

An Investigation into Relationship among Stress, Optimism and Life Satisfaction of Adolescents

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Abstract

The aim of the study was on exploring the relationship between stress and optimism of college students, stress and life satisfaction of college students, as well as to investigate the relationship between optimism and life satisfaction among college students. The sample comprised 100 students 50 male and 50 female students studying in four different institutes of Lahore. A demographic survey was obtained from each participant. This form included questions regarding the participant's age, sex, educational status, and institute. The Perceived Stress Scale designed by Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein (1983). The revised Life Orientation Test (LOT-R; Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994). Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWL) developed by Diener, Emmons and Larsen et al., (1985) as a measure of global life satisfaction were used in the study. Results revealed that stress had a significant and inverse relationship with optimism and life satisfaction among college students.

Keywords: *Stress, Optimism, Life Satisfaction*

1. Introduction

Stress is a process in which environmental events or forces threaten the well being of an individual in the society. Stress is a disruption of the emotional stability of the individual that induces a state of disorganization in personality and behavior. It is a biological phenomenon that is experienced by all persons regardless of their socio-economic status, occupation or age. Thus , the ability to cope successfully with stress is frequently held to be the key to human happiness Burns & Gunderman (2007).

Cha (2003) separated stress into two categories: eustress and distress . He mentioned that during both eustress and distress the body undergoes virtually the similar nonspecific response to the range of positive or negative stimuli acting upon it. However, the fact that eustress causes much less damage than distress is how you take it' that determines, ultimately how one can adapt successfully to change. Similarly , Carver, Scheier & Segerstrom, (2010) identified two kinds of stress: acute and chronic. Carver states that acute stress can be related to small daily hassles while chronic stress takes place when several environmental stressors, like finance and college work .

Mental Stress/Psychological stress defined by Car (2004) is any particular relationship between a person and the environment that the person judges to be beyond his or her resources and jeopardizes his or her well-being. It is something that causes an individual to worry. The situation or object that causes the worrying situation is known as the stressor. It is the very basic or root of all symptoms and indications of stress. Our cognitive thinking is affected by mental stress. The mind is responsible for acknowledging stress as something good or bad. Once the decision is made it will perceive stress, and the rest of the bodily functions respond to it. Mental stress is a disturbance or disruption of the logical and rational way of thinking. A mentally stressed person cannot think properly and is not able to gain concentration. Constant worrying is an indication, too. A boss who needs to make a decision whether to retain or terminate a poorly performing employee will feel mentally pressured because of the decision-making Chang, (1998).

Emotional Stress: is a product of mental pressure and tension. The emotional symptoms manifest according to the mental symptoms. For example, if one worries which is a condition of the mind, it follows that one would feel anxious and uncomfortable. The experience of racing thoughts and lack of concentration, you tend to become restless and panicky. When the mind is confused, the person becomes irritable and short-tempered. Emotional stress is also manifested through nervousness and a feeling of loneliness. Both mind and feelings are heavy to control and handle especially during moments of stress (Abolghasemi & Varaniyab,(2010).

Physical Stress: Mental and emotional symptoms directly affect the physical aspect of the person. Physical stress pertains to the physical reaction of the body to the causes of stress and the other symptoms. The different body systems and functions, particularly the nervous and cardiovascular functions, are affected. Breathing difficulties happen such as shortness of breath. The person may even experience chest pains and lower back aches. Some encounter urination and nausea. A person with poor health and pessimistic attitude easily encounters physical stress. On the other hand, a person with a generally healthy well-being optimistic attitude and healthy lifestyle is not vulnerable to experiencing stress Haybron, (2005).

Perceived stress is not a type of stress but it is simply a measure of the degree through which a person assesses their life as demanding and stressful. This is measured through the perceived stress scale. Much of the stress we experience has to do with how we perceive the stimulus that surrounds us and the degree to which we perceive it as threatening Abolghasemi & Varaniyab (2010)..

