

Relationship between Optimism, Resilience and Subjective Well-being: Literature Review

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Abstract

In this research, researcher reviewed literature of three very important area of research that is related to positive psychology. Those are subjective well-being, optimism, and resilience. Then researcher tried to analyze how optimism and resilience affect subjective well-being and vice versa.

This research provides overview of concept of optimism, resilience and subjective well-being and how optimism and resilience are related to and affect subjective well-being. Overall, this paper establishes that there is a significant relation between these three concepts.

Keywords: Optimism; Subjective Well-being; Resilience

Introduction

Subjective well-being (SWB), optimism, and resilience are three important area of research that have generated huge interest in researchers. These concepts are related to positive psychology and have been studied from various perspective and point of view. While both resilience and optimism are very unique and vast concept on itself, these concept are closely related to the idea of subjective well-being. Therefore, both optimism and resilience have been studied in relation to SWB because both concepts are closely intertwined with SWB. So studying the effect of these two on SWB and vice versa is very significant.

The current study aimed to review the literature of these three concept and analyze the relation and effect of optimism and resilience on SWB. This research, based on literature review, will cover various aspects of the relationship between optimism, resilience and subjective well-being in overall.

Subjective Well-being

In simple term, SWB is a field of psychology that endeavors to understand people's evaluations of their lives. Diener (1984) introduced this concept which tries to understand people's evaluation of their quality of life. There has been growing research in this field since then where it has been analyzed from various different perspective.

Andrews & Withey (1976) explained three components of SWB: Life satisfaction, Positive affect and Negative affect. Diener, Suh, Lucas and Smith (1999) stated that the structure of subjective well-being has two areas: cognitive and emotional aspects. The cognitive aspect is degree of satisfaction with life. The emotional aspect includes both positive and negative emotions such as pleasant and sad. Furthermore, Diener, Oishi and Lucas (2003) argue that subjective well-being is a concept that includes high positive emotions, low negative emotions, and high satisfaction with life.

Diener, Suh and Oishi (1997) mentioned that those people have high SWB who are satisfied with their life with more positive affect and less negative affect. McGillivray and Clarke (2006) explained that "subjective wellbeing involves a multidimensional evaluation of life, including cognitive judgments of life satisfaction and affective evaluations of emotions and moods."

About subjective well-being, the definition and components vary depending on the researcher.

Cummins et al. (2010) described SWB as a normal positive state of mind comprising the entire life experience and stable happiness. According to Diener and Ryan (2009), SWB specifies satisfaction of life. Also, it signifies high positive emotions and reduced negative emotions. They also mentioned that SWB also covers satisfaction with various other aspects of life such as work, marriage and health. Nishaat and Magari (2020) has defined wellbeing as a state of sustaining the satisfaction and fulfillment of life backed by positive emotional evaluations such as joy and enjoyment, and cognitive evaluations such as the meaning of living and health status.

Optimism

There have been various studies and various definitions of optimism. For example, one of the characteristics of optimism in positive psychology is "explanatory style," (Seligman,1991) which states that positive recognition of self leads to well-being. The key to being an optimist is to develop

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an optimistic style of explanation. Pessimists can also become optimists by receiving guidance to change their explanation style. Seligman (1991) shows that optimists can work and study better than pessimists, achieve better grades and achievements, be successful, challenge and overcome suffering, and live longer and healthier. On the contrary, pessimists (which can also be referred to as patients with mild depression) are said to be negative in "thinking", "mood", "behavior", and "physical" reactions. Seligman (1991) states that there are three major optimistic styles of explanation. First, when an optimist encounters an unfortunate event, he/she considers it as "temporary" and not permanent. Second, he/she considers the unfortunate situation occurred due to "specific" causes, not universal causes. The last one is called an "external" explanatory style which means he/she doesn't completely blame himself/herself for any unfortunate event.

Scheier and Carver (1985) defined dispositional optimism, as "generalized outcome expectancies" which means optimist expects positive results from any event. He also stated that optimism is associated with physical health as well as mental health. Schneider (2001) discusses his notion of realistic optimism, while reviewing many studies on optimism. According to Schneider (2001), the perspectives of reality and optimism have been viewed as contradictory, but they are not necessarily contradictory, even if there are boundaries, they are only loose boundaries. The nature of reality is unclear in the first place, but reality exists regardless of whether it is clear or not. Therefore, it is possible to have more realistic optimism by performing appropriate fact matching, and it is necessary to deal with such uncertainty in order to be realistic. Schneider (2001) pays particular attention to the meaning and knowledge of how to capture the events that occur to him, advocating the ideas of "fuzzy meaning" and "fuzzy knowledge", while discussing realistic optimism.

