

Exploring Psychological Capital as Predictor of Mental Health among Graduate-Level Students

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ABSTRACT

Developments in positive psychology paved the way for shifting the focus from the weaknesses and deficits to the individuals' strengths and resources. These developments gave impetus to the research exploring the predictors of the mental well-being of students. The role of psychological capital in students' mental well-being is an expansion of Luthans and associates' research in an organisational setting. The present study focused on PsyCap as a resource that can impact the mental well-being of students. The current investigation's primary aim was to examine the predictive relationship of Psychological Capital with undergraduate students' mental health. For this purpose, 400 participants (200 males and 200 females) were randomly selected from Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India. Out of 400 participants, 321 completed the questionnaires, and 79 participants who did not meet the questionnaires were not included in the study. A cross-sectional, exploratory study survey method was used to collect and analyse results; descriptive statistics, correlation, and multiple regression analyses were done. The study results indicated that the dimensions of PsyCap such as hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism (HERO) were correlated with the mental health of the graduate students, and there was a positive predictive relationship between PsyCap and mental health.

Keywords: *Mental Health, Hope, optimism, efficacy, resilience and students*

There has been a significant focus on deficits and problems rather than strengths and resources in examining students' behaviour. Positive psychology addresses the strengths and resources to divert immersion of positive psychology to address the individuals' capacities and potentials. According to Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2005), Positive Psychology is the study of mental illness, weakness, and damages. It is also studying strengths, optimism, hope, skills, courage, abilities and virtues. Positive psychology aims to focus on the positive aspects of an individual's personality to optimise his capabilities, assets, and life functions. To overcome the obstacles and setbacks of life, Luthans, Youssef, and Avolio (2007) build the ideas and facts of the individuals' psychological resources within the context of positive psychology. Luthans defined PsyCap

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Exploring Psychological Capital as Predictor of Mental Health among Graduate-Level Students

as "an individual's positive psychological state of development that is characterised by : (1) having confidence (self-efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at the challenging task; (2) making a positive attribution (optimism) about growing now and in future; (3) persevering toward goals and, when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope) to succeed; and (4) When beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resiliency) to attain success (Luthans et al., 2007). Psychological Capital (PsyCap) focuses on the individuals who positively appreciate daily life events and enlarge their likelihood of success by entrusting persistence and striving. It is a state of psychological skills that are characterised by self-efficacy, optimism, hope and resilience. (Luthans et al., 2007). PsyCap endeavours mental health practitioners to focus on positive aspects of human experiences and emphasise the positive individual traits. PsyCap is composed of four psychological strengths; hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism, with an Acronym HERO.

PsyCap and Hope

Hope is defined as a positive attitude, positive opinion, and judgment regarding life's present and future events. Hope is the positive potential in dealing with the new possibilities of life. Hope is referred to as "a positive motivational state that is constructed on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed energy) and (2) pathways (planning to meet goals) (Synder et al., 1991: 287). Hence, hope is the determination to achieve the goals and framework of goals by developing willpower. The pathways have been developed through "mental rehearsals", which enables the individuals to visualise the alternative pathways to the obstacles and challenges in achieving their goals of life.

PsyCap and Optimism

Optimism includes personal, permanent and pervasive attributes that good things will happen in his/her life. According to Scheier & Carver (1985), optimism is a stable and permanent trait. An opposite term for optimism is pessimism, in which an individual always thinks negative things and that nothing good will happen to him. Optimism is one's attitude and mood related to socially desirable and material world expectations that enable them to be desirable and pleasurable things will happen with them.

PsyCap and Efficacy

Self-efficacy is one of the essential characteristics of an individual. Albert Bandura (1986, 1997) defines self-efficacy as one's beliefs regarding abilities and capabilities. The individuals holding self-efficacy trust their abilities when faced with hurdles and obstacles in achieving their goals. They are more committed to the challenging tasks and objectives of life. This positive psychological trait boosts and enhances motivation in performing activities.