The term optimism is the opposite of pessimism. Optimism and pessimism are explanatory styles of thinking about life events which predict a positive vs. negative mood and expansive vs. inhibited behavior. People with optimistic explanations of life generally feel happier and more energized to cope with obstacles, seeing them as challenges rather than failure experiences. Optimists are more likely to analyze whether setbacks are situational, then are able to develop plans to remove obstacles to their goals. Pessimists are more likely to view life problems as personal failures, blame themselves, feel unhappy and give up trying to change Olpin (1988).

Seligman (2004) regards optimism as a learnable approach to life and a priceless motivator. In the 1988 Seoul Summer Olympics, Matt Biondi lost the gold and silver medals in his first event, his best event, the 200-meter freestyle, by mere centimeters. Many sportscasters predicted that this early defeat would dispirit Biondi and cost him any chance of winning gold medals in any successive events. They were wrong. Biondi went on to win gold medals in five of his six remaining events and took the silver in his second event.

Higher levels of optimism have been related prospectively to better subjective well-being and low levels of stress in times of adversity or difficulty. Consistent with such findings, optimism has been linked to higher levels of engagement coping and inferior levels of avoidance, coping. There is evidence that optimism is coupled with taking proactive steps to protect one's health, whereas pessimism is associated with health-damaging behaviors.

Life satisfaction along with positive and negative affect is one of the three components of Subjective Well-Being. Subjective well-being is a way of defining a good life, and is often referred to as happiness. But satisfaction with life is different from happiness. People who experience abundant SWB have many pleasures and few pains, and they feel satisfied with their lives. The positive and negative affects of SWB refers to affective emotional aspects whereas satisfaction refers to cognitive judgmental aspects. Previous research has found college students consider happiness and life satisfaction to be extremely important, and there is evidence that increased life satisfaction impacts academic performance in college students (Pettay, 2008).

Life satisfaction has also been defined as a sense of contentment and peace stemming from small gaps between wants and needs. It is defined as the ability to enjoy one's experience accompanied by a degree of excitement. Since ancient times human have wondered about what makes a good life. Scientists who study subjective well being assume that a significant ingredient of satisfied life is that the person himself or herself likes his or her life Henry (2004)..

Taylor, Margeret, & Ethel, (2010). believed that optimists' holding of positive expectations for the future leads them to be better able to solve problems, enjoy a more satisfied life and also experience better health .

Objectives of the study

1. explore the relationship between stress and optimism in adolescents .
2. investigate the relationship between stress and life satisfaction as perceived by adolescent.
3. find out the relationship between optimism and life satisfaction among adolescents .

Hypothesis of the study

H₀ : There is no relationship between stress and optimism in college students.

H₁ : There is a relationship between stress and optimism in college students.

H₀ : There is no relationship between stress and optimism in college students.

H₁ : There is a relationship between stress and life satisfaction in college students.

H₀ : There is no relationship between stress and optimism in college students.

H₁ : There is a relationship between optimism and life satisfaction among college students.

2. Rationale

The present study examines the relationship of stress with optimism and life satisfaction among college students. Since college students are a very important and unique part of our society with distinct environmental, situational, and interpersonal stressors and are an important population for studying potential stressors; thereby this group was selected. Moreover in view of the fact that field of positive psychology is flourishing a great deal therefore the relationship between stress with life satisfaction and optimism in college students was observed in order to assess whether stress effects optimism and life satisfaction of college students or not. In addition to this within the last decade, researchers have begun to investigate a host of positive psychological factors (e.g., optimism, life satisfaction spirituality, social support) that have been shown to influence general well-being and since the filed of positive psychology has a very broad scope therefore this area was selected. Thus this study will provide insights into the relationship between optimism and stress, stress and life satisfaction as well as the relationship between satisfaction and optimism among college students. More over very few number of research has been done collectively in this stance therefore it would be a boost to the field of positive psychology.

