

CORRELATIONAL ANALYSIS OF HAPPINESS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL

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ABSTRACT

Happiness and psychological capital (PsyCap) are increasingly recognized as crucial factors impacting the academic achievement, mental health, and general well-being of college students. This research undertakes an in-depth exploration of the intricate association between happiness and PsyCap, which is conceptualized as a higher-order construct encompassing four core components: hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism (HERO). The study involved a carefully selected sample of 200 college students who voluntarily completed standardized assessments designed to measure their levels of psychological capital and subjective happiness. The statistical analysis of the collected data yielded significant findings, indicating a strong positive correlation between overall PsyCap and happiness. Furthermore, among the individual components of PsyCap, optimism and hope were identified as the most robust predictors of happiness in this student population. These compelling findings carry substantial implications, suggesting that targeted interventions aimed at enhancing psychological capital could significantly contribute to improved student well-being and academic achievement. The research underscores the critical need for integrating positive psychological resources within educational institutions and strongly advocates for further empirical studies on intervention programs specifically designed to improve PsyCap in students.

Key Words: Happiness, Psychological Capital, Hope, Efficacy, Resilience and Optimism

INTRODUCTION

Happiness, often considered an ultimate human pursuit, is an integral and fundamental aspect of human existence. Its profound importance extends beyond mere individual fulfillment, influencing a diverse array of life domains, including academic performance, career success, and the quality of interpersonal relationships. For college students, a demographic experiencing unique developmental challenges and academic pressures, happiness is intricately associated with their intrinsic motivation, capacity for resilience in the face of adversity, and overall psychological well-being. A growing body of contemporary research consistently identifies the pivotal function of psychological capital (PsyCap) in fostering and enhancing a multitude of positive outcomes, thereby establishing it as a critical construct in the comprehensive study of student success and thriving.

Psychological Capital, originally developed and articulated by Luthans et al. is defined as "the positive psychological state of an individual". This robust construct is uniquely characterized by its four core, measurable components, often referred to by the acronym HERO:

1. **Hope:** This component refers to an individual's perceived capability to set clear goals, develop viable pathways to achieve those goals, and possess the drive and perseverance to navigate obstacles and strive towards their aspirations. It embodies a sense of agency and determination in pursuing desired outcomes.

2. **Efficacy:** Rooted in Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory, efficacy represents an individual's conviction and belief in their own competence to successfully execute the actions required to produce desired outcomes in specific situations. It is the confidence in one's ability to perform effectively.
3. **Resilience:** This refers to the dynamic process by which an individual demonstrates the remarkable ability to bounce back, adapt, and even grow stronger in the face of significant adversity, setbacks, and change. It involves successfully navigating difficult circumstances and responding positively to challenges.
4. **Optimism:** Defined by Carver and Scheier (2002), optimism is characterized by positive expectations for favorable and flourishing outcomes in the future. It is a general positive outlook on life and a belief that good things will happen.

While earlier research has provided compelling evidence indicating that PsyCap generally has a positive impact on various aspects of well-being, its direct and specific link with happiness among university students has not yet been extensively studied. This research endeavor specifically seeks to address and cover this existing limitation by systematically investigating the direct correlation between overall PsyCap and happiness within a college student population²⁵. Furthermore, a key objective is to identify which of the individual dimensions of PsyCap (hope, efficacy, resilience, or optimism) emerges as the most significant predictor of happiness in this context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

HAPPINESS AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

Happiness, a multifaceted and widely studied psychological construct, is most commonly defined and understood as subjective well-being (SWB). This conceptualization of happiness encompasses both emotional and cognitive elements. The emotional component typically refers to the presence of positive affect (e.g., joy, contentment) and the relative absence of negative affect (e.g., sadness, anxiety), while the cognitive component involves a global evaluation of one's life as satisfying and fulfilling. Consequently, happiness is to a great extent quantitatively measured through the assessment of these affective components, particularly positive and negative affect, which are typically evaluated using empirically validated and standardized questionnaires, such as those developed by Lyubomirsky et al. The significance of happiness for college students extends to improved academic engagement, stronger social relationships, and enhanced coping mechanisms for stress.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL (PSYCAP)

