

The Prediction of Psychological Well-Being Based on Gratitude, Social Support and Self-Esteem

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Abstract

Introduction: The aim of this study was to investigate the prediction of psychological well-being based on gratitude, social support and self-esteem among students.

Method: This research was a non-experimental and correlation study. The statistical population of the study included all bachelor students of Yasouj University in the academic year of 2019-2020, among whom 360 were selected through a random cluster sampling method. Data were collected using Gratitude Questionnaire, Social Support Scale, Self-esteem Scale and Psychological Wellbeing Scale. Cronbach's alpha was applied to check the reliability in which the results indicated an appropriate reliability for these scales.

Results: The findings of this study showed that there was a correlation between variables including gratitude, social support, self-esteem and psychological well-being. In addition, gratitude, social support and self-esteem significantly predicted psychological well-being.

Conclusion: According to the results of this study it can be concluded that grateful people who have social support, with high self-esteem experience a higher level of psychological well-being.

Keywords: Gratitude, Social Support, Self-esteem, Psychological Well-being

Introduction

Students are considered as the future builders of the country. Thus, their mental health and well-being is of paramount importance. Entering university is a very sensitive stage in the life of dynamic and young individuals in which an individual encounters abundant changes in social and human relations. Being in such situations is often associated with stress and anxiety, affecting individuals' performance and learning. In this regard, the students with well-being as well as mental and physical health can prepare themselves to effectively deal with the stressful situation of student life. Therefore, recognizing the factors that lead to students' well-being and mental health is of particular significance [1].

The concept of well-being is considered as the focus of a branch of psychology called positive psychology [2]. Well-being refers to evaluate cognitive and emotional positive aspects of people's lives as well as their good social relationships. Well-being is beneficial for various aspects of life including physical and mental health and work performance [3]. It is a kind of feeling of physical, mental and social comfort that is not only related to the absence of illness or disability, but also includes the three axes of body, mind and society [4]. Two most popular conceptualizations of wellbeing in the history of psychology include subjective wellbeing and psychological wellbeing [5]. Diner defines subjective well-being as a structure with three components including life satisfaction, the presence of positive affect and the absence of negative affect [6]. In the conceptualization of psychological well-being, Ryff [7] refers to six dimensions including self-acceptance, positive relationships with other people, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, as well as personal growth.

Psychological studies have shown that well-being can be further estimated by positive personality traits, especially gratitude and forgiveness [3]. The disposition toward gratitude is initially defined by McCullough [8] "as a generalized tendency to recognize and respond with grateful emotion to the roles of other people's benevolence in the positive experiences and outcomes that one obtains". Gratitude is also considered as an empathic emotion. It could be defined as a sense of thankfulness and happiness in response to receiving a tangible benefit or a moment of peaceful bliss [9].

Gratitude plays an essential role in social and moral life [10]. Gratitude predicts mental well-being, and gratitude training promotes well-being [3]. Psychological research also highlights the benefits of gratitude as an attribute and shows that dispositional gratitude is associated with a higher level of subjective well-being, and counting one's blessings can increase positive emotions [11]. Numerous studies have demonstrated that gratitude is related to well-being [2, 12-14]. Furthermore, the results of regression analysis of previous research indicated that gratitude could significantly predict well-being [15, 16].

In addition, numerous studies have confirmed the relationship between self-esteem and human well-being indicators such as mental health [17]. Self-esteem refers to individual overall feelings and beliefs about himself, self-assessment and reaction to self-assessment [18]. A person's self-esteem determines what a person accomplishes, and how he fulfills life. Many theorists have highlighted self-concept as a goal of self-awareness and as a determinant of behavior [19].

Experimental studies show that self-esteem is a significant psychological factor on health. Enhancing self-esteem contributes to the sense of empowerment as well as self-worth [20]. The contribution of self-esteem in psychological empowerment is also confirmed [21]. Furthermore, it leads to positive changes such as educational achievement, high self-confidence and psychological well-being [20]. In addition, self-esteem is not only an essential feature of mental health, but also a predictor of better mental health and positive social behavior since it can function as a shield against negative effects [18]. In other words, high self-esteem seems to protect individuals against anxiety, increase coping, and promote physical health [19]. Various studies have referred to the relationship between self-esteem and well-being [20, 22-25]. Furthermore, previous research revealed that well-being was positively related and predicted by variables including self-esteem and social support [26, 27].