3. Literature Review

A study called optimism, accumulated life stress, and psychological and physical adjustment: Is it always adaptive to expect the best was conducted by Chang and Lawrence (2003) who examined optimism-pessimism as a moderator of the link between accumulated negative life stress and psychological adjustment and physical adjustment in a large sample of college students (N = 560). Results showed that optimism-pessimism and negative life stress significantly predicted each outcome. Moreover, for all of the outcomes, a noteworthy Optimism-Pessimism x Accumulated Negative Life Stress interaction was found. As expected, a plot of the significant interactions indicated that optimism, but not pessimism,

exacerbated the associations between accumulated negative life stress and poor psychological and physical outcomes.

A study titled the moderating effect of trait meta-mood and perceived stress on life satisfaction by Pettay (2008) examined the moderating effect of meta-mood skills, and perceived stress on life satisfaction after controlling for dispositional optimism. Three-hundred and nine undergraduate students were asked to complete the trait meta-mood scale (TMMS), the perceived stress scale (PSS), the revised life orientation test (LOT-R), and the satisfaction with life scale (SWLS). Results showed a positive correlation between dispositional optimism and life satisfaction. Also scores on the meta-mood skills were significantly related in the expected direction to scores on perceived stress and life satisfaction and showed additive value in predicting these constructs even after controlling for optimism and stress. Moreover, findings from hierarchical regression analyses also indicated that those with higher scores in life satisfaction scored low on the PSS as compared to those with low scores on SWLS. Implications of these findings for future research on perceived emotional intelligence construct and for working with distressed people should be discussed.

Simons, Aysan, Thompson *et al.*, (2002) conducted a study called coping resource availability and level of perceived stress as predictors of life satisfaction in a cohort of Turkish college students This study investigated the effects of perceived stress and availability of coping resources to predict satisfaction with life among a group of college students in Turkey (N=172). The sample consisted of 172 participants ranging in age from 19 to 35 (M age =21.24, SD=2.01). All participants were recruited from among students enrolled in a College in Izmir, Turkey. A global measure of perceived stress, The Perceived Stress Scale, Coping Resources Inventory for Stress, Coping Resources Effectiveness Score, The Satisfaction With Life Scale were used. Test packets containing the three instruments utilized in this study were assembled for distribution. Each packet contained an informed consent form, the three measures, and the demographic questionnaire. All testing materials were translated into Turkish from English, by a bi-lingual psychologist and back-translated from Turkish into English to ensure that questions held the same meaning in both languages. Results were analysed through the Pearson r's to assess the relatedness between the PSS, the CRE, and the SWLS. Scores on the PSS correlated with scores on the SWLS, resulting in a Pearson r of -.61. High scores on the PSS were indicative of elevated stress levels, while high scores on the SWLS indicate high satisfaction with life. Therefore, according to these measures, as the level of perceived stress increased, the level of life satisfaction decreased for college students. Scores on the CRE were correlated with scores on the SWLS using Pearson r. A Pearson r of .57 indicated a moderate correlation between the CRE and SWLS. According to this data, satisfaction with life increases as coping resource availability increases, resulting in a moderate to good predictability of life satisfaction from coping resources. A Pearson r of -.67 was found between the CRE and the PSS, indicating a strong negative correlation between coping resource effectiveness and perceived stress. Thus the results showed that both perceived stress and coping resource availability predict level of life satisfaction and results also found significant correlations between life satisfaction with perceived economic well being, social support, and stress monitoring.

Coffman, Donna, and Gilligan *et al.*(2003) conducted a study called Social support, stress, and self-efficacy: effects on students' life satisfaction. This study investigated the relationships between social support, perceived stress, self-efficacy, and life satisfaction among 94 first-year college students in America. The results showed that students who reported higher levels of social support and self-efficacy and lower levels of perceived stress also reported higher levels of life satisfaction. Social support and stress together accounted for 41 percent of the variance in life satisfaction ratings.

