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Effect of an Optimistic Approach on Individual Life Satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the impact of an optimistic approach on an individual's life satisfaction. The study aims to understand the relationships between variables and determine whether they align with previous research findings showing that an optimistic approach benefits greater life satisfaction. The study was conducted in Pakistan. Two hundred participants were taken through purposive sampling, belonging to different socio-economic backgrounds. They were administered The Life Orientation Test (LOT) and Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). To establish inter-item consistency, Cronbach alpha value was found for LOT as ($\alpha = .69-.72$) and for SWLS as ($\alpha = .83-.92$). Results showed a positive & relatively strong correlation ($r=.473$, $n=200$, $p=.000$) between the two variables through Pearson correlation test. Further, Regression was applied, resulting in a highly significant relationship $f(1, 98) = p<0.05$, $R^2=.552$. Despite low optimism scores, a high level of life satisfaction was determined, and when optimism increases by 1 point, the life satisfaction score increases by 2,141 points. Based on the results of the study, the influence of optimism on life satisfaction in the context of Pakistan is discussed.

KEYWORDS: Social behaviour, individual differences, cognition, well-being, optimism, pessimism, life satisfaction, life orientation, Pakistan.

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Efecto de un enfoque optimista sobre la satisfacción con la vida individual

RESUMEN

El estudio explora el impacto de un enfoque optimista en la satisfacción con la vida de un individuo. El estudio tiene como objetivo comprender las relaciones entre las variables y determinar si se alinean con los hallazgos de investigaciones anteriores que muestran que un enfoque optimista beneficia una mayor satisfacción con la vida. El estudio se realizó en Pakistán. Se tomó un muestreo intencional de 200 participantes, pertenecientes a diferentes orígenes socioeconómicos. Se les administró la Prueba de Orientación de Vida (LOT) y la Escala de Satisfacción con la Vida (SWLS). Para establecer la coherencia entre ítems, se encontró el valor alfa de Cronbach para LOT como ($\alpha = .69-.72$) y para SWLS como ($\alpha = .83-.92$). Los resultados mostraron una correlación positiva y relativamente fuerte ($r = .473$, $n = 200$, $p = .000$) entre las dos variables mediante la prueba de correlación de Pearson. Además, se aplicó la regresión, lo que resultó en una relación altamente significativa $f(1, 98) = p < 0,05$, $R^2 = 0,552$. A pesar de las bajas puntuaciones de optimismo, se determinó un alto nivel de satisfacción con la vida, y cuando el optimismo aumenta en 1 punto, la puntuación de satisfacción con la vida aumenta en 2141 puntos. A partir de los resultados del estudio, se discute la influencia del optimismo en la satisfacción con la vida en el contexto de Pakistán.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Comportamiento social, diferencias individuales, cognición, bienestar, optimismo, pesimismo, satisfacción con la vida, orientación de vida, Pakistán.

Introduction

Optimism has gained interest in the field of research lately. The influence of optimism on physical health (Scheier et al., 2021), academic achievement (Gordeeva et al., 2020), reactions to stressful situations (DuPont et al., 2020), physical pain (Basten-Guenther et al., 2019), etc., is investigated. This approach to life defines every individual's decision-making style and what they are likely to do in a particular situation (Al-Dabbagh, 2020; Bacha & Azouzi, 2019). People who think positively – optimists – are more likely to put more effort into achieving their goals. In contrast, pessimists will have preconceived notions about the situation and will not try harder to attain their objective when faced with any obstacles (Blasco-Belled et al., 2022; Segerstrom et al., 2017; Thun & Bakker, 2018).

Confidence is the most important factor when determining which approach people use. Optimists have confidence in themselves and their powers; therefore, they usually assess

themselves positively (Lumbantobing, 2020; Scheier & Carver, 1992). On the other hand, pessimists always have difficulties believing in themselves since, according to them, nothing is in their control. Pessimistic people do not believe they have the power to take charge of their lives. The optimist will always see endless possibilities to get out of a problem and eventually do so. However, the pessimist sees only problems and obstacles and does not work hard enough to overcome them, thinking there is not much he can do. At the same time, pessimism can also be a kind of defensive strategy that provides an opportunity to make excuses in case of failure, removing doubts about the person's capabilities, and allows preserving self-esteem (del Mar Ferradas et al., 2017).

