

The Impact of Psychological Distress and Motivation on Happiness Among College Student NGO Volunteers

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ABSTRACT

The well-being and motivation of college students is a crucial area of study, particularly in the volunteers. This study focuses on the happiness, psychological distress, and motivational levels of college students who volunteer in Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). With a quantitative approach, we surveyed 211 college students and NGO volunteers aged 18-24. Standardized scales were used such as the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K-10) for measuring psychological distress, the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) for measuring happiness, and the Global Motivation Scale (GMS-28) used to measure various kinds of motivation. Statistical analyses were conducted using Jamovi software. The findings reveal significant correlations between happiness, psychological distress, and motivation among volunteering students. The average happiness score was relatively high ($M=17.8$). Motivation, especially factors such as intrinsic motivation to know and towards accomplishments shows positive correlations with happiness. Conversely, psychological distress negatively impacted happiness with 30.5%. Extrinsic motivation- identified as positively correlated with happiness and extrinsic motivation- introjected had a negative impact. The study concludes that volunteering enhances happiness and intrinsic motivation among college students but also introduces a higher degree of psychological distress. The mental health support for student volunteers should be provided. Limitations of the study include its cross-sectional design and reliance on self-reported measures which may introduce response bias. Future research should consider focusing on advanced statistical techniques or qualitative study designs to track the reasons and the impact of different types of volunteer activities on psychological well-being. Education institutions and NGOs can develop support systems to mitigate distress and enhance the positive outcomes of volunteering.

Keywords: *Happiness, Psychological Distress, Motivation, College Students, NGO Volunteers, Young Adults*

Happiness

Isn't every little action we take, consciously or unconsciously, an attempt to achieve happiness? The feelings of positive emotions are often described as happiness itself, a subjective feeling that resonates deeply within oneself. The sources of happiness vary widely among individuals, yet the result remains universally recognized as a positive

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and fulfilling emotional state. This emotional state not only nurtures physical and mental health but can also be derived from life's simplest pleasures. Happiness transcends barriers of color, race, gender, and age, remaining a constant across all global communities. Positive psychology emphasizes the importance of adopting a positive perspective and nurturing mental well-being, akin to the Japanese concept of *kintsugi*, where imperfections are embraced to find happiness.

In the pursuit of happiness, one may not yield the expected results, potentially leading to feelings of sadness or depression. It is crucial to maintain a balanced approach, recognizing and managing the full spectrum of human emotions. Emotional intelligence plays a significant role here, scientifically linked to increased happiness and overall well-being. While external events like marriage may bring happiness, emotional intelligence fosters sustained happiness throughout life's journey. Ultimately, achieving happiness involves understanding the consequences of our actions and how we interpret them. Happiness is not merely acquired; it is a skill that can be cultivated by anyone. The key to unlocking this skill lies within each individual.

A review paper on happiness conducted by Veenhoven, R. (1991), examines the evolution of happiness from ancient Greek philosophy through enlightenment moral philosophy to contemporary quality-of-life. The research critiques Dodge's work that 'philosophical understanding of the happy life has stagnated since and instead initiates survey research to conceptualize happiness and measure life satisfaction. Despite some progress, there are still some unanswered questions about how overall happiness and the brain process work. However, studies show that happiness is not fixed and can be improved, benefiting society in positive ways without harmful effects. This review focused on the efforts to study and promote happiness through brief analysis and application in today's world.

Psychological Distress

Overwhelming and unpleasant feelings associated with traumatic experiences or a highly stressed environment can often lead to psychological distress. Most frequently reported symptoms are negative such as anxiety, sadness, avoidance behaviour, low appetite, or sleep disturbances. People with psychological distress problems may react differently and can manifest in distinct ways as the level of effect it has is subjective. Individuals with moderate levels may face hindrances in personal life changes or daily life activities, such as work or school-related and individuals who have high levels may have severe symptoms and outcomes like not acting like themselves and being distant from everyone or even sudden death due to the stroke. It is important to note that psychological distress, a mental health problem, is different from a psychological disorder, which is a mental health disorder.

According to a study by Sheila Rider (2004), a literature review was conducted which included empirical references and constructed cases. It covered databases such as MEDLINE, CINAHL, Ovid, Psych INFO, and Cancer literature of the last 50 years. The study aimed to establish an easy-to-distinguish concept from strain, stress, and distress and also to provide a foundation that can act as an aid for nurses to plan effective clinical interventions. The results revealed that, despite the frequent usage of the term psychological distress, it remains poorly defined with its origin being unclear. This lack of clarity affects nurse's efforts to manage patient care effectively. There is a need to establish a clear and distinct definition of psychological distress for better clinical interventions.