PsyCap and Resilience

The word resilience has been defined as the capacity of "bouncing back" from adverse situations and conditions. Oxford English dictionary defined resilience as the ability to deal with or bring back after challenging and turmoil situations. Resilience includes artfulness, power, positive attitude and ability and psychological strength that can be determined, studied, trained and developed in any one's life (Masten, 2001., Masten & Reed, 2002). Resilience is the ability to cope with adversity, failure, and conflict and the capability to strengthen after being exposed to highly stressful, negative and traumatic events (Bonanno, 2004).

Mental Health

Mental health refers to our cognitive, behavioural, and emotional well-being - it is all about how we think, feel, and behave. Sometimes, the term mental health also indicated as an absence of mental disorder. It can affect our daily life, relationships, and physical health. Mental health also includes a person's ability to enjoy life - to attain a balance between life activities and efforts to achieve psychological resilience (Nordqvist, 2017).

According to WHO (2004), mental health is a "state of well-being in which the individual becomes aware of his or her abilities, can cope with normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and can contribute to his or her community" (WHO, 2004, p.12). Besides, mental health is the presence of a complete state of positive mental health and the absence of mental illness (Keyes, 2002). Eisenberg, Hunt & Speer (2013, p. 60) surveyed 2007 and 2009 on 14,175 students, and findings revealed 17.3% depression, 15.3% for non-suicidal self-injury, 7.0% general anxiety, 6.3% suicidal tendencies, and 4.1% panic disorder. The literature showed a strong association of well-being with the PsyCap among employees. The findings showed that promoting PsyCap will improve well-being (Avey, Luthans, Smith, & Palmer, 2010; Luthans, Avey, Avolio, Norman & Combs, 2001). In association with mental health and substance abuse, psychological capital found that the people with high level PsyCap were less likely diagnosed with mental health problems and substance abuse than people with a low level of PsyCap (Krasikova, Lester, and Harms., 2015). This study shows that the drug-dependent students have a lower level of psychological capital and have disturbed metacognitive beliefs than normal students (Akbarzadah, Akbarzadeh, and Javanmard., 2013). Azimi (2014) determine a positive relationship of psychological capital with well-being and mental health as the PsyCap shows the positive association with positive emotions and subjective well-being (Afzal, Atta and Malik., 2016). Singh and Mansi (2009) examine the role of psychological capital as a predictor of psychological well-being. It possesses that people with a high level of psychological capital have better psychological well-being. A study conducted on gender differences reported no significant impact of gender on positive psychological capital (Barmola, 2013). However, there is not much research on the PsyCap and mental health among college students. Hence, In the present study, the researchers were interested in knowing the positive adaptations among students dealing with stresses of life, such as academic stress, parental expectations, teachers stress, academic choices, and achievement. These risks processes, later on, develop emotional and psychological problems among students.

Objectives of the study

1. To examine the PsyCap and Mental Health among college students.
2. To explore the relationship between PsyCap and Mental Health among male and female students.
3. To assess the impact of PsyCap and its dimensions on the Mental Health of college students.

Hypotheses of the study

1. PsyCap will be significantly correlated with mental health.
2. Male and female students will not differ in their PsyCap and mental health.
3. PsyCap dimensions would significantly impact the mental health of college students.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The present study sample consisted of 400 students, out of which was 321 students completed the questionnaire (males = 53.0, females = 47.0) and ranged in age 18 to 22 years old. All the participants in the study are from Aligarh Muslim University. The researchers randomly distributed the questionnaire, and the objectives of the study were described to them. Consent of the subjects was taken before giving them a questionnaire and then asked to complete the questionnaire

Instruments

1. Academic Psychological Capital Questionnaire

We used the Academic Psychological Capital questionnaire (A-PCQ) developed by Luthans, Luthans & Jensen, (2012). The A-PCQ is a six-point Likert scale containing two categories: Psychological Capital Scale, Overall life (OL) and School-work (SW). Each category includes four dimensions of hope, self - efficacy, resilience and optimism (HERO) that make up the high level of Psychological Capital (Luthans et al., 2007). The academic PsyCap questionnaire (A-PCQ) is the adapted version of the original PsyCap Questionnaire (PCQ) by Luthans et al. (2007). A-PCQ is the instrument modified by Brett Luthans and his associates (2012) as a result of the original research of PCQ. The total score of each category, such as OL & SW is the overall PsyCap score is 78. The minimum possible score is six, and the maximum possible score is 36 for each dimension of HERO. The total final score of PsyCap may range from 48 to 288.