4. Methodology and Procedures

The present research is Correlational; that is used here to investigate the relationship between stress and optimism, stress and life satisfaction and optimism and life satisfaction in college students. Selected

through random sampling technique the sample comprised of 100 students 50 male and 50 female students studying in four different institutes of Lahore. The age range was 17-21 years. The mean age for females was 2.78 with a Standard deviation SD = 1.130 and the mean age for males was 3.34 with a standard deviation SD = 1.062. Moreover two grade levels i.e. intermediate level and Bachelor's level were opted. A demographic survey was obtained from each participant. This form included questions regarding the participant's age, sex, educational status, and institute. The Perceived Stress Scale is designed by Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein (1983), **Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R)**, The revised Life Orientation Test (LOT-R; Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994) is a 6-item measure (plus 4 filler items) of individual difference in optimism–pessimism, **Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWL)**. The Satisfaction with Life Scale is developed by Diener, Emmons and Larsen et al., (1985) as a measure of global life satisfaction. Its focus is on global cognitive judgments of one's life, allowing the participant to respond in terms of her own values. This scale was selected because of its proliferation in life satisfaction literature as well as for its superior psychometrics.

Four institutes of Lahore were approached. These were Kinnaird College for Women, Government College of Home Economics, National University of Fast and School of Accountancy (SKANS). Permission letters were obtained from these institutes prior to the data collection. Consent of the participants was also obtained before the collection of data. At the same time each participant was ensured of confidentiality of the information and the fact that the information will be used only for the research purpose. At the beginning of data collection the participants were told clearly about the purpose of the study, the fact that they were free to participate or withdraw from the research and instructions were clearly and properly given to them. Mostly the students were cooperative and were motivated and interested in the filling the questionnaires. The students took around 10-15 minutes in filling out the questionnaires. After all the questionnaires were filled, the results were calculated and then statistically analyzed.

5. Results of the Study

Hypothesis 1

“There is a relationship between stress and optimism in college students”.

The hypothesis was supported as through Pearson Product Moment Correlation which was applied to examine the relationship between two variables called stress and optimism in college students.

Table 1: Mean, Standard Deviation, Pearson correlation coefficient r and p value of stress with optimism of college students

| | N | M | SD | Pearson correlation coefficient r | P value |
|--------------|-----|-------|--------|-----------------------------------|---------|
| PSS | 100 | 26.16 | 12.440 | -0.747** | .000 |
| LOT-R | 100 | 17.35 | 5.064 | | |

Note: N = sample size, M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation and a = 0.01

H1 was accepted. The two variables were highly significantly but inversely correlated with a correlation coefficient r - 0.747** and P value of .000. Since the two variables; stress and optimism were inversely correlated that is increase in one variable caused a decrease in the other variable. Thus college student's response on PSS yielded a mean of 26.16 and a standard deviation of 12.440. Whereas college student's response on LOT-R yielded a mean of 17.35 and standard deviation of 5.064. that showed if the level of stress of college students will be increased then the level of optimism will also be decreased.

Hypothesis 2

“There is a relationship between stress and satisfaction with life in college students”.

The hypothesis 2 was accepted as well as through Pearson Product Moment Correlation which was applied to investigate the relationship between two variables, which were stress and satisfaction with life of college students.

Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation, Pearson correlation coefficient r and p value of stress with life satisfaction of college students

| | N | M | SD | Pearson correlation coefficient r | P value |
|-----|-----|-------|--------|-----------------------------------|---------|
| PSS | 100 | 26.16 | 12.440 | -0.827** | .000 |
| SWL | | 25.13 | 8.057 | | |

Note: N = sample size, M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation and $\alpha = 0.01$

H1 was accepted and the two variables were highly significantly but inversely correlated with a correlation coefficient $r = -0.827^{**}$ and P value of .000. The increase here in one variable caused a decrease in the other variable since the correlation was inverse. Therefore college student's response on PSS yielded a mean of 26.16 and a standard deviation of 12.440. Whereas college student's response on SWL yielded a mean of 25.13 and standard deviation of 8.057 that showed if the level of stress of college students will be increased then the level of life satisfaction will be decreased.

Hypothesis 3

“There is a relationship between optimism and life satisfaction among college students”.

The hypothesis 3 was also supported as through Pearson Product Moment Correlation which was applied to find out the relationship between two variables, optimism and life satisfaction among college students.

