

Relationship between Optimism and Mental Health Problems: A Study on Working Women

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, Indian women are represented in the workforce in greater numbers than ever before. Whereas these responsibilities require a significant amount of time from female, maintaining a work-life balance becomes difficult. Women face stress and poor mental health due to their various roles. Researchers have conducted a considerable corpus of research on the effectiveness of optimism in mental health over the last few years. In this context, the present study aims to investigate the relationship between optimism and mental health problems among working women. The study was conducted on a sample of 135 working women with the age range of 30 to 40 years belonging to different aided colleges of Kanpur Nagar. The participants were administered the "Resilience and Optimism Scale" and the "General Health Questionnaire." The result of the study revealed that resilience has a significant negative correlation with mental health problems.

Keywords: *Optimism, workforce, mental health problems, working women, general health*

The roles and status of women have changed significantly in recent times. In India, women now have increased access to education, especially in urban areas, compared to earlier decades. This has expanded their perspectives, increased their awareness, and fostered personal development. With greater education and rights, women's views on traditional roles are evolving. However, despite these advancements, many women today experience stress and mental health challenges due to their multifaceted responsibilities. Working women, in particular, face stress from balancing family duties, job insecurity, workplace culture, and high-performance expectations (Rajasekhar and Sasikala, 2013). Women's obligations are shifting as they devote more time to their work and families. This shift brings numerous stressors and strains that impact various aspects of their lives. These challenges can affect relationships, self-esteem, job performance, and both physical and mental health. Women in urban areas, benefiting from greater social freedom and higher educational attainment, often have better opportunities for prominent positions compared to their rural counterparts, who are generally confined to domestic roles and face limitations in job prospects. Nevertheless, the life of a working woman, whether in urban or rural settings, remains complex due to significant occupational stress. Working women in India, regardless

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of marital status, encounter a range of unique issues and difficulties in their professional lives.

Both positive and negative outlooks on life are essential for understanding susceptibility to mental illnesses, such as mood and anxiety disorders, as well as physical health issues. Research indicates a significant negative correlation between optimism and mental health problems. The term "optimism" is derived from the Latin word *optimum*, meaning "the best." In psychology, optimism, or dispositional optimism, encompasses a set of attitudes and behaviors that lead individuals to focus on the positive aspects of life rather than the negative. It is a personality trait indicative of resilience and inner strength. Evidence shows that individuals with high levels of optimism tend to experience fewer mental health issues and enjoy a higher quality of life compared to those with lower levels of optimism or those who are pessimistic. Optimism can significantly enhance both mental and physical well-being by promoting a healthier lifestyle and encouraging adaptive behaviors. It is associated with improved cognitive flexibility, better problem-solving abilities, and more effective handling of negative information (Coversano et al., 2010). Optimists naturally tend to be hopeful and envision positive outcomes in life. Research indicates that optimistic individuals generally enjoy better physical health. Studies show that optimism significantly influences health outcomes related to cardiovascular disease, cancer, pain, physical symptoms, and overall mortality (Scheier & Carver, 2018). Conversely, pessimists are more likely to engage in behaviors that are detrimental to health (Carver & Scheier, 2010). Furthermore, research has demonstrated that those with higher levels of optimism typically experience fewer depressive symptoms, suggesting that a positive outlook can serve as a protective factor against mood disorders (Chang & Sanna, 2001; Hart, Vella & Mohr, 2008). Optimism is also linked to a reduction in suicidal thoughts. Individuals with a hopeful outlook often exhibit better coping mechanisms, which can help them manage or avoid thoughts of self-harm. Optimism influences how feelings of hopelessness affect suicidal ideation, with a more optimistic perspective diminishing the impact of hopeless emotions and lowering the risk of suicidal thoughts (Hirsch, Conner & Duberstein, 2006; Hirsch & Conner, 2006). Ruthig, Perry, Hall, and Hladkyj (2004) found that optimism can enhance mental health, psychological functioning, performance, and age-related conditions. Over the past two decades, there has been growing interest in optimism due to its beneficial effects. Research indicates that individuals with positive beliefs about their abilities, personal traits, and future tend to outperform those who are pessimistic or skeptical (Brown & Marshall, 2001).

Additionally, most of the existing research has been conducted in Western contexts, highlighting the need for similar studies in India. Research on the role of optimism in the mental health of working women in India has been limited. Consequently, present study aims to address this gap.

Objectives

In view of the gaps in the available literature, the present study was conducted to address the following objectives:

- To study the Optimism of the Working Women.
- To study the Mental Health Problems of the Working Women.
- To investigate the relationship between Optimism and Mental Health Problems among Working Women.

Hypothesis

On the basis of literatures, hypothesis was formulated-

- **H1.** Significant negative correlation would be found between Optimism and Mental Health Problems among Working Women.