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Motivation

Motivation is the inner drive that pushes you to chase your goals and dreams. Motivation can be of two types, intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is when it's from within because it makes you happy and satisfied within. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is driven by external rewards like money, praise, or avoiding punishment. Motivation is influenced by goals, direction, and rewards which act like a mediator for keep going.

A study done by (Sekhar et al., 2013) investigates multiple facets of motivation that shape motivational techniques' authors present the multifaceted nature of motivation, leaning on existing literature and, in turn understanding the conceptual framework that underpins their findings. According to their study, the different motivation techniques have a positive impact on the employee's satisfaction and the organization's positive performance.

A book (R.S., 1960) called *The Concepts of Motivation*, "explains philosophically and psychologically the idea of motivation to explain human behaviour". Book chapters cover types of explanations in psychological theories, motives, and motivation, along with drive theories.

A growth mindset that holds that abilities can improve with effort, is what increases motivation. Challenges are now looked upon as opportunities rather than obstacles. Ultimately, motivation is the process in which you find and use what in life inspires you and you gather energy out of those things to push forward. It is the factor of success that no one knows, making every step of the enjoyable journey not just tolerable but also joyful.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Happiness

Extensive research on happiness and various factors such as stress, social support, and volunteering highlighted their relationship. King et al. (2014) investigated how stress and social support influence perceived happiness among college students, it found that low happiness is associated with higher stress and low emotional connection with others. A similar study by Calderon et al. (2019) compared happiness, perceived stress, psychological well-being, and health behaviours among Thai university students, it revealed that lower happiness and higher stress compared to Western counterparts, gender differences in health behaviours were noticed. Research on the sample of Iranian nursing students identified happiness and achievement motivation are significantly correlated and there are demographic influences on these variables (Amani Nezhad et al., 2022). Thematic analysis by Singh et al. (2020) revealed through conducted interviews, the notion of subjective perception of happiness the individuals living in various Indian socio-economic groups have multidimensional concepts of happiness such as social connections, material satisfaction, personal responsibility, etc. Additionally, a study on Indian university students revealed that emotional intelligence mediated the relationship between certain personality traits and happiness for females, not for males who showcased only direct associations (Hafen et al., 2011).

Psychological Distress

Across various studies, psychological distress is a common problem. Rescue workers have increased psychological distress, which inversely relates to resilience and may be attenuated through interventions aimed at increasing resiliency factors, according to Med J. (2016). A very high level of psychological distress, relating to test anxiety and motivation, is suffered

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by pharmacy students; hence, targeted interventions in academic settings are needed, according to Rajiah et al. (2014). Those individuals suffering from anorexia nervosa report compulsive exercise behaviour, which add to elevated levels of psychological distress and a poorer quality of life. This suggests that treatments for this disorder should include strategies against compulsive exercise. Humanitarian aid workers report heightened levels of anxiety and depression during deployment, moderated by social support and positive organizational practices. There are benefits from community-based intervention tools, including home visits, in reducing psychological distress, particularly among older adults with more severe symptoms. The findings reveal the diversity of contexts within which psychological distress occurs and underscore tailored interventions to improve mental well-being across different demographic groups.

Motivation

Recent literature shows that the concept of motivation and performance has been firmly examined in different contexts and by using different methodologies and theoretical frameworks. Other studies, such as those on emotional intelligence and achievement motivation among undergraduate students by (Shibila, S., & Sannet, T.,2020), further highlight the significance of knowing motivational factors both in an academic and a workplace environment. Similarly, (Korkmaz et al.,2019) add to the NGO member's management literature by discussing some innovative solutions that blockchain technology can offer, while (Halis et al., 2020) test the relationships between personality factors and volunteer motivations in crisis settings. Discussing the management of NGOs or NPOs, (Mishra et al., 2022) focus on the organizational factors that could determine motivation, and (Schmidt, J. 2016) seek to find out the motivational types of NGO employees. It is reviewed that what the literature pointed out was tailored interventions and sustainable strategic management practices to optimize motivation for enhancing organizational and NGO worker's effectiveness within different sectors.

