

Research Paper

Optimism and Life Satisfaction Among Young Indian Adults: A Correlational Study

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ABSTRACT

Background: Optimism (OP) is defined as a mental attitude characterized by hope and confidence in success and a positive future. Life satisfaction (LS) refers to an individual's overall assessment of their quality of life. Their predictive relationship remains relatively underexplored among the Indian young adult population. **Aim:** This study investigates the relationship between optimism and life satisfaction in young adults. **Methods:** A correlational design was used on a sample of 200 participants (59% females and 41% males) aged between 18 to 25. The data was collected through an online questionnaire. The self-report measures of Life Orientation Test - Revised (Scheier, M.F., Carver C.S., and Bridges, M.W., 1994) and Satisfaction with Life scale (Diener et al, 1985; Pavot & Diener, 1993) were used to measure OP and LS respectively. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics, correlation and linear regression analyses. **Results:** The mean of OP is 20.88 and LS is 12.82 and Standard deviation was 6.041 and 3.804 respectively. Optimism was positively and significantly correlated with life satisfaction ($r = 0.332$, $p < 0.01$). **Conclusion:** The findings reveal a significant positive correlation between the two variables. Higher levels of optimism were positively correlated with greater life satisfaction, indicating that individuals with higher levels of optimism reported greater overall life satisfaction. This suggests that a positive outlook may enhance subjective well-being in young adults. These results highlight the potential benefits of fostering optimism as a strategy to promote life satisfaction in this age group. Future studies could investigate how factors like academic stress, family support, and social relationships moderate the link between optimism and life satisfaction.

Keywords: Optimism, Life Satisfaction, Quality of Life, Young Adults, Positive Psychology

Dispositional optimism, defined as a generalized expectation that positive outcomes will occur, is a foundational psychological construct influencing how individuals engage with the future (Scheier et al., 1994). Optimism operates through interconnected cognitive, motivational, and affective systems, enabling individuals to appraise events constructively, mobilize resources effectively, and persist through adversity, thereby influencing outcomes from immediate stress responses to long-term life trajectories (Carver & Scheier, 2014).

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Life satisfaction, a core component of subjective well-being, reflects individuals' global evaluation of the quality and value of their lives based on personal standards and goals (Pavot & Diener, 1993). Unlike transient affective states, life satisfaction represents a stable cognitive appraisal, with higher levels associated with better mental health, stronger social relationships, and improved occupational functioning (Diener et al., 2018). Life satisfaction is often used as an indicator/measure in psychological research as well as public health assessments.

Young adulthood (ages 18–25) is a critical developmental stage marked by identity exploration, growing independence, and significant life transitions (Arnett, 2000). In India, young adults also face pressures from academic competition, familial expectations, and the balance between traditional values and modern ambitions (Deb et al., 2015). Understanding psychological resources that support well-being in this population is therefore particularly important.

A theoretical framework that explains the link between optimism and life satisfaction is Carver and Scheier's Self-Regulation and Goal-Setting Theory (1981, 2014). According to this framework, individuals evaluate their progress toward goals and regulate behavior based on perceived discrepancies between current status and desired outcomes. Optimistic individuals are more likely to interpret setbacks as temporary, mobilize effort, and adjust strategies effectively, which facilitates goal attainment and enhances overall life satisfaction.

Extensive empirical research has linked optimism to enhanced life satisfaction across diverse populations. Liu et al. (2018) showed that dispositional optimism, even when controlling for constructs such as self-efficacy, is positively associated with subjective well-being (including life satisfaction) among Chinese working adults. Yıldırım and Green (2024) further reported that resilience mediates this relationship, while excessive social media use may weaken it.

Context-specific studies highlight optimism's relevance in Indian settings. Deb et al. (2015) reported that optimism buffered the negative effects of parental pressure and academic stress on anxiety and mental health among Indian adolescents. Mishra et al. (2016) found that optimism was linked to greater well-being among Indian IT professionals experiencing high occupational stress. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Sulkers and Loos (2022) observed that optimism contributed to sustaining life satisfaction among marginalized urban slum communities in India. Likewise, Singh and Mishra (2014) highlighted optimism's role in reducing perceived threat and supporting psychological stability during crises.

Optimism is also linked to tangible health benefits. Rasmussen et al. (2009) associated optimism with reduced mortality and better cardiovascular health, while Seligman et al. (2005) emphasized that optimism can be enhanced through interventions, leading to improved life satisfaction. Collectively, these studies indicate that optimism functions as a protective and promotive psychological resource across diverse populations and contexts.

Despite these contributions, research specifically focusing on Indian young adults remains limited. Most studies have examined Western populations or broader age groups, reducing the direct applicability of findings to Indian emerging adults who navigate unique familial, academic, and cultural dynamics. The present study addresses this gap by investigating the

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relationship between optimism and life satisfaction in Indian young adults and assessing whether optimism predicts variance in life satisfaction scores.

Based on these objectives, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- **Hypothesis 1:** There is a significant positive relationship between optimism and life satisfaction among young adults.
- **Hypothesis 2:** Optimism is a significant positive predictor of life satisfaction in young adults, such that higher levels of optimism will predict higher life satisfaction.

