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Research Paper



The Effect of Autonomy and Sociotropy on Wellbeing of College Students

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ABSTRACT

Martin Seligman (2011) defines well-being as combination of positive emotion, engagement, meaning, relationships, and accomplishment (PERMA). The notion of well-being can be either hedonistic or pursuit of sensation and pleasure or Eudaimonia or being true to one's inner self (Maslow,1970). Sociotropy scale is related to pleasing other, dependency and concern over what others think while the autonomy scales include independence, perfectionism, self-criticism and defensive separation. Aim: The present study aims to find the relationship between autonomy and wellbeing and Sociotropy and wellbeing in college students. Method: Quantitative data was collected from 30 college students of Kolkata aged between 18-25 years, using standardized psychometric questionnaire: Ryff's Psychological Well-being scale (1995) and Sociotropic Autonomy Scale by A.T Beck (1983) and Beck and Clark (1999). Results: The correlation analysis indicates that for the present sample a significant negative correlation exists between sociotropy and wellbeing (-0.397, p<0.05) while no significant relationship was found between autonomy and wellbeing. Thus, it can be said that with increasing sociotropy, psychological wellbeing decreases.

Keywords: Autonomy, Well-being, Sociotropy, College students

Positive psychology takes you through the countryside of pleasure and gratification, up into the high country of strength and virtue, and finally to the peaks of lasting fulfilment, meaning and purpose (Seligman, 2002). Positive psychology advances in giving rise to highlighted interest in psychological well-being across various disciplines (Henn et al., 2016; Hides et al., 2016). This has led to the scientific literature taking an approach to the construct from two polarized perspectives. In the first one, psychological well-being is constructed from a hedonic perspective, the result of an internal state that the individual experiences on a subjective temporal plane associated, with high levels of positive affect and life satisfaction ((Weiss et al., 2016; Opree et al., 2018). Martin Seligman (2011) defines well-being as combination of positive emotion, engagement, meaning,

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relationships, and accomplishment (PERMA). The notion of well-being can be either hedonistic or pursuit of sensation and pleasure or Eudaimonia or being true to one's inner self (Maslow,1970). Sociotropy scale is related to pleasing other, dependency and concern over what others think while the autonomy scales include independence, perfectionism, self-criticism and defensive separation.

In 1998, Dr. Martin Seligman used his inaugural address as the incoming president of the American Psychological Association to shift the focus from mental illness and pathology to studying what is good and positive in life. From this point in time, theories and research examined positive psychology interventions that help make life worth living and how to define, quantify, and create wellbeing (Rusk & Waters, 2015). In developing a theory to address this, Seligman (2012) selected five components that people pursue because they are intrinsically motivating and they contribute to wellbeing. These elements are pursued for their own sake and are defined and measured independently of each other (Seligman, 2012). Martin Seligman (2011) defines well-being as combination of positive emotion, engagement, meaning, relationships, and accomplishment (PERMA). The notion of wellbeing can be either hedonistic or pursuit of sensation and pleasure or Eudaimonia or being true to one's inner self (Maslow, 1970). Whereas, Sociotropic individuals are characterized by an overvaluation of closeness and social acceptance in order to boost self-esteem on the other hand autonomous individuals base their self-esteem on achievement, independence and control ((Martinez, Senra, Ferandez, Merino, 2020). The PERMA+ model provides practical ways to apply its components in your private practice or personal life. Abraham Maslow (1962) was one of the first in the field of psychology to describe "wellbeing," with his characteristics of a self-actualized person. The description of self-actualization is a foreshadowing of the PERMA model, which outlines the characteristics of a flourishing individual and Wellbeing Theory (WBT). In PERMA, P stands for Positive Emotion, E stands for Engagement, R stands for Positive Relationships, M stands for Meaning and lastly A stands for Achievements or Accomplishments.

Sociotropy scale takes into account aspects related to pleasing others, dependency & concern what others think. Autonomy scale includes elements such as perfectionism, stroke self-criticism needs for control & defensive separation. Highly sociotropic individual often consume more food or try to match a peer eating habit when they believe that doing so makes the peer more comfortable. This is hypothesized as being a result of the individual attempting by different behavioural strategies (Atk, 1993, Beck, 1999, Clark). The Sociotropy & Autonomy scale was introduced by Aron. T. Beck, was in need for assessing cognitive constructs hypothesized as risk factor. This scale focuses on sociotropy (social dependency) and autonomy (satisfying independency). Autonomy refers to making independent decision that align with personal value and goals which is not forced by external agencies in psychology. It is a basic human need needed for psychological wellbeing.

