Optimism, Stress, and Life Satisfaction Among Indian College Students

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ABSTRACT:

The aim of this research is to assess the interplay between optimism, stress, and life satisfaction among Indian college students to provide insights into student well-being and inform interventions to enhance their overall life satisfaction. The sample consisted of 204 college students from prominent Universities of India. Tools consisted of Revised Life Orientation test (LOT-R) (Scheier et al., 1994), Satisfaction with life scale (SWLS) (Diener et al., 1985), and Student Stress Inventory (SSI) (Arip et al., 2016). The Pearson Product moment correlation and Multiple regression analysis were computed for data analysis. Findings reveal a significant negative correlation between optimism and stress $r (204) = -.353, p < .01$, a significant negative correlation between stress and life satisfaction $r (204) = -.316, p < .01$, and a significant positive correlation between Optimism and Life Satisfaction $r (204) = .334, p < .01$. Further, regression analysis revealed that Optimism and Stress are statistically significant predictors of Life Satisfaction. The variables optimism and stress turned out to be significant predictors of life satisfaction. Results highlight the importance of a positive outlook and effective stress management strategies to enhance students' quality of life. Future research could explore additional psychological and environmental factors influencing life satisfaction.

Keywords: Optimism, Stress, Life Satisfaction, College students, Higher education in India.

1. INTRODUCTION:

College life is a transformative period that presents students with numerous academic, social, and personal challenges. While higher education aims to provide intellectual growth and career opportunities, it also brings

considerable stress, which can impact students' mental health and overall well-being. It's crucial to understand how psychological resources like optimism influence life satisfaction when faced with stress.

Operational definitions:

1. **Optimism:** Scheier and Carver (1985) have described optimism as a generalized tendency to expect positive outcomes even in the face of obstacles.

2. **Stress:** Stress is the term used to describe the physical, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses to events that are appraised as threatening or challenging (Ciccarelli & White, 2018).

3. **Life satisfaction:** According to Diener (1984), Life Satisfaction is an overall assessment of feelings and attitudes about one's life at a particular point in time ranging from negative to positive (Behlau, 2010).

While research on these variables are common in western countries, studies exploring these relationships within the Indian student population remain limited. This research seeks to address this gap.

1.2 Problem Statement:

"A Study on Optimism, Stress, And Life Satisfaction Among Indian College Students."

Despite increasing awareness of mental health issues among college students in India, there is still a lack of empirical research investigating how optimism and stress interact to influence life satisfaction. While studies in Western settings suggest that optimism acts as a buffer against stress and contributes to greater well-being, the extent to which these findings apply to Indian students remains unclear. Cultural differences in coping mechanisms, academic expectations, and social support systems necessitate an in-depth examination of these psychological constructs within the Indian context.

1.3 Objectives of the Study:

This study aims to:

1. Examine the relationship between optimism, stress, and life satisfaction among Indian college students.

2. Determine whether optimism and stress significantly predict life satisfaction.

1.4 Significance of the Study:

Understanding the role of optimism and stress in shaping life satisfaction is essential for designing effective mental health strategies. Given the high prevalence of academic stress among Indian college students, identifying protective factors that enhance well-being can help universities and policymakers implement targeted interventions. This study not only contributes to the growing literature on student well-being but also fills a critical gap in Indian research by exploring these relationships in a culturally relevant context. Findings from this research can be instrumental in developing counseling programs, stress management workshops, and resilience-building initiatives to improve students' overall life satisfaction.

2.Literature Review:

2.1 Stress and Life Satisfaction in College Students

In a study conducted by Weinstein & Laverghetta, 2009, the aim was to determine if general life satisfaction is negatively correlated with college student stress. They found that scores on the satisfaction with

life scale were significantly negatively correlated with scores on the college student stress scale, suggesting that overall life satisfaction in college students is adversely influenced by college stress. Moreover, females reported higher college stress scores than the males. Another study by Puri, Yadav, Shekhawat in 2016 aimed to investigate whether satisfaction with life is related to perceived stress in students of Rajasthan University, Jaipur. They found that Stress and life satisfaction were significantly negatively correlated. Further, higher levels of perceived stress were associated with lower levels of satisfaction with life among the students. A study by Holinka in 2015 found that stress is negatively correlated with life satisfaction in college students.