Schneider (2001) referred to the idea of realistic optimism in an overview of research on conventional optimism. She described that concept of conventional dispositional optimism holds optimistic outlook towards future on unfounded grounds while realistic optimism emphasizes on realistic outlook of future which is based on events that happened in a person's life. It also takes uncertain reality into account as objectively as possible. She said that optimism enables a realistic outlook on the future. Based on that definition, the characteristics of the realistic optimist are (1) focusing on favorable experiences of the past, (2) objectively recognizing the reality but having hope for the future, (3) having strong will and working towards the desired outcome (Schneider, 2001). So the characteristic of a realistic optimism is to continue to have a positive outlook and attitude toward the future while recognizing and accepting the harshness of the reality.

Magari (2013) defined realistic optimism as "a way of thinking and a way of life with good outlook

for the future, even after encountering various difficulties.” Furthermore, by incorporating Alain’s philosophical view (1953) of the optimism and the idea of optimism based on Keller’s view of life (1903) with the explanatory style of Seligman (1991), he assumed that realistic optimism is composed of three factors, “Flexibility”, “Will and Courage,” and “Future-orientation and Hope.”

Alain (2007) states that “pessimism comes from the temperament optimism from the will”. Keller (1903) states that “Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence.” Nishaat and Magari (2018) has developed such a realistic optimism scale (12 items of 3 factors) and tried to measure it.

Resilience

Resilience is an important area of research. Defining resilience is a challenging task as it has been used in a variety of contexts such as organizational, educational, community, sports, military, and clinical (Gómez-Molinero, Zayas, Ruíz-González and Guil, 2018). Resilience has been defined in various ways, but there is common factor which is coping in the face of adversity. Various definitions have been given over the years of research to describe this concept. Many researchers have defined resilience as the process of adapting while facing adversities such as tragedy, trauma, threats, or sources of stress—such as family and relationship problems, health problems, or workplace and financial stressors.

Masten and Powell (2003) stated “Resilience refers to patterns of positive adaptation in the context of significant risk or adversity”. Zautra, Hall, and Murray (2010) defined resilience as effective adapting to adverse circumstances. Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker (2000) described resilience in the same way referring it to a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity. The American Psychological Association (2010) has defined resilience in the same as “the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy threats or even significant sources of threat”.

In general, the concept of resilience shows that it desire for optimism under adverse situation (Rutter, 2006). In other words, optimism and resilience work together in a person when he/she faces stressful conditions (Carver, Scheier, and Segerstrom, 2010).

Resilience is very important because it gives people the psychological strength to cope with stress and hardship (Walker et al., 2017). Campbell-Sills, Barlow, Brown and Hofmann (2006), in their

research, found that individuals with high resilience engage more often in adaptive coping skills. Also, individual who are highly resilient can convert stressful situations into opportunities for learning. Resilience is not an inborn quality. According to Reid (2016) people are very capable of learning the skills that it takes to become more resilient.

Optimism and Subjective Well-being

There are many studies that have examined the relationship between optimism and well-being. Scheier and Carver (1985) examined the relationship between dispositional optimism as positive expectations for future as personality traits. They conducted research on university students and found that students with high optimism had good mental health. Baker, Blacher and Olsson (2005) show how problematic behavior of developmentally delayed pre-school children affect well-being of parents and how optimism affects well-being of parents. The research shows that the problematic behavior of the retarded child increases the depressive tendency of the parents and worsens the relationship between the parents. But, in case of parents who are more optimistic, depression tendency and parental friction is moderate.

Also, Karademas (2006) conducted research on relationship between self-efficacy, social support, and optimism and well-being. Result shows that optimism is significantly related to self-efficacy and social support, and optimism, as the core of well-being, is strongly related to the satisfaction of life. Also, optimism is strengthened by emotional support from surrounding people and self-efficacy.

Augusto-Landa, Pulido-Martos and Lopez-Zafra (2010) examined the relationship between perceived emotional intelligence, dispositional optimism / pessimism and psychological well-being. As a result, it is clarified that there is a positive correlation between optimism and psychological well-being, and that there is a negative correlation between pessimism and psychological well-being.