Another effective factor and predictor of mental health and well-being is perceived social support [28]. In general, the term social support, defined in different ways, is generally understood to refer to the kind of help that people receive or expect to receive from those whom they keep contact with in any way [29]. In fact, social support is one of the most important protective factors that is related to receiving comfort, care, dignity or help, which can be from various sources such as support of spouse, family, friends, colleagues, etc. [18]. According to some

theories, if social support increases, the risk of disease and subsequently the demand for medical services will decline [30]. Therefore, it can be stated that one of the consequences of perceived social support seems to be health, in general, and mental health in particular. Furthermore, the relationship between social support and mental health has been extensively studied and numerous studies have indicated that having good social support leads to physical health as well as psychological well-being [28]. Numerous research have also illustrated that the perceived social support is related to psychological well-being positively and significantly [31-34]. Also, some studies indicated that social support could explain the variance of psychological well-being [1, 35, 36].

It is worth mentioning that, even though in various previous studies the relationships between gratitude, social support, self-esteem and well-being have been addressed, there is still a need for determining the contribution of each variable in predicting psychological well-being. Hence, the purpose of this study was to investigate the prediction of psychological well-being based on gratitude, social support and self-esteem among students. In this regard, the contribution of mentioned variables to psychological well-being could be investigated in the current study.

Method

The present study was a non-experimental and correlation research. The statistical population consisted of all bachelor students of Yasouj University during the 2019-2020 academic year (5,359 individuals). Random cluster sampling method was used and a total of 360 questionnaires were completed. In order to collect research data, four questionnaires were used in the current study:

Psychological Well-Being Scale: The Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scales revised in 2002, is one of the most widely used and validated psychological well-being scales [37]. The short form consists of 18 items and is taken from the 120-item form. This scale measures six subscales (*autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relation with others, purpose in life and self-acceptance*) in a 6-point Likert scale (from 1 strongly disagree to 6 strongly agree). In order to investigate the validity of the questionnaire, the correlation between the scale score and its item score was calculated. Eliminating items 9 and 16 in which the correlations were not high enough, the validity of the psychological well-being scale was confirmed. The range of coefficients of the remained 16 items was from 0.34 to 0.56 which were significant at 1% significance level. Also, in order to evaluate its reliability, Cronbach's alpha was obtained 0.77 for 16 items which indicates that its reliability was acceptable.

The Gratitude Questionnaire: The Gratitude Questionnaire- Form 6 questions designed by McCullough in 2002 was used in this study. It has six items scored in a 6-point Likert scale (from 1 strongly disagree to 6 strongly agree). Cronbach's alpha coefficient of this questionnaire was reported 0.80 [38]. In this study, the correlation between the scale score and its item score

ranged from 0.58 to 0.72 all of which were significant at 1% significance level indicating its validity. In addition, the reliability of this questionnaire was confirmed calculating Cronbach's alpha acquired 0.75.

Social Support Scale: The Social Support Scale developed by Sherborne and Stewart in 1991 was applied in this research. The scale consists of 19 items measuring five subscales namely, emotional, informational, tangible, affectionate, and positive social interaction, with a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 never to 5 always). Sherborn and Stewart found that reliability coefficient for the subscales including emotional, informational, tangible, positive social interaction, affectionate, and overall scale were 0.96, 0.96, 0.92, 0.94, 0.91 and 0.97, respectively [39]. In this study, the correlation coefficient of social support items with total social support varied from 0.59 to 0.80 all of which were significant at the level of 1% which indicated its acceptable validity. Cronbach's alpha calculation to evaluate the reliability of the research tool also showed that Cronbach's alpha for subscales including emotional, informational, tangible, affectionate, positive social interaction and 19 items of social support were 0.88, 0.87, 0.86, 0.88 0.90 and 0.96, respectively, which indicated an appropriate reliability.

