

# Positive psychology impact



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Positive psychology aims to bring about the best in a person so that person can live life to the fullest. Positive psychology can help individuals live a pleasant life, engaged life, meaningful life or an achieving life. Counseling and positive psychotherapy can be used to bring out the person's strengths. Positive psychology is not limited to the mentally ill but for everyone in general. Positive psychology can help individuals understand how to achieve good mental health, happiness and well-being. Well-being can be achieved through mental, physical, social or financial well-being. Thinking positive and being optimistic are the best predictors of well-being.

#### The Effects of Positive Psychology in Society

Positive psychology is the branch of psychology that focuses on the thriving of human beings when they are faced with adversity (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The aim of positive psychology is to help individuals and groups to prosper by magnifying human vigor and moral excellence to make life worth living (Froh, 2004). Positive psychology was brought about in order to produce positive phenomena in an individual such as happiness, courage and love (Froh, 2004). This is because these positive phenomena are much needed for a human being to overcome their adversities. In other words positive psychology is a method that is used to introduce or promote the positive phenomena in you to you. To help you unleash the inner moral excellence in you so that you can live a pleasant life, engaged life, meaningful life or an achieving life (Seligman, 2002). This variation of approaches is essential in order to promote well-being (Slade, 2010).

The use of positive psychology can be seen in clinical practice. Strength promotion has found to be beneficial especially in a counseling setting. Strength promotion is required in order to bring out the best in the client (Harris, Thoresen, & Lopez, 2007). Counseling is a field where the counselors can clearly express the clients' strengths to the client (Gelso, & Woodhouse, 2003). However, a research shows that promoting strengths maybe one of the characteristics of positive psychology in counseling but forgiveness has been found to be the area of interest under positive psychology for counseling settings (Konstam, Marx, Schurer, Lombardo, & Harrington, 2002).

Positive psychology can be used to break the "state of unforgiveness" (Worthington, Sandage, & Berry, 2000). This is the state when clients are unforgiving and as a result goes through negative mental (McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000) or physical (Everson, Goldberg, Kaplan, & Cohen, 1996; Everson, Kauhanen, & Kaplan, 1997; Williams & Williams, 1993) consequences. Research has shown that forgiveness in counseling also gives a positive effect to the client (Enrigh, & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Worthington, Sandage, & Berry, 2000). Nevertheless strength promotion and forgiveness in a counseling setting have found to be important and beneficial as counselors continue to use these techniques in order to enhance the clients' well-being. However a study shows that there is an issue of the development of strategies that binds positive psychology with counseling (Harris, Thoresen, & Lopez, 2007).

The effectiveness of positive psychology lies within the extent to which positive psychology can turn negative emotions into positive emotions.

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Positive psychology has found to be effective in dispelling negative emotions more swiftly (Fredrickson, 1998). Biologically, positive psychology has found to dispel issues with the negative emotions involving the aftereffects of the cardiovascular system (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Positive psychology can help turn stressful situations into positive meaning (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). In doing so individuals are able to find meaning in negative events that will in turn lead to having greater positive emotion (Fredrickson, & Joiner, 2002). Positive psychology is important and relevant because it aims to produce positive emotions.

## **Mental Illness and Positive Psychology**

Mental illness is linked with positive psychology because of its effects on recovery. But a study proposed that health professionals should not only focus on reducing mental illness but should also focus on improving mental health of the patients (Slade, 2010). Another study seems to agree with this statement as it states that 'recovery' means giving life meaning and value and not just getting rid of the problem (Perkins, & Repper, 2003). This means that the person should look beyond merely recovery, that is, a personal recovery. Personal recovery occurs when a person tries to enhance mental health regardless of the mental illness that the person is having (Slade, 2009). However, a study showed that as far as clinical psychology is concerned, there is a balance in the focus of positive psychology while dispelling negative focuses such as pathology, weakness and damage (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

The common assumption is that healthy people are the ones who gain from positive psychology while negative psychology continues to be necessary for

the ones who are mentally ill (Gillham, & Seligman, 1999). This assumption has however been under criticism as a studies stated that there is no evidence for this assumption and that it should be the opposite (Resnick, & Rosenheck, 2006; Slade, 2010). Nevertheless both healthy and mentally ill people can benefit from positive psychology in their respective manner. As to the level of benefiting, a study shows that mentally ill people can actually benefit more from positive psychology than the people who are healthy (Resnick, & Rosenheck, 2006). However, the lack of the quality of good ideas and the relatively little amount of evaluative research have caused a barrier in getting recovery-focused practice to be used in mental practice (Slade, & Hayward, 2007).

Positive psychotherapy has been known to be an effective method when treating mental illness. Positive psychotherapy is therapy which aims to enhance the patient's positive emotions rather than dealing the symptoms of illness straight away (Seligman, Rashid, & Parks, 2006). The therapy seeks to enhance the patient's strengths, preferences and goals (Slade, 2010). In this therapy the person is required to go through life with a positive attitude in every single thing they do in order to produce positive feelings that result in happiness (Seligman, 2002). After a one-year follow-up, a study showed a significant amount of decrease in depression when positive psychotherapy was given to patients (Seligman, Rashid, & Parks, 2006). However, this study had a limitation of having a small sample size. This approach is also considered unhelpful since treatment should come first and after which people get on with their own lives (Slade, 2010). There is limited amount of research to support this approach as well.