Hanssen et al. (2014) brought up motivational coping (persistent goal pursuit and flexible goal adjustment) as a mechanism that links perceived optimism and well-being factors (overall well-being, depressive tendency, anxiety, and physical symptoms). As a result, it was confirmed that perceived optimism and flexible goal adjustment are more related to overall well-being.

In addition, Hashimoto and Koyasu (2012) studied the relationship of depressive tendency, optimism, positive orientation, and well-being. Result shows that optimism is positively related to positive orientation and well-being.

Carver, Scheier and Segerstrom (2010) show that optimists are more positive in adversity or difficult situations. They have prominent subjective well-being, and they maintain their well-being in even difficult situations. They also show that optimists have high level of coping strategies and are taking positive steps to maintain their health.

The optimism mentioned in these studies, which has been conducted in the context of well-being, is optimism based on individual personality traits, and is dispositional optimism pointed out by Scheier and Carver (1985).

On the other hand, Norem (1989) explained the tendency of having expectation that one will succeed in the future based on the experience of successful past using the concept of strategic optimism. Hosogoshi and Kodama (2006) examined about strategic optimism and psychological well-being proposed by Ryff (1989). As a result, it was suggested that the constructive concepts of psychological well-being such as “personal growth,” “purpose in life,” and “positive relation with others,” are positively related to strategic optimism.

These studies refer to well-being from the perspective of strategic optimism. Thus, it can be said that most of the research on optimism and well-being is conducted from the viewpoint of dispositional optimism and strategic optimism.

Resilience and Subjective Well-being.

Subjective well-being, also known as “happiness,” is affected by a number of factors which includes resilience. Research has found that resilience is positively associated with satisfaction of life which is an important component of SWB. Wagnild and Young explained in their research paper that scoring medium to high on a life satisfaction scale was considered an early descriptor of resilience (1990). Also, it is negatively associated with negative affect and positively associated with positive affect (Mak, Ng and Wong, 2011).

Resilient people who progress toward their goals have higher levels of positive affect and satisfaction with life (Klohn, Vandewater and Young, 1996). In other words, those who can cope with traumatic and adverse situations and adapt to it are happier than those who cannot.

Davydov, Stewart, Ritchie and Chaudieu (2010) state that resilience and well-being are basically related. The concept of resilience comes from the literature on stress and coping and is consistent with the general definition of “adaptive and recovery ability” (Windle, Bennett, and Noyes, 2011).

A study about resilience in college students in Hong Kong found that resilience was significantly related to positive cognitions about the own self, the world, and the future. And this was related

to higher levels of life satisfaction (Mak, Ng and Wong. 2011).

Cummins and Wooden (2013) described the concept of resilience in the context of SWB homeostasis theory. However, their paper presents only theoretical connections, drawing implications from a modern understanding of the concept of SWB set points and the concept of homeostasis of SWB, and connecting these components together to create a homeostasis restoration.

Seligman, Schulman and Tryon (2007) state resilience and specific coping skills has been shown to help university students' well-being, reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety, and improve optimistic descriptive style, at least in the short term.

So, resilience has been associated with SWB as an extremely important viewpoint in forming it. However, the relationship between these two constructs is still not well understood, and clear theoretical convergence and distinction is seldom offered in the literature.

Conclusion

This was simple literature review on three very important concepts of positive psychology. SWB, optimism, and resilience has attracted lots of attention from researchers from various different backgrounds. Because of that there are diverse definitions of these three concepts and are connected to many different fields of research which covers but not limited to health, economy, and psychology etc.

Literature review involving SWB, optimism and resilience shed some light on the interconnectedness of these factors. Souri and Hasanirad (2011) examined the relationships between resilience, optimism and psychological well-being on medical students (213 male and 191 female). Their research showed that resilience can predict psychological well-being, and optimism played a role in the relationship between resilience and psychological well-being. Another research by Agarwal and Malhotra (2019), about the relationship between optimism, resilience and psychological well-being in young adults, showed that there is a significant and positive relationship between all the variables.

However, there is no research on realistic optimism, resilience and subjective well-being. Magari (2015, 2018) stated that resilience is at the center of the realistic optimism. It will be interesting to further examine, that concept by linking it to SWB, through quantitative and qualitative research in future.

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