2. Mental Health Continuum- Short Form (MHC –SF)

Mental health Continuum-Short form was used to assess Mental Health (Keyes, 2009), is derived from the MHC-Long Form (MHC-LF; 40 items) and consists of 14 items, with three dimensions emotional well-being (items1-3), Social well-being (items4-8), and psychological well-being (items 9-14) measures mental health. In the MHC-SF, each of the three measures has high internal consistency reliability $<.80$ of Keyes (2005a). All the 14 items were rated using a six-point Likert scale ranging from never = 0 to every day = 5. The total score used to assess mental health range from 0-70.

Statistical Analysis

Statistical analysis was done by using SPSS 23.0 version. The Mean, SD, Correlation, regression, and Cronbach's alpha were calculated to assess PsyCap and Mental health outcomes among the students.

RESULTS

Cronbach alpha was .627 for overall life and .691 for overall schoolwork. Table 1 Shows the Zero-order correlation between the dimensions of PsyCap (Hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism) and dimensions of mental health (emotional, social and psychological well-being) to ascertain relationships and their directions.

Exploring Psychological Capital as Predictor of Mental Health among Graduate-Level Students

Table 1: Showing the correlations between Psychological Capital and Mental Health

Variables	OL-E	OL-H	OL-R	OL-O	OL- PsyCp	SW-E	SW-H	SW-R	SW-O	OL-SW	Overall PsyCp	EW	SW	Psy-W	Overall MH	
Overall self-Efficacy	1	.359**	.063	.053	.604**	.384**	.266**	.155**	.026	.310**	.510**	.217**	.276**	.228**	.316**	
Overall hope		1	.209**	.310**	.759**	.338**	.469**	.170**	.226**	.446**	.675**	.360**	.160**	.343**	.365**	
Overall resilience			1	.283**	.553**	.120*	.121*	.468**	.081	.273**	.462**	.136*	.118*	.201**	.202**	
Life optimism				1	.637**	.166**	.198**	.183**	.555*	.395**	.578**	.264**	.085	.238**	.245**	
Overall life					1	.405**	.425**	.359**	.349**	.559**	.872**	.388**	.252**	.397**	.446**	
PsyCap																
School-work Efficacy						1	.430**	.317**	.196**	.720**	.645**	.105	.055	.217**	.172**	
School-work Hope							1	.361**	.299**	.777**	.688**	.160**	.149**	.179**	.214**	
Schoolwork resilience								1	.183**	.650**	.578**	.044	.130*	.206**	.182**	
Schoolwork Optimism									1	.601**	.544**	.155**	.088	.175**	.181**	
Overall Schoolwork										1	.893**	.171**	.152**	.281**	.271**	
Overall PsyCap											1	.312**	.227**	.382**	.403**	
Emotional Well-being												1	.315**	.564**	.755**	
Social well-being													1	.274**	.714**	
Psychological Well-being														1	.822**	
Overall Mental Health															1	
Mean	Male	25.17	24.17	23.26	23.36	97.20	25.59	24.24	23.63	23.62	97.58	194.78	10.16	14.23	19.99	44.39
	Female	24.28	24.28	23.83	24.59	97.26	24.91	24.75	23.48	23.87	97.01	194.24	10.01	12.62	20.52	43.12
SD	Male	3.659	4.230	3.209	3.625	9.514	4.140	4.434	3.663	3.745	10.729	17.801	3.134	4.157	4.979	9.446
	Female	4.379	3.996	3.212	3.985	10.134	3.906	3.859	3.187	3.700	10.535	18.335	3.117	5.030	5.143	10.262
t-value		1.968	.790	.176	2.881	.059	1.529	.042	.399	.601	.480	.266	.452	3.110	.922	1.148

