

SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING AND SELF-ESTEEM OF POST-GRADUATE STUDENTS IN PAKISTAN

Farva M. Butt
Offenbach am Main, Germany

Using a convenient sample of 200 postgraduate students, the present study examined the effect of gender and subject of study on subjective well-being, self-esteem and life satisfaction. It was assumed that self-esteem will be a significant predictor of subjective well-being and life satisfaction. Rosenberg's Self Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) and Index of Well-Being (Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1976) were used to measure the study variables. The results supported the research hypotheses partially. Male students obtained significantly higher mean life satisfaction score than their female counterparts. Significant gender differences did not appear on other measures. Faculty also did not reveal significant differences on any of the three measures. Self-esteem correlated positively with subjective well-being and life satisfaction and explained significant amount of variances (18%) in subjective well-being and life satisfaction. These findings are compared with other studies that examined hypotheses similar to the assumptions of the present study.

Key words: subjective well-being, self-esteem, post-graduate students, Pakistan

Subjective well-being (SWB) is a multidimensional and emerging concept of psychology. It assesses the degree of respondent's satisfaction with their lives and their feelings of well-being (Catanzaro, 1998). According to Campbell, Converse and Rodgers (1976) well-being can be defined as a sense of satisfaction with one's physical and psychological health, circumstances and life style.

The concept of subjective well-being has many different aspects (Diener, 2000; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Fiest, Bodner, Jacobs, Miles, & Tan, 1995) which can be divided into cognitive and affect aspects. Life-satisfaction is a cognitive

aspect of subjective well-being (Andrews & Withey, 1976; Diener, 1984; Diener et al., 1999; Veenhoven, 1996). The present study also focused on life-satisfaction.

According to Bridle (1984) self-esteem is an evaluation process which determines one's judgment about self. Blascovich and Tomaka (1993) defined self-esteem as an individual's sense of self worth or the extent to which person values, approves of, admire or likes him or herself. Judge, Locke, and Dunham (1997) defined self-esteem as people's approval of themselves.

Previous research on gender in relation to self-esteem has been fairly consistent. Dukes and Martinez (1987) indicate that gender has significant effect on different groups, as compared to males their female counterparts have higher levels of self-esteem

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Farva Mansoor Butt, Bettina Straße. 9, Offenbach am Main 63067, Germany. E-mail: Farva_malik@hotmail.com

on public domain trait across black, Native Americans and Asian groups. Most of previous literature also shows that females have lower levels of self-esteem during adolescence as compared to males (Cairns, McWhirter, Duffy, & Barry, 1990; Chubb, Fertman, & Ross, 1997; Martinez & Dukes, 1991; Quatman & Watson, 2001) and greater depressive mood (Marcotte, Fortin, Potvin, & Papillon, 2002). Some researchers have also indicates that in comparison with males, females shows not only lower levels of self-esteem, but their self-esteem decreases and depressive symptoms increase over time during adolescence (e.g., Robins, Trzeniewski, Tracy, Gosling, & Potter, 2002)

Lucas and Gohm (2000) found very small gender differences in subjective well-being by using two independent international samples. Campbell et al. (1976) discovered that demographic factors such as age, sex, education and marital status have less than 20% of variance in SWB, whereas Andrews and Witheys (1976) explained 8% of variability in life-satisfaction using demographic variables, and Argyle (1999) found that demographic variables could only predict 15% of the variability in SWB. Some studies on positive well-being found that females reported higher levels of happiness and life-satisfaction than males (Wood, Rhodes, & Whelan, 1989) whereas a meta-analysis (Haring, Stock, & Okun, 1984) indicated that males were slightly happier than their female counterparts.

Past researches regarding gender differences of subjective well-being

have produced inconsistent results. People's circumstances, values, goals, personality traits and culture are also very important in their subjective well-being. Past researches also indicate that major personality traits were also very important in determining life-satisfaction (Ramanaiah, Detwiler, & Byravan, 1997).