METHODOLOGY

Sample of the Study

The study was conducted on 135 working women with the age range of 30-40 years belonging to different Aided colleges of Kanpur Nagar. A convenient sampling method was utilized for selecting the participants. Participants in this design were chosen according to their accessibility and availability.

Tools

Participants were provided with multiple scales to assess their level of optimism, and mental health problems as working women.

- **Resilience and Optimism Scale:** The scale devised by Srivastava (2008) was used to identify the levels of resilience and optimism among working women. It is a five-point rating scale. The questionnaire consists of 21 statements (17 true-keyed and 4 false-keyed) about two psychological characteristics or traits, namely resilience and optimism. For the present study only optimism schedule was used.
- **General Health Questionnaire:** The participants' mental health was assessed using Goldberg and Hiller's (1979) General Health Questionnaire (GHQ), a four-point rating scale with 28 items that includes four dimensions of ill-health: somatic symptoms, anxiety and insomnia, social dysfunction, and severe depression. The scale's Cronbach's alpha coefficient ranges from 0.82 to 0.86, and the mean of the inter-item correlation.

RESULT

Various statistical techniques were applied on the sample data to understand the significant relationship and development of theoretical base from the current study. Primarily statistical methods included computation of mean, standard deviation and Pearson correlation coefficient to reveal significant relationships among the variables and empirically test research questions.

Table-1: Mean and Standard Deviation of the studied variables

Variables	Mean	S.D.	N
Optimism	34.93	5.70	135
Mental Health Problems	56.14	8.65	135

Table-2: Correlation between Optimism and Mental Health Problems

Predictor Variable	Criterion Variables				
	Anxiety	Depression	Somatic Symptoms	Social Dysfunction	Overall GHQ
Optimism	-.197*	-.285**	-.202*	-.224**	-.223*

**p<0.01, *p<0.05

The relationship between optimism and mental health problems were examined. It is visible from table-2 that optimism has significant negative correlation with overall mental health problems and its all dimensions. Optimism was found to be significantly negatively

Relationship between Optimism and Mental Health Problems: A Study on Working Women

correlated with the anxiety ($r = -.197, p < .01$), depression ($r = -.285, p < .05$), somatic symptoms ($r = -.202, p < .01$), social dysfunction ($r = -.224, p < .05$) and overall mental health ($r = -.223, p < .01$).

DISCUSSION

Data analysis revealed that optimism is significantly negatively linked with mental health problems among working women. Women who possessed a higher degree of optimism had less mental health problems and maintained good health and well-being. In other words, working women who reported high levels of optimism were less likely to complain about somatic symptoms, depression, anxiety, and social dysfunction than those who reported low levels of optimism. Evidence also suggests that individuals with high levels of optimism experience lower mental health problems and better quality of life compared to those with lower levels of optimism or pessimists. Optimism greatly impacts both mental and physical well-being by encouraging a healthier lifestyle and fostering adaptive behaviors. It is linked to enhanced cognitive flexibility, problem-solving skills, and more effective processing of negative information (Coversano, Rotondo, Lensi, Vista, Arpone, & Reda, 2010).

The finding of the study is also consistent with the finding that compared to optimists; pessimists nurtured little hope for the future and were more at risk for depressive and anxiety disorders, with subsequent impairment of social functioning and quality of life. Optimists are significantly more successful than pessimists in aversive events and when important life goals are impaired. (Van der Velden, Kleber, Fournier, Grievink, Drogendijk & Gersons, 2007). Optimistic people generally report fewer depressive symptoms. This suggests that having a positive outlook can help protect against mood disorders (Chang & Sanna, 2001, Hart, Vella & Mohr, 2008). Optimism also plays a role in how feelings of hopelessness influence suicidal thoughts. Those with a hopeful perspective seem to have better coping mechanisms, which might help them manage or avoid thoughts of self-harm (Hirsch, Conner & Duberstein, 2006; Hirsch & Conner, 2006).

CONCLUSION

The results indicated a significant negative correlation between optimism and mental health problems among working women. This suggests that higher levels of optimism are linked to fewer mental health issues. Women with a positive outlook tend to have a protective effect against stress and mental health challenges in their professional sphere. Overall, the study highlights that optimism plays a crucial role in enhancing mental health and well-being.

Implication

Present research has substantial theoretical and practical value. Firstly, it introduces a novel theoretical framework for examining optimism and its impact on mental health problems among working women. Understanding the connection between both the variables may offer valuable insights into enhancing optimism among women. Practically, the study can provide preventive measures and intervention programs designed to foster a positive outlook and strengthen social relationships for women. It may also contribute to psychological treatments for those experiencing negative outcomes due to poor life outlooks or strained social connections.

Overall, the findings of the study are crucial for enhancing the mental health and well-being of women, as outlined by the research.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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