

Research Paper

Unlocking the Relationship between Sociotropy, Autonomy and Psychological Well Being among Women

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ABSTRACT

Aim: The study attempts to investigate Sociotropy and Autonomy how these two characteristics interact and contribute to women's total psychological well-being. Tools The Sociotropy Autonomy Scale by A.T. Beck (1983) and Beck and Clark (1999) and Ryff's Psychological Well-Being scale (2007) were two standardized psychometric questionnaires used to gather quantitative data from women. Sample: A questionnaire was utilized to gather a sample of 200 women in the age ranges of 18 to 40 years from community centres and universities using a convenience sampling technique. Results: Although strong sociotropism may reduce women's psychological well-being (McMullen (1999); Kirsch & Kuiper (2002), Conversely, higher levels of psychological well-being are linked to more autonomy, especially when it comes to personal development and life satisfaction (Ryff (1989); Ryff & Keyes (1995). According to the study's conclusion, women's mental health may benefit from programs that encourage both self-reliance and positive social relationships. This is because a balanced integration of sociotropism and autonomous attributes may support optimal psychological health (Beck (1983); Ryff (1989). **Conclusion:** According to the correlation study, psychological well-being is negatively correlated with women who exhibit strong sociotropy. However, there is a favourable association between psychological well-being and women who have a great degree of autonomy.

Keywords: *Psychological Health, Sociotropy, Autonomy, Women, Society, Balance*

India is a country with a basic social structure that dictates how each gender should behave. This behaviour, including aspects like appearance and social roles, is influenced by historical forces and powerful societal norms. In a country like India, the position of women is such that their nature is seen as inherently giving and caring. They prioritize their responsibilities towards others, especially within the family, and value family relationships above their own personal freedom. They strive to maintain balance within the family and often prioritize the needs of those around them over their own (Patel et al., 2007). Usually, women are seen not as individual figures with their own identity, but rather as someone's wife, someone's mother, or someone's daughter (Stoppard, 1999). They have some pressure to connect themselves to others and to prioritize the well-being of others. This tendency is later reinforced by cultural norms, family structures, and long-standing religious beliefs that women have always prioritized collective responsibility over their own individual needs.

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They are expected to maintain social balance, even if it means sacrificing their own independence and individual choices (Kirsch & Kuiper, 2002). However, as women are gaining more knowledge, and it has been observed that women's experiences in India are neither invariable nor fixed, women are gradually moving away from their traditional roles defined by society. They are becoming educated, especially women in metropolitan areas, who are trying to educate themselves and become employed (Patel et al., 2007; Stoppard & McMullen, 1999). It's not that they are completely suppressing relationships or becoming indifferent to others; rather, they are trying to break free from the roles assigned to them by society, such as being a mother, daughter, or sister. They are striving to prove that they are also human beings with individual personalities and choices, and they are prioritizing these choices instead of simply focusing on maintaining relationships and avoiding conflict (McMullen, 1999). They are trying to move away from the old cultural notion that women are meant to stay at home, serve others, and always avoid conflict in relationships, and instead, they are trying to establish their own identities. Previous research, including developmental research, social research, and research in clinical psychology, suggests that women tend to have a greater capacity for relatedness and connecting with others. While Men, on the other hand, are more inclined towards self-reliance and independence. In short, women prioritize relationships, while men tend to focus more on their individual, personal identity (Kirsch & Kuiper, 2002; Stoppard, 1999). The trait self-reliance shows that men are independent, achievement-oriented, and can direct themselves. However, a characteristic of women that is relatedness shows that they prioritize relationships, and show a little more dependency compared to those of men. The research being conducted today has found that both orientations, like self-reliance and relatedness, have both favourable and unfavourable aspects. Understanding this is crucial because it has been observed that one of the reasons for depression, particularly over genders, is that when they use these two traits too frequently or in the wrong way, it can lead to depression (Gammel & Stoppard, 1999; McMullen, 1999). When a woman prioritizes her individual identity or independence, whether in her culture or in society, she feels distressed because she feels she is not fulfilling the gender role assigned to her by society or her culture. This leads to psychological distress among women. Similarly, when men prioritize relationships and connections with others instead of autonomy or independence, they face a psychological challenge. They worry that society will no longer view them as macho men, and that people will think these are tasks meant for women. This feeling of not conforming to societal expectations becomes a source of distress for both genders. According to Beck's 1983 cognitive theory, sociotropy and autonomy are two personality traits that are said to be associated with a higher susceptibility to depression. Sociotropy means that individuals have a strong need for approval from others and want to be emotionally connected to them. They fear rejection, and their self-esteem is derived primarily from their relationships. Autonomy, on the other hand, emphasizes independence. Individuals with trait of autonomy are more achievement-oriented, have a strong sense of self-control, and their self-worth comes from their own achievements, productivity, and success. Although the researches conducted so far on clinically depressed populations is limited, which suggests that individuals who possess the traits of sociotropy and autonomy are more prone to depression. However, gender trends indicate that the trait of sociotropy is more prevalent in women, while autonomy is more common in men (Beck, 1983; Robins & Luten, 1991). All the research conducted so far shows gender differences. However, there is no consistency in these studies regarding these two personality traits. Some research suggests that if women have higher levels of autonomy, they experience more depression compared to men, while other studies indicate that higher levels of social support lead to increased depression. Therefore, these studies

