carried out by Saleem, Saba & Adnan (2012) to find out the relationship among organizational commitment, optimism, and Self- efficacy in employees of banks. On the basis of statistical outcomes they concluded that optimism and self-efficacy were positively related with each other.

More recently, Asgari and Fotowat (2013) conducted an empirical study to investigate the relationship between optimism and OCB (organizational citizenship behavior) of primary school teachers in Shiraz. The results showed significant positive relationship among optimism, OCB, and student-centered activities of teachers. The optimism level of the teachers was higher than average and no gender differences were reported.

OBJECTIVES

On the basis of provided conceptual description and literature review regarding optimism and happiness main objectives of the present study are:

- To access the strength of association between optimism and happiness among working women.
- To study whether the group differences exist for happiness and optimism among women working in public sector banks and schools.

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Hypotheses

To meet the objectives of the present study following hypotheses were postulated:

- There would be significant positive coefficient of correlation between optimism and happiness among working women.
- The two groups (bank employees and school teachers) of working women would significantly differ on happiness and optimism.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample of the present study comprises a total sample of 130 working women who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. All were between the age ranges of 35 to 50 years, married and living with their family members. None of the participant reported any bed ridden medical condition. Total sample was divided into two equal groups (I & II) where Group I includes 65 public sector bank employees and Group II includes 65 public sector school teachers. All the subjects' of present study were educated up to graduation and were living in urban area of Ambala and Hissar districts from Haryana.

Tools

1. THE OXFORD HAPPINESS QUESTIONNAIRE [OHQ; Argyle & Hills, (2002): The happiness scale comprises of 29 statements related to personal happiness out of which some statements are expressed positively while others are expressed negatively. The subject was requested to assign a number against each statement indicating subject's level of agreement or disagreement with the statement, in accordance to the given scale: 6=strongly agree, 5=moderately agree, 4=agree, 3=slightly disagree, 2=disagree and 1=strongly disagree.

2. LEARNED OPTIMISM TEST [LOT; Seligman, (1990): There are forty-eight (48) questions in this test that are used to determine an individual's base level of optimism. Higher score on pessimistic categories means that by learning optimism one can prevent depression, which further leads to achieve more and improve physical health.

Procedure

After getting the formal permission from the competent authority of concerned institutes, data was collected during working hours. To initiate the study participants were briefed about the nature and the purpose of the research in order to receive the reliable data. They were informed that any provided information by them would be used only for research purpose and assured about the confidentiality of the data. Instructions were given regarding the questionnaires as per the respective manuals. The scales were filled in by the participants and collected immediately after completion.

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Statistical Analyses

To arrive at the final results and reveals the trends pertaining to the variables under the study descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation were computed. To evaluate group differences t-test for independent sample was applied. Analyses were done with the help of SPSS – 21. The obtained results are presented in the following section.

RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

The results of statistical analysis for the present investigation has been presented with the help of tabulation which shows the descriptive statistical values with the help of Table – I, Table – II shows the Product moment correlation coefficient results and results of mean comparison are represented with the help of Table - III for the said variables.

TABLE I: SUMMARY TABLE SHOWING MEAN AND S.D.'S FOR TOTAL SAMPLE (N=130)		
Variables	Mean	S. D.
Happiness	2.93	1.56
Optimism	5.81	3.77

It is evident from the mean values that for happiness obtained scores are falling on the higher side (M=2.93; SD=1.56). Which means that majority of government teachers and bank employees comprises the present sample experience more happiness associated with their optimism occupational demand. Whereas mean scores (M = 5.81; SD = 3.77) on the optimism are also falling on higher side. Such trends reflect their tendency to make effective use of happiness and maturity to deal with the optimism stress full demands.

TABLE II: Product moment correlation of coefficient for the total sample (N=130)	
Variables	Optimism
Happiness	.89**
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).	

Inter-correlation results from Table – II reveals that optimism is a strong and significant correlate of happiness ($r = 0.89$; $p \leq .001$) in positive direction. Meaning thereby, if an individual holds positive cognitions or think optimistically under any given circumstances it may lead to or promote the higher level of happiness.

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TABLE III:

Variables	Group	N	Mean	S.D.	t	Sig. (2-tailed) df= 128
Happiness	Bank employees	65	4.41	.496	33.71	.001
	School teachers	65	1.46	.502		
Optimism	Bank employees	65	9.24	1.741	25.08	.001
	School teachers	65	2.38	1.354		

The two groups were subjected to comparisons for both the variables. Table – III shows the results of t- test which reveals that bank employees scored higher means as compared to school teachers on happiness ($t = 33.71$; $p \leq .001$). Similarly, means on optimism are on higher side for bank employees as compared to school teachers ($t = 33.71$; $p \leq .001$).

CONCLUSION:

The present study reveals that the bank employees were found to be high on happiness and optimism as compared to school teachers. But it is a matter of fact that most of the individuals are into their present profession with choice but unexpected demand of the profession influence their cognitions significantly. Though, the chances of promotion are present in both the professions but natures of public relations differ. Moreover, it is a matter of fact that in the teaching profession individual deals with minor individuals whereas bank professionals have to deals with socially mature individuals.

Some supporting studies revealed the same results as present study. Like, Peterson (2000) cites several studies that report positive correlation between optimism and good health. In terms of physical benefits, optimism as a personality attribute has been found to be a significant mediator or moderator of stress levels.

Though fewer studies exist concerning optimism in the workplace, evidence certainly exists linking the concept to improvement in worker performance (Medlin & Green, 2009). The popular conception of optimism is that it is the outcome of both inherited characteristics and experience. While there is a belief that some people are more naturally inclined towards being optimistic, most people also believe that optimism is the result of social interaction. In response to the statement ‘people become optimists or pessimists mainly as a result of their life experiences’, 61% of poll respondents agreed (Social Issues Research Centre, 2009).

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Further similar findings were supported by Saleem, Saba & Adnan (2012) and reported that the relationship among organizational commitment, optimism, and Self- efficacy in employees of banks. They found that optimism and self- efficacy were positively related with each other.

Asgari and Fotowat's study (2013) investigated the relationship between optimism and OCB of primary school teachers in Shiraz. The results showed that there is a significant positive relationship among optimism, OCB, and student-centered activities of teachers.

The results of this study have important implications for organizational employees because optimism and happiness can be developed through training and effectively managed for performance improvement in the workplace.

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