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level; SD = Standard deviation, OLE= Overall-life efficacy, OLH= Overall-life hope, OLR =Overall life resilience, OLO= Overall life Optimism, OL-PsyCap =Overall-life Psychological Capital, SW-E = schoolwork efficacy, SW-H= schoolwork hope, SW-R = schoolwork resilience, SW-O = Schoolwork optimism, SW-PsyCap =school-work Psychological Capital, E-WB = emotional wellbeing, S-WB =Social wellbeing, Psy-WB=Psychological Wellbeing, Overall-MH = Overall mental health.

In Table 1, inter-correlation between variables showed that PsyCap and its dimensions are statistically positively correlated with mental health and its three-dimension. Table 1 shows that dimension of PsyCap such as overall-life (HERO) and Overall-schoolwork (HERO) has a positive and significant relationship with Emotional well-being ($r = .388, p < .01$), Social well-being ($r = .252, p < .01$), psychological well-being ($r = .397, p < .01$) and overall mental health ($r = .446, p < .01$). Respectively, and Overall-schoolwork (HERO) have also positive and significant correlation with Emotional well-being ($r = .171, p < .01$), Social well-being ($r = .152, p < .01$), psychological well-being ($r = .281, p < .01$) and overall mental health ($r = .271, p < .01$). Respectively. Overall-PsyCap have also positive and significant correlation with Emotional wellbeing ($r = .312, p < .01$), Social wellbeing ($r = .227, p < .01$), psychological wellbeing ($r = .382, p < .01$) and overall mental health ($r = .403, p < .01$) respectively.

Table 1 also shows the descriptive statistics Mean and SD on a gender basis among college student of all PsyCap Scores and their dimensions across the three dimensions of mental health based on gender. The means scores were underscored of all the categories and indicated that overall mental health score ($M = 44.39, SD = 9.44$) for males ($M = 43.12, SD = 10.263$), for females is the sum of all three dimensions of mental health. Total PsyCap

Exploring Psychological Capital as Predictor of Mental Health among Graduate-Level Students

score for male ($M = 194.78$, $SD = 17.801$) and for female ($M = 194.24$, $SD = 18.335$) is the sum of Overall-life PsyCap and Overall School-work scores.

Table 2: Backward linear Regression were analysed by Considering Overall- life dimensions of Academic Psychological Capital.

Predictors	β	SE (β)	P-value
OL optimism	.347	.139	.013
OL efficacy	.544	.131	.000
OL resilience	.316	.162	.316
OL hope	.530	.136	.000
F	20.412		.000
R ²	.205		

** < 0.01; OL = overall-life

Predictors: Overall-life Optimism, OL self-efficacy, OL resilience, OL hope.

Dependent Variable: Mental Health

The backward regression analysis has been conducted to estimate the unit of increases in the predictor. This analysis can be carried out to omit the PsyCap and its dimensions (HERO) with a low score on mental health. Table 2 represents the backward regression analysis used to predict mental health. The prediction model is statistically significant, $F = 20.412$, $df = 320$, $p < .000$, showed that OL optimism, OL self-efficacy, OL resilience and OL hope together accounted for 20 % of the variance in the mental health scores ($R^2 = .205$, $Adj.R^2 = .195$), indicating a strong effect of PsyCap on mental health and that 20% of the variance in mental health could be explained by overall-life hope, overall-life optimism, overall-life resilience and overall-life efficacy.

Table 3: Backward Regression Analysis of Mental health on Dimension of School-work Psychological capital.

Predictors	β	SE (β)	P-value
SW optimism	.316	.151	.037
SW efficacy	.169	.149	.261
SW resilience	.313	.167	.061
SW hope	.328	.142	.021
F	6.401		.000
F ₂	8.106		.000
R ²	.075		
R ² ₁	.071		

** < 0.01; SW = school-work

Predictors: School-work Optimism, resilience, efficacy, hope.

Predictors: Schoolwork optimism, resilience, hope.