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have not yet shown consistent results (Robins et al., 1997; Scheibe et al., 2003). Significantly, depend only on average gender differences shallow the relationship between personality orientation and depression (Kirsch & Kuiper, 2002). Social relationships play a dual role in psychological wellbeing among women Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Positive relationships contribute to women's psychological health by providing support and emotional connection. They feel supported and have someone in their lives who enhances their well-being. However, if women become overly dependent on others, neglecting and sacrificing their own goals, they experience a loss of identity. This can lead to anxiety and depression, as they feel an identity void due to the lack of personal goals. Furthermore, their autonomy is often diminished by societal expectations. They are taught that their roles are fixed as mothers, sisters, and daughters and if they deviate from these roles, society rejects them, leading to feelings of depression and identity loss (Stoppard, 1999; Patel et al., 2007). Psychological well-being means having emotionally harmony, fulfilling life and making full use of our inherent capacities. We are functioning meaningfully in our daily lives, and we are satisfied with that life. (Ryff, 1989). Psychological well-being has its roots in positive psychology, which emphasizes how much we grow mentally and physically and the strengths we develop (Seligman, 2011). Carol Ryff proposed a multifaceted model of psychological well-being with six components: autonomy, purpose in life, positive relationships, environmental mastery, self-acceptance, and personal growth. This model highlights the importance of a balance between an individual's relationships and their sense of identity for ideal mental health (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This literature review encompasses all the studies that support the understanding of how psychological well-being is affected by how much resilience an individual demonstrates, how much independence they exhibit in their decisions and how much they prioritize their social relationships over their individual identity.

Punhani and Sharma (2025) examined that the level of social approval received by emerging adults was significantly and positively related to their anxiety levels. Their findings suggest that the more dependent individuals are on social approval, the more vulnerable they are to anxiety and social evaluation concerns.

A study conducted by Jaggi and Sethi (2025) reveals that the sociotropy experienced by private sector employees negatively predicts their burnout, while the same level of autonomy acts as a psychological protective factor against occupational stress and emotional exhaustion among these employees. Although this study does not directly predict that social support is the sole factor negatively influencing burnout levels in private sector employees, it is one of several factors that contribute to increased burnout levels.

Bhaumik et al. (2024) conducted a study that found that social comparison is negatively associated with the psychological well-being of college students. The study also indicated that autonomy does not have a direct association with the psychological well-being of college students, but if social dependency becomes excessive, it is more detrimental compared to situations where the level of autonomy is lower.

Strizhitskaya and Murtazina (2024) suggests that autonomy and personal growth can moderate the relationship between social support and loneliness, and reduce the adverse effects of social isolation and loneliness on social and emotional well-being.

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Jhangir and Jameel (2023) reports that higher scores on sociotropy and autonomy are associated with higher self-criticism and lower self-esteem. This was observed in both clinical and non-clinical samples, suggesting how personality orientation shapes the self-evaluative process, which is crucial for mental health.

Charanya and Simon (2024) study found that there is no direct relationship between sociotropic and autonomy on the psychological well-being of Indian millennials. However, this study suggests that these two constructs indirectly influence psychological outcomes through mediators such as self-criticism and self-rumination.

A study conducted by Gilar-Corbi et al. (2023) identified resilience, self-efficacy and emotional intelligence are significant predictors of psychological well-being among female training instructors.

Marfoli et al. (2021) demonstrated that sociotropy and autonomy personality traits, which are related to women's psychological distress levels and this relationship is mediated by rumination and the use of immature Defence mechanisms among women.

Yang and Girgus (2021) investigated the effects of sociotropy and autonomy personality traits on psychological well-being. It suggests that in collectivist cultures, sociotropy has minimum detrimental effects on psychological well-being than in individualistic cultures while autonomy is consistently related to positive mental health outcomes among different culture.