NGO Volunteers

Literature on volunteers and nonprofit workers shows that they are influenced by factors like happiness and well-being. Motivations in the individuals who volunteer full-time in Indian humanitarian and spiritual NGOs, findings revealed through self-determination theory analysis that their decisions were due to the need for relatedness, autonomy, and competence (Sengupta & Joshi, 2023). Similarly, Karhina et al. (2017) explored the effects of motive and well-being in Ukrainian military crisis volunteers, identifying positive and negative effects, including an increase in social networks, positive emotions & physical fatigue, and emotional strain respectively. Certain motivations for volunteers might reduce the risk of PTSD symptoms among adolescents despite high exposure to traumatic events (Jaffe et al., 2012). A study by Mishara and Giroux (1993), revealed that volunteering experience in suicide prevention hotline and coping strategies like positive thinking reduces stress, while magical thinking tends to increase it. Huang (2012) studied the happiness among NPO workers in five Asian societies, it found that generally, employment in NPOs enhances happiness, particularly in the individuals whose profile is of highly skilled workers or nonsupervisory. These studies underscore volunteering benefits and drawbacks across diverse cultures and situational contexts.

Purpose

The purpose of this correlational study is to compare the impact of psychological distress on happiness and motivation among college students who volunteer in NGOs.

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Objective

1. To assess the relationship between happiness, psychological distress and motivation among college students who volunteer in NGOs.
2. To assess the impact of psychological distress and motivation on the happiness among college students who volunteer in NGOs.

Hypothesis

- **H1:** There is a significant correlation between happiness and psychological distress among college students who volunteer in NGOs.
- **H2:** There is a significant correlation between psychological distress and motivation among college students who volunteer in NGOs.
- **H3:** There is a significant correlation between happiness and motivation among college students who volunteer in NGOs.
- **H4:** There is a significant impact of psychological distress and motivation on the happiness among college students who volunteer in NGOs.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample for this study consists of 211 college students aged between 18-24. Purposive and snowball sampling design is employed to make sure that only those young adults are included who are a college student and they volunteer or work in the non-profit organisation. Sample is selected from Delhi, NCR region. All the research participants were informed regarding the aim of the study and informed consent was taken.

Measures

Three scales were used for this research study:

1. **Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10)** given by Ronald C. Kessler in 1992 is a 10-item questionnaire which aims to measure the distress based on anxiety and depressive based symptoms that a person may have experienced in the last 4-week period. The total internal consistency reliability is 0.844 and concurrent validity is 0.722. It is a 5-point Likert scale where the subject is supposed to rate an item from “none of the time” to “all of the time”. For the scoring, the numbers obtained are added up and the total score will range from 10 to 50.
2. **The Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS)** given by Lyubomirsky & Lepper in 1999 is a 4-item questionnaire which aims to measure global subjective happiness. Two items ask the participants to rate with absolute ratings and rating relative to peers and the other two ask the descriptions and level to which they consider themselves happy and unhappy. The internal consistency and test-retest reliability is 0.86 and 0.72 respectively and convergent validity is 0.62. It is supposed to be assessed on a 7-point Likert scale. All the subjects are scored by adding the obtained score and the 4th item is reverse coded.
3. **The Global Motivation Scale (GMS-28)** given by Frédéric Guay, Geneviève A. Mageau et Robert J. Vallerand in 2003 is a 28 items scale. The scale aims to measure people’s general motivation in their life as a whole. There are 7 sub-scales: intrinsic motivation- to know, towards accomplishment, to experience stimulation and extrinsic motivation- identified, introjected, external regulation, and lastly amotivation. Each subscale consists of 4 items. Internal consistency values of the seven subscales are reported to be satisfactory. It is assessed on a 7-point scale where

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1 means “does not correspond accordingly, 4 means corresponds moderately and 7 means corresponds completely.

Procedure

The data was collected through an online survey which consisted of basic demographic details, the NGO survey questions and three standardised questionnaires were used. Kessler Psychological Distress Scale for psychological distress, Subjective Happiness Scale for happiness, and Global Motivation Scale for motivation. For each scale, clear instructions were stated at the starting. All the participants were ensured of the confidentiality of their response. The form was sent and forwarded to people who live in Delhi, NCR regions only. Scoring was done based on the instructions provided in their respective manual. The statistical techniques viz. Descriptive Statistics, Pearson’s Correlation, and Simple Linear Regression were used to interpret the objectives and hypothesis of this study.

Variables

For this research, the following variables were chosen-

- Independent Variable 1- Psychological distress
- Independent variable 2- Motivation
- Dependent variable – Happiness

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

This study aimed to understand the impact of happiness, psychological distress, and motivation on NGO volunteers. Volunteers are individuals who choose to offer their time, skills, and efforts to a cause or organization without expecting payment, often assuming specific responsibilities to advance the organization's mission and activities (Weatherspoon, 1997). Volunteers are required to work on their own will, resources for others who need help, or assist through some serious illness or any other life tragedy. NGO workers fulfill essential functions in community development by promoting community involvement, providing services, advocating for policy reforms, and overseeing organizational resources (Sarker & Khan, 2013).

