



THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HAPPINESS AND OPTIMISM WITH EXAM STRESS AMONG STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Background and Objective: exam stress is one of barriers to academic achievement of students, so required measurements should be taken to reduce such stress; hence, the purpose of this research is to examine the relationship between happiness and optimism with exam stress among students.

Materials and methods: this is a descriptive and correlational study. Statistical population of study consisted of all students of Payam Noor University in Urumia Province, Iran 2017. The sample size consisted of 60 members who were selected randomly. Oxford Happiness Questionnaire was employed to collect data, Life Orientation Test (LOT) was used to assess optimism, and Sarason Exam Stress Inventory was used to measure exam stress. The obtained data were analyzed using Pearson test and multivariate linear regression through SPSS22 software.

Findings: the results obtained from study indicated that there is a significant relationship between happiness and exam stress ($r=-0.983$) at level of ($P<0.05$) also between optimism and exam stress ($r=-0.995$) at level of ($P<0.05$).

Conclusion: it can be found in accordance with obtained findings that there is a negative relationship between happiness and optimism with exam stress; in other words, increase in happiness and optimism of student would lead to reduced exam stress.

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Introduction

Exam stress is along with physical, cognitive and behavioral signs when preparing for exams and test and this is taken as a problem into account when there is a server anxiety that can effect on performance of person within an exam [1]. This stress can effect on academic abilities of student negatively leading to declined academic performance [2]. People with exam stress fear from negative evaluation of others and concentrate on negative attitude of others toward them instead of concentrating on the exam and this might intensify the stress [3]. Results of studies conducted by Schaefer et al. [4] showed that students with high exam stress have more social concerns, mental and psychiatric disorders.

Happiness is defined as a collection of emotions and cognitive evaluation of life by person; it is also considered as level of quality of life [5]. In other words, happiness is satisfactions with life as one of the main elements of spiritual well-being [6] that is treated as one of mental health indicators [7]. Also, happiness is one of underlying scopes in positive psychology studies and has three main factors including 1- level of positive affection, 2- lack of negative feelings such as depression and anxiety, and 3- an average level of satisfaction within a specific period of life [8].

Positive thinking means optimistic analysis of events in which, the person keeps his/her positive perspective considering all aspects of an issue [9]. Positive thinking is related to positive emotions that brings positive behavioral changes [10]. Optimism can effect on psychological implications and can anticipate changes in immune system and body health [11]. The purpose of positive thinking is reliance on positive thoughts [12]. Personal differences in optimism are related to risk factors for mental pathology directly or indirectly at individual or social level [13]. One of harms of lack of optimism is its effect on interpersonal relationships [14]. In accordance with importance of the optimism, the purpose of this study is to examine the relationship of happiness and optimism with exam stress among students.

Method

This is a descriptive and correlational study. Statistical population of study consisted of all students of Payam Noor University in Urumia Province, Iran 2017. The sample size consisted of 60 members who were selected randomly. Oxford Happiness Questionnaire was employed to collect data, Life Orientation Test (LOT) was used to assess optimism, and Sarason Exam Stress Inventory was used to measure exam stress. The obtained data were analyzed using Pearson test and multivariate linear regression through SPSS22 software.

Instruments

Exam Stress Inventory (test anxiety scale): this scale was designed by I.G. Sarason in 1908 and revised in 1980. Reliability coefficients of the scale were more than 80% within several weeks. This questionnaire consists of 37 items and is a collection of physical, psychological, and behavioral reactions at the time of preparing for a test. Scoring of this questionnaire is based on the answers of respondents (yes or no). Cheraghian et al. [15], obtained validity and reliability of this questionnaire to 88% for retest reliability, to 90% for internal consistency, and to 72% for criterion validity.

Life-Orientation Test (LOT): is an 8-item scale has been designed to measure optimism including 4 questions for optimistic mood and 4 questions for pessimistic mood. Respondents would answer the questions based on a 5-point scale (0=strongly disagree and 4=strongly agree) and the higher the score, the more optimist the person is. Validity and reliability of this scale obtained to an optimal level in study conducted by Khodabakhshi (2004) [16] and simultaneous validity coefficient between optimism scale with depression and self-mastery obtained to 0.64 and 0.72, respectively. The obtained Cronbach's alpha coefficient was equal to 0.70 in study of Scheier (1985) [17] that reported a good stability over time.

Oxford Happiness Questionnaire: this questionnaire consists of 29 items. In opinion of Argale, this questionnaire can be divided into 5 categories including life satisfaction, self-esteem, subjective well-being, comfort, and positive mood. Reliability of this questionnaire reported to 52%-60% by Headey et al. (2010). Mozafarinia et al. (2014) [18, 19] used content validity method to determine validity of this questionnaire and used Cronbach's alpha coefficient to ascertain reliability of the questionnaire; according to the results, the calculated alpha of spiritual health obtained to 90%, happiness 94%, and total coefficient obtained to 95%.