Yang and Girgus (2019) in another study found that men as compared to women, tend to exhibit more sociotropic tendencies, and that cultural and gender roles moderate the relationship between their level of sociotropy and their emotional susceptibilities.

Rationale

Women's mental well-being is strongly influenced by how they balance their relationships and how they maintain their own identity and personal independence. In many societies, especially in India, which is an example of a collectivist culture, women are constantly taught to prioritize their family's needs over their own. Their nature, by virtue of social conditioning, is ingrained with the idea that their role is to care for others, build emotional connections, and prioritize the goals of others over their own, which consistently affects their mental health and well-being (Patel et al., 2007; Stoppard, 1999). According to Carol Ryff's psychological well-being theory, close relationships are important for psychological well-being. Because close relationships are necessary for providing support and a sense of belonging but when they suppress an individual's autonomy, they can lead to increased stress and depression levels, and a decrease in self-worth (Ryff, 1989). In psychology, the relationship of these two personality traits, sociotropy and autonomy has been explained by theory of sociotropy and autonomy by Beck (1983). Sociotropism means depending heavily on relationships and others' approval, while autonomy means valuing independence and personal achievement (Beck, 1983). Research shows that high sociotropism can increase emotional problems when relationships become stressful, whereas autonomy often helps people feel more confident and emotionally stable (Kirsch & Kuiper, 2002; Bhaumik et al., 2024). However, little research focuses only on women. Although India is a collectivist country, a culture where the well-being of the group is given higher priority compared to the value of the individual. And especially women have historically played a role in society

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where they tend to prioritize the decisions of others over their own. They often sacrifice their own goals to support the goals of those important to them. This research is important because, in today's world, education is bringing about awareness, and women are gradually becoming more educated and prioritizing their own decisions compared to the decisions of their families or society. There are still many cultures where women are suppressed when they speak up for their decisions, being threatened with expulsion from the community or even subjected to physical harm. Due to this ingrained fear, they are unable to raise their voices for themselves. This study aims to bring awareness to how these two personality traits sociotropy and autonomy need to be balanced. If one trait suppresses the other or diminishes its effect, this imbalance will negatively impact women's psychological well-being. Therefore, this study aims to understand how sociotropism and autonomy relate to psychological well-being among women, so better support and mental health programs can be developed (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Seligman, 2011).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Objectives:

1. To examine the relationship between sociotropy and psychological well-being among women.
2. To examine the relationship between autonomy and psychological well-being among women.

Hypotheses

- **H1.** There will be a significant relationship between sociotropy and psychological well-being among women.
- **H2.** There will be a significant relationship between autonomy and psychological well-being among women.

Variables

- **Independent Variables:** 1. Sociotropism 2. Autonomy
- **Dependent Variables:** Psychological Well Being

Research Design

The present study uses a quantitative correlational design, which is appropriate for finding out the relationship between autonomy and sociotropy on psychological well-being among women.

Sample

The study included 200 women aged 18–40 years, selected through convenience sampling. Women from diverse backgrounds gave informed consent after being informed about the study, voluntary participation, withdrawal rights, and confidentiality.

Statistical Tools

Demographic information of sample regarding their age, gender, education, occupation, marital status was obtained by using demographic well-structured questionnaire. The 60-item Sociotropy-Autonomy Scale (Beck & Clark, 1999; Beck, 1983; $\alpha = 0.90, 0.83$) examined sociotropy and autonomy. The 18-item Ryff Scale (2007) was used to assess psychological well-being ($\alpha = 0.75-0.88$).

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Procedure

- Women were contacted from colleges and community areas.
- The purpose of the study was explained in simple language.
- Participation was voluntary, and consent was taken from all participants.
- Participants were assured that their information would remain confidential and anonymous.
- No names or personal details were recorded.
- Standard questionnaires were given to measure sociotropism, autonomy, and Psychological Well-Being.
- Clear instructions were provided before filling the forms.
- Questionnaires were completed in a quiet setting in about 20–25 minutes.
- Responses were checked, scored, and analysed using statistical methods.

Statistical Technique

Descriptive statistics and Pearson’s correlation were used to analyse relationships among sociotropy, autonomy, and psychological well-being among women.

RESULTS

Table: 1 Descriptive Statistic (N = 200)

Variables	Scale	Mean	Standard Deviation	Observed level
Sociotropy	Sociotropic-Autonomy Scale (Beck & Clark, 1999)	99.10	2.56	High
Autonomy	Sociotropic-Autonomy Scale (Beck & Clark, 1999)	77.20	3.34	Low
Psychological Well Being	Ryff’s 18- items Psychological Well-Being scale (2007)	69.30	2.13	Low

The table presents the descriptive statistics of sociotropy, autonomy, and psychological well-being among 200 women. The average scores indicate that women exhibit high levels of sociotropy which shows that women prioritize their interpersonal relationships and seek social approval. In contrast, the lower mean scores for autonomy which reflect that reduced independence and self-directed behaviour among women. Similarly, the lower mean score for psychological well-being, as measured by Ryff’s 18-item scale, indicates comparatively lower levels of psychological well-being among the women.