2.2 Optimism and Life satisfaction in College Students

A 2012 study by Ünüvar, Avsaroglu, and Uslu aimed to assess the levels of optimism and life satisfaction among undergraduate students in tourism and hotel management. The findings revealed that, on average, the students had moderate life satisfaction but exhibited high levels of optimism. Female students tended to report higher optimism and life satisfaction than their male counterparts. Additionally, students with higher income levels were more likely to be both optimistic and satisfied with their lives. The study also found a positive relationship between students' optimism and their overall life satisfaction. Another study by Rezaei & Khosroshahi in 2018, the purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between optimism, social intelligence, and positive affect with students' life satisfaction. The results of Pearson's correlation analysis indicated a positive correlation between social information processing, social skills, optimism, positive affect, and life satisfaction. Furthermore, measures of optimism and positive affect were statistically significant in predicting Life Satisfaction. Further, a study by Hassan, Sadaf, Saeed, Idrees in 2018 was conducted to find out the association between hope, optimism and life-satisfaction among adolescents. Pearson correlation analyses revealed positive correlation between hope, optimism and life satisfaction.

2.3 Optimism and Stress in College Students

A study by Huan, Yeo, Ang, & Chong, in 2006, investigated the role of optimism together with gender, on students' perception of academic stress. Results revealed a significant negative relationship between optimism and academic stress in students. Gender was not a significant predictor of academic stress and no two-way interactions were found between optimism and gender of the participants. Another study by Morton, Mergler & Boman, in 2014, the aim was to examine the effects that optimism, self-efficacy, depression, and anxiety have on an individual's life stress and adaptation to university. Results showed that optimism, depression, and anxiety each had a significant relationship with students' perceived level of stress. Furthermore, self-efficacy and depression had a significant relationship with adaptation to university. González, Hernández & Torres in 2015 conducted research in which the aim was to analyze how optimism, self-esteem and social support help to predict academic stress. Results showed that the physiological manifestations of stress are not predicted by the used predictor variables, while there is significant proof that the behavioral manifestations of stress are predicted by satisfaction with instrumental social support and optimism. There is significant proof that the emotional manifestations of stress are predicted by optimism and pessimism. As for self-esteem, it did not prove to be significant.

2.4 Optimism, Stress and Life satisfaction

A 2014 study by Boro and Dhanalakshmi aimed to explore the connections between life stress, optimism, and life satisfaction in adolescents. The results revealed a significant positive correlation between optimism and life satisfaction. Additionally, the study found that girls reported higher life satisfaction compared to boys, while boys experienced greater levels of life stress, particularly in terms of pressure, compared to girls.

3.Methods and Materials:

3.1 Sample- The data was collected from a total of 204 college going students, their age range was 18-25 years old, and the students were pursuing either Undergraduate or postgraduate degree in India. The method of sampling was convenience sampling.

3.2 Tools-

3.2.1- Revised Life Orientation Test (LOT-R): Life Orientation Test–Revised (LOT-R) was developed by Scheier et al., (1994) for measuring dispositional optimism on a 10-item scale, it has 4 filler items and 6 scale items. These items are designed to apply to all individuals irrespective of their demographic characteristics and investigates attitudes about future events that we all consciously or unconsciously possess. Anolli (2005) reported an internal reliability coefficient of .82. Cronbach's alpha calculation was .86.

3.2.2- Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS): The SWLS developed by Diener et al., (1985) assesses respondents' satisfaction with life as a whole. The SWLS consists of 5 items rated on a 7point scale (1: Strongly agree to 7: Strongly disagree). Areepattamannil & Bano (2020) examined the psychometric properties in India. They found evidence for good reliability and validity. The Satisfaction with Life Scale is said to have strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87, and demonstrates excellent test–retest reliability, showing a correlation of 0.82 over a two-month interval (Magyar-Moe, 2009).

