



ISSN NO. 2320-5407

Journal homepage: <http://www.journalijar.com>

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
OF ADVANCED RESEARCH

RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE HAPPINESS AND HUMAN STRENGTH –
A POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Dr J Balamurugan¹ and Ginni Malik²

1. Assistant Professor, Social Science Division, School of Social Sciences and Languages, VIT University, Vellore – 632 014, Tamil Nadu, India.

2. B.Tech Student, School of Computer Science and Engineering, VIT University, Vellore – 632 014, Tamil Nadu.

Manuscript Info

Manuscript History:

Received: 25 November 2014

Final Accepted: 26 December 2014

Published Online: January 2015

Key words:

Positive psychology, Enhance, Strength, Virtues, Life satisfaction, Optimism, Confidence, Thought-action.

***Corresponding Author**

Dr J Balamurugan

Abstract

This paper aims to understand the strengths and virtues associated with positive thinking and positive attitude towards life. Positive psychology explores and cultivates human strengths and virtues. It is argued here that virtue represents an important and challenging construct with the potential to integrative numerous areas of positive psychology science and practice. The attempt is to study the impact of positivity, optimism, positive attitude towards life and positive thinking in the behavior of students. In this study concern with the qualities and experiences that makes life most worthwhile. Positive psychology focuses on individuals' inner strength in an attempt to overcome any obstructions and negative forces in the path of life. Positivity and optimism enhances an individuals' capability to cope with different life situations and the ups and downs of life with better and enhanced positive energy and with more confidence. It is also known and heard that a person with high level of positive psychology is found to cope better with stress than the rest. Two standard questionnaires has been circulated among the students to access the measure of positive thinking in them and then ensure their satisfaction with life based on their nature of thinking. The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions posits that experiences of people's momentary thought-action repertoires, which in turn serves to build their enduring personal resources, ranging from physical and intellectual resources to social and psychological resources.

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INTRODUCTION

Positive Psychology is a recent branch of scientific psychology that "studies the strengths and virtues that enable individuals and communities to thrive" (Compton, 2005). People have been discussing the question of human happiness since at least Ancient Greece. Seligman (2002), who is considered as "the father of positive psychology" has pointed out how psychology has been primarily dedicated to addressing mental illness rather than mental "wellness". Several humanistic psychologists—such as Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, and Erich Fromm—developed successful theories and practices that involved human happiness, despite a lack of solid empirical evidence at the time behind their work, and especially that of their successors, who chose to

emphasize phenomenology and individual case histories. Positive psychology refers to cultivation of a more appreciative view of human nature. It advises psychologists to scientifically study the positive qualities, motives and capacities of human beings. It came into being as a protest against the predominant negative bias of traditional psychology. Positive Psychology focuses on well-being, psychological health, personal development, work-life balance and meaning making procedures. Psychologists in this field conduct studies in which they examine the elements that contribute to individual advancement as well as to the leading of a happier and more meaningful life. Positive Psychology is intended to complement the classical psychological approach which deals mainly with psychological illness.

During the last decade, an increasing number of research findings indicate that positive stands towards reality (i.e., optimism, hope) can significantly assist individuals and organizations in their effort to function efficiently and in balance with natural and social environment. Positive Psychology is founded on the systematic study of human behavior, emotion and thought. Seligman (2002), classified positive emotions into three categories: those associated with the past, the present and the future. Positive emotions associated with the future include optimism, hope, confidence, faith and trust. Satisfaction, contentment, fulfillment, pride and serenity are the main positive emotions associated with the past. There are two distinct classes of positive emotions concerned with the present: momentarily pleasure and more enduring gratifications. The pleasures include bodily pleasures and higher pleasures. Bodily pleasure comes through the senses. Feelings that come from sex, beautiful perfumes, delicious taste falls into this category. In contrast higher pleasure comes from more complex activities and includes feelings such as bliss, glee, comfort, ecstasy and ebullience. Gratification differs from pleasure in that they entail states of absorption or flow that comes from engagement in activities that involve using unique signature strengths. Sailing, teaching and helping others are examples of such activities. Signature strengths are personal traits associated with particular virtues.