As previously introduced, PsyCap is a synergistic, higher-order construct comprised of four distinct yet interrelated positive psychological states:

1. **Hope:** The capacity for realistic goal setting, combined with the self-motivation and diligent effort required for goal attainment, even in the face of obstacles. Individuals high in hope are adept at identifying pathways to their goals and maintaining their drive.
2. **Efficacy:** The strong belief in one's inherent capabilities and personal resources to successfully execute tasks, achieve objectives, and ultimately excel in various situations. This self-belief is a powerful motivator for action and persistence.
3. **Resilience:** The dynamic and adaptive capacity for robustly rebounding from mishaps, adversities, and failures, along with the remarkable ability to flexibly mold

oneself and successfully adapt to significant changes and demanding circumstances. Resilient individuals are able to overcome challenges and grow from them.

4. **Optimism:** A pervasive and positive expectancy regarding future outcomes, characterized by a general belief that good things will happen and that one's efforts will lead to success and flourishing. Optimists tend to attribute positive events to internal, stable, and global causes, and negative events to external, unstable, and specific causes.

Extensive empirical evidence from various contexts consistently suggests that higher levels of PsyCap are strongly associated with a range of desirable outcomes, including increased overall well-being, enhanced academic achievement, and greater success in professional and occupational settings (e.g., Luthans et al., 2007). However, despite this accumulating evidence of its broad benefits, as noted, limited specific research exists to unequivocally establish its direct and profound correlation with subjective happiness specifically among the population of college students. This gap in the literature highlights the importance of the current study.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HAPPINESS AND PSYCAP

Prior research has indeed indicated a general trend where individuals possessing higher levels of Psychological Capital tend to report greater levels of happiness and life satisfaction (Avey et al., 2011). Components such as optimism and resilience, in particular, have been consistently correlated with reduced levels of stress and enhanced overall life satisfaction (Seligman, 2011). This current research endeavors to build upon this existing body of work by specifically focusing on the unique context of college students. By examining this specific demographic, the study aims to not only confirm the general link but also to empirically determine which of the individual PsyCap components are the most significant and influential predictors of happiness within this student population. This nuanced understanding is crucial for developing targeted interventions.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The primary research objectives guiding this investigation are as follows:

1. To quantitatively examine and describe the prevailing level of happiness among a representative sample of college students.
2. To rigorously explore and analyze the nature and strength of the relationship between overall psychological capital and subjective happiness among college students.
3. To precisely identify, through statistical analysis, the strongest and most significant predictors of happiness among the four core components of Psychological Capital (hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism).

HYPOTHESES

Based on existing literature and theoretical frameworks, the following hypotheses were formulated:

1. **H1:** Psychological capital is hypothesized to be positively and significantly correlated with happiness among college students.
2. **H2:** It is hypothesized that each individual component of PsyCap—namely hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism—will be positively and significantly correlated with happiness.

3. **H3:** Among the various PsyCap components, optimism is specifically hypothesized to emerge as the strongest and most influential predictor of happiness'

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study meticulously employed a quantitative, correlational research design. This design was chosen specifically to systematically examine and quantify the nature and strength of the relationships between the independent variable, psychological capital, and the dependent variable, happiness, without manipulating any variables. A correlational design is appropriate for exploring associations between variables as they naturally occur in a population.

SAMPLE

The participants in this study comprised a diverse group of 200 college students, carefully balanced to include an equal number of 100 males and 100 females. The age range of the participants was between 18 and 25 years. Participants were recruited from multiple universities located in the region, utilizing a stratified random sampling technique to ensure representation across different academic institutions and to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Stratified random sampling helps to ensure that specific subgroups within the population are adequately represented in the sample.