Association with Depression- The Sociotropic Autonomy Scale (SAS) has two factors, one is neediness and the other one is connectedness. Neediness symptoms of depression & connectedness has sensitivity towards others & associated with valuing relationship. People who are very dependent on social approval are called Sociotropic, and they are prone to depression to sustain their low self-esteem by establishing a secure interpersonal relationship with other people and have higher desires for acceptance, support understanding and guidance, which is problematic when the relationship fails. Sociotropic are going through failed relationship are likely to feel depressed due to intensified feeling of abandonment &

loss. It can be seen that a person can either be high on sociotropy and low on autonomy, vice versa.

Ryff and Keyes (1995) defined psychological wellbeing as the combination of six dimensions: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationship with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Each of these components is designed to lead to positive functioning. Thus, their model focuses more on eudemonic wellbeing than hedonic traditions that argue wellbeing is about gratification and positive emotions. Eudemonic wellbeing argues that happiness comes from meaning, rather than gratification and positive emotions (Goodman, Disabato, Kashdan, & Kauffman, 2017). As the field of positive psychology has grown, so have its theories about wellbeing. Tom Rath, co-author of *Wellbeing: The Five Essential Elements*, considered overall happiness as a product of wellbeing in five distinct areas of life. He explained, Wellbeing is about the combination of our love for what we do each day, the quality of our relationships, the security of our finances, the vibrancy of our physical health, and the

pride we take in what we have contributed to our communities. Most importantly, it's about how these five elements interact. (Rath & Harter, 2014, p.4). Furthermore, he argued, long-term happiness is really about the positive short-term decisions we make in relation to our finances, relationships, physical health, community, and career.

Talking about the schools of thought Hedonistic & Eudemonic where Hedonistic means happiness as seen as totality of pleasurable moments. According to DESADE it is a pursuit of sensation and pleasure. The notion of Eudemonia is being true to one's inner self can be equated with Maslow's 1970 perspective of wellbeing related to the concept of self-actualization and DECI and RYAN's (2000) self-determination theory.

The present study aims to see whether any significant relationship exist between wellbeing and these two traits of personality namely Sociotropy and Autonomy in college students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on Adolescent Psychological well-being:

In a study conducted by S. Lee Rinder (2016) on 568 college students it was found that interventions that can improve sleep quality can enhance the Well-being of college students. John Maltby and Liza Day (2001) conducted a study on 227 undergraduate students. They divide them into two groups on the basis of regular exercise. The findings suggest that for the group of individuals who were exercising for less than 6 month a number of extrinsic motivations leads to poor psychological well-being where as individuals who were exercising for 6 month and more, they are intrinsically motivated which leads to better psychological well-being.

Studies on adolescent autonomy and sociotropy:

In a study conducted by Chien Ti Lee et.al (2009) on 781 Taiwanese High School students, teenage girls are found to have lower cognitive autonomy than teenage boys.

However, in another study conducted by Christopher Daddis (2011) on 527 adolescents it was found that younger adolescents and girls desire more autonomy than older adolescent and boys. This study also reveals that adolescent prefer more autonomy in personal issues than in moral issues. Furthermore, the study also reveals that adolescents who perceive their peers as having more autonomy than them have an increased need of autonomy.

In a recent study Juming Jiang et.al (2022) found that students who received autonomy support from teaching assistants shows more satisfaction with campus life, less depressive symptoms and timely engagement in activities.

Richard Beck et.al (2003) conducted research on 167 college students where they found that sociotropic individuals are more home sick and preoccupied with thoughts about home as a result they experience symptoms of depression than autonomous individuals.

Studies on relationship between well-being, sociotropy and autonomy:

In a study conducted by SoheilaPanahiet.al (2013) on 534 graduate students of Malaysia University, it was found that students who are employed shows higher autonomy than un employed students. On the other hand, in another study James Fagget.al (2008) shows that being employed is associated with higher psychological well-being.