Positive Psychology has three central concerns: positive emotions, positive individual traits, and positive institutions. Positive emotions is concerned with being content with one's past, being happy in the present and having hope for the future. Positive individual traits focus on one's strengths and virtues: the capacity to love, valor, altruism, grit, creativity, curiosity, integrity, moderation, self-control, spirituality and humor. Finally, positive institutions are based on strengths to better a community of people and it consists in the study of the strong families, communities, corporations and the virtues that nourish them such as justice, responsibility, civility, work ethic, leadership, teamwork, purpose, and tolerance. Happiness encompasses different emotional and mental phenomena. One method of assessment is Diener's (2011) Satisfaction with Life Scale. According to Diener (2011), this 5-question survey corresponds well with impressions from friends and family, and low incidence of depression. Some researchers (Seligman, 2002) in this field posit that positive psychology can be delineated into three overlapping areas of research: firstly, research into the **Pleasant Life** or the "life of enjoyment" examines how people optimally experience, forecast, and savor the positive feelings and emotions that are part of normal and healthy living (e.g. relationships, hobbies, interests, entertainment, etc.). Secondly, the study of the **Good Life** or the "life of engagement" investigates the beneficial effects of immersion, absorption, and flow that individuals feel when optimally engaged with their primary activities. These states are experienced when there is a positive match between a person's strength and the task they are doing, i.e. when they feel confident that they can accomplish the tasks they face. Lastly, Inquiry into the **Meaningful Life** or "life of affiliation" questions how individuals derive a positive sense of well-being, belonging, meaning, and purpose from being part of and contributing back to something larger and more permanent than themselves (e.g. nature, social groups, organizations, movements, traditions, belief systems).

Methodology

The participants were 60 undergraduate volunteers who included 30 males and 30 females from VIT University enrolled in different branches. These participants ranged in age from 18 to 21 years with a mean age of 19.5. Two questionnaires were selected for the purpose of the study. One questionnaire was to judge the level of optimism of the sample and the second judged the level of satisfaction with life of the participants. The participants were randomly assigned to first mark the questionnaire wherein their level of optimism could be rated. After that the same set of samples are asked to fill the life satisfaction scale to estimation their satisfaction with life. Both the set of questionnaire were correlated and hence the same samples were asked to fill both the sets, as the result of the experiment performed could be obtained based on their mind set and thinking and their level of optimism. The data collected was analyzed based on the already predefined linear scale rating of the standard questionnaire they were

given. The ones with more positive attitude towards life are expected to have a greater level of satisfaction with life than the rest.

Data Analysis

The result for both the questionnaire has been found as wanted. The researchers had two sets of questionnaire. One questionnaire to find the level of optimism in people and the other to find their satisfaction with life based on their level of optimism.

The level of optimism in people

The level of optimism in people is judged based on a certain set of questions. The questions were based on events related to their past and present life. The questions also are framed in such a way that they can find out the mind set and think of a person. The questions put persons in life situation and finds out their probable reaction to the situation. This gives us the thinking of the person. In the test for optimism it is found that majority of the people are optimist. Optimism is a quality found in all individuals in certain amount varying only in the level found in each-in some its quite high and in the rest it low. The optimist thinking is based on their experience with life and life situations. People who have always found good result in all aspects of life is seen to possess high amount of optimism. And the people who have faced a lot of hurdles and failures and disappointment in life tend to be relatively pessimist.

In the survey it is found that almost 50 percent of the total samples under study are found to be optimist scoring in the range from 45-54. These people have a realistic and practical approach towards life and see things in the right direction. They think positive and live positive. They have a positive approach toward everything in life. They move forward with a positive attitude. The good part about their attitude is that they are not overly confident towards things in life. It is seen that being overly optimist can be harmful in many aspects. It can shield that actual truth and may hide the realistic nature of the world due to this set of optimistic believe. But other than the optimist, the survey has shown that there also exist a huge number of people falling in the pessimist group of people. These people are the ones who have a negative approach towards life and everything around. Their negative affinity may be due to their various life experiences right from their childhood. However, if a person faces more disappointments in life then happiness, he is inclined towards negativity. Moreover, he is made to look at things in a negative attitude due to the circumstances in life.

But this study also got us to the conclusion that extremities are found very rarely in people i.e. the people who are extremely optimist and the people who are extremely pessimist are found lesser in a crowd. Such kind of extremely positive or extremely negative people are found one in a million. Such characters are sometimes good and sometimes it can put the person in danger. However it is seen from the survey that moderately optimistic and lightly optimistic people are also found in large number. The ability to look at things as "half full" rather than "half empty" is an innate quality and that sought after quality is found in the students of VIT University in the majority of them in a large amount. This survey conducted in a total of 60 students testing their level of optimism it is found that 27 of them falls in the category of students who are optimist. That accounts to almost 46 percent of the sample under study. On a wide view a large percentage of the students fall in the optimistic group. Overall almost 80-85 percent of the samples fall in the optimistic group but only differing in their level of optimism. More than one third of the students falls in the highly optimistic group followed by one fourth in the moderately optimistic, nearly one fifth in the lightly optimistic group and few of them in the optimistic group. All these people fall in optimistic group but ranging in their level of optimism is different among them. Moreover, it has helped them to achieve good approach towards life. It can probably be concluded that majority of the students studying in an institution like VIT have always had a good life style attaining most of the things in life that they must have ever urged for. Thus the good events and the positive experiences of life have made them to gain a very high level of positive thinking. But also there are students who probably have faced the other face of life and this brought into them a set of negative thinking and a negative thought process. Pessimism in nothing but having more percentage of negativity in everything around. It involves considering that the probably of not occurrence of an event is much higher than the probability of its occurrence. It is seeing the bad side of things than the numerous positive that it holds. And it is this aspect of life that hampers growth and proper understanding. Thus overall it is found that though majority of the samples under study are optimist there also are pessimistic people. The ratio though not equal is comparable.