Diener, Oishi, and Lucas (2003) indicated that not only personality traits like extraversion, neuroticism, and self-esteem can explain a significant amount of the variance in level of SWB, but life circumstances and culture also influence it in long-term levels. Cha (2004) examined the subjective well-being of Korean college students and its relation with personality constructs, such as self-esteem, collective self-esteem and optimism. Korean students scored low in life satisfaction and affective well-being compared to students of other nations. Cheng and Furnham (2003) describe from their study of personality, self-esteem, and demographic predictions of happiness and depression that self-esteem and gender had a direct predictive power on happiness.

Zhang (2005) found that among two self-esteem and five big personality factors collective self-esteem was a second most powerful predictor of life domain satisfaction and explained 20% of variance in it. According to Cathrine (2000) three different constructs of personality self-esteem, perceived control and optimism form well-being. Previous studies also indicate that not only in individualistic cultures but also in collective cultures self-esteem has strong positive association with life satisfaction (Arrin-

dell, Heeink, & Feij, 1999; Kwan, Bond, & Singelis, 1997)

Previous researches indicate that subjective well-being has strong association with many personality constructs that is why it was assumed that self-esteem will be the predictor of SWB. Secondly, previous research did not focus post-graduate students. Post-graduate students of educational institutions at Lahore form an important section of Pakistani population. Their psychological change, well-being, self esteem and life-satisfaction become crucial because of the national and international events taking place with the beginning of 21st century. Thirdly, previous findings indicate that the link between self-esteem, subjective well-being and life-satisfaction is not consistent, if there are differences in people's background. Therefore, defining boundary condition for the relationship between self-esteem and subjective well-being becomes important and present research focused gender as boundary condition in this Eastern culture as most past researches were employed on Western population.

So there were two main objectives of the study; first, to test the relationship among subjective well-being, life-satisfaction and self-esteem with Pakistani post-graduate students and, second, to estimate the effect of demographic variables (gender and faculty) on extent of these variables in Eastern culture of Pakistan. The main hypotheses of the current study were:

1. Science and arts students will differ significantly in terms of their average scores on measures of subjective well-being, life-satisfaction and self-esteem.

2. Male and female postgraduate students will differ significantly in terms of their average scores on measures of subjective well-being, life-satisfaction, and self-esteem.
3. Self-esteem will be a significant predictor of subjective well-being and life-satisfaction.

Method

Participants

The convenient sample included 200 M.A. / M.Sc. Students from science and arts faculties in equal number (50% men) and (50% women) from two universities situated in Lahore. Mean age of male science students was 21.96 ($SD = 1.12$) and that of females was 21.22 years ($SD = .84$). Mean age of male arts students was 22.56 ($SD = 1.61$) and of female arts students was 21.24 years ($SD = 1.13$).

Instruments

The following tools of measurement were employed in this research.

1. Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965)

The original Rosenberg's Self-esteem Scale (1965) is 4 point Likert type scale, which was modified to 5 point scale scored as strongly agree (5), agree (4), undecided (3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1). The example of scale items are: "I feel that I have number of good qualities." "All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am failure." The total scores range from 10 to 50 with higher scores presenting

higher self-esteem. Previous studies reported significant Cronbach's alpha ranging from .64 to .75 (Butt & Imam, 2002; Imam, 2003; Stewart et al., 1999.) For the present sample, item-total correlations were statistically significant ranging from .40 to .63 $p < .01$ and coefficient alpha was .64, $p < .0001$.

