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*Dr. Deepthi Hooda*

## Gender Differences in the Indices of Positive Youth Development and Happiness

Dr. Deepti Hooda

### Abstract

The present study aimed to examine gender differences in positive youth development (PYD) and happiness, as well as gender differences in the relationship between the five Cs of PYD and happiness. A sample of 500 students (undergraduate and postgraduate) with an age range of 17-22 years (mean age 19.74 years) was selected based on availability from the different institutes/departments of Maharshi Dayanand University, Rohtak. Gender differences in five Cs of PYD and happiness were studied by applying *t*-test. Results showed that females scored significantly higher on confidence, caring and connection. No gender differences were observed on competence, character and as well as on happiness. Correlation and regression analysis was applied separately for males and females in order to examine the gender differences in the relationship between the five Cs and happiness. The results of the present study highlight the need to design some gender-specific actions and programmes to foster and promote the five Cs of PYD in order to enhance happiness among youth.

**Key words:** Positive youth development, happiness, gender differences

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### INTRODUCTION:

Positive Youth Development (PYD) is a theoretical framework that focuses on identifying and understanding psychosocial strengths and providing positive social environments to youth which contribute to their holistic development and well-being, in turn enabling them to thrive (Richardson et al., 2017; Tomé, Gaspar de Matos, Reis, Gomez-Baya, Coelho, & Wiium, 2021). The development of Positive Youth Development (PYD) as a concept and framework can be attributed to several factors and historical trends. Traditional approaches to youth development focused on identifying and addressing behavioural problems, deficits, and risks. However, over time, especially with the emergence of the positive psychology movement, it was realised that a more holistic and strengths-based approach was needed to promote youth's well-being and positive development. This shift in perspective contributed to the development of PYD. Moreover, theories of human development progressed from merely

developmental stage-based approaches to more contextually influenced theories which led to a better understanding of the role of environment, relationships, and opportunities in youth's development. PYD emerged in response to these more nuanced understandings of human development.

The PYD framework operationalised positive youth development in terms of the “five Cs” of PYD—competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring (Geldhof et al., 2014; Lerner et al., 2014). Competence is an ability to effectively sail through contexts/environments to achieve desired goals. Confidence refers to feelings of personal agency, self-efficacy and self-worth. Character includes integrity, ethical values, a moral code of conduct and a sense of purpose. Caring indicates concern for others, and connection refers to supportive and reliable social relations (Geldhof et al., 2019). These five Cs of PYD are interlinked. Healthy development in all the five Cs are required for holistic development, healthy adjustment and wellbeing of youth

(Geldhof et al., 2019). According to this framework, when these five Cs are present, young people are more likely to experience happiness, well-being and holistic development.

The literature has highlighted and emphasised upon various correlates of PYD, such as academic achievement, mental health, wellbeing, self-regulation skills, prosocial behaviour, behavioural problems, mental disorders, sense of community and civic engagement (Acosta, Chinman, Phillips, 2021; Beck & Wiium, 2019; Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak & Hawkins, 2004; Chase, Warren, & Lerner, 2015; Crocetti, Erentaitė, & Zukauskienė, 2014; Durlak, et al., 2007; Olson & Goddard, 2015; Park, 2004; Onyeka, et al., 2021; Shek and Chai, 2020; Urke, Holsen, & Larsen, 2021; Zhu, & Shek, 2020). Happiness is one such correlate which appears to be associated with PYD, but is not much explored empirically.

Attaining happiness is a universal and ultimate pursuit. The concept of happiness is the keystone of positive psychology. According to King and Napa, (1998), happiness is regarded as an important aspect of a good and desirable life. Moreover, happiness is the subject matter of almost every individual's daily thoughts (Freedman, 1978). Tkach and Lyubomirsky (2006) defined happiness as the frequent experience of positive affective states rather than negative ones and the perception of progress toward important life goals. Thus, happiness can be conceptualised as the experience of well-being both in thoughts and feelings (Diener, 2000; Kahneman and Krueger, 2006).