However, based on the questions in the questionnaire, their successive answer by the samples and based on it can be observed that an optimist person relates even a small insignificant incident in life in a positive way and from it further attaches greater possibility of more such or even greater events in their life. These questions relate them to

their day to day situations and their most probable behavior which in case of all human beings is decided by their thought process and the way they see life and its different aspects. Their thought process is in turn controlled by their previous experiences with life and its effects in their life. Thus the questionnaire assesses the tendency to have positive expectations based on previous experiences. Only when positive outcome obtained in these much selected situations in the questionnaire by the samples, the samples will have a positive say in it. If the previous experience with the situation is bitter than the person will have an inborn detachment to such events and situations and happenings and as such the person will show negativity toward them. This whole discussion and its outcome is reflected in the survey conducted in the sample of 60 students. Basically this questionnaire answers the question "How much do you believe in positive outcomes"? And lastly in the survey it is found that men and women when separated and rated based on their level of optimism, men are found to be holding a position higher in the list i.e. the men are found to possess greater positive attitude towards life, greater hopes from life and has higher believe in positive outcomes than women for the same situation at hand.

The level of satisfaction in people

Satisfaction with life is one of several aspects of positive mental health. It is not a direct, verifiable experience, nor a known personal fact, but a cognitive product that involves a comparative process between the individual's current life situation and internalized standards, allowing respondents to use the information they subjectively deem relevant when evaluating their own lives. The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) is perhaps the most commonly used measure of life satisfaction worldwide. The Satisfaction with Life Scale is perhaps the most widely used measure of well-being worldwide. The dimensionality of SWLS has been widely discussed, but most studies have been based on specialized sample groups limited in size and biased with respect to gender, age, and relevant socio-demographic parameters. The scale consists of five statements and was originally developed to circumvent problems inherent in previous scales based on single items, or scales based toward domain or culture-specific items. As people derive their life satisfaction from different sources and vary considerably in their ideas about what constitutes a good life, the SWLS measures people's perception of their life as a whole, using items that are supposedly free from the varying criteria people use when evaluating their lives. The scale thus reflects a global evaluative judgment, partly determined by the respondent's current mood and immediate context, and partly by stable personality factors and genetic influences. The result of the SWLS is based on 7 point liker scale.

The result obtained showed that the test conducted on the 60 students from VIT University most of them are satisfied with their life scoring between 25-29 ranges. This makes them obtain high score in the satisfaction scale. This implies that more than 75 percent of the students in the University are satisfied with the things they attained in their life. Dissatisfaction with life can occur due to different bad experiences with life. But having the opportunity to study in an institution as this signifies that in most ways their life must have offered them with most of the things they ever wanted in life. This leaves them with no reason to be not satisfied with life. But exceptions exist everywhere. In the survey it has also been seen that though a very less number, but there also exist some who are dissatisfied with life. This may be due to their past bitter experiences with life. But such students who are not satisfied with life are only one which will account to only around 5 percent of the total students under study.

Discussion

Our study in this case has been limited in size to around 60 samples and age limit of 18-21 years i.e. the study is biased with respect to age. It has been concerned only with the students undergoing their under graduate programs. On earlier studies done in this field by Durak et.al. (2010), the results obtained have not shown any variation from the ones obtained by this study. It was even found by the Turkish researchers that majority of the school students falls in this range where they are satisfied with life.

