

# Effects of optimism on health



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## Optimism and Health

According to Carver, Scheier and Segerstrom (2010), optimism is a trait that determines the extent to which favorable outcomes are to happen to people in the future (p. 1). It is further stated that the difference between optimists and pessimists determine how they cope with adversities and confront the problems that face them in life (Carver, Scheier, & Segerstrom, 2010). This essay will therefore be looking at the effects of optimism on both physical and psychological health.

There are at least two measurement approaches of optimism (Carver, Scheier, & Segerstrom, 2010). One involves the use of the Life Orientation Test (LOT) or the Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R), which is a direct measure based on the expected outcomes of people in their lives; whether they expect good or bad. The second approach is based on the people's expectancies of their future based on their past's interpretations. Several studies have been conducted to determine optimism and its effects on individual's health. However, the area of the effect of optimism on physical health has not been thoroughly exploited compared to health psychology (Carver, Scheier, & Segerstrom, 2010, pp. 11-12).

## Optimism and Physical Health.

Research has shown that optimists compared to pessimists report less pain, better physical functioning, experience fewer physical symptoms, and less likely to be re-hospitalized following coronary artery bypass surgery (Rasmussen, Scheier, & Greenhouse, 2009). A study conducted by Rasmussen, Scheier and Greenhouse (2009) aimed at determining the

strength of the link between optimism and physical health through a meta-analytic review of 84 studies. The review was quantitative in nature focusing on multiple outcomes that affect physical health. Rasmussen, Scheier and Greenhouse (2009) study determined that in order to differentiate between effect sizes (ESs) in different studies, as they did their meta-analysis, it was important to consider the manner of assessment of physical health in those studies. Their meta-analysis sort to determine the extent of relationship to subjective than objective physical health outcomes of optimism. Subjective health outcomes studied involved physical symptom reports, pain reports, and physician ratings of health status (Rasmussen, Scheier, & Greenhouse, 2009). On the other hand, objective health outcomes studied involved objective health records, survival, immune parameters, and various other biological outcomes (Rasmussen, Scheier, & Greenhouse, 2009).

From the study, Rasmussen, Scheier and Greenhouse (2009) ascertained that the studies reviewed strongly suggested that optimism was a significant predictor of physical health. The study also ascertained that the mean effect size (ES) for subjective health outcomes was almost double the mean ES for objective measures. The findings of the study also showed optimism to predict health outcomes through harder disease endpoints, mortality, physiological markers (including immune function), cancer outcomes, pregnancy, survival, cardiovascular outcomes, and immune function only.

The study was a valid one as was used as an authority by other studies such as Carver, Scheier and Segerstrom (2010). It provided an overview of what other studies say on the link between optimism and physical health. A review

of all these studies, using quantitative data provided more insight to the study hence adding to its validity.

### Optimism and Psychological Health.

Studies identifying some of the psychological characteristics that moderate the impact of stress-inducing conditions on women executives are very few (Fry, 1995). According to Fry (1995), women executives experience common negative health outcomes such as physical illness, emotional exhaustion, and declined self-esteem.

Fry (1995) conducted a study testing the hypothesis that certain personality attributes buffered the impact of daily hassles on health outcomes among female executives. In the study, Fry (1995) hypothesized certain factors as modifying the effects of daily hassles on women's health outcomes. These factors included perfectionism, humor, and optimism. The researcher conducted four pilot studies on each of the three factors on their psychological health. A fourth pilot study focused on the examination of various cognitive appraisal and cognitive coping among women executives (Fry, 1995). The first three pilot studies' objective was to ascertain the effect of certain personality attributes on health outcomes of women executives. For purposes of this essay, focus will be on the pilot study three that was on optimism.

Fry (1995) conducted the study on 104 women executives who volunteered to participate. Among these volunteers, 79% aged between 36 and 52 years, 11.8% aged over 52 years and about 10% aged between 30 and 34 years. Of these 104 women executives, 63% were married while 37% were single, <https://assignbuster.com/effects-of-optimism-on-health/>

separated or divorced. The study used the Measure of Dispositional Optimism (MDO) in order to ascertain the assumption that perfectionism, humor, self-esteem, coping patterns, and cognitive appraisals of stressful events interact with optimism thereby influencing women's cognitive appraisals of the women's executive functions consequently affecting health outcomes (Fry, 1995).

The main hypothesis on moderating effects of optimism on health outcomes is that the personal attribute of optimism moderates the psychological effects of stress as shown in physical symptoms, loss of self-esteem, and burnout (Fry, 1995). Using the MDO, 37 out of the 104 women executives provided completed data. The results showed that the variables showed that high levels of optimism were correlated with greater self-esteem ( $r = .56, p < .01$ ), lower perceptions of daily hassles ( $r = -.42, p < .05$ ), fewer physical symptoms ( $r = -.44, p < .05$ ), and lower burnout ( $r = -.41, p < .01$ ) (Fry, 1995). These findings from the 37 women executives reveal support for the hypothesis that the executive women's optimistic outlook is linked to a reduced impact of daily hassles. It was concluded that optimism helps some women executives cope more effectively with stress and the development of this attribute coupled with humor may be useful in socializing and managerial training programs for women.

The study therefore provides insight on how people can cope up with stress situations at the workplace by not only using optimism as a personal attribute but also combining it with other personal traits such as humor for more effectiveness. Hence, its validity as a study is more than evident.

## References.

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