Table 3: Mean, Standard Deviation, Pearson correlation coefficient r and p value of optimism with life satisfaction among college students

| | N | M | SD | Pearson correlation coefficient r | P value |
|-------|-----|-------|-------|-----------------------------------|---------|
| LOT-R | 100 | 17.35 | 5.064 | 0.791 | .000 |
| SWL | | 25.13 | 8.057 | | |

Note: N = sample size, M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation and $\alpha = 0.01$

H1 was accepted. The two variables were highly significantly and positively correlated with a correlation coefficient $r = 0.791$ and P value of .000. College student's response on LOT-R yielded a mean of 17.35 and standard deviation of 5.064. While college student's response on SWL yielded a mean of 25.13 and standard deviation of 8.057 that showed if the level of optimism of college students will be increased then the level of life satisfaction will also be increased.

6. Conclusion

The topic of the present study was the relationship of stress with optimism and life satisfaction of college students. The aim of the study was on exploring the relationship between stress and optimism of college students, stress and life satisfaction of college students, as well as to investigate the relationship between optimism and life satisfaction among college students. Sample comprised 100 college students between the age range of 17-21 years. Three hypotheses were formulated. Results revealed that stress had a significant and inverse relationship with optimism and life satisfaction among college students, whereas satisfaction with life had a significant and positive relationship with optimism. Thus the general trend of the present study, indicated that optimistically oriented people are less susceptible to stress or stressors and they are more satisfied with their lives. Whereas, pessimistic people are more prone to excessive worries and tensions. Thus, this is not what happens to a person but how he perceives the situation that makes all the difference. Positivity or optimism not only makes a person less vulnerable to stress, more satisfied with their lives but it also benefits health of a person as a whole.

7. Recommendations

Future studies might choose other populations like adults or opt for selected populations (e.g., clinical populations, chronically ill populations). In addition broader range of educational levels and age ranges would also prove to be valuable. Moreover the sample only comprised of Asians, however further studies might also study cultural differences. No doubt more research is also needed to examine the relationship of optimism and life satisfaction with other important variables such as resilience, coping, socio economic status and more other variables.

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Revised Life Orientation Test (LOT-R)

Instructions:

Please answer the following questions about yourself by indicating the extent of your agreement using the following scale:

[0] = strongly disagree

[1] = disagree

[2] = neutral

[3] = agree

[4] = strongly agree

Be as honest as you can throughout, and try not to let your responses to one question influence your response to other questions. There are no right or wrong answers.

- _____ 1. In uncertain times, I usually expect the best.
- _____ 2. It's easy for me to relax.
- _____ 3. If something can go wrong for me, it will.
- _____ 4. I'm always optimistic about my future.
- _____ 5. I enjoy my friends a lot.
- _____ 6. It's important for me to keep busy.
- _____ 7. I hardly ever expect things to go my way.
- _____ 8. I don't get upset too easily.
- _____ 9. I rarely count on good things happening to me.
- _____ 10. Overall, I expect more good things to happen to me than bad.

SCORING OF LOT:

Reverse code items 3,7 and 9 prior to scoring(0=4),(1=3),(3=1),(2=2),(4=0)
Sum item 1,3,4,7,9and 10 to obtain an overall score

The Satisfaction with Life Scale

DIRECTIONS: Below are five statements with which you may agree or disagree. Using the 1-7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number in the line preceding that item. Please be open and honest in your responding.

1 = Strongly Disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Slightly Disagree

4 = Neither Agree or Disagree

5 = Slightly Agree

6 = Agree

7 = Strongly Agree

- _____ 1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal.
_____ 2. The conditions of my life are excellent.
_____ 3. I am satisfied with life.
_____ 4. So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.
_____ 5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

SCORING

Add up the results to see where you lie in the following list:

35-31 extremely satisfied

26-30 satisfied

21-25 slightly satisfied

20 neutral

15-19 slightly dissatisfied

10-14 dissatisfied

5-9 extremely dissatisfied