Optimism is considered an essential factor in life satisfaction (Kardas et al., 2019). However, an optimistic attitude leads to several problems that can negatively influence professional activity and personal life. Optimistic decision-makers may falsely perceive that they can control crisis events (Al-Dabbagh, 2020), and overconfidence in themselves and others hinders an adequate assessment of the situation Bacha and Azouzi (2019). Furthermore, optimism was related to greater cardiovascular reactivity to cognitive stressors and did not facilitate recovery from stress (DuPont et al., 2020).

Considering the above-mentioned review of the factors involved in this research, the study aims to understand the effect of an optimistic approach to life on an individual's life satisfaction. The current study aims to strengthen or weaken the findings of previous research on whether an optimistic approach is beneficial for greater life satisfaction. Specifically, we hypothesise that an optimistic approach will lead to greater life satisfaction than a pessimistic one.

This research would debar important patterns within psychological literature, highlighting the relationship between life satisfaction and optimism. The magnitude and direction of the relationship will be of special attention and disclosed at the end of this research. Although Pakistan's Human Development Index (HDI) value has increased from 0,400 (in 1990) to 0,544 (in 2021), the country is in 161st place among 191 countries of the world (Human Development Insights, 2022). It lags behind many other states in the South Asian region. This low ranking is a sign of less attention paid to health, education and

improved standard of living. Within such circumstances, when the extrinsic factors have been unable to ensure enough satisfaction in a person's life, then studying some intrinsic (intrapersonal) factors for creating life satisfaction could add considerable value to the field of research.

1. Literature Review

Pessimism, unlike optimism, is related to a negative self-concept, doubts about one's abilities and expectation of negative results (Chang, 2001; Lumbantobing, 2020). In Psychology, these two constructs are widely used to gauge an individual's cognitive status under observation. A person with an optimistic mindset expects good consequences from events; therefore, he or she reacts positively to emerging problems, too (Ginevra et al., 2017; Scheier & Carver, 1985). The study conducted by Ginevra et al. (2017) showed that a higher level of optimism and hope and lower pessimism could lead to a more positive perception of personal life since the person is better able to cope with difficult situations and is less vulnerable. In addition, it was found that higher optimism and lower pessimism could reduce the negative impact of psychological inflexibility in overcoming psychological problems in crises (Arslan et al., 2021). Authors who investigate the influence of optimism on life satisfaction also consider the relations between optimism/pessimism and neuroticism and depressiveness. The study of Bonsaksen et al. (2018) showed that dispositional optimism and general self-efficacy were related to a lower risk of depressiveness. Meanwhile, optimism and pessimism are the factors that allow us to predict the state of physical and psychological health (Peres et al., 2019). The fact that these factors impact the well-being of an individual is unrivalled.

Both pessimism and optimism manifest themselves by making a person adopt specific defensive or coping strategies. These strategies reveal how people deal with problems emerging at different stages of life or professional activity (del Mar Ferradas et al., 2017; Hwang & Choi, 2021). There is statistical evidence that optimistic people or people who perceive life positively are generally happier than those who have a low level of optimism about life or are pessimistic about the future (Blasco-Belled et al., 2022; Trudel-Fitzgerald et al., 2019). In addition, a study by Trudel-Fitzgerald et al. (2019) showed that higher levels of

optimism and happiness were associated with maintaining individuals' healthy lifestyles. Optimism is therefore associated with a healthy mental lifestyle which makes proponents of an optimistic lifestyle better at coping with stress and firmly controlling the problem-solving situation, which makes them cognitively stronger. Therefore, it is asserted that optimism is related to a healthy and happy life compared with pessimism.

Holistically, three divergent schools of thought are dedicated to studying pessimism and optimism concerning its impact on the person's life. 'Dispositional optimism', proposed by Scheier and Carver (1985), is considered a personality trait. This feature helps one understand the past and present and allows one to move into the future. According to Scheier et al. (2021), dispositional optimism has traditionally been treated as a bipolar construct with optimism at one end and pessimism at the other. However, optimism and pessimism may not be diametrically opposite but represent two independent but related dimensions, the relationship of which may determine the person's well-being.