## **Happiness and Positive Psychology**

Happiness is linked with positive psychology because happiness is a state which involves positive emotion and attitude. Studies indicate that happy people tend to be emotionally stable (Sharma, & Malhotra, 2010; Carver & Scheier, 2004; Gopal, 2006). Some studies have focused more on the unhappiness states such as anxiety, mood disorders and mental illness (Argyle, 2001, Seligman & Csikszentmohalyi, 2000) whereas some studies have also focused more on happiness (Diener, 2000; Seligman and Csikszentmohalyi, 2000) in order to understand what causes these unhappy states or what things are lacking in order to produce happiness (Argyle, Martin and Crossland, 1989). Basically, happy people tend to live with the philosophy of positivity (Diener and Seligman, 2002).

Money has often been linked with happiness. A study found that as a person's income increases the person's happiness tends to increase (Aknin, Norton, & Dunn, 2009). However, the results of this study showed that people who earned about \$7500 were relatively happier than people who earned about \$20 000-\$25 000. One can interpret this as; losses can have greater impact on people than actual gains (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001; Aknin, Norton, & Dunn, 2009). This means that people may work hard in order to stay in the level they are in, happily, not expecting to gain a higher income but as long as their income doesn't decrease. However, one can gain happiness by spending money on others. A cross-sectional study found that spending money on other people had an increased level of happiness as compared to spending money on own self (Dunn, Aknin, & Norton, (2008).

Positive psychology can help understand what causes happiness. Happiness can be achieved in many other ways. Research shows that social support (North, Holahan, Moos, & Cronkite, 2008; Pavot, Diener, & Fujita, 1990) extraversion (Nettle, 2008; Pavot, Diener, & Fujita, 1990), religiosity (Gopal, 2006; Abdel-Khalek, 2006), internal locus of control (Sharma, & Malhotra, 2010; Gopal, 2006) or even personality hardiness (Sharma, Thapa, & Malhotra, 2009) can amount to happiness. However, a study indicates that happiness is not limited to a single factor and thus it's hard to know what really causes happiness (Sharma, & Malhotra, 2010). The key to be happy, however, is to be emotionally stable. Meaning to say that the greater emotional stability one has, the greater the happiness level would be (DeNeve, 1999). This can be achieved by living in the present finding joy in the little things of the day (Lyubomirsky, 2001; Myers & Diener, 1995) taking things positively.

## **Well-being and Positive Psychology**

Well-being is linked with positive psychology because of its variety of contributions to well-being. Pleasant emotional states, low amounts of negative moods and a high level of life satisfaction amount to well-being (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2002). Well-being can be achieved in a variety of ways. A study shows that happiness is what brings about good mental health and well-being (Diener, 2000). Well-being can also be achieved through mental well-being (Milligan, Gatrell, & Bingley, 2004) and physical well-being (Ströhle, 2009) as well. Another study indicated that social support can also bring about well-being (Cohen, 2004). There is financial well-being where good income levels can produce well-being (Aknin, Norton, & Dunn, 2009).

However, a study shows that the key to well-being is a positive mindset (Scheier, & Carver, 1992).

It is widely known that having a religion brings about well-being. A study indicated that religion has a positive effect on well-being (Sharma, & Malhotra, 2010). A study found that feeling close to God per se increases happiness and well-being (Pollner, 1989). Another study found that well-being is highly associated with being regularly devotional to God (Ellison, & George, 1994). Meaning to say that daily prayer and the constant feeling of being closer to God gives people a sense of inner peace and they feel like they are in the right track in life. However, a more recent study found that religion increased positive effect and decreased stress but had no impact on dispelling negative mood states such as worry and sadness (Kahneman, & Deaton, 2010).

Psychological well-being is found to be the most effective of well-beings. Psychological well-being involves positive thinking (Scheier, & Carver, 1992). Meaning to say that, being optimistic can lead to a good life. However, studies show that optimism actually benefits a person at the time of adversity (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1990; Taylor, 1989). When people believe that they can pursue their goals, they tend to experience positive affect (Carver, & Scheier, 1990). A six month follow up study found that optimistic people reported lower amounts of negative mood states than pessimistic people (Scheier et al, 1989). This shows that being optimistic improved quality of life. However, this outcome may have been affected by major medical factors that influenced the results of this study since the subjects were heart patients.



## **Conclusion**

Positive psychology seeks to bring out the best in an individual. A person can pursue a pleasant life, engaged life, meaningful life or an achieving life through the use of positive psychology. Positive psychology has major influences treating mental illness, being happy and bringing about well-being. Positive psychotherapy can be used to treat people with mental disorders. People who live their lives with a positive philosophy tend to be happy. The most effective in order to achieve well-being is psychological well-being. Thinking positive and becoming optimistic does not only give an individual a good life but also well-being. Therefore despite the mental state one is in, positive psychology can improve quality of life and bring about well-being.