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Optimism as a predictor of psychological well-being among working and non-working women

*Narendra V. Deshmukh**

This paper investigates the role of optimism as a predictor of wellbeing. This study offers a further examination of this emergent association by comparing the well-being of two specific respondent groups drawn from a population of Indian women. The first consists of working women's groups, and the second is non-working women group. As a result of the different configurations of their work characteristics, employed wives and homemakers experience different levels of subjective well-being. The Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being and Optimistic-Pessimistic Attitude Scale by D.S Parashar is used to gather the results from the subjects. The present study determined whether or not there was a positive correlation between optimism and subjective well-being. By examining the previous research on optimism and happiness, it was expected that there would be a positive correlation between the two factors. The results of the study revealed a positive relationship between optimism and subjective well-being, and thus support previous findings. At the same time, they reinforce the need for further research on the association between specific aspects of optimism and well-being. The data collected from this study also revealed that optimism is a strong predictor of subjective well-being.

Key words: *Optimism, well-being, working and non-working women*

INTRODUCTION

In the past, psychologists have focused their research on understanding and treating mental illnesses, representing studies on negative emotions. Recently, psychologists shifted focus to research positive emotions such as happiness, due in part to the emergence of positive psychology in 1998 founded by Martin Seligman. Subjective well-being and happiness has been the subject of a growing collection of empirical studies (eg. Tkach & Lyubomirsky, 2006; Csikszentmihalyi & Hunter, 2003; Diener & Seligman, 2002; Pinquart & Sörensen, 2000).

Optimism has consistently been found to be one of the strongest predictors of general Subjective Well-Being (e.g., Scheier and Carver, 1985; Carver & Scheier, 2002a). However, almost all information about the relationship between optimism and general SWB comes from cross-sectional studies carried out in adulthood. In addition to that, what mechanism underlies the strong relationship is not fully understood.

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The magnitude of life satisfaction and happiness is one important aspect of the quality of life in today's society (Diener & Lucas, 2000). Women's life conditions are now dramatically different from what they were just a few decades ago. Looking at the positive side of a changed society, we see that the material standard of living has risen, people live longer and are healthier, more possibilities for self-actualization have emerged, and so on. Looking at the negative side, we see that families are less stable, and that time-pressure and stress may have increased for many women. The distribution of welfare and factors that are of importance for it have been the subject of a considerable body of research, which has often been carried out within a sociological framework. As such, the focus has often been on the resources that people have at their disposal – as is the case within what is known as the Scandinavian approach to welfare research (Erikson & Uusitalo, 1987).

The present research paper is concerned with women's welfare, namely their psychological well-being and factors related to it. Numerous studies have been published since 1967, when one of the pioneers of SWB, Wilson, published his broad review of happiness. However, research on SWB remains rather fragmented and is based primarily on youthful (for example, student), mixed (not gender specific) samples.

Review of Literature:

This section reviews recent research examining the beneficial effects of optimism on psychological well-being of women. It includes studies that show the relative effect of optimism on Subjective well-being. However, it should be noted that although over the past few years a lot of research involving Subjective well-being has been carried out, not much has been done in context of Indian working women .

Subjective well-being is universal and discussed in both medical science and behavioral and social science. Low Level of Subjective well-being could be seen as psychological crisis which causes high stress in different ways and people suffers psychologically, emotionally which may have serious impact on their personality, self-concept, marital and personal adjustment.

Psychological well-being has been regarded as synonymous with mental health and quality of life. It is being studied by using both subjective and objective indicators. Researchers are defined psychological well-being in different ways.

Optimism as a predictor of psychological well-being among working women
According to Deiner (1984), Kahneman, Diener, and Schwarz (1999), the psychological well-being is equal to the good life or satisfaction with life in a hedonic sense. The concept of well-being finds its origin primarily in the hedonistic concept, by which well-being is operationally defined by a high level of positive effects, a low level of negative effects and high degree of life satisfaction.