Another perspective was proposed by Taylor (1989). According to his positive illusions theory, the human mind blocks out negative information and creates positive illusions that help cope with arising difficulties. This self-deception helps people to maintain a positive attitude, increase self-esteem, reduce stress, and improve psychological well-being. For example, the perception of an illusory loss of control can reduce the experiences of positive emotions (Kaufmann et al., 2019). However, although numerous studies have reported the effects of positive illusions on personal well-being, no such effects were found in the study conducted by Schimmack and Kim (2020).

The third perspective defines optimism as an explanatory style. According to Boyer et al. (2021), this theory explains all events by personalisation, permanence, and pervasiveness. In this context, sound events are explained as personal, permanent, and pervasive, while bad events as external, temporary, and specific. A study conducted by Garvin and Putri (2021) demonstrated that an optimistic explanatory style helped to maintain personal well-being during the pandemic. It is easier to cope with negative experiences when interpreted as temporary, specific, and impersonal.

However, contrary to earlier models discussed, this bias is not a personality trait in the definitive sense. Instead, it is a mere cognitive distortion or undermining of one's tendency to encounter an adverse event. In this context, defensive optimism can also mean unrealistic expectations and denial that there is an insurmountable problem (Gordeeva et al., 2020). However, both pessimism and optimism have a direct impact on the quality of life of an individual. Quality of life is associated or gauged in terms of health, wealth, social conditions and satisfaction of personal desires based on one's preference. It is noted that these variables are all subjective measures and vary from person to person. There are two distinct variables which can influence the quality of life. These terms are called optimism (low-level optimism may be termed pessimism) and the general adaptation of purpose. As stated earlier, there is core evidence to substantiate the claim that optimistic people are better at deploying coping strategies with unfavourable events, such as severe pathological illnesses. For example, a study by Maguire et al. (2021) shows that developing a sense of optimism and resilience is particularly important in interventions to increase the well-being of those limited by illness. In general, an optimistic view of life and one's ability to cope with stress can be beneficial when appraisal strategies, reframing or reasoning are applied, which help change the situation's perception (Erthal et al., 2021).

On the other hand, a relationship between optimism and narcissism is noted (Tailab et al., 2023). Kealy et al. (2022) found that narcissistic vulnerability combined with neuroticism was associated with loneliness and lower life satisfaction. This challenges the prevailing view that optimism is always a precursor to a happy life. In addition, in the long run, unrealistic optimism may harm the well-being of disadvantaged individuals (Li et al., 2020).

The other factor that is used in the study is life satisfaction. Kasprzak (2010) defined life satisfaction as a subjective process related to a practical and reflective approach to life, which encompasses the perception and assessment of the past. It is related to family, relationships (single people's satisfaction decreases most since they spend more time alone), and work (Hamermesh, 2020). In addition, satisfaction with life is also related to the socioeconomic conditions people encounter (Nadeem et al., 2020).

Studies investigating the relationship between optimism and life satisfaction show that the latter can increase when strengthening people's optimistic attitudes (Piper, 2022; Sany et al., 2023). According to Piper (2022), what people think about their future strongly relates to their current life satisfaction. Those with an optimistic view of the future feel more satisfied with life, while a pessimistic view of the future leads to lower life satisfaction. However, considering the complexity of the construct of optimism and the relations of life satisfaction not only to optimism but also to socioeconomic conditions, the question arises as to what extent optimism will influence life satisfaction in the case of Pakistan.

The hypothesis of the research: Optimism has a positive impact on life satisfaction.

2. Methodology

Participants. This study used purposive sampling to obtain participants for the research. There were 200 participants, of which 106 were females, and 94 were males. According to the inclusion criteria, only people above 20 were included in the study, and those above 45 were excluded. The participants belonged to different socio-economic statuses.

Instrumentation. Standardised tools were used for the current research.

The Life Orientation Test (LOT) was developed to assess individual differences in generalised optimism versus pessimism. The test contains ten items and only takes 10 minutes to complete. Some of the items in the questionnaire are used as filler items to reduce negative response bias. Internal consistency was checked for this test, and it showed to be adequate at baseline ($\alpha = .69$) and follow-up ($\alpha = .72$). Criterion validity was intense; the LOT-R was significantly negatively correlated with hopelessness ($r = -.65, p < .001$) and depression ($r = -.60, p < .001$).

