

Perceived Stress and Optimism among Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

This aim of this was to assess the relationship between perceived stress and optimism among young adults and also to find out the difference in perceived stress and optimism with respect to gender among the young adults. The tools used to assess perceived stress and optimism were PSS - Perceived stress scale (Cohen et al., 1983) a 10-item measure and the LOT-R - Life Orientation Test-Revised a 10-item instrument (Scheier, M. F., Carver, C. S., & Bridges, 1994). This study included a sample of 170 (72 men and 98 women) participants. The results indicated that there was a significant negative low correlation between Perceived stress and optimism among young adults. Also, there was no significant gender difference in perceived stress and optimism.

Keywords: *Perceived Stress, Optimism, Young adults*

Stress is body's reaction to any kind of change that requires an adjustment or response. The body reacts to these types of changes with physical, mental, as well as emotional responses. Stress happens when one's homeostasis is endangered or perceived as to be so. Young adults generally while at the start of new occupation or career plan undergoes a lot of pressure causing stress in individuals. Hans Selye who is considered to be the father of stress research, published *The Stress of Life*, in 1946, defining stress as "A non-specific response of the body to any demand for change". He categorized stress into pleasant and unpleasant stress, which he called as Eustress and is the optimal amount of stress which promotes health and growth (celebrations, promotions, or reuniting with old friends) and distress (death of a loved one, loss of a job, or accidents) and distinguished between them. Any kind of change either positive or negative requires a response from ones body in order to adapt and get back to the relatively peaceful state of mind. Stress is perceived when an external event results in unpleasant physiological and psychological distress that exceeds his or her emotional and behavioral capacity designed to nullify the harmful effects of the external stressors. According to the transactional stress and coping theory by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) Psychological stress is defined as "a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being". As per Lazarus's theory of psychological stress individual ability to deal with stress is a function of two components: individual's evaluation of what is important for general well-being in one's life and the ability of the

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individual to cope with any event or situation that may seem to be harmful to one's wellbeing found that stress aroused by a given condition was high in some individuals, whereas it was low in others. Thus, it was concluded that different people cope in different ways the same level of stress.

Perceived stress is the feelings or assumption that an individual has about how much stress they are under at a given point of time or time period. Perceived stress encompasses feelings about the uncontrollability as well as uncertainty of one's life; how often one deals with inconveniences, how much changes are happening in one's life, and faith in one's ability to deal with problems or dilemmas. It shows how the individual feels about the general stressfulness present in their life and ability to handle such stress. Individuals may face negative life events but evaluate the impact or severity of these to different extents as a result of factors like personality, coping resources, and support. Perceived stress is commonly measured as the frequency of such feelings.

Dispositional optimism is a belief that, outcomes in any endeavor or generalized expectancy that only good things, rather than bad things, shall happen. The construct of dispositional optimism developed from the notion that positive expectancies lead to increased effort to achieve desired goals, whereas negative expectancies lead to reduced effort and disengagement from good pursuit (Segerstrom & Nes, 2006). Dispositional optimism refers to the degree to which an individual holds positive expectancies for their future (M. E. Scheier & Carver, 1987), these individuals in turn, expect a positive outcome from their effort and are called as optimists, on the other hand, pessimists are the people who tend to hold more negative expectations, and their desired goals are viewed as unattainable thus, striving in the face of adversity.

A study conducted by (Olga Orosová1 et al., 2014) investigated the effect of gender, optimism, and perceived stress on Generalized Problematic Internet Use among university students. A total of, 817 first year university students from Slovakia (25.5% male, 74.5% female) who completed three measures: Perceived Stress Scale, Revised Life Orientation Test and The Generalized Problematic Internet Use Scale 2. The study showed that students with a lower level of optimism and a higher level of perceived stress seemed to have higher levels of generalized problematic Internet use. The findings of this study provide support for the conclusion that the development of life orientation, optimism, coping with stress, and reflection/deconstruction of perception of stress among first year university students could contribute to the prevention of generalized problematic Internet use.

A study by (Yew et al., 2015) studied the association between Perceived Stress, Life Satisfaction, Optimism, and Physical Health in 112 sample of Singapore Asians. The Shapiro-Wilk test, Kruskal-Wallis test, Pearson's correlation, Spearman's rho and Mann-Whitney U test were used. The findings showed that perceived stress levels were correlated with physiological health parameters such as heart rate, BMI and blood pressure. Also, optimism and life satisfaction were not associated with physical health, suggesting that optimistic behaviour was not substantial enough to affect physiological measures such as blood pressure.

A study was conducted by (Gliebe, 2018) to determine the relationship between perceived stress and a specific set of predictor variables among selected teachers in Lutheran schools in the United States. The sample consisted of 582 teachers, from which 147 participated. They answered three surveys: the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), the Cognitive Emotion

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Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ) and the Life Orientation Test Revised (LOT-R). The results showed that all three independent variables (rumination, positive reappraisal and optimism) are statistically significant predictors of perceived stress for this population of Lutheran teachers. This study shows that as levels of positive reappraisal and optimism increase, perceived stress decreases. This means that reappraising stressful situations in a positive light and having an optimistic outlook on life ameliorates stress. The study also shows that as rumination increases, perceived stress increases as well. This means that dwelling on the negative aspects of stressful situations exacerbates the experience of stress.

A study on Psychological Capital as Predictor of Psychological Well-Being was conducted by (Singh, 2009) with a sample of 250 students in the age group 18 - 25. The sample comprised of both males and females and was collected from the state of Haryana. Negative coefficients were found with depression, anxiety, stress, burnout, and health complaints. Results also found that well-being was negatively and significantly correlated with optimism.

