

Positive Affect and Human Flourishing

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ABSTRACT

Flourish means to live within an optimal range of human functioning, one that connotes goodness, generativity, growth, and resilience. People experience a range of pleasant and unpleasant emotions and moods, and they express a variety of positive and negative evaluative sentiments or attitudes. Affect represent spectrum of valance feeling states and attitudes, with positive affect and positivity interchangeably representing the pleasant end (e.g., feeling grateful, upbeat; expressing appreciation, liking) and negative affect and negativity representing the unpleasant and (e.g., feeling contemptuous, irritable, expressing disdain, disliking). Positive affect involves both pleasant feeling states and good moods. The strongest links between positive affect and health are found in studies that examine trait affective style, which reflects a person's typical emotional experience, rather than state affect, which reflects momentary responses to events. The review highlights consistent patterns in the literature associating positive affect and health. Evidence suggests an association of trait positive affect and lower morbidity (illness onset), lower mortality (increased longevity), survival from life-threatening disease, decreased symptoms and pain. Positive affect confers specific and measurable benefits for cognition and thought-action repertoires across a range of domains.

Keywords: *Flourish, Positive Affect, Morbidity, Mortality, Health.*

Over time, people experience a range of pleasant and unpleasant emotions and moods, and they express a variety of positive and negative evaluative sentiments or attitudes. Affect represent spectrum of valance feeling states and attitudes, with positive affect and positivity representing the pleasant end (e.g., feeling grateful, upbeat; expressing appreciation, liking) and negative affect and negativity representing the unpleasant and (e.g., feeling contemptuous, irritable; expressing disdain, disliking). The affective texture of person's life can be represented by its positivity ratio positivity ratios that meet or exceed a certain threshold characterize human flourishing. Flourish means to live within an optimal range of human functioning, one that connotes goodness, generativity, growth, and resilience (Keyes, 2002). Goodness, indexed by happiness, satisfaction, and superior functioning; generativity, indexed by broadened thought-action repertoires and behavioural flexibility; growth, indexed by gains in enduring personal and social resources; and resilience, indexed by survival and growth in the aftermath of adversity. Positive emotion or affect it the feelings that reflect a level of pleasurable engagement with the

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Received: February 25, 2022; Revision Received: June 28, 2022; Accepted: June 30, 2022

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environment, such as happiness, joy, excitement, enthusiasm and contentment (Clark, Waston, & Leeka, 1989). Positive affect (PA) involves both pleasant feeling states and good moods (Estrada, Isen, & Young, 1994). According to Fredrickson (2013) ten representative positive emotions are joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe, and love.

REVIEW

There is a large body of research focused on the relationship between affect, positive traits and physical health. Affect has been divided considering its emotional valence in positive and negative (Waston, Clark & Tellegen, 1988). The strongest links between positive emotions and health are found in studies that examine traits affective style, which reflects a person's typical emotional experience, rather than state affect, which reflects momentary responses to events. Several reviews suggest that positive affect is associated with improved longevity fewer physical symptoms, and biological indicators of good health. It is possible that positive affect could influence these outcomes by promoting healthful cognition and behaviours.

Positive Affect and Health

Higher traits PA has been associated with better health practices such as improved sleep quality, more exercise, and more intake of dietary zinc, as well as with lower levels of the stress hormones epinephrine, norepinephrine, and cortisol (Pressman & Cohen, 2005). PA has also been associated with other health relevant hormones, including increases in oxytocin and growth hormone and secretion of endogenous opioids. PA may also influence health by altering social interactions. Persons who report more PA socialize more often and maintain more and higher quality social ties. PA may result in more and closer social contacts because it facilitates approach behavior and because others are drawn to form attachments with pleasant individuals. More diverse and closer social ties have been associated with lower risk for both morbidity and premature mortality. Health care providers may be more attentive to persons with more pleasant affect. Fredrickson (1998) suggests that positive emotions encourage exploration and creativity and result in the building of social, intellectual, and physical resources. Salovey, Rothman, Detweiler, and Steward (2000) suggest that positive emotions generate psychological resources by promoting resilience, endurance, and optimism. Both cross-sectional and prospective studies of PA and illness virtually unanimously support an association between higher PA and health.

Positive Affect and Survival

Survival studies are prospective studies of groups of people with serious (often fatal) illnesses. They are basically mortality studies of people who are sick. A study by Moskowitz (2003) revealed that PA was associated with an increased likelihood of survival. Levy, Lee, Bagley, and Lippman (1988) found beneficial effect of PA on survival of cancer patients. Survival after open heart surgery was benefited by the energy component of PA (Chocron et al., 2000).