Table 1 Descriptives Table

Variables	Mean	Median	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
H	17.8	17	4.56	-0.1072	-0.4257
PD	24.6	24	8.17	0.3592	-0.7021
M	131.3	130	21.80	0.1041	0.1889
IN-K	20.8	21	4.66	-0.2780	-0.6141
IN-A	20.6	21	4.46	-0.2261	-0.5828
IN- ES	19.3	20	4.29	-0.4748	0.5457
EX-ID	20.5	21	4.32	-0.1684	-0.6289
EX- IN	17.0	17	5.29	-0.1788	-0.3556
EX- ER	18.2	18	4.94	-0.4297	-0.0469
AM	14.9	15	5.06	0.0313	-0.3192

Please note that here, H denotes for happiness, PD for psychological distress, M for motivation, IN-K for intrinsic motivation-to know, IN-A for intrinsic motivation-towards accomplishments, IN-ES for intrinsic motivation-experience stimulation, EX-ID for extrinsic motivation-identified, EX-IN for extrinsic motivation-introjected, EX-ER for extrinsic motivation- external regulation and AM for amotivation.

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The above table statistics indicate, the complete view of happiness, psychological distress, and motivational factors of the NGO workers. On average, participants described themselves as relatively highly happy, with a (M=17.8), and on the level of psychological distress, (M=24.6). These values indicated that the sample was essentially balanced but at the same time highly variable in emotional conditions. The motivation scores were very high, with a mean of (M=131.3), meaning there was a substantial drive toward goals and tasks. It becomes clear that intrinsic motivation exists along such dimensions as to know, with a (M=20.8), Accomplishment with a mean of (20.6), and Experience stimulation with (M=18.2). Extrinsic motivation demonstrates rather moderate Identified (M=20.5) and Introjection (M=17.0), motivation by external regulation with a mean of (18.2). A moderate level of motivation with an (M=14.9) predefines general activation among the subjects about activities. All variable data is normally distributed as indicated by skewness and kurtosis values which are within an acceptable range of + - 3.

Table 1.2: Correlation Table

Variable	H	PD	M	IN-K	IN-A	IN-ES	EX-ID	EX-IN	EX-ER	AM
H	—									
PD	0.552*	—								
M	0.116	0.059	—							
IN-K	0.357*	0.213*	0.651*	—						
IN-A	0.148*	-0.114	0.817*	0.725*	—					
IN-ES	0.242*	0.167*	0.708*	0.559*	0.659*	—				
EX-ID	0.202*	-0.082	0.741*	0.704*	0.738*	0.625*	—			
EX-IN	0.191*	0.280*	0.677*	0.129	0.379*	0.214*	0.242*	—		
EX-ER	-0.068	0.316*	0.637*	0.112	0.321*	0.236*	0.300*	0.591*	—	
AM	-0.072	0.161*	0.427*	-0.074	0.073	0.121	-0.038	0.452*	0.307*	—

*represents 0.05 & 0.01 level of significance.

Please note that here, H denotes for happiness, PD for psychological distress, M for motivation, IN-K for intrinsic motivation-to know, IN-A for intrinsic motivation-towards accomplishments, IN-ES for intrinsic motivation-experience stimulation, EX-ID for extrinsic motivation-identified, EX-IN for extrinsic motivation-introjected, EX-ER for extrinsic motivation- external regulation and AM for amotivation.

The correlation table reveals significant relationships between happiness, psychological distress, and motivation in the sample of NGO volunteers. Happiness (H) is significantly negatively correlated with psychological distress (PD), indicating that as higher happiness leads to lower distress. Various motivational factors such as intrinsic motivation (to know, towards accomplishments and experience stimulation) and extrinsic motivation (identified) are positively correlated with happiness whereas negatively correlated with extrinsic motivation (introjected). Psychological distress exhibits a positive and significant relationship with extrinsic motivation (introjected, emotional regulation) and motivation whereas negatively significant with intrinsic motivation (to know, experience stimulation). Motivation is strongly correlated with all forms of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, particularly with intrinsic motivation indicating that motivated individuals tend to be intrinsically driven in this sample. Conversely, motivation shows fewer correlations suggesting it is less integrated with other forms of motivation.