Table: 2 Association of Sociotropism and Psychological Well Being among Women (N = 200)

Variables	Sample Size (N)	Pearson Correlation (r)	p-value	Remark
Sociotropy & Psychological Well Being	200	• 0.471	P< 0.05	A significant relationship is present & null hypothesis is incorrect.

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Table 2 shows that sociotropy was significantly and negatively related to psychological well-being among ($r = -0.47$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that increased sociotropic tendencies are associated with reduced psychological well-being among women.

Table: 3 Association of Autonomy and Psychological Well Being among Women (N = 200)

Variables	Sample Size (N)	Pearson Correlation(r)	p-value	Remark
Autonomy & Psychological Well Being	200	0.689	$P < 0.05$	A significant relationship is present & null hypothesis is incorrect.

Table 3 shows that autonomy showed a strong, significant positive correlation with psychological well-being ($r = 0.689$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that higher autonomy is associated with greater psychological well-being among women.

DISCUSSION

This result shows that the higher level of sociotropy negativity ($r = -0.471$) associated with psychological well-being while autonomy and psychological well-being are positively related ($r = 0.689$) among women which suggests that even today, women's self-worth is decided by others and their expectations, which is affecting women's mental health. (Beck & Clark, 1999). This relationship orientation is good, especially for building social bonds. However, it creates problems when personal needs and individual freedom are neglected in order to maintain these social bonds. The findings bring about the awareness that in modern times, it's necessary to educate women about their freedom and the importance of their individual identity and how they can maintain their relationships while fulfilling their social roles. If they keep suppressing their decisions and goals, their psychological well-being will be affected. This is because the PERMA model of well-being includes a component of accomplishment, which refers to what we have accomplished in life (Seligman, 2001). If anyone who keeps suppressing their autonomy for the sake of societal value and their relationships, they will never be able to accomplish anything in life, which will prevent optimal individual functioning and negatively impact psychological well-being of an individual. a significant negative relationship between sociotropy and psychological well-being, meaning that as sociotropic tendencies increase, psychological well-being tends to decrease. Women have a tendency to fear that if they don't receive approval or a sense of belonging from others, or if they prioritize their own decisions, they will be ostracized from the group. They worry that they will be harmed in some way, and so they continue to invest in relationships to gain emotional security. However, when this becomes excessive over time, and they only focus on caring for others and don't give importance to their own decisions, an imbalance occurs, which reduces their overall well-being (Beck, 1983). This study supports the idea that if women become excessively dependent on others, giving more importance to them than to ourselves, it increases their susceptibility to psychological distress. This finding is also supported by Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory, which states that individuals have three basic needs which is competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Social relatedness and competence are essential for extrinsic while autonomy is necessary for intrinsic motivation. An individual well-being will continue to suffer until they achieve a level of autonomy in their life (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

CONCLUSION

The present study call attention to that sociotropism and autonomy shape women's psychological well-being. It suggests that suppressing freedom and excessively valuing social relationship creates an imbalance that affects psychological well-being among women. In modern times, there's a need to raise awareness that women should maintain a balance between these two personality traits that is sociotropy and autonomy to maintain an optimal level of well-being. Sometimes, it's important to speak up for their own decisions, and at other times, it's necessary to value our relationships. Sometimes, making sacrifices is also essential but constantly prioritizing others and neglecting one's own goals will eventually negatively impact mental health. Therefore, it's crucial that women start making smart decisions, depending on the situation, about when to prioritize their own needs and when to fulfil the needs of family and society demands Psychological well-being will continue to be affected until a balance is achieved between these two aspects of personality that is sociotropy and autonomy, especially in women (Beck, 1983; Ryff, 1989; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Limitations

1. The study used a type of non-probability sampling, specifically a convenience sampling method. Also, the sample size was not very large, which reduces its generalizability.
2. The study followed a correlational design, which does not provide information about cause-and-effect relationships, and there are confounding variables whose effects were excluded from the study, which could also affect the results.
3. Data collection was done online, and self-reports were questionnaires, which increases the chance of social desirability bias.
4. Furthermore, the study included women in the 18 - 40 age range, which limits its applicability, as the results might be different in other age groups.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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