Self-esteem Scale: The Heatherton & Polivy Self-esteem Scale was constructed in 1991. This scale has 20 items which consists of three subscales intended to gauge performance, social and appearance using a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree). The correlation coefficient of self-esteem items with total self-esteem, except for item 8, which was not significant, ranged from 0.29 to 0.65 and was significant at the level of 1%. Therefore, with eliminating item 8, it had suitable validity. In the current study, the values of Cronbach alpha for subscales including performance, social, appearance and the total scale was obtained 0.69, 0.73, 0.65 and 0.84, respectively.

Results

The demographic characteristics of the respondents showed that the average age of the respondents was about 21 years with a standard deviation of about two years. The minimum age of the respondents was 18 and the maximum was 39 years. Also, 66.0% of the respondents were female and 34.0% were male. In addition, 89.7% of the respondents were single and only 10.3% were married.

The descriptive statistics of variables such as the values of mean and standard deviation of variables are demonstrated in Table 1. Furthermore, the values of skewness and kurtosis in Table 1 indicated that all variables were normally distributed since no index was obtained above the absolute value of 1. Table 1 also depicts the Pearson correlation coefficients among the research variables.

As Table 2 illustrates, the correlation between gratitude and psychological well-being took value 0.49. This correlation was moderate and positive. Therefore, the results suggested that gratitude positively and significantly was correlated with psychological well-being. Furthermore, there was a weak but significant correlation between social support and psychological well-being since the value of the correlation coefficient was obtained 0.37. Hence, social support was positively related to psychological well-being significant at the 0.01 level. Moreover, the correlation coefficient between self-esteem and psychological well-being obtained 0.60 indicating that self-esteem had a moderate, positive and significant relationship with psychological well-being. In other words, the findings revealed that variables namely gratitude, social support, self-esteem were correlated with psychological well-being positively and significantly.

Simultaneous multiple regression was used to examine the prediction of well-being based on gratitude, social support and self-esteem analyses. According to Table 2, since the F value was acquired highly significant ($p < 0.01$), it is indicated that all variables including gratitude, social support, and self-esteem could explain a considerable amount of the variance in psychological well-being. To put it another way, 48.7% of the variance of psychological well-being could be predicted with all four predictors accounting for unique variance.

The contribution of each variable in predicting psychological well-being has been presented in Table 3. Accordingly, the p-value of the t-test for each predictor were highly significant ($p < 0.01$), revealed that all variables including gratitude, social support, and self-esteem contributed to the prediction of psychological well-being. In addition, it seems necessary to point out that self-esteem ($\beta = 0.48$) had the highest beta coefficient which indicated that self-esteem had the greatest contribution whereas social support ($\beta = 0.17$) had the lowest beta coefficient and consequently had the smallest contribution in predicting psychological well-being.

Table 1. The Descriptive Index and Pearson Correlation Matrix of Research Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Gratitude	1				27.19	5.65	-0.80	0.61
Social Support	0.38**	1			66.84	17.23	-0.33	-0.44
Self-Esteem	0.32**	0.19**	1		64.61	11.43	0.03	-0.002
Psychological Well-Being	0.49**	0.37**	0.60**	1	67.77	11.60	0.09	-0.43

** $P < 0.01$

Table 2. Simultaneous Multiple Regression Predicting Well-being Based on Gratitude, Social Support and Self-esteem

Variables	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean squares	R	R2	F	Sig.
Regression	23536.81	3	7845.60	0.69	0.48	112.44	0.0001
Residual	24839.40	356	69.77				

Table 3. Statistical Features of Psychological Well-being Regression Based on Gratitude, Social Support and Self-esteem

Predictor variables	B	β	t	Sig.
Gratitude	0.55	0.26	6.24	0.0001
Social Support	0.11	0.17	4.22	0.0001
Self-Esteem	0.48	0.48	11.92	0.0001