Some studies have pointed out gender differences in well-being, mental health and psychological adjustment among youth. Higher anxiety and depression have been reported in females (Burani & Nelson, 2020; Farhane-Medina, Luque, Taberner, & Castillo-Mayén, 2022; McLean, Asnaani, Litz & Hofmann, 2011; Zhao et al. 2020); while no gender differences have been

observed in happiness (Mahon, Yarcheski & Yarcheski, 2005). Some studies reported significant gender differences in happiness (Namazi, 2022) and life satisfaction (Joshani, & Jovanović, 2020). However, only a few researchers have examined gender differences in the PYD components or attributes or have explored gender differences in PYD's relationship with happiness (Årdal, Holsen, Diseth, & Larsen, 2018). Females generally score higher on the 5Cs of PYD (Phelps, Balsano, Fay, Peltz, Zimmerman, Lerner, & Lerner, 2007; Lerner, Lerner & Phelps, 2008). On the other hand, Tomé, et al. (2021) found that males reported higher Competence, Confidence and connection; and no gender differences in character and caring. Årdal et al. (2018) observed that females scored higher on character, connection and caring, and males scored greater on confidence, whereas they observed no gender difference in competence. Gomez-Baya et al. (2019) found that girls had higher scores on connection, caring, and character than boys, while boys showed greater competence and confidence, were less depressive and anxious, and had more frequent physical activity than girls. A few studies found girls to be more prosocial, empathetic and assertive than boys (Carlo & Randall, 2002; Einolf, 2011; Garaigordobil, 2009). These differences in PYD and mental health may be because of the gender differences in socialisation within the developmental contexts such as family, friends, peers, media, culture and community that communicate gender roles, gender stereotypes and inequities (Leaper & Friedman, 2007). These developmental contexts, especially culture, play a significant role in shaping youth's experiences, values, beliefs, behaviour and opportunities, thereby influencing their development. So, cultures may influence how youth interacts with others and engage in their communities differently. There's a dearth of studies that assess gender differences in positive youth development as an indicator of happiness among youth, especially in the Indian population. Moreover, researches in this area are in a piecemeal manner. In order to gain a

better understanding, the present study was conducted to assess gender differences in the five Cs of PYD and its relationship with happiness among youth.

### Objectives:

1. To assess gender differences in the five Cs of positive youth development and happiness.
2. To assess the relationship between the five Cs of positive youth development and happiness as a function of gender.
3. To assess the contribution of the five Cs of positive youth development in predicting happiness as a function of gender.

### Hypotheses:

1. There would be significant gender differences in the five Cs of positive youth development and happiness.
2. There would be significant association between the five Cs of positive youth development and happiness that would vary as a function of gender.
3. There would be significant contribution of the five Cs of positive youth development in predicting happiness that would vary as a function of gender.

### Method

#### Sample:

A sample of 500 students (undergraduate and postgraduate) with an age range of 17-22 years (Mean age = 19.74 years) was selected on the basis of availability from the different institutes/ departments of Maharshi Dayanand University, Rohtak. The sample consisted of 226 males and 274 female participants.

#### Tools used:

*Positive Youth Development - Short form* developed by Geldhof et.al, (2014) was used to assess the five Cs of PYD. The questionnaire contained 34 items divided into five dimensions measuring 5 C's of positive youth development (i) Competence, (ii) Character, (iii) Connection, (iv) Caring, (v) Confidence. Positive Youth Development

questionnaire is based on 5-point Likert rating scale ranging from 1 as strongly disagree to 5 as strongly Agree. The scale possesses good psychometric properties. A global measure of PYD and the individual Five Cs of PYD consistently correlate with important criterion measures (i.e., contribution, depressive symptoms, and problem behaviors) in expected ways (Geldhof et.al, 2014).

*Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS)*, developed by Lyubomirsky & Lepper (1999), assesses global subjective happiness. The scale consists of four items with a response format of 7-point rating scale. SHS has high internal consistency, good reliability and sound validity that confirms the use of this scale to assess the construct of subjective happiness. The scale is suitable for use with college and high school students and community adults.