2. *Index of Well-Being (Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1976)*

For measuring subjective well-being, the standardized Index of Well-Being developed by Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers (1976) was used. The Index of Well-Being consists of two parts. First part consisted of Index of General Affect, having eight items on semantic differential scales, namely, boring-interesting, miserable, enjoyable, useless-worthwhile, lonely-friendly, empty-full, discouraging-rewarding, disappointing, hopeful, 'brings out the best in me' 'doesn't give me much chance', and second part consist of a single item for assessment of life-satisfaction. The total scoring range on Index of Well-Being was 9 to 63. It has been standardized on a large sample of American adults aged 18 and above. The Index of General Affect had a Cronbach's alpha of .89 and this index correlated ($r = .55$) with the life-satisfaction question. The test-retest reliability at eight months interval was .56. The Well-Being Index correlated with the measures of fear and worries ($r = .20$ & $.26$), with measure of personal competence ($r = .35$) and the Index of Affect correlated ($r = .52$) with the measure of happiness (Campbell et al., 1976). For pre

sent sample, coefficient alpha for index of well-being is .81, $p < .0001$. Item-total correlations were also significant (range = .51 to .71).

Demographic information including age, education and gender was also obtained from the participants.

Procedure

Using purposive sampling technique the data were collected from different (Science and Arts) faculties of two universities of Lahore. Permission was obtained from authorities of Universities. The two scales were administered in group setting. The size of the group ranged from 5 to 10 participants. In most cases it took about 15 to 20 minutes to fill the two scales. The cover page of the scale booklet briefly described the purpose and nature of the present research and assured the participants that their identification will be anonymous and that no person other than the researcher would have access to their data. All participants of the study participated voluntarily. The response rate was 99%.

Results

The data were analyzed through SPSS for Windows, version 11.00. Descriptive statistics were computed to summarize the data. Independent sample t-tests were computed to examine the effect of gender and subject of study on the measures of subjective well-being, life satisfaction, and self-esteem. Regression analyses were conducted to see whether self-esteem predicted subjective well-being and life satisfaction significantly.

Table 1 shows average subjective well-being, self-esteem and life satisfaction scores and SD of male and female participants on all the three measures. Male students obtained significantly higher mean life-

satisfaction scores than females. These results indicate that male and female post-graduate students do not differ significantly on their average scores on other two measures.

Faculty-wise mean SWB, SE, LS

Table 1

t-test, Mean Scores and Standard Deviations on Variables for Gender

Measure	Male	(n = 100)	Female	(n = 100)	<i>t</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
SWB	41.09	8.50	40.15	9.50	.739
SE	36.53	5.24	35.70	5.52	1.09
LS	5.58	1.03	5.06	1.33	2.18*

df = 198. **p* < .05.

Note: SWB = Subjective Well-being, SE = Self-esteem and LS = Life satisfaction

Table 2

t-test showing Difference in Variables by Faculty of Arts and Science

Measure	Science	(n = 100)	Arts	(n = 100)	<i>t</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
SWB	40.27	9.29	40.97	8.71	.55
SE	36.10	5.23	36.21	5.56	.14
LS	5.24	1.60	5.31	1.21	.35

df = 198. *p* = ns.

Table 3

Correlations among Variables (N = 200)

	1	2	3
1. Subjective wellbeing	-	-	-
2. Life satisfaction	.48*	-	-
3. Self-esteem	.40*	.38*	-

**p* < .01.

Table 4*Predictors of Subjective Well-Being and Life-Satisfaction (N=200)*

Predictor	B	SE B	<i>B</i>
Gender	-.78	1.38	-.04
Faculty	.78	1.38	.04
Self-esteem	.76	.11	.42*

 $R^2 = .18$, $*p < .05$.

score and standard deviations are indicated in Table 2. The results show that the science and arts students do not differ significantly in terms of their mean SWB, SE and LS scores.

Table 3 indicates inter-scale correlations for the whole sample. All correlations were highly significant at $p < .01$.

Presence of significant correlations among the study variables indicated that it was desirable to run regression analysis. Table 4 indicates simple regression to predict subjective well-being and life-satisfaction as a whole. Self-esteem constituted a significant amount of variance, $R^2 = .18$, $F(1,198) = 14.31$, $p < .05$.