MEASURES

Two well-established and psychometrically sound instruments were utilized for data collection:

1. **Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS)** (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999): This is a concise yet robust four-item global scale designed to measure an individual's overall level of subjective happiness. Participants respond to questions about their happiness using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from "not a very happy person" to "a very happy person" or "not at all" to "a great deal". The SHS has demonstrated good reliability and validity in various populations.
2. **Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ-24)** (Luthans et al., 2007): This comprehensive 24-item self-report questionnaire is specifically designed to assess an individual's levels across the four core components of psychological capital: hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism. Each component is measured by six items, and participants respond on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The PCQ-24 is widely used in research and practice for its validated psychometric properties.

PROCEDURE

The data collection process was conducted entirely online to ensure convenience and accessibility for the student participants. Participants were invited via email or through university online platforms to complete a survey that included a demographic questionnaire, followed by the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) and the Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ-24). Prior to participation, all individuals were provided with a clear explanation of the study's purpose and assured that their responses would be kept strictly confidential and anonymous. Emphasis was placed on the voluntary nature of their participation, and informed consent was obtained electronically from all respondents. This ethical approach ensured participant comfort and data integrity.

DATA ANALYSIS

All collected quantitative data were meticulously analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. To examine the bivariate relationships between the individual components of PsyCap (hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism) and happiness, Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was performed. This statistical technique provides a correlation coefficient (r) indicating the strength and direction of a linear relationship. Subsequently, to identify the strongest and most significant predictors of happiness among the PsyCap components, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. Multiple regression allows for the examination of the predictive power of several independent variables on a single dependent variable, while controlling for the influence of other predictors. The significance level for all statistical tests was set at

$p < 0.05$.

RESULTS

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

The descriptive statistics provided valuable insights into the self-reported levels of happiness and psychological capital among the college students in the sample. The mean happiness score, as measured by the SHS, was found to be 5.8 with a standard deviation (SD) of 1.2. This indicates a moderate-to-high overall level of happiness within the student cohort. For the individual components of PsyCap, the mean scores were as follows:

- Hope: 4.9 (SD = 0.8)
- Efficacy: 4.7 (SD = 0.9)
- Resilience: 4.5 (SD = 1.0)
- Optimism: 5.0 (SD = 0.7)

These mean scores suggest that, on average, students reported relatively high levels across all four components of PsyCap, with optimism having the highest mean score and resilience the lowest, though all are generally positive.

CORRELATION ANALYSIS

The Pearson correlation analysis revealed significant positive relationships, thereby supporting the first two hypotheses (H1 and H2). A strong positive correlation was found between overall Psychological Capital and happiness ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that as an individual's overall PsyCap increases, their reported level of happiness tends to increase proportionally. Examining the individual components, significant positive correlations with happiness were also observed:

Hope and happiness: $r = 0.58$, $p < 0.01$

Efficacy and happiness: $r = 0.54$, $p < 0.01$

Resilience and happiness: $r = 0.50$, $p < 0.01$

Optimism and happiness: $r = 0.61$, $p < 0.01$

These results confirm that each component of PsyCap is individually linked to greater happiness among college students, with optimism showing the strongest correlation among the four.

REGRESSION ANALYSIS

To determine the predictive power of each PsyCap component on happiness, a multiple regression analysis was performed. The results of the regression analysis strongly supported the third hypothesis (H3), indicating that optimism and hope emerged as the most significant predictors of happiness. Specifically, optimism had a standardized beta coefficient of

$\beta=0.35$ ($p < 0.01$), and hope had a standardized beta coefficient of $\beta=0.29$ ($p < 0.01$). These findings suggest that for every one standard deviation increase in optimism, happiness is predicted to increase by 0.35 standard deviations, holding other variables constant. Similarly, for hope, a one standard deviation increase predicts a 0.29 standard deviation increase in happiness. Together, optimism and hope explained a substantial proportion of the variance in happiness, with an R-squared value of 0.42 ($R^2 = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$). This means that 42% of the variability in happiness among college students can be accounted for by these two PsyCap components. The overall regression model was statistically significant, indicating its predictive utility.