Objectives of the study:

- To study the relation between subjective well-being and optimism.
- To study the subjective well-being of working and non-working women.
- To assess the cause of the happiness when compared with optimistic scale.
- To formulate recommendations plan for a happy and healthy conditions for living a better life and to suggest suitable measures for improving women's well-being.

Hypotheses:

In the course of analysis and discussion following hypothesis are formed for testing purpose based on the empirical data:

1. Optimism is significantly positively correlated to subjective well-being.
2. Working Women reported significantly higher levels of optimism as compared to non-working women.
3. Subjective well-being of Working women is more than Well-being of non-working women.
4. Women who were high on optimism also reported significantly more subjective well-being.

The present study offers such a comparison by examining certain characteristics of work among homemakers and employed wives and their relation to psychological well-being. This paper utilizes this body of knowledge and applies it to working and non-working women in India.

METHOD

In this section the method used to study the variables and test the hypotheses are described. Thus, it is a description of the sample selected, the tools used and the procedure employed.

Sample: Data for this investigation come from a stratified sample of employed women, and homemakers, selected to be representative of the Indian population. The subject for the present study will comprise of 100 women 50 working and 50 housewives. In this study Survey method has

been used to acquire response from the women for studying our problem with the help of questionnaires. Questionnaires were used to gather response from candidate with a sample of both working and non-working women on Subjective Well Being and women's attitude. Data will be collected through Random sampling method.

The homemaker sample was restricted to women who were married, not working outside the home. These restrictions were designed to produce a comparison group of women whose primary work-related activities were focused on home-making. The final sample consists of 50 employed women, and 50 full-time homemakers. The present analysis focuses on comparisons of homemakers (N = 50) and employed women (N = 50).

Tools: The Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being was used to measure participants' personal judgments of their well-being. The Ryff inventory consists of either 84 questions (long form) or 54 questions (medium form). There is also a short form, but it is statistically unreliable and therefore should not be used for assessment. Both the long and medium forms consist of a series of statements reflecting the six areas of psychological well-being: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Respondents rate statements on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 6 indicating strong agreement.

Further, to assess the attitude of students Optimistic-Pessimistic Attitude Scale (Parashar, 1998) will be used. The scale consists of 40 questions, which assesses the optimistic and pessimistic attitude of adults and adolescents aging from 13 to 25. 20 items are related to optimistic attitude and 20 items are related to pessimistic attitude. Each statement has two alternatives for the response of the subject in the form of "Agree" and "Disagree". This scale has been standardized on 400 girls and on 640 boys aged 13 to 25 years from different schools and colleges.

Procedure: Before conducting the study the entire process and the objective of the study was explained to the women selected for our study. The questionnaires were given to them, after which their responses were obtained and the results were then analyzed.

RESULTS

This study investigates the relationship between optimism and women's psychological well-being. Employed wives and full-time homemakers are studied on characteristics of their daily work activities and the consequences of these work conditions for psychological well-being.

Table 1: Mean and SD value of working and non-working women

Women		Optimism	SWB	N
Working	Mean	29	367.7	50
	SD	3.29	68.67	
Non-Working	Mean	27.58	336.54	50
	SD	6.19	53.24	

Table 2: The relationship between optimism and well-being

		Optimism
Well-being	r	.36
	sig	0.01

Now we will analyze each hypothesis separately with explanation and test results given in detail.

Hypothesis 1: Optimism is significantly positively, correlated to subjective well-being.

Correlations between optimism and subjective wellbeing were calculated. This hypothesis was supported; in this study, significant relationship was found between SWB and optimism of women. Results reveals that there is a significant correlation between attitude and well being of women ($r = .367$, $p < 0.01$). Hence our hypothesis that “Optimism is significantly positively, correlated to subjective well-being” is accepted.

Hypothesis 2: Working Women reported significantly higher levels of optimism as compared to non-working women.

As predicted, employed wives report high level of optimism than house wives. By looking at table 1, the mean score (29) of working women for optimism is more than the mean score (27.58) of non-working women. Significant relationships were found, and it was found that working women were more optimistic than non-working women. Hence the hypothesis that “Working Women reported significantly higher levels of optimism as compared to non-working women.” is accepted.