Findings

Respondents consisted of 60 students of Payam Noor University in Urumia Province at age range of 22-28; of that, 605 were male and 40% were female; in terms of education level, 85% were at BA degree and 15% were at MA degree.

In the following part, the table related to mean, variance, standard deviation, minimum, maximum, and total data is presented as well as Pearson correlation table and multivariate linear regression.

Table 1. Mean, variance, standard deviation, minimum, maximum, and total data of variables happiness, positive thinking, and exam stress

Exam stress	Positive thinking	Happiness	Variable
26.1000	10.8833	55.5167	Mean
36.702	38.986	346.525	Variance
6.05819	6.24389	18.61519	Standard deviation
8	4	30	Min
33	32	95	Max
1566.00	653.00	1114.00	Total

This table shows Mean, variance, standard deviation, minimum, maximum, and total data of variables happiness, positive thinking, and exam stress. Accordingly, the highest mean and data is related to happiness compared to positive thinking and exam stress.

Table 2. Pearson correlation between variables happiness and exam stress

Exam stress	Happiness		
-.983**	1	Pearson Correlation	Happiness
.000		Sig. (2-tailed)	
60	60	N	
1	-.983**	Pearson Correlation	Exam Stress
	.000	Sig. (2-tailed)	
60	60	N	

According to table 2, the obtained Pearson correlation coefficient is -0.983 and since the Sig value (0.000) is lower than 0.05, this correlation coefficient is significant. Therefore, it can be stated that there is a negative significant relationship between happiness and exam stress.

Table 3. Pearson correlation between variables positive thinking and exam stress

Exam stress	Positive thinking		
-.995**	1	Pearson Correlation	Positive thinking
.000		Sig. (2-tailed)	
60	60	N	
1	-.995**	Pearson Correlation	Exam stress
	.000	Sig. (2-tailed)	
60	60	N	

According to table 3, the obtained Pearson correlation coefficient is -0.997 and since the Sig value (0.000) is lower than 0.05, this correlation coefficient is significant. Therefore, it can be stated that there is a negative significant relationship between positive thinking and exam stress.

Table 4. Results of multiple linear regression for exam stress anticipation

Sig.	t	Beta	Standard error	B	Variable
.000	124.562		.312	38.900	Constant
.000	-7.817	-.293	.012	-.095	Happiness
.000	18.940	-.710	.036	-.689	Positive thinking

According to table 4, both variables of happiness and positive thinking can anticipate exam stress and happiness has the most power (-0.710) to anticipate exam stress.

Discussion

One of results of this study is presence of a negative significant relationship between happiness and exam stress among students; in this regard, an increase in happiness would lead to reduced exam stress among students and a decrease in happiness would lead to increase in exam stress. This finding is matched with results of following studies: research of Dolan and White (2007) [20] in which, happiness was related to health, researches of Walton et al. (2011) [21] that indicated students with higher level of happiness have a better health status and academic achievement, and study of Mozafarina et al. (2014) [19] in which, there was a positive and significant relationship between happiness and spiritual health among students.

The other result of this research was presence of negative and significant relationship between positive thinking and exam stress so that high level of positive thinking would result in declined exam stress among students and reverse. The mentioned finding is in line with results obtained from following studies: studies conducted by Lai et al. (2005) and Steptoe & O'Donnell (2008) [22, 23] indicating that optimism leads to increase in ability and adequacy of immune system; in other words, optimism

would reduce psychiatric disorders, increase quality of life, correct negative attitude, and improve performance of immune system; findings of the study conducted by Abdel-khalek and Lester (2006) [24] in which, optimism was negatively related to death anxiety while pessimism has a positive relationship with death anxiety; study of Alibake et al. (2012) [25] in which, optimism could improve quality of life among students; study of Bairami and Porfarajomran (2013) [26] indicating that optimism is reversely related to exam stress so that high optimism is in relation with low level of exam stress; study of Fallahi and Asadi (2015) [27] in which, it was indicated that positive thinking would reduce anxiety and depression; studies conducted by Chang et al. (2009) [28] indicating a close relationship between optimism and mental health so that optimism is related to low anxiety, mental well-being, life satisfaction, positive affection, resiliency against depression, lower despair, and active coping style.

Seemingly, positive thinking would result in increased well-being, improved symptoms of depression, and reduced anxiety through promoting positive feelings, positive behaviors, recognition and positive perception (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009) [29]. Also, happiness would increase efficiency of the person helping him/her to think better and have more academic achievement (DordiNejad et al. 2011) [30].

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