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) was used to assess satisfaction with the participants' life; it was developed by Diener et al. (1985). It is a 5-item scale to measure global cognitive judgments of one's life satisfaction. Participants indicated how much they agreed or disagreed with each of the five items using a 7-point scale: 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (slightly disagree), 4 (neither agree nor disagree), 5 (slightly agree), 6 (agree) and 7 (strongly agree). The internal consistency of the scale was found to be high, with Cronbach's alpha of 0.83-0.92. Diener et al. (1985) worked on the development of 'The Satisfaction with Life Scale'. It focuses

on the formation and validation of the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). This scale assesses global life satisfaction. The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) was designed to report the concept of life satisfaction as a whole rather than to assess satisfaction with sub-dimensions of life (Diener et al., 1985). The scale had high reliability and internal consistency. Conceptually, the SWLS measures the 'discrepancy or balance' between one's life achievements and expectations. It is a validated tool to assess a person's satisfaction with his or her life. The scores of SWLS correlated on a level of moderately to high with other constructs of subjective well-being. The scale can be used with different age groups.

Procedure. To carry out the research, a sample was obtained through purposive sampling. Research participants were first given the consent form, then, The Life Orientation Test and the Satisfaction with Life Scale. Afterwards, the data from both scales was analysed to see if there was a relationship between optimism and life satisfaction.

3. Results & Discussion

Descriptive Analysis. Statistical analysis of descriptive measures was performed (see Table 1). It shows that there were 200 participants, and all scored firstly on optimism and then on life satisfaction. The average optimism score is 1.54, whereas the average life-satisfaction score is 4.47 on a five-point Likert scale with a standard deviation of 0.58 and 1.68, respectively. Skewness and Kurtosis are close to zero, indicating that data is normally distributed.

Correlation Analysis. Similarly, the Pearson correlation test was applied to analyse the association between the two variables, i.e., optimism and life satisfaction (see Table 2). A strong correlation was found as the value of association is 74.3 per cent, statistically significant as the p-value = .000, which is lesser than the benchmark ($p < 0.01$). Hence, based on this bivariate analysis of the relationship, it is found that there is a direct association between life satisfaction and optimism.

Regression Analysis. To analyse impact assessment, the Regression model has been applied to the data (Table 3), which shows the goodness of fit (R-square), i.e., 55.2 per cent explanatory power of the model. Moreover, the adjusted R-square is 55 per cent, which is very close to the R-square, indicating that the sample size is adequate. Furthermore, the ANOVA is highly

significant as $F\text{-stat} = 243.9$ ($F > 4$) followed by the sig value = .000 ($\text{sig} < 0.01$), which depicts that the overall model and goodness of fit both are significant.

Optimism has a positive and significant impact on life satisfaction. When the optimism score increases by one point (over a five-point Likert scale), the life satisfaction score increases by 2.141 points. Its $t\text{-value} = 15.617$ ($t > 2$), followed by the sig value = .000 ($\text{sig} < 0.01$), which shows that the relationship is significant at a 99% confidence interval. The results support the hypothesis.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Key Study Variables.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
				Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Optimism	200	1.5355	.58403	-.502	.172	-.864	.342
Satisfaction	200	4.4730	1.68304	-.370	.172	-1.147	.342
Valid N (list-wise)	200						

Table 2. Correlation between Optimism and Life Satisfaction.

		Optimism	Satisfaction
Optimism	Pearson Correlation	1	.743**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	200	200
Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	.743**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	200	200

Note. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Discussion. This research aimed to study the relation of the optimistic approach towards life to personal life satisfaction. All measures used in the study were significantly correlated, and the present study provides evidence supporting the positive relationship between optimism and life satisfaction. Participants reporting higher levels of optimism also scored

higher on life satisfaction. Through statistical analysis, it has also been seen that there was a positive relationship between optimism and life satisfaction which means that more optimistic people are more satisfied with life. This aligns with other studies showing that hope and optimism positively affect life satisfaction (Kardas et al., 2019; Piper, 2022).