In a study Harry. T. Reis et.al (2000) explores how satisfaction of three needs namely autonomy, relatedness and competence in daily life activity affects well-being of individuals. The results indicate that the satisfaction of these needs, especially the feeling of being understood is related to psychological well-being.

In another study Alicia Elena Romero Carrasco et al. (2013), explore different factors of wellbeing among professional tennis player, with special attention to their perception of autonomy and coping strategies. For this purpose, data was collected from 155 male tennis players. Results indicate that the players perceived more autonomy when they are engaged in professional sports, and this perception of autonomy leads to psychological well-being among them.

Miguel Melendroet.al (2020) conducted a study on 1148 Spanish and Colombian young adults. The researchers focus on three different pathways that mark their transition to adulthood namely education, employment and social disadvantages. Data was collected for both well-being and autonomy scale, in addition the subjects were asked about the most relevant aspect of their transition to adulthood. The result reveals that higher level of well-being is related to higher level of autonomy. Furthermore, in case of the pathways, autonomy and we'll being is found to be higher in education pathway than the other two.

In a recent study conducted by Dr. Arzu Buyruk Genç (2021), found that the level of life satisfaction of university students is negatively correlated with the trait of sociotropy whereas it is found to have no significant relation with autonomy.

In a study conducted by Robins C. J et.al (1991) it was found that both the traits of Sociotropy and Autonomy are significant predictor of depression.

Indian Studies:

In a study conducted by Tusshar Mahajan and Vikas Arora (2018) on university students of north-India, it was found that female students especially from non-metropolitan areas shows more autonomy and entrepreneurship intensions than students of metropolitan areas.

In a study conducted by Namrata Punia et.al (2015) it was found that students who have medium or high level of academic performances shows high level of psychological wellbeing, purpose of life and personal growth.

METHOD

Aim:

The present study aims to find the relationship between autonomy and wellbeing and Sociotropy and wellbeing in college students.

Objectives:

- To assess the relationship between wellbeing and sociotropy among college students.
- To assess the relationship between wellbeing and autonomy.

Hypothesis:

- There is no significant relationship between wellbeing and sociotropy among college students.
- There is no significant relationship between wellbeing and autonomy among college students.

Plan of work:

Variables:

- Wellbeing: Martin Seligman (2011) defines well-being as combination of positive emotion, engagement, meaning, relationships, and accomplishment (PERMA). The notion of well-being can be either hedonistic or pursuit of sensation and pleasure or Eudaimonia or being true to one's inner self (Maslow, 1970).
- **Sociotropy:** Sociotropic individuals are characterized by an overvaluation of closeness and social acceptance in order to boost self-esteem (Martinez, Senra, Ferandez, Merino, 2020).
- **Autonomy:** Autonomous individuals base their self-esteem on achievement, independence and control ((Martinez, Senra, Ferandez, Merino, 2020).

Sample size: Data was collected from 30 college students of Kolkata aged between 18-25 years.

Sampling Technique: Random sampling techniques was used to select the sample.

Methods: The data was collected using standardized psychometric questionnaires.

Approach: The present study is a correlational study.

Inclusion Criteria:

- Age Range: 18-25 years
- Both male and female students were included.
- Only under-graduate and post-graduate students were included.

Exclusion Criteria:

- School students were excluded.
- Individuals with any psychiatric illness were excluded.

Tools:

• **Psychological Well-being scale (EDATVA)**- Psychological Well-being scale was developed by Ryff (1995). The form consists of series of statements reflecting six areas of psychological well-being: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal

growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life and self-acceptance. The questionnaire consisted of 18 items (medium form). Respondents rate statements on a scale of 1 to 6 with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 6 indicating strong agreement. Its internal consistency reliability ranges from 0.86 to 0.93 (Wong & Law, 2002).

Sociotropic Autonomy Scale (SAS)- Sociotropic Autonomy Scale was developed by A. T Beck (1983) and Beck and Clark (1999). Two separate scales were devised to assess the degrees to which an individual is characterized by "sociotropic" and "autonomous" attitudes. The questionnaire consisted of 60 items where 30 for sociotropy and 30 for autonomy which were factor analyzed separately. Its internal consistency reliability for sociotropy 0.90 and for autonomy 0.83.