Criterion variable: Psychological Well-Being

Discussion

Studying at university is recognized as a highly-stressed period owing to various factors. It is, therefore, essential to identify the factors that play a significant role in promoting the mental health of this educated group. One of the psychological constructs that has attracted the attention of many researchers in the field of mental health is psychological well-being [1]. Various factors are associated with the psychological well-being of individuals, particularly students, some of which includes gratitude, social support and self-esteem. Therefore, the aim of this study was to predict psychological well-being based on gratitude, social support and self-esteem among students. Simultaneous multiple regression findings suggested that gratitude, social support and self-esteem explained 48.7% of the variance of psychological well-being.

In this study, gratitude could predict psychological well-being among students which was consistent with previous findings [15, 16]. Prior studies highlighted that gratitude associated with psychological well-being and could explain the variance of psychological well-being. There are many benefits of gratitude such as having better physical and mental health, increasing happiness and life satisfaction. In fact, grateful people are happier, more satisfied with life, and less likely to experience burnout and depression since they are more resilient to traumatic events [40]. Grateful people, therefore, experience higher well-being. In addition, social psychologists view gratitude as a positive state that correlates with or leads to well-being [41]. In other words, having the ability to feel and express the kindheartedness of others by expanding the insight could result in individuals' well-being.

The findings of this study also indicated that social support could predict psychological well-being among students. The findings of the current study are in complete agreement with the results of previous studies [1, 26, 27, 35, 36]. These studies have demonstrated that well-being could be positively predicted by social support. It can be noted that social support refers to the existence of people who an individual can count on asking assist, support, and acceptance in the occurrence of problems and includes informational and emotional support, judgment and instrumental assistance. This support makes individuals feel loved, appreciated, and be a member of the groups [42]. In other words, being able to rely on someone when needed is comforting, and consequently, contributes to people's wellbeing [26]. Admittedly, this social support can come from a variety of sources, including family, friends, co-workers, or any particular person in an individual's life. Perceived social support has many benefits that reduce and eliminate psychological distress as well as diminish the level of anxiety and depression

[43]. This is actually because social support works as an important coping mechanism in stressful situations [44].

In addition, the results of this study revealed that the variance of psychological well-being could be explained by self-esteem with the highest beta coefficient. To put it another way, self-esteem made the most contribution in the prediction of psychological well-being. This result was in line with previous studies [26, 27]. These researchers obtained similar results and showed that self-esteem is positively related to well-being. According to research, creating a positive self-esteem is one of the most important factors to have mental, emotional and social health. Self-esteem is an effective dimension of self-concept that is vital for mental health [45]. High self-esteem was found to result in greater happiness, whereas low self-esteem can lead to depression [26]. Furthermore, self-esteem plays the role of a buffer against the effect of negative cognitions, emotions and dysfunctional behavioral responses. In other words, self-esteem can have various protective functions in the context of stressors [46]. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a logical positive relationship between self-esteem and well-being.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the present study highlighted the association between variables including gratitude, social support, self-esteem and psychological well-being by which psychological well-being was explained. The findings imply that grateful, high self-esteemed students perceiving social support could experience a higher level of psychological well-being.

In general, the findings of this study could be beneficial in order to increase the psychological well-being of students. Accordingly, it is suggested that workshops be held at the university to improve students' self-esteem so that students gain positive evaluation of themselves and consider themselves worthy and respected. Professors also need to raise the spirit of appreciation in students through their speech and practical behavior. In addition, holding some workshops in order to acquaint students with various ways of being grateful is recommended. Finally, it is suggested that families and university authorities provide more social, emotional, informational, and other support for students in order to promote their psychological well-being.

Considering the limitation of the participants in terms of age and university, it seems essential to be cautious in generalizing the findings of the current study to other age groups and universities.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Ethical Approval

Ethical principles were taken into account in this study. The questionnaires were completed by the participants who were informed about the purpose of the research and its implementation stages. They were also assured that there was no compulsion to participate in the research and the consent of the participants was taken into consideration.

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