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Table 1.3: Regression Table

	β	R square	SE	t	p
PD	-0.309	0.305	0.0322	-9.58	<.001
M	0.0242	0.0134	0.0144	1.68	0.094
IN-K	0.350	0.128	0.0632	5.53	<.001
IN-A	0.152	0.0220	0.0700	2.17	0.031
IN-ES	0.257	0.0584	0.0714	3.60	<.001
EX-ID	0.214	0.0409	0.0716	2.99	0.003
EX-IN	-0.165	0.0366	0.0586	-2.82	0.005
EX-ER	-0.0631	0.00468	0.0637	-0.991	0.323
AM	-0.0652	0.00523	0.0622	-1.05	0.296

Please note that here, *H* denotes for happiness, *PD* for psychological distress, *M* for motivation, *IN-K* for intrinsic motivation-to know, *IN-A* for intrinsic motivation-towards accomplishments, *IN-ES* for intrinsic motivation-experience stimulation, *EX-ID* for extrinsic motivation-identified, *EX-IN* for extrinsic motivation-introjected, *EX-ER* for extrinsic motivation- external regulation and *AM* for amotivation.

The table above shows simple linear regression, where the relationship between happiness (the outcome variable) and various predictors was noticed. Psychological distress has a significant negative impact on happiness, explaining 30.5% of the variance. Motivation shows a positive but non-significant effect. Intrinsic motivation and accomplishment have a strong positive influence on happiness with 12.8% and 2.2% of the variance respectively. Intrinsic motivation- experience stimulation has a significant positive impact with an R-square of 0.0584. Identified extrinsic motivation shows a positive significant relationship, with 4.09% of the variance. Introjected extrinsic motivation has a significant negative impact with an R-square of 0.0366. External regulation and motivation do not show significant relationships with happiness. Overall, it can be said that happiness is likely to have a stronger impact on intrinsic motivation compared to extrinsic motivation. The predictors of psychological distress and various types of motivation significantly contribute to explaining the variance in happiness.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study was intended to understand the impact of happiness, psychological distress, and motivation on NGO volunteers. Descriptive statistics returned results that generally showed that volunteers reported experiencing high levels of happiness and substantial motivation. These findings align with the research that indicated volunteer activities within a residential community and socially vulnerable groups positively correlated to happiness when controlling for sociodemographic factors (Lee, 2018). There was also a notable level of psychological distress. This confirms the duality of volunteer experiences arguing that the satisfaction one derives from contributing toward a cause is accompanied by emotional challenges.

The correlations were significant, wherein happiness was related negatively to psychological distress, meaning that the more a person is happy, the less his or her level of distress is. Happiness was related negatively to psychological distress. On the other hand, different kinds of motivation were significantly correlated to happiness and psychological distress. This aligns with the boarder literature on the inverse relationship between positive affect and psychological distress (Diener et al., 2009). Happiness was positively related to the intrinsic motivations to know, accomplish, and experience stimulation. In addition, the extrinsic motivations, especially by identified regulation, we positively correlated with happiness. In

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contrast, introjected motivation was negatively associated, and this means internal pressures lessen happiness.

Regression analysis further supported these relationships, showing that psychological distress negatively impacts happiness, accounting for 30.5% of its variance. Intrinsic motivation to know, accomplish, and experience stimulation all show significant positive effects on Happiness. IN-Know has the strongest impact, explaining 12.8% of the variance in happiness, underscoring the importance of internal drives in enhancing well-being among volunteers. In research, results indicated that variables that include psychological attributes significantly relate to one or more motivations for volunteering (Sugiartiet al,2020). Extrinsic motivation through identified regulation shows a positive significant relationship with happiness, but its effect is smaller compared to intrinsic motivation. Introjected regulation has a significant negative impact on happiness, indicating it decreases happiness to some extent. These findings add to the idea that intrinsic motivation in volunteer programs could be set up in a way to increase well-being and reduce the psychological distress of volunteers, consequently leading to a more sustainable and fulfilling experience of volunteering (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

Consequently, Intrinsic and identified extrinsic motivations are positive influencers of happiness in NGO volunteers, while psychological distress has a negative effect, therefore is need to build up intrinsic motivation to improve well-being and reduce distress. The findings underline a complex interplay between emotional well-being and motivational drivers in volunteer experiences.

Limitations and future recommendations

Purposive sampling can limit the generalization of the results. The self-report measure can cause response biases and not signify the subjective experiences and behaviour. Future researchers should conduct the study by narrowing down the used variables with advanced statistical techniques, and t-tests to measure the comparison with non-NGO workers, gender or age groups, etc. Longitudinal studies can delve deeper into the causal relationships between these variables and how they unfold over time. The development of healthy motivation tips and strategies to counteract the psychological elements of distress and happiness in 21st-century college students can help flourish their personal as well as professional lives.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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