#### Procedure:

To fulfil the aim of the present study, participants were contacted individually. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. After establishing rapport with the individual participant, the scales of PYD and happiness were administered one by one. Instructions for each scale were provided separately. The order of presentation of the scales was randomized to avoid any inadvertent bias in answering items. It was assured that the participants have filled each item and had not left any blank items. Afterwards, the scales were scored as per the manuals and the scores were tabulated.

The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, inferential analysis (mean comparisons), correlations analysis and multiple regression analysis through SPSS software (IBM SPSS Statistics 25).

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to assess gender differences in the five Cs of positive youth development and happiness t-test was applied. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics (i.e., means and standard deviations) of the variables under study for males and females, the table also shows the results of mean comparisons

of males and females on five Cs of PYD and happiness among youth. The results in Table 1 depict significant gender differences in three out of five Cs of PYD, which are confidence, caring and connection. Females scored significantly higher on confidence, caring and connection than males among youth. This means females have more positive internal feelings about self-regarding self-esteem, self-efficacy and self-worth than males. Females also express greater love, empathy, and sympathy for others than males. Compared to males, female youth possess greater positive social connections with family, friends and the community they interact with, like neighbours, school, college, workplace, religious places, and society. No gender differences were observed on two Cs of PYD i.e. competence and character. As hypothesised, some gender differences in the five components of PYD were observed. The results of earlier studies exploring gender differences in the five Cs of PYD have not been very conclusive. But

most of the studies have found that females show more caring and connection which supports our findings (Ardalet al., 2018; Gomez-Baya et al., 2019; Gomez-Baya et al., 2021; Gomez-Baya et al., 2022). The present study also found that females scored higher on confidence than males; these results are contrary to the findings of earlier studies that reported higher confidence in males (Ardal et al., 2018; Gomez-Baya et al., 2019; Gomez-Baya et al., 2021; Gomez-Baya et al., 2022; Tomé et al., 2021). Previous studies also contradict the finding of the present study that no gender differences exist in competence and character (Gomez-Baya et al., 2019; Gomez-Baya et al., 2021; Gomez-Baya et al., 2022; Tomé et al., 2021). In the case of gender difference in character, the present study finds support from the results of Ardal et al. (2018). These differential outcomes could be because of differences in gendered socialisation across different cultures that transmit differences in gender roles and gender stereotypes.

**Table 1**  
*Descriptive statistics and Gender differences: Mean comparisons on 5 Cs of PYD and Happiness*

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	t
Competence	Male	226	18.8673	4.84333	-0.374	.908
	Female	274	19.2409	4.35011		
Character	Male	226	27.8805	5.54327	-0.904	1.784
	Female	274	28.7847	5.71813		
Confidence	Male	226	21.7832	5.02986	-2.060	4.560**
	Female	274	23.8431	5.02457		
Caring	Male	226	21.1195	4.82943	-1.859	4.355**
	Female	274	22.9781	4.68177		
Connection	Male	226	27.6372	6.50615	-2.042	3.568**
	Female	274	29.6788	6.25342		
Happiness	Male	226	18.8540	4.55592	-0.310	.783
	Female	274	19.1642	4.28543		

The results in table 1 also reveal no gender difference in happiness among youth. The present study's findings are supported by Moirangthem and Ojha (2022), who found no gender differences in happiness among youth (2021; Namazi, 2022). There is complexity in understanding gender

elderly Indians. But these results were contradicted by studies that report females are happier than males (Inglehart, 2002; Matud, Bethencourt, Ibáñez, Fortes, & Díaz,

differences in happiness, life satisfaction and well-being (Bartram, 2022; Becchetti&Conzo, 2022; Montgomery, 2022; Stevenson & Wolfers, 2009), which may be because of these related and overlapping concepts (e.g. happiness, life satisfaction, flourishing, thriving, positive affect, etc.); and their measures or scales. Another reason for the variations in the outcome of gender differences in happiness may be because of the changes that occur across the lifespan in terms of life satisfaction, happiness and well-being (Booker, Kelly & Sacker, 2018; Inglehart, 2002). There might also be other determinants, like religion, social norms, and

gender roles, that may possibly cause gender differences in happiness, well-being and life satisfaction.