DISCUSSION

The comprehensive findings of this research strongly support all three formulated hypotheses, providing robust evidence for the pivotal role of psychological capital in fostering happiness among college students. The observed significant positive correlation between overall psychological capital and happiness underscores the idea that a stronger foundation of positive psychological resources directly contributes to higher levels of subjective well-being.

A particularly salient finding is the emergence of optimism as the strongest individual predictor of happiness, closely followed by hope. This outcome resonates powerfully with previous research in the field of positive psychology, which consistently highlights the profound impact of positive psychological resources on overall well-being (Avey et al., 2011; Seligman, 2011). Optimism, characterized by positive expectations for future outcomes, appears to buffer against negative experiences and foster a more positive outlook on life, which directly translates into higher happiness levels. Hope, which involves goal-directed thinking and the belief in one's ability to achieve those goals, provides a sense of purpose and direction that is inherently linked to feelings of contentment and accomplishment. While efficacy and resilience also showed significant positive correlations with happiness, their predictive strength was less pronounced compared to optimism and hope, suggesting a differential impact of the PsyCap components on happiness within this population.

These compelling findings carry significant practical implications, particularly for educational institutions and those involved in student support services. The results strongly highlight the critical need for developing and implementing targeted interventions specifically designed to enhance psychological capital among college students. Such interventions could include, but are not limited to, resilience training programs aimed at improving students' ability to bounce back from setbacks, and positive psychology programs that focus on cultivating gratitude, mindfulness, and optimistic thinking. By proactively fostering these positive psychological traits, universities can contribute meaningfully to improving not only the happiness levels of their students but also their overall mental health and academic success. This aligns with a broader educational philosophy that recognizes the importance of holistic student development.

CONCLUSION

This study provides unequivocal confirmation that psychological capital plays an indispensable and crucial role in determining the happiness levels of college students. The

research distinctively identifies optimism and hope as the most powerful predictors of happiness within this demographic. This finding strongly suggests that strategic efforts aimed at deliberately fostering and strengthening these specific traits among students could lead to significant enhancements in their overall well-being and life satisfaction.

Therefore, a clear and imperative recommendation emerges from these findings: universities and higher education institutions should proactively consider and actively incorporate comprehensive PsyCap development programs into their existing student support frameworks and curricula. Such programs could take various forms, including workshops on goal setting and problem-solving to cultivate hope, cognitive restructuring exercises to promote optimism, and training in coping strategies to build resilience. By integrating these initiatives, universities can create a more supportive and empowering environment that not only promotes academic achievement but also nurtures the psychological flourishing of their student body, preparing them for success beyond their academic careers.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Building upon the foundational insights gleaned from this correlational study, future research endeavors should strategically pivot towards exploring the complex causal relationships between psychological capital and happiness. This transition from correlation to causation can be achieved through the implementation of more rigorous research methodologies. Specifically, longitudinal studies are highly recommended, as they can track changes in PsyCap and happiness over extended periods, providing valuable insights into how these variables influence each other over time. This would allow researchers to observe if increases in PsyCap indeed precede and lead to increases in happiness.

Furthermore, the deployment of experimental designs would be particularly insightful. For instance, intervention studies that randomly assign participants to a PsyCap-enhancing program (e.g., a multi-week workshop on hope and optimism skills) versus a control group could provide strong evidence of causality. Such designs would allow for direct manipulation of PsyCap components and observation of subsequent effects on happiness. Future research could also delve deeper into specific intervention strategies, assessing their efficacy in improving distinct PsyCap components and, consequently, student well-being. Additionally, exploring potential mediating or moderating variables in the relationship between PsyCap and happiness (e.g., social support, academic stress) could provide further nuanced insights into this complex interplay. Investigating these avenues will significantly advance our understanding of how to effectively cultivate positive psychological resources for enhanced student well-being.

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