Discussion

With regard to hypotheses that male and female post-graduate students have different levels of subjective well-being, self-esteem and life satisfaction, the findings of study do not confirm the present assumption completely. Only on measure of life satisfaction, male students have significantly higher mean scores than their female counterparts, whereas the

mean scores do not show significant gender difference on other two measures of self esteem and subjective well-being. Generally in Eastern cultures, females have less supportive cultural background as compared to males as Zhang and Leung (2002) found that the relationship between individual self-esteem and life-satisfaction was stronger in male group than in female participants as well as in older people than in younger group in Chinese culture. This was the basis for assuming gender differences in terms of mean scores on all three measures. The present sample involves post-graduate students of well reputed and highly preferred educational institutions of Lahore. Further, most of the students studying at these institutions enjoy supportive familial background. Perhaps they belong to a culture where males and females are given approximately equal importance. This might have reduced any overall gender differences in average scores of three measures.

The present findings do not support the hypotheses that the arts and science students will differ in terms of average of their subjective well-being,

self-esteem and life satisfaction scores. The author could not locate any previous study dealing with faculty of study difference in terms of average SWB, SE and LS. Faculty difference in terms of average scores on the three measures were assumed on the basis of today's Pakistani society, in which the study of science is given more weightage than study of arts. The present results show the absence of any faculty difference on these three measures. These days in Pakistani society higher study is a source of prestige. Higher education increases the self-esteem of the individuals and post-graduation is a higher form of education. Perhaps post-graduate students give more importance to their preference of subjects of study than outcome of the study. This may be the cause of the two groups having non-significant difference in their mean subjective well-being, self-esteem and life satisfaction scores. These findings support Mayers and Diener's (1995) point of view that as compared to demographic variables like age, race, sex and income, psychological variables such as one's traits, close relationships and culture provide full explanations for happiness.

The findings of present study support the hypotheses asserting significant positive correlation among subjective well-being, self-esteem and life satisfaction scores of post-graduate students. These three variables were strongly associated with each other. The present results support the previous findings showing strong positive and significant correlation among these three variables. Moreover, results from multiple regressions con-

firmed that self-esteem was still an important and significant predictor of subjective well-being and life satisfaction. The strength of relationship between them support some previous findings of collective culture as magnitude of correlation was significantly high ($r = .39$) for Chinese college students by Chen, Cheung, Bond and Leung (2006) and Hong Kong sample by Kwan et al. (1997) was $r = .38$. But these correlation were weaker as compared to strong correlations of individualistic cultures like USA, where, for instance, correlation was .55 in an adults' sample (Campbell, 1981) and .54 in a sample of college students (Kwan et al., 1997). Neto (1993) found that in an adolescent sample, self-esteem is a strongest predictor of satisfaction with life. In collective cultures, self-esteem and life-satisfaction are typically related, but not strongly as in individualistic Western nations (Lucas et al., 1996). So, on the basis of results it has been concluded that self-esteem has strong positive association with subjective well-being and life-satisfaction and also explained significant amount of variance in subjective well-being and life-satisfaction on the whole. Moreover, gender has significant effect on life-satisfaction but not on self-esteem and subjective well-being whereas faculty did not have significant effect on any of the three measures.

Limitations and Suggestions

The present study has some limitations also. Firstly variables like subjective well-being, life-satisfaction and self-esteem should be studied longitudinally rather than cross-

sectionally. Longitudinal studies can provide more comprehensive understanding of these variables. Secondly, the sample of the study was restricted to only two universities so it is recommended that study should be replicated with broad postgraduate students' samples from different universities of Pakistan. Thirdly, additional research is needed with other types of samples to see whether results could be generalized to collective cultures. Finally, the study was based on gender and faculty differences only, so to test the effects of demographic variables more variables like socio-economic status, age, etc. should be included in future research.

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Received February 2007

Revision received May 2009