Further, correlation and regression analyses were applied separately for the two genders to understand the role of the five Cs in happiness for male and female youth. The results of the correlational analysis showed that all five components of positive youth development significantly correlated with happiness for both males and females. The correlation coefficients between five Cs of PYD and happiness were higher in the case of females than males.

**Table 2**

*Coefficients of correlation between the Five Cs of positive youth development and happiness among youth*

	Gender	Five Cs of PYD				
		Competence	Character	Confidence	Caring	Connection
Happiness	Male	.423**	.289**	.413**	.157**	.346**
	Female	.352**	.403**	.446**	.283**	.446**

**Table 3**

*Positive Youth Development (Five Cs) as predictors of Happiness among males and females (Stepwise Regression analysis)*

Gender	Criterion Variable	Predictors	R <sup>2</sup>	Δ R <sup>2</sup>	B	SE-B	Beta
Male	Happiness	Step 1	.179		.261**	.068	.278**
		Step 2	.223	.044	.230**	.065	.254**
	Happiness	Step 1	Connection	.199		.194**	.044
Step 2		Confidence	.253	.054	.241**	.055	.283**

The results of the regression analysis revealed that there are gender differences in the significant predictors of happiness and their contribution to happiness. The happiness of males was significantly predicted by competence and confidence, accounting for 17.9% and 4.4% of variance, respectively. The direction of influence is positive both for competence (B= .261,

p<0.01) and confidence (B= .230, p<0.01). Higher competence and confidence predicted more happiness in male youth. Competence and confidence together accounted for 22.3% of the variance in happiness among males. Whereas in the case of females, happiness was predicted by connection and confidence, accounting for 19.9% and 5.4% of the variance in happiness, respectively. The

direction of influence is positive both for connection ( $B = .194, p < 0.01$ ) and confidence ( $B = .241, p < 0.01$ ). This means more connections and higher confidence predicted greater happiness in females. Connections and confidence together accounted for 25.3% of the variance in happiness among females. From the present results, it was also observed that the components of PYD have a greater influence on happiness in the case of females than males among youth. The results of the present study obtained a different set of PYD predictors for males and females, thereby indicating the effect of gender on the relation between the five Cs of PYD and happiness. The most significant predictor of happiness for males was competence; for females, it was connection. This means that positive views about one's abilities and capacities predict happiness among males, whereas positive bonds with people and communities predict happiness in females. It was also observed that confidence was a significant predictor of happiness for both females and males, revealing self-worth, self-regard and self-efficacy as essential characteristics that should be promoted among young people. The results of the present study do not completely align with the findings of the earlier studies on different cultures, thereby indicating the influence of culture on the five Cs and their relation with happiness.

The main limitation of the current investigation was that a convenience sample was assessed, so the generalizability of the findings is limited. Variations in the outcomes of the present study and earlier studies highlight the importance of considering social and cultural factors while working on the happiness and related variables. As happiness and well-being change across the lifespan, it is important to assess the effect of age on such variables. Assessing gender and age interaction effects would also be of great interest. Despite these limitations, the findings of the study suggest some practical implications.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

The findings of the current study contribute to the limited knowledge of gender differences in the five Cs of PYD and their contribution in predicting the happiness of male and female youth. The results suggest significant gender differences in three Cs of PYD i.e. confidence, caring and connection, where females scored higher on all the Cs than males. The present results also highlight the contribution of the two Cs i.e. competence and confidence, in promoting happiness among males. In the case of females, connection and confidence contributed to enhancing happiness. These findings on gender differences in the components of PYD and their role in happiness lay emphasis on the need to include certain gender-specific programs and actions to acquire, develop and promote the 5Cs. This calls for designing and developing gender-specific interventions to promote positive youth development, which would increase the efficacy of the intervention programs by focusing on the gender-specific needs to strengthen the five Cs of PYD that promote happiness among males and females. Thus, gender-sensitive policies are highly recommended to promote holistic development and happiness among youth.

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