Table 3. Showing Linear Regression between the Key Variables.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.743 ^a	.552	.550	1.12943

Note. Predictors: (Constant), Optimism

ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
1	Regression	311.123	1	311.123	243.901	.000 ^b
	Residual	252.571	198	1.276		
	Total	563.694	199			

a. Dependent Variable: Satisfaction

b. Predictors: (Constant), Optimism

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.186	.225		5.266	.000
	Optimism	2.141	.137	.743	15.617	.000

Dependent Variable: Satisfaction

However, it should also be taken into account that the mean of the optimism scores was quite low (1.54), which indicates that the respondents are, on average, less optimistic or more prone to pessimism. Meanwhile, the mean score for life satisfaction is particularly high (4.47), which shows that on average, respondents feel more satisfied with life. Although the study showed that optimism had a significant effect on life satisfaction and was very important, other

factors that would explain the high level of life satisfaction should also be sought. Especially considering that Pakistan's HDI is quite low.

Other factors can impact the relationship between optimism and life satisfaction, self-esteem, financial status, stability of relationships, job burnout, etc. Marcionetti and Castelli (2022) investigated Swiss teachers' dispositional optimism and life satisfaction by including burnout. It has been found that dispositional optimism, burnout, and job satisfaction were directly related to teachers' life satisfaction. Therefore, according to the authors, promoting self-directedness and good relationships with co-workers may be beneficial, seeking to reduce the risk of burnout and increase satisfaction with life and job.

Another study investigated the influence of religiosity on hope, optimism, and life satisfaction. Comparing the results of religious and non-religious groups of persons, it was found that religiosity was positively related to hope, optimism and life satisfaction (Uddin & Irshad, 2022).

The study was conducted in Pakistan, where Islam is an official religion established in the Constitution and is practised by more than 90 per cent of the population. According to Sholihin et al. (2022), life satisfaction is often measured using material criteria such as satisfaction with economic and social levels. However, their meta-analysis showed that the religiosity variable's influence was linear across samples and positively affected life satisfaction. Meanwhile, other studies show that life satisfaction in economically developed countries was related to the place of residence (satisfaction is lower in big cities) (Weckroth & Kemppainen, 2021) and was also influenced by health, economic security, and social support (Hsu & Wu, 2020). In addition, yet another study revealed that pessimistic expectations related to income were a factor in reducing personal well-being (Fan & Mahadevan, 2023).

As already mentioned, Pakistan ranks relatively low on the HDI. This indicator reflects the level of human potential and quality of life. It consists of factors such as average life expectancy, education, economic benefits, and output expressed in purchasing power (Dasic et al., 2020). These are the factors that should reduce people's life satisfaction in Pakistan, whereas our study shows that optimism was the factor that increased respondents' life satisfaction.

Economic growth is a long-term process; therefore, it would make sense for public policy to focus on those factors that could increase life satisfaction in the near term because both helplessness and optimism are not immutable since they can be learned (Chadwick, 2019; Schulman, 1999). In addition, it would make sense in the future to analyse how economic factors, religiosity and optimism affect the life satisfaction of Pakistan's residents, compared with the residents of more developed countries. It is important to note that, irrespective of culture, factors such as an individual's beliefs and religious practices have a positive impact on one's self-esteem, interpersonal sensitivity, and psychological well-being (Vveinhardt & Deikus, 2021, 2023). In this case, religiosity could be measured by the extent to which people nominally attribute themselves to religion and how they are involved in religious practices related to community participation, relationships with it, and its support.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the current study and relevant research conducted previously, it can be established that optimism significantly impacts life satisfaction and that the change in one variable will result in a change in the other. The current study establishes an understanding that the more optimistic approach a person opts for, the more satisfied with the life he or she will be. The more pessimistically people feel and think, the less satisfied they will be.

This study not only supplements knowledge about the relation between optimism and life satisfaction. It also broadens the understanding of optimism and life satisfaction in Pakistan's specific socioeconomic and cultural context. Hence, the key to being satisfied with life and everything around is to opt for an optimistic approach and see things positively rather than be pessimistic about issues in life. Since optimism can be learned, this should be considered by educationalists, psychologists, and counselors who help people solve personal problems.

Limitations

Considering the population targeted, the current study is limited due to the sample not being diverse; i.e., the sample should consist of people representing all age groups, socioeconomic statuses, educational backgrounds, etc. Secondly, the current study only focused on two factors. In contrast, other factors, like self-esteem, socioeconomic status,

relationship harmony, etc., can impact optimism and life satisfaction, which were not studied. Thus, these factors should be considered when working on similar research so that a wider area of research and discovery is provided. A broader comparative study in the South Asian region would also contribute to this.

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