In this analysis, among the four IVs schoolwork such as SW optimism, SW resilience, SW efficacy and SW hope, only SW optimism, SW resilience and SW hope were statistically significant predictors of mental health. The positive unstandardized coefficient of the SW optimism ($\beta = .316$, $p = .037$) and the SW resilience ($\beta = .313$, $p = .061$) and the SW hope ($\beta = .318$, $p = .021$) indicated that SW-optimism, hope and resilience scores increased, mental health scores also increased. SW optimism and SW hope positively predicted mental health, but SW resilience was not a significant predictor of mental health.

Exploring Psychological Capital as Predictor of Mental Health among Graduate-Level Students

The SW- optimism, hope, resilience, and efficacy-were entered into SPSS for the analysis. The F statistics was significant ($R^2 = .075$, $F = 6.401$, $p < .000$), and model 2 showed that SW optimism and SW resilience and SW hope ($R^2 = .071$, $F = 8.106$, $p < .000$), indicating that 7% of the variance in mental health could be explained by SW optimism, hope and resilience. The regression analyses devoted that the higher the optimism, resilience and hope levels of college students, the better students are entertaining their positive mental health.

DISCUSSION

It is believed that the students who have high psychological capitals are seemed to be mentally healthy individuals. Hypotheses 1 of the study is approved. Table 1 shows that all the HERO (hope, efficacy, resilience, optimism) dimensions of PsyCap are significantly positively related to mental health and its dimensions (emotional, social and psychological well-being). Optimism was found positively related to adaptive coping and inversely correlated with negative emotions, which were more likely to experience well-being (Anderson., 1996). The results found that individuals with high self-efficacy significantly influence subjective well-being, which contradicts the present study; a researcher did not found that self-efficacy impacts mental health (Caprara & Steca 2005; Lent et al., 2008).

The hypotheses 2 of the present study was that male and female students would not differ on PsyCap and mental health; hence, hypotheses were rejected as results show that there is a difference in mean scores of overall-life efficacy, overall-life optimism, schoolwork efficacy, social well-being, psychological well-being and overall mental health. The researcher found that males experience a greater degree of overall-life efficacy, schoolwork efficacy, social well-being and overall mental health than females. However, females tend to have a high overall-life optimism and psychological well-being than male students. The evidence found that females experience a higher degree of happiness and more positive emotions than males (Cameron, 1975; Diener, Sandvik, and Larsen, 1985; Fujita, Diener, Sandvik, 1991; Grossman and Wood, 1993). Hypotheses 3 was not rejected as the results in table 3 showed that an increase in different dimensions of PsyCap would increase students' mental health. Evidence showed that PsyCap is positively associated with well-being (Avey et al., 2010; Luthans et al., 2013; Roche, Haar & Luthans, 2014). The findings concluded that students who are hopeful, efficacious, resilient and optimistic have good mental health. The results found that gender plays a vital role in the PsyCap and mental as female students are recognised as investing energy in dealing with their life problems. The students who have good mental health are happy and positive in their lives. PsyCap helps students recognise the strength and power in challenging life stressors, such as personal and academic. Parents' demands and pressure to achieve the goal of life and lack of support and guidance increase the stress levels and often lead to drug abuse and suicidal tendencies. In this competitive world, the students often feel social isolation. They are twenty-four hours involved in their books, which leads them to be dissatisfied in their academic, social, and personal lives.

The inclusion of a student's mental health with PsyCap gives a deep understanding of mental abilities to enhance the strength and potential. The researchers have acknowledged that PsyCap is a powerful tool to develop a positive relationship with higher mental health among medical students (Nafees & Jahan, 2017). Developing PsyCap with skills and resilience will contribute fully to life goals and prepare students for dealing with challenges in their lives. Krasikova et al. (2015) suggested that promoting PsyCap using positive psychology interventions focuses on strengthening positive mental health and well-being. The positive interventions result in decreasing mental health issues and severe psychological problems.

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Exploring Psychological Capital as Predictor of Mental Health among Graduate-Level Students

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

Exploring Psychological Capital as Predictor of Mental Health among Graduate-Level Students

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