Procedure

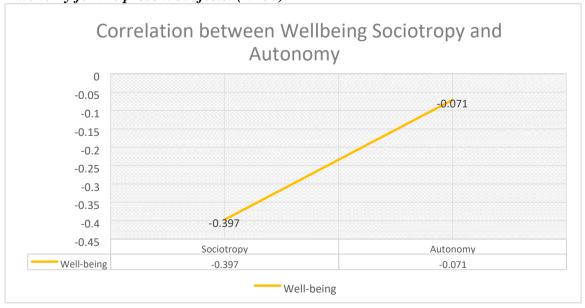
Online google form was created and circulated among the college students of Kolkata. Data has been collected from 30 college students aged between 18-25 years. The data thus collected was then statistically evaluated using SPSSv.16.0. With the help of SPSS 16 (Statistical Package for Social Science, version 16) (Levesque 2006), the data was then statistically evaluated. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to determine if there is any significant relationship present between wellbeing, sociotropy and autonomy.

RESULTS

Table-1: Correlation of Well-being with Sociotropy and Autonomy among College Students (N=30).

Domain	Pearson Correlation	Level of	Remark
	Coefficient	Significance	
Sociotropy	-0.397	0.03	Significant relationship present.
			Null hypothesis is rejected.
Autonomy	-0.071	0.709	No significant relationship present.
			Null hypothesis is accepted.

Graph: 1 Graphical representation of relationship between Well-being, Sociotropy and Autonomy for the present subjects. (N=30).



DISCUSSION

Table: 1 indicates that for the present sample wellbeing is significantly correlated with sociotropy with a Pearson correlation coefficient of -0.397 (p<0.05) however no significant relationship was found between autonomy (-0.071, p>0.05) and wellbeing. Thus, our first null hypothesis is rejected, but second null hypothesis is accepted.

A negative correlation between sociotropy and well-being indicates that as the level of sociotropy increases the level of wellbeing decreases and vice versa i.e.as the more someone becomes dependent on others and the more someone have the urge of acceptance from the society the more their self-esteem and wellbeing decreases which in turn affect their mental health. Sociotropy describes one's concern over disapproval, separation and pleasing others. Once a sociotropic individual faces disapproval they are more likely to suffer from mental health issues like, depression, anxiety etc (Sing & Manjula, 2018). The current finding is also in line with the previous body of literature where a negative relationship was found between sociotropy and wellbeing.

However, in contrast to the previous body of literature no significant relationship was found between autonomy and wellbeing. The present finding can be explained by the fact that most of the college students are financially dependent on their parents. Complete autonomy can be achieved when a person is financially independent. Therefore, for the present sample autonomy is not found to have any relationship with well-being.

The present findings are also similar with a recent study conducted by Dr. Arzu Buyruk Genç (2021), where the author found that the level of life satisfaction of university students are negatively correlated with the trait of sociotropy whereas it is found to have no significant relation with autonomy.

CONCLUSION

Thus, it can be concluded from the present study that the trait of sociotropy is negatively related with the wellbeing of college students of Kolkata. However, the trait of autonomy does not have any significant relation with wellbeing for the present sample. It has been found from the research that sociotropy is a personality trait characterised by excessive investment in interpersonal relationships which might be a cause of excessive anxiety and stress thus it affects the wellbeing in a negative way. People with sociotropy has a strong need of acceptance which causes them to be overly nurturant leading to interpersonal stress. Sociotropy can be seen as opposite of autonomy because those with sociotropy are concerned with interpersonal relationship, whereas those with autonomy are more concerned with independence and do not care much about others. However, in this particular research paper the relationship with autonomy and wellbeing is not very clear and thus cannot be generalised and the sample were teenagers or college students who are dependent on their parents financially and thus not really autonomous.

Delimitations

- A large number of samples could have been taken to increase the generalisation of the findings
- Inability to include other psychological dimensions.

Future Scope

• School students can be included in the study.

- A comparative study on wellbeing, sociotropy and autonomy of male and female students can be done.
- Students from different socio-economic status can be taken in consideration for future research.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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