METHODOLOGY

Research problem

To examine the relationship between perceived stress and optimism among young adults and also to find out the difference in perceived stress and optimism with respect to gender among the young adults.

Objectives

- To find the relationship between perceived stress and optimism among young adults.
- To compare the difference between perceived stress and gender among young adults.
- To compare the difference between optimism and gender among young adults.

Hypotheses

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between perceived stress and optimism among young adults.

Ho2: There is no significant difference between perceived stress and gender among young adults.

Ho3: There is no significant difference between optimism and gender among young adults.

Participants

A sample of 170 young adults (n=), 72 males and 98 females between the age group of 18-39 from various parts of India was taken which was based on the exclusion and inclusion criteria of the study. Convenience sampling was used for collecting the sample and is a type of non-probability sampling in which the sample is drawn from that part of the population that is close to hand.

Tools used for the study

Perceived Stress Scale

The PSS (Cohen et al., 1983) is a 10-item measure designed to assess the degree to which individuals perceive their lives as stressful. Respondents rate each item on a 5-point Likert type scale that ranges from 0 (Never) to 4 (Very Often). The Item scores are summed for a total score, which ranges from 10 to 40 and higher scores indicate greater perceptions of life stress; lower scores reflect lower perceptions of stress. The PSS showed adequate coefficient alphas (.84 and .85 for two college samples; Cohen et al., 1983) and has a good internal

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consistency with an alpha of .78. The PSS has been positively correlated with life-event scores, depressive and physical symptomatology, social anxiety, and maladaptive health related behaviours (e.g., increased smoking; Cohen, Sherrod, & Clark, 1986). These pieces of evidence indicate the construct and concurrent validity of the PSS.

Optimism

The Life Orientation Test–Revised (Scheier, M. F., Carver, C. S., & Bridges, 1994) was used to assess dispositional optimism. The LOT-R is a 10-item instrument in which respondents indicate the extent to which they agree with each item on a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Responses to three negatively worded items (e.g., “If something can go wrong for me, it will”) are reverse-scored and summed with responses from three positively worded items (e.g., “I’m always optimistic about my future”). These six items are averaged to produce an overall score in which higher scores indicate more optimism. Four filler items are not scored. Internal consistency scores for the LOT-R have been reported in the high .70s to low .80s range (M. F. Scheier & Carver, 2003), and the instrument is stable over time. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for the LOT-R in the present study was .70.

The **Socio-Demographic data sheet** which comprises of details such as name, age, and gender of the participant.

Procedure

The participants in this study were selected based on the inclusion-exclusion criteria. Informed consent was obtained from all the participants before collecting the data. Two questionnaires regarding the perceived stress and optimism were administered to them along with the socio-demographic data sheet. The scale was administered to the participants through Google Forms. The participants were given assurance based on the ethical guidelines of this study as well.

RESULTS

Table 1: Pearson’s correlation test results showing correlation between perceived stress and optimism

	N	M	SD	r	p
Perceived stress	170	19.5471	5.72554	-.361	.001
Optimism	170	13.8059	3.14595		

Table 2: Independent sample t test showing gender differences in perceived stress

	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Men	72	18.79	6.336	1.480	168	.141
Women	98	20.10	5.196			

Table 3: Significant difference in optimism among young adults with respect to gender

	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Men	72	13.7083	3.26931	.346	168	.730
Women	98	13.8776	3.06717			

- There is a significant low inverse correlation between perceived stress and optimism among young adults.

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- There is no significant difference in perceived stress among male and female young adults.
- There is no significant difference in optimism among male and female young adults.

DISCUSSION

The overall purpose of the test was to assess the relationship between perceived stress and optimism among young adults and also to find out the difference in perceived stress and optimism with respect to gender among the young adults. From table 1, it was understood that there is a significant difference between perceived stress and optimism rejecting the null hypothesis. This shows that there is a low inverse correlation between perceived stress and optimism. Similar results were found in a study by (Yew et al., 2015) which was done with a sample of 112 Singaporean citizen Asian context showed that optimism was negatively correlated with perceived stress. The study by (Gustafsson & Skoog, 2012), to investigate the relationship between optimism and burnout symptoms in 217 athletes (139 males and 78 females, aged 16 to 19 years), while also examining stress as a mediator in this relationship, showed that optimism had a significant negative relationship with stress.

From table 2, it was understood that, there was no significant difference in perceived stress among male and female young adults. A study conducted by (Gupta et al., 2014) showed that no significant difference between male and female for emotional intelligence and perceived stress.

From table 3, it was understood that, there was no significant difference in optimism among male and female young adults. A study by (Boman et al., 2003) was conducted to assess the difference in levels of optimism between males and females of first-year high school students in relation to a school setting. It was found that both male and female students did not differ in their levels of dispositional optimism. Likewise in a study by (Lai & Cheng, 2004) in an Asian sample from Hong Kong, examined the effect of dispositional optimism of both adults and adolescents on their intention to take vaccines for prevention purposes. No significant difference was observed between gender and level of optimism in both adults and adolescents.

CONCLUSION

According to the findings of the study, there is a significant low inverse correlation between perceived stress and optimism among young adults. The study also revealed that there is no significant difference in perceived stress among male and female young adults and also there is no significant difference in optimism among male and female young adults. The limitations include; the current study focused only on males and females excluding transgender samples so the results cannot be generalized to the whole young adult population. The sample of 170 participants included responses across India and thus is small in number in order to generalize the results. The questionnaires were circulated online so this also could have affected the concentration of participant resulting in inaccurate responses. In case of statistical techniques, the research has only used independent sample t test and pearson's correlation analysis to study the relationship between perceived stress and optimism among young adults. Therefore, the results of the study could have some drawbacks due to the limited statistical techniques used.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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