Positive Affect and Longevity

Maier and Smith (1999) examined how Subjective Well-Being (SWB) influenced mortality in a sample of older individuals. Lower levels of SWB (i.e., lower satisfaction, lower PA, higher NA) were associated with increased mortality risk. A study of community-dwelling older individuals self-rated happiness and self-rated emotional status were associated with mortality. (Kawamoto & Doi, 2002). Greater PA as assessed by both factors was associated with decreased mortality. Parker, Thorslund, and Nordstrom (1992) found that happiness

with life emerged as a predictor of longer life. Longevity was assessed of a sample of older adults using an interview measure of PA (Palmore,1969). Interviewer assessed happiness had the highest correlation with longevity, with happier people living longer.

Positive Affect, Cognitions and Behaviours

Frederickson's (2001) describes the psychological benefits of positive affect. In Broaden and Build Model (BBM). The BBM proposes that positive affect confers specific and measurable benefits for cognition and thought-action repertoires across a range of domains. In term of broadening, positive affect widens an individual's attentional scope (Frederickson's,2004), encouraging the development of connections across concepts and promoting more global information processing. In term of building, positive affect is thought to develop individual's resilience (Cohn, Fredrickson, Brown, Mikels, & Conway, 2009) and to enhance resources both in terms of coping (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002) and social relationships (Waugh & Frederickson, 2006).

Benefits of Positive Affect

A wide spectrum of empirical evidence documents the adaptive value of positive affect. Beyond their pleasant subjective feel, positive emotions, positive moods, and positive sentiments carry multiple, interrelated benefits. First, these good feelings alter people's mindsets. Induced positive affect widens the scope of attention (Frederickson & Branigan, 2005; Rowe, Hirsch & Anderson, 2005), broadens behavioural repertoires (Frederickson & Branigan, 2005) increases intuition (Bolte, Goschkey, & Kuhl, 2003) and creativity (Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki 1987). Second, good feelings alter people's bodily systems. Experiments have been shown that induced positive affect speeds recovery from the cardiovascular aftereffects of negative affect (Frederickson, Mancuso, Branigan, & Tugade, 2000), alters frontal brain symmetry (Davidson et.al., 2003), and increases immune function (Davidson et.al., 2003). Third, good feelings predict salubrious mental and physical health outcomes: prospective studies have shown that frequent positive affect predicts-resilience to adversity (Frederickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Lakin 2003); increased happiness (Frederickson & Joiner,2002); psychological growth (Frederickson et al.2003), lower levels of cortisol (Stephoe, Wardle, & Marmot, 2005), reduced inflammatory responses to stress (Stephoe et al., 2005), reductions in subsequent day physical pain (Gil et al., 2004), resistance to rhinoviruses (Cohen, Doyle, Turner, Alper & Skoner, 2003) and reductions in stroke (Ostir, Markides, Peek, & Goodwin, 2001). And fourth, good feelings predict how long people live. Several studies document a link between frequent positive affect and longevity (Danner, Snowdon, & Friesen,2001; Levy, Slade, Kunkel, & Kasl, 2002; Moskowitz, 2003; Ostir, Markides, Black, & Goodwin, 2000).

Paths from Positive Affect to Health Cognitions and Behaviours

- **Pathway 1: Improved Attention-** positive affect broadens attention which is the mechanism underlying the array of observed changes in cognition (Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987).
- **Pathway 2: Through and forward-looking thinking-** positive affect can promote through thinking and increases openness to information (Isen, 2004).
- **Pathway 3: Increased Motivation-** positive affect could promote more healthful goal choices and stronger behavioural intentions by generating more favourable outcome expectancies and stronger self-efficacy feelings (Erez & Isen, 2002; Isen & Reeve, 2005).

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- **Pathway 4: Responsiveness to goal cues-** Fishbach & Labroo (2007) proposed that positive mood is a signal to adopt one's currently accessible goal.
- **Pathway 5: Mood Maintenance or Repair-** people who are in a positive mood generally are motivated to maintain that mood (Isen, 1984).
- **Pathway 6: Arousal effects-** Taubman-Ben-Ari (2012) suggested that elevated positive arousal states, such as excitement, are associated with increased risk-seeking behavior.
- **Pathway 7: Self-control and Resilience:** Early research on the delay of gratification showed that positive affect aided children's ability to wait for a larger reward.

CONCLUSION

The present review set out to answer the question: 'Does Positive Affect Influence Health'? The strongest links between positive affect and health are found in studies that examine trait affective style, which reflects a person's typical emotional experience. Several reviews suggest that positive affect is associated with improved longevity, fewer physical symptoms, and biological indicators of good health. Human flourishing is optimal functioning characterized by four key components- goodness, generativity, growth and resilience.

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Acknowledgement

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Jahagirdar D. (2022). Positive Affect and Human Flourishing. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 10(2), 1567-1572. DIP:18.01.156.20221002, DOI:10.25215/1002.156