Hypothesis 3: Subjective well-being of working women is more than Well-being of non-working women.

From the Table No. 1 it can be seen that the mean value (367.7) of working women students is slightly higher than the mean value (336.54) of non-working women. The calculated F value is not significant thus there is no significant difference among working and non-working women category with respect to well-being. Hence our hypothesis that

“Subjective well-being of working women is more than Well-being of non-working women” is rejected.

Hypothesis 4: Women who were high on optimism also reported significantly more subjective well-being.

The data supported the hypothesis that optimism influenced subjective well-being of working and non-working women. Our results partially support the results from previous research. From the above Table it is found that the optimism of working women is higher than non working women. Similarly it is found that the Well-Being of working women is also higher than non working women. Thus we can say that there is a positive correlation among optimism and well-being. Since the variation is in the same direction we can say that our hypothesis no4, “Women who were high on optimism also reported significantly more subjective well-being” is accepted.

Discussion and Conclusions:

This study sought to find a relationship between optimism and subjective well-being among working and non working women. In past studies it was found that optimism has been linked to a greater sense of well-being. The findings of our study also demonstrate that optimism is an important correlate of subjective well-being. It also demonstrates that higher level of optimism lead to high level of subjective well-being. Optimism is found to enhance subjective well-being and which would be highly useful for women. This study had been performed in hopes of identifying ways for improving womens Subjective well-being that would help them to live a more full-filled life by lower stress levels.

The results supported the contention by Lucas et al. (1996) that life satisfaction and optimism might partly reflect the same underlying predisposition, despite the fact that the measures focus on different time frames (past and future, respectively). In addition to that, consistent to Carver and Scheier’s (2002a) notion that optimists/pessimists tend to develop more positive/negative feelings, we found strong direct relationships between optimism and PA/NA, but it is likely that this affective information is only used to a lesser extent by optimists/pessimists in forming GLS judgments, whereas a kind of pre-stored evaluation or “chronic” expectancies that have been developed based on previous behavior and on earlier life situations are used to a greater extent.

In this study it is concluded that Optimism is significantly positively, correlated to subjective well-being. The results displayed a positive

Optimism as a predictor of psychological well-being among working women correlation among optimism and subjective well-being which supports the previous findings. These findings are similar to the previous studies in which the correlation between optimism and subjective well-being was found to be strong.

A second hypothesis was that working women reported significantly higher levels of optimism as compared to non-working women. This hypothesis was also supported in this study. The results however, do not support the hypothesis that Subjective well-being of working women is more than well-being of non-working women as no significant difference was found among working and non-working women on subjective well-being. This could be due to the small sample size that was used and the fact that the sample was not particularly controlled and therefore wasn't an accurate representation of society.

The hypothesis that Women who were high on optimism also reported significantly more subjective well-being was found to be supported in this study. Thus it was concluded that optimism is a strong predictor of subjective well-being.

Limitations:

- A limitation that applies to all the associations presented in this paper is that what they demonstrate are merely correlations, and do not prove a direction of causation between potential determinants and well-being outcomes.
- Though the sample was chosen very carefully. It was obviously very small in size to give a clear picture of the relation between optimism and SWB.
- Within this experiment, the attitude of working and non-working women is not reflective of the overall population.
- Only one factors i.e. optimism, is studied to measure Subjective well-being of working and non-working women. There may be other factors that also have significant impacts on wellbeing, which are also correlated with womens wellbeing.

Recommendation:

- Future research should take more consideration into the sample size, to give more accurate results.
- Further research on the topic should focus on examining other parameters which have a stronger influence on subjective well-being of women.

- Overall this study suggests that working women who are more optimistic will have higher levels of subjective well-being than those who are pessimistic and non-working.
- It is evident that relating optimism with subjective well-being is an informative method of understanding why people are happy or unhappy with their lives, as it is found that optimism is one of the strongest factors in determining one's overall life satisfaction.
- More research studies need to be carried out to replicate findings of present study with respect to women on optimism and well-being.

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