By focusing on Indian young adults and evaluating both association and prediction, this study aims to advance cross-cultural understanding of optimism's role in subjective well-being and generate evidence to inform interventions and policies targeting youth mental health and well-being.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants

A quantitative correlational research design was employed to investigate the variables of interest. Prior to participation, all individuals were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study, and digital informed consent was obtained in accordance with ethical research guidelines. Data were collected using an online survey platform, and participants were recruited through convenience sampling via online platforms, ensuring representation from a diverse population.

The study included young adults aged 18–25 years. Individuals reporting a current diagnosis of severe mental, psychiatric, or physical illness, as defined by the ICD-11, were excluded. The final sample consisted of 200 participants, including 82 males (41%) and 118 females (59%).

Measures

1. **Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al., (1985)):** The SWLS is a brief 5-item scale designed to assess global life satisfaction as a single construct. Items are rated on a seven-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater life satisfaction and lower scores reflecting dissatisfaction. The scale has demonstrated excellent internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha typically ranging from 0.82 to 0.87 across diverse samples (Pavot & Diener, 1993). Its test–retest reliability is high ($r = 0.82$ over two months), indicating strong temporal stability.
2. **Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R; Scheier et al., (1994)):** The LOT-R is a 10-item instrument designed to measure dispositional optimism. Of the 10 items, six are scored (three optimism items and three pessimism items, which are reverse-scored), while the remaining four serve as filler items. Responses are provided on a five-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater optimism and lower scores reflecting pessimism. The scale demonstrates good reliability, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.70 to 0.80, and acceptable test–retest reliability (ranging from 0.60 to 0.68 over several months). It also shows good construct validity, as optimism scores are positively related to measures of coping and positive affect.

Procedure

Data were collected through an online survey, with participants recruited via social media platforms and academic networks. Prior to participation, informed consent was obtained

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through a digital form that clearly outlined the study's purpose, procedures, voluntary nature, and the participants' right to withdraw at any time. The form also indicated that no foreseeable risks were involved in participation.

Following consent, participants completed a demographic questionnaire and then the LOT-R and SWLS scales, with clear instructions provided for each measure. All responses were collected anonymously, and no identifying information was retained to ensure confidentiality.

Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 21 (Armonk, NY, USA). Prior to main analyses, the data were screened for completeness, and descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were computed for optimism and life satisfaction. Skewness and kurtosis values were examined to assess the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity.

To address the first study objective, Pearson's product-moment correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between optimism and life satisfaction. For the second objective, a simple linear regression analysis was performed, with optimism as the predictor variable and life satisfaction as the outcome variable. A significance level of $p < .01$ was applied for all inferential analyses.

RESULTS

The study comprised a total of 200 participants whose sociodemographic characteristics are summarized in Table 1. The majority of the participants were between 19 and 21 years of age (42.5%), followed by those aged 22 to 24 years (37%), while 15 participants (7.5%) were in the 16–18 years age group, and 26 participants (13%) were aged 25 years. In terms of gender distribution, 118 participants (59%) were female and 82 participants (41%) were male, indicating a slightly higher representation of females in the sample. With respect to occupation, the majority were students (78.5%), followed by working individuals (20%), and a small proportion were unemployed (1.5%). Overall, the sample primarily consisted of young adult students, with a balanced gender composition leaning slightly towards females.

Table 1: Sociodemographic profile of the participants. (n=200)

Variable	Categories	Frequencies
Age (in years)	16-18	15
	19-21	85
	22-24	74
	25	26
Gender	Male	82
	Female	118
Occupation	Student	157
	Unemployed	3
	Working	40

Following the presentation of participants' sociodemographic characteristics, Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics, normality indices, and inter-correlation between Life Satisfaction and Optimism. The mean score for Life Satisfaction was 20.88 (SD = 6.04), while the mean score for Optimism was 12.82 (SD = 3.80). The skewness (–0.124 and –

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0.209) and kurtosis (-0.550 and 0.788) values for both variables fell within the acceptable range of ± 1 , indicating that the data were approximately normally distributed and thus suitable for parametric analyses.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Inter-correlations among study variables (N = 200)

Variable	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	1	2
1. Life Satisfaction	20.88	6.04	-0.124	-0.550	-	0.332*
2. Optimism	12.82	3.80	-0.209	0.788	0.332*	-

* $p < 0.01$

To investigate the relationship between Optimism and Life Satisfaction, Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was conducted. The results revealed a significant positive correlation between the two variables ($r = 0.332$, $p < .01$), indicating that higher levels of optimism were associated with greater life satisfaction among participants. This suggests that individuals who tend to hold positive expectations about the future also experience a more favorable evaluation of their overall quality of life.