On closer look of the study it has also been found that the satisfaction with life i.e. the data obtained from the survey didn't show much variation in the satisfaction level of boys and girls. Thus it can be concluded that boys and girls do not differ in their level of satisfaction with life in this age. In other word the satisfaction with life is not biased with the gender i.e. it does not matter what the gender of the person is to see his/her satisfaction with life. Life satisfaction is based on experiences with life and also the level of optimism in people. In this aspect too studies have been found to be made by Clench-Aas et.al. (2011). It has been found in their study that no gender difference was observed at the level of factors affecting the level of life satisfaction. It is gender invariance. In their studies the factors asked in the questionnaire are related in the same way to boys and girls. But in this study is limited to age. It

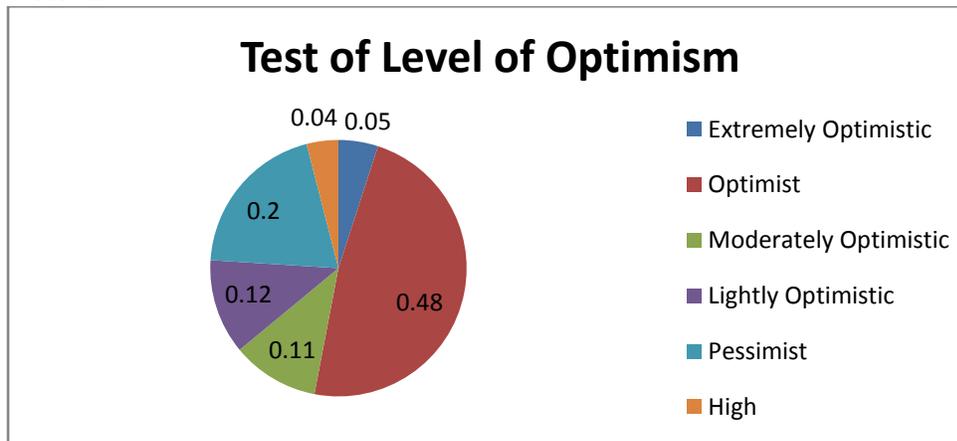
is conducted in only in the University students. Different ages and life circumstances may cause systematic shifts in how people evaluate their life situation. But that aspect of the life satisfaction is not conducted by this study.

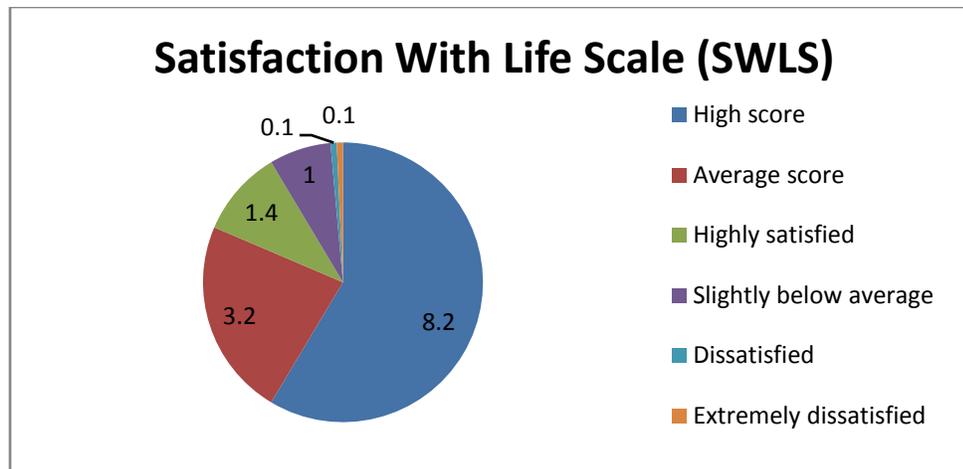
On further look in both the studies shows that the person with very high positive attitude i.e. the ones found to have higher optimism in the test for optimism also is found to have high satisfaction with life. This was the basis of in this study. Thus from the systematic study of both the survey it shows that positive attitude in life leads to positivity towards life and this leads to higher life satisfaction. When the same study was conducted in the same set of students it seen that the students who are optimistic 90 percent of them are also satisfied with their life, and vice versa i.e. the students who are pessimist some of them are not much satisfied with their life standards. It is solely our thinking which influence and control our life. Thus from the study it can be concluded that is very important to have a positive set of thought process to lead a satisfied life. Optimism is important virtue which is to be adopted by all the individuals. Only when optimist we have the ability to think positive and that will lead to positive outcome in life thereby leading to life satisfaction.

Conclusion

From the studies conducted in positive psychology it has been found that optimism is an innate virtue which is to be adopted by all individuals. Optimism leads to positivity towards life and all others prospects in it and optimism is that quality which gives a person positive attitude towards life and it is this attitude which will lead to success in life and thus this quality is highly required for a satisfied life and healthy living. Thus it can be concluded with the words that positive psychology i.e. positive thinking is the science of positive emotions or in other words the science of happy living and holds a bright prospect in the field of psychology in leading the future generation towards a happy life and showing them the way of leading a satisfied life. Positive psychology deals with the positive side of a person's psychology thereby leading the world to a positive path.

Results





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