

Role of Positive Psychological Constructs in Mental Health of School Teachers

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Abstract

This study was conducted with an aim to assess the role of positive psychological constructs namely self efficacy, hope, resilience, optimism, personal growth initiative, life satisfaction in determining the mental health of school teachers. Sample comprised of 200 school teachers with mean age 36.43 years. Using the multistage sampling technique the data were drawn from fourteen private/government schools located in Poonch and Jammu (Jammu and Kashmir). To measure the positive psychological constructs, Psychological Capital Questionnaire, Personal Growth Initiative Scale, and Life Satisfaction Scale were administered. Mental health was measured using General Health Questionnaire. Pearson's correlation and multiple linear regression using enter method was applied for the statistical analysis. The data were treated at both 0.05 and 0.01 level of significance. A significant and negative correlation was found between the positive psychological constructs and mental health. It reveals the reduction in emotional distress in the teachers with an increase in level of various positive psychological constructs. There has been significant contribution of hope and personal growth initiative in enhancing the mental health of the teachers. Findings are indicative of better mental health in the teachers high on positive psychological constructs. Mental health is related with the optimal functioning at the workplace. Implications for development of positive psychological constructs within the context of school teacher populations have been discussed.

Key words: *Life Satisfaction, Mental Health, Personal Growth Initiative, Positive Psychology, School Teachers*

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Introduction

The teachers in school settings are entrusted to involve in multifaceted tasks. They are to cater to the students, the best of their services and are required to fulfill the high demands placed upon them by the parents and also the school administration. Teaching is considered as 'high stress' profession (Kyriacou, 2001). The teachers are constantly submerged under great pressure placed upon them in a variety of situations. The work environment creates a lot of stress as the teachers constantly strive to achieve the time bound targets. This makes teaching in schools as a stressful occupation resulting in negative impact on the mental health. Cropley, Steptoe, and Joeke

(1999) revealed the existence of relationship between stressful working conditions and the mental health in the school teachers.

Mental health is a comprehensive and complex concept. It may be referred to as the condition marked with an absence of psychological distress. Mental health is defined as "a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community"(WHO, 2007). Poor mental health of teachers is crucial for the delivery of effective services and hence the holistic development of the students. Teachers, whose chronic mental health issues

are left undetected, could do untold harm to their students. As per Kornhauser (1965) mental health of employees is very important as they spend nearly one third of their time in their workplace. Previous research has shown that the positive traits and strengths might enhance quality of life through acting as preventive agent against any psychological problems and also help in buffering against negative psychological effects (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This could be accomplished by identifying positive psychological constructs that may help in alleviation of symptoms of psychological distress and help in enhancement of mental health (Avey, Luthans, Smith, & Palmer, 2010). They further stated that the current trend in psychological research is directed toward identifying the role of positivity in betterment of well being. The concept of positivity has recently been applied in the area of organizational behaviour (Luthans & Youssef, 2007). Positive organizational behavior emphasizes on developing the organization and the employees while nurturing the personal characteristics in employees.

Personal growth initiative (PGI) is an intentional inclination to improve on one's self in various areas of life (Robitschek, 1998). It comprises of cognitive and behavioural components. Personal growth experiences largely depend on the manner in which an individual carries out an evaluation of past, present and future likely experiences. An attempt is made to seek out and capitalize on opportunities for growth. PGI is aimed at bringing improvement and growth in an individual. PGI has been associated with mental health (Robitschek & Keyes, 2009).

According to Diener, Suh, Lucas, and Smith (1999) life satisfaction is person's subjective as well as global evaluation of the positivity of her/his life as a whole or with specific life domains. As per Shin and Johnson

(1978), life satisfaction is a global assessment of a person's quality of life and it is based on the criteria set by individual. An association between life satisfaction and mental health has been reported (Mehtar & Sekhri, 2013).

The personal characteristics such as self efficacy, hope, resilience and optimism have positive impact on mental health of employees (Estiri, Nargesian, Dastpish, & Sharifi, 2016). Mental health is improved with an increase in level of self efficacy. High self efficacy predicts high mental health (Bavojudan, Towhidi, & Rahmati, 2012; Kim, 2003; Muris, 2002; Ogunyemi & Mabekoje, 2007). On the other hand Parto (2011) has revealed complex relationship between self efficacy and mental health. Self efficacy could be crucial for determining the mental health as it brings the sense of self reliance in the employee even during the challenging situations (Bandura, 1997; Meier, Semmer, Elfering, & Jacobshagen, 2008). It helps in tackling ups and downs which create stress. Thus, it prepares firm ground for the development of better mental health. The employees high on optimism are better equipped with the coping strategies and are most likely to adapt at the workplace (Luthans and Youssef, 2007). Optimism is found to be inversely correlated with mental disorders and its symptoms (Chang & Sanna, 2001; Hart, Vella, & Mohr, 2008; Steele & Wade, 2004; Talbott, 2009). As per Snyder, Rand, and Sigmon, (2002) hope is perceived as the capability of an individual to plan in such a manner so that they are closer to the goal or are able to achieve the target. It is evident that hope is a positive motivational state. Snyder (2002) found an association between hope and mental health. Shorey, Snyder, Yang, and Lewin (2003), reported the impact of hope on the mental health. Amongst employees hope has been found to be related to general mental health (Avey, Luthans, Smith, & Palmer, 2010). The component of