Table 3: Results of regression analysis between life- satisfaction and optimism

Criterion	Predictor	<i>t</i>	β	<i>p</i>
Life-satisfaction	Optimism	4.958	.332	<0.01
<i>R</i>		.332		

$R^2 = .110$, $F = 24.578$, $p < .01$

To further examine the predictive relationship between Optimism and Life Satisfaction, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted, with Life Satisfaction as the criterion variable and Optimism as the predictor. As shown in Table 3, the overall regression model was found to be statistically significant ($F = 24.578$, $p < .01$), indicating that Optimism significantly predicted Life Satisfaction. The model accounted for approximately 11% of the variance in Life Satisfaction ($R^2 = .110$). The standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = .332$, $t = 4.958$, $p < .01$) revealed a positive predictive relationship, suggesting that higher levels of optimism were associated with greater life satisfaction. This finding reinforces the earlier correlation result and highlights optimism as a meaningful predictor of how individuals evaluate their overall life satisfaction.

Overall, the findings of the study provide support for both proposed hypotheses. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, Pearson's correlation analysis revealed a significant positive association between optimism and life satisfaction, indicating that young adults with higher levels of optimism tend to report greater satisfaction with their lives. In line with Hypothesis 2, the regression analysis demonstrated that optimism significantly predicted life satisfaction, accounting for 11% of the variance. These results collectively suggest that optimism not only relates to but also serves as a meaningful predictor of life satisfaction in young adults, highlighting its important role in shaping individuals' subjective evaluation of their overall quality of life.

DISCUSSION

The present study sought to examine the relationship between optimism and life satisfaction in young adults and to assess whether optimism serves as a significant predictor of life satisfaction. The results confirmed that optimism is both positively associated with and predictive of life satisfaction, highlighting the pivotal role of positive future expectations in

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shaping individuals' subjective well-being. These findings align with existing theoretical frameworks in positive psychology, which emphasize the influence of cognitive and attitudinal factors, such as optimism, on overall life evaluation. Liu et al. (2018) and Yildirim and Green (2024) had reported optimism as a critical psychological resource that enhances well-being across cultures.

The significant positive association and predictive effect of optimism on life satisfaction may be explained through several psychological mechanisms. First, optimistic individuals tend to appraise situations more positively (Hemenover & Zhang, 2004), focusing on potential gains rather than losses, which may promote adaptive coping and may reduce the perceived impact of stressors. This positive cognitive appraisal enhances emotional well-being and contributes to higher life satisfaction (Lapp, 2023). Second, optimism is closely linked with self-mastery and persistence (Li et al., 2023). Optimistic individuals are more likely to set realistic goals, maintain motivation in the face of obstacles (Abram et al., 2022), and experience a sense of personal accomplishment, which reinforces their overall satisfaction with life. Third, optimism often fosters better social relationships and stronger social support networks (Sagi et al., 2021). Optimistic people are more likely to engage positively with others, seek help when needed, and maintain constructive interpersonal interactions, which in turn enhances their subjective well-being. Finally, optimism is associated with adaptive physiological and psychological stress responses (Puig Pérez et al., 2020). Research suggests that optimists exhibit lower physiological reactivity to stress (Parra-Gaete & Hermosa-Bosano, 2023) and recover more efficiently from negative experiences (Leslie-Miller et al., 2021), which cumulatively may support a higher evaluation of life satisfaction.

Taken together, these mechanisms suggest that optimism enhances life satisfaction by influencing cognitive appraisal, goal attainment, social functioning, and stress regulation, providing a multi-dimensional explanation for the findings of the present study.

The present study contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence that optimism is both associated with and predictive of life satisfaction in young adults, highlighting its role as a key psychological resource in enhancing subjective well-being. These findings offer valuable insights for interventions aimed at promoting positive psychological traits to improve life satisfaction in this population.

Despite its contributions, the study has certain limitations. First, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences between optimism and life satisfaction. Second, the sample was limited to young adults, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other age groups or cultural contexts. Third, the study relied on self-report measures, which may be subject to social desirability or response biases. Additionally, in terms of gender, 118 participants (59%) were female and 82 (41%) were male. This slight predominance of females should be considered when interpreting findings, as prior research highlights potential gender-based variations in optimism and well-being.

Future research could employ longitudinal or experimental designs to establish causal relationships and explore additional mediating or moderating variables, such as coping strategies, resilience, or social support, in the optimism–life satisfaction relationship. Expanding the study to diverse populations and incorporating multi-method assessments would further strengthen the generalizability and robustness of the findings.

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Overall, the present findings underscore the importance of fostering optimism as a psychological resource to enhance life satisfaction among young adults.

CONCLUSION

The present study examined the relationship between optimism and life satisfaction among Indian young adults and found a significant positive correlation, with optimism emerging as a meaningful predictor of life satisfaction. These findings suggest that individuals with higher optimism tend to experience greater satisfaction with their lives, aligning with previous research that highlights optimism as a key psychological resource promoting adaptive coping, resilience, and positive life evaluations. By extending existing evidence to the Indian context, this study underscores optimism's universal role in fostering well-being, particularly during the formative stage of emerging adulthood, where individuals navigate identity exploration and life transitions. Practically, the findings emphasize the value of interventions that cultivate optimism through cognitive restructuring, resilience training, and positive psychology programs to enhance life satisfaction and mental health among youth.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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