optimism provides novice workable and most suited pathways to enable to adjust and adapt. Resilience has been found to be associated with mental health (Carver et al., 2005; Hartley, 2011; MacDonnell, Dastjerdi, Bokore, & Khanlou, 2012; Peng et al., 2012) as it provides protection from various mental health disorders. Resiliency enables an individual to withstand stressors and not manifest psychological dysfunction despite difficult circumstances. Resilience changes with circumstances (Rutter, 1981), and becomes operational during adverse circumstances. It is an ability to deal with tough times (Akhtar, 2012) and bouncing back while recovering from misfortune (Wandberg, 2001), hence it contributes to the mental health. Resiliency has demonstrated to have an association with mental health (Ferris, Sinclair, & Kline, 2005; Keyes, 2007).

With this backdrop following research questions were raised and answered in the study:

1. Is there any relationship between positive psychological constructs (self efficacy, hope, resilience, optimism, personal growth initiative, life satisfaction) and the mental health among school teachers?
2. Does each of the positive psychological construct contribute to teacher mental health?

Given the above research questions, the objectives and hypotheses stated below have been formulated:

Objectives

1. To determine the relationship between positive psychological constructs (self efficacy, hope, resilience, optimism, personal growth initiative, life satisfaction) and mental health among school teachers.
2. To investigate whether positive psychological constructs (self efficacy,

hope, resilience, optimism, personal growth initiative, life satisfaction) would be able to predict the mental health among school teachers.

Hypotheses

1. There is significant relationship between positive psychological constructs (self efficacy, hope, resilience, optimism, personal growth initiative, life satisfaction) and mental health among school teachers.
2. The positive psychological constructs (self efficacy, hope, resilience, optimism, personal growth initiative, life satisfaction) are the predictors of the mental health among school teachers.

Method

Sampling

Using the multistage sampling technique the data were collected from 200 teachers from seven schools in Jammu City and Surankote town each. The primary teachers teaching in various government and private schools in Jammu city and Surankote town (Poonch) in the state Jammu and Kashmir (India) formed the sample of this study. The teachers with minimum one year of service in a given school were included in the study. The mean age of participants was 36.43 years.

Procedure

For the collection of data, the purpose of the study was explained to the school authorities and the permission was sought. The teachers were contacted during the break time in the school. The consent for participation was obtained from each participant and confidentiality was assured. It took nearly 15 minutes to fill in the questionnaires. Though the questionnaires were self administering, every care was taken that the participants follow the instructions hence clear verbal instructions were

given. As soon as questionnaires were filled in, they were collected from the respondents. Using the scoring keys the scoring was done for all the scales. The data were coded to SPSS (20th version) and subjected to statistical analyses.

Tools

Psychological Capital Questionnaire (Luthans, Avolio, Avey, & Norman, 2007) is a twelve item and six point likert-type scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The items for twelve item scale are extracted from twenty four item version of the scale. There are four components in the scale namely self efficacy (items 1-3), hope (items 4- 7), resilience (items 8-10) and optimism (items 11-12). The score of each dimension is averaged and the composite score is also calculated. The PCQ-12 has shown to have high reliability ranging from .87 to .93 (Baron, Franklin, & Hmieleski, 2013; Luthans, Youssef, Sweetman, & Harms, 2013; Norman, Avolio, & Luthans, 2010).

The General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) is a self-administered tool used for detecting individuals with diagnosable common psychiatric disorders (Goldberg & Hillier, 1979) and for measuring psychiatric well-being. The 12-Item General Health Questionnaire (Goldberg & Williams, 1988) consists of 12 items, each one assessing the severity of a mental problem over the past few weeks using a 4-point Likert-type scale (from 0 to 3). A higher score indicates a greater degree of psychological distress.

Personal Growth Initiative Scale (PGIS) by Robitschek (1998) is a unidimensional self report measure of cognitive and behavioral aspects of intentional self change. The scale comprises of nine items on six point likert type scale with possible score range from nine to 54. Higher the score higher is the PGI. The internal consistency of PGIS is from .79 to .90 and test retest reliability is .74 (Robitschek, 1999). The convergent and

discriminant validity of the measure is reported to be high (Robitschek, 1998). There is a strong positive association in PGIS and psychological well being.

Satisfaction with life scale (SWLS) developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin (1985) is a five item unidimensional measure of global life satisfaction based on seven point likert scale. The measure can be administered on individuals at any age. It has demonstrated to have favourable psychometric properties. It has high internal consistency and temporal reliability. It has good convergent validity with the scales measuring subjective well being. It has discriminant validity from emotional well being scales (Pavot & Diener, 1993).

Results and Discussion

The result of some basic statistics (descriptive statistics) of variables is presented in the Table 1.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for the Positive Psychological Constructs and Mental Health

	N	Mean	S. D.
Self efficacy	200	15.6400	2.51236
Hope	200	20.1000	3.34003
Resilience	200	14.0750	2.79435
Optimism	200	10.6850	2.03136
PGI	200	42.3450	8.14479
Life satisfaction	200	26.0800	5.87419
Mental health	200	9.1750	5.24039

The Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was calculated for positive psychological constructs (self efficacy, hope, optimism, resilience, PGI, life satisfaction) and mental health (Table 2).

Table 2 Correlation between Positive Psychological Constructs and Mental Health of Teachers

Variables	Mental Health
Self efficacy	-.206**
Hope	-.361**
Resilience	-.172*
Optimism	-.152*
Personal Growth Initiative	-.366**
Life Satisfaction	-.248**

** Significant at .01 level

* Significant at .05 level

As per the Table 2 the correlation of all positive psychological constructs and mental health has been found to be negative and significant at .01 and .05 level. It reveals the reduction in emotional distress in the teachers with an increase in level of various positive psychological constructs. In the light of the previous studies reporting the similar findings (Carver et al., 2005; Hartley, 2011; MacDonnell,

Dastjerdi, Bokore, & Khanlou, 2012; Mehar & Sekhri, 2003; Peng et al., 2012; Robitschek & Kashubeck, 1999; Snyder, Lehman, Kluck, & Monsson, 2006) the hypothesis stating that there is significant relationship between positive psychological constructs (self efficacy, hope, resilience, optimism, personal growth initiative, life satisfaction) and mental health among school teachers is accepted.

A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to evaluate whether psychological constructs (self efficacy, hope, resilience, optimism, personal growth initiative, life satisfaction) predict mental health of the school teachers. The linear combination of psychological constructs (self efficacy, hope, resilience, optimism, personal growth initiative, life satisfaction) is significantly related to general mental health of the school teachers, $F(6, 193)=7.421$, $p < .001$. The multiple correlation coefficient was .433, indicating that 18 percent of variance of the general mental health can be accounted for by the linear

combination of psychological constructs (self efficacy, hope, resilience, optimism, personal growth initiative, life satisfaction) scores. The multiple R for the relationship between the set of independent variables and dependent variable is 0.433 which is moderate. The probability of the F statistic (7.421) for the overall regression relationship is <0.001 . This shows that there is statistically significant relationship between set of predictor variables i.e. psychological constructs (self efficacy, hope, resilience, optimism, personal growth initiative, life satisfaction) and the criterion variable (mental health).

Table 3 Psychological Constructs as Predictors of Mental Health

Predictor	β	t	Significance
Self Efficacy	.058	.354	.724
Hope	-.380	-2.665	.008
Resilience	-.044	-.314	.754
Optimism	.142	.728	.468
Personal Growth Initiative	-.151	-2.976	.003
Life Satisfaction	-.087	-1.372	.172

The results of the multiple linear regression is clearly shown in the Table 3. For self efficacy, the probability of t statistic is .354 for the β coefficient .058 is >0.01 . Hence it is concluded that self efficacy is not a significant predictor of mental health. The t value (-2.665) for the β coefficient -.380 is $<.01$ establishes that hope is a significant predictor of mental health. In case of resilience the β coefficient -.044 with t value (-.314) is $>.001$ hence the resilience fails to predict mental health. The t value (.728) for β coefficient for optimism is $>.05$ shows that optimism also does not predict mental health. The t value (-2.976) for the β coefficient -.151 is $<.01$ so personal growth initiative has a predictive value for the mental health. However

in case of life satisfaction, the β coefficient -.087 with t value (-1.372) is $>.001$ hence the life satisfaction is not significantly associated with mental health and does not predict it. It could be said that of all the positive psychological constructs considered in this study, only hope and PGI contribute significantly in prediction of the mental health of school teachers. This leads to partial acceptance of the research hypothesis that psychological constructs will be the significant predictor of mental health. The finding that there has been significant contribution of hope in enhancing the mental health of the teachers is in line with Shorey, Snyder, Yang, and Lewin (2003) and (Avey, Luthans, Smith, & Palmer, 2010). Positive

growth initiative was the strongest predictor of mental health. Robitschek & Keyes, 2009 also reported the similar findings. The findings obtained in the current study are important from the practical perspective.

Conclusion

The main purpose of the study was to find the relationship between positive psychological constructs with mental health and also to ascertain which positive psychological construct contributes to the mental health among the school teachers. The findings suggest that the hope and PGI are important and should be developed in the school teachers to enhance the level of mental health. These findings need to be confirmed by carrying out more studies with the larger sample and collected from different areas.

Implications

Based on the findings, recommendations are offered to the school administrators and policy-makers for an increased focus on developing positive psychological constructs in teachers which would focus on their mental health. Attempts should be made in provision of such training programs which would strengthen the positive psychological constructs and help in coping or overcoming the stressful work conditions.

Directions for future research

The findings have implications for teacher student relationship and therefore provide a rationale for the emergence of this study. The future studies should be conducted to ensure that the school teachers are in a state of adequate mental health. Future research may be oriented towards determining the causal relationships while incorporating the longitudinal designs.

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