3.2.3- Student Stress Inventory (SSI): The SSI was developed by Arip et al., in 2016. It measures the level of stress among college students. SSI contains 40 items to measure 4 subscales (10 items for each subscale) which are sub-scale Physical, Interpersonal relationship, Academic and Environmental factor. The SSI scale is on 'Never', 'Somewhat frequent', 'Frequent' and 'Always'. The value marks given for each choice are 1 for 'Never', 2 for 'Somewhat Frequent', 3 for 'Frequent' and 4 for 'Always'. The scale has good Reliability and Validity (Arip et al. 2016).

Procedure:

Participants were given a brief overview of the purpose of the study. Participants were informed of their rights as a participant, i.e. their participation is voluntary, their data will be kept confidential, they can withdraw from the study at any point in time, following this, informed consent was taken. The participants were then administered the scales after giving clear instructions. Participants were then thanked for their participation.

Data Analysis:

The obtained data was organized and tabulated and statistical analysis was done through SPSS. Pearson product moment correlation and Multiple regression analysis were computed.

4.Results and Discussion:

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Optimism	13.96	3.92	204
Stress	88.18	18.89	204
Life satisfaction	19.52	6.76	204

Table 1: *Descriptive Analysis of Optimism, Stress and Life Satisfaction*

Table 1 depicts the mean scores along with the standard deviations of three variables which are Optimism, Stress and Life Satisfaction with a sample size of 204 participants. The results in the table also indicate that the data of the sample in the present study was normally distributed.

Predictor variables	Criterion variable
	Life satisfaction
Optimism	.329**
Stress	-.316**

Table 2: *Coefficient of Correlation between Optimism, Stress and Life Satisfaction*

N = 204, **p<.01 (two tailed)

Table 2 portrays Pearson's correlation coefficients for all the variables i.e., Optimism, Stress and Life Satisfaction. a significant negative correlation between Stress and Life Satisfaction amongst college students $r(204) = -.316$, $p < .01$, and a significant positive correlation between Optimism and Life Satisfaction amongst college students $r(204) = .329$, $p < .01$.

Predictor	β	t-value	R	R²	Adj R²	F
Optimism	.250	3.614**	.394	.155	.147	18.358**
Stress	-.231	3.337***				

Criterion variable: Life satisfaction, **p<.000, ***p<.001

Table 3: *Regression Analysis using Optimism and Stress as Predictor Variables and Life Satisfaction as Criterion Variable.*

Table 3 portrays the results for the multiple regression analyses. 15.5 % of the variance in Life satisfaction can be explained by the above model. From the results of F= 18.358, p=.000 it can be concluded that the above-mentioned regression model is a good fit of the data and optimism along with stress contributes to the variance in Life Satisfaction. It can also be seen that optimism has a beta value of .250 while the beta value of stress is -.231. From the results of the t-value it can be seen that optimism, t = 3.614, (p= .000), is a statistically significant predictor of Life Satisfaction. Further, Stress, t = -3.337, (p=.001) significantly predicts Life Satisfaction.

Discussion:

The aim of this study was to examine the relationship of Optimism and Stress with Life Satisfaction and study its impact on Indian college students. It was hypothesized that; there would be a significant negative correlation between Stress and Life Satisfaction and there would be a significant positive correlation between Optimism and Life satisfaction amongst Indian college students. The sample consisted of 204 college students.

The selection criteria was college students in the age range of 18-25 years old. There were three questionnaires: Revised Life Orientation test (LOT-R) (Scheier et al., 1994), Satisfaction with life scale (SWLS) (Diener et al., 1985), and Student Stress Inventory (SSI) (Arip et al., 2016). For Data analysis, the Pearson Product moment correlation and multiple regression were calculated. Results indicate a significant negative correlation between Stress and Life Satisfaction r(204) = -.316, p < .01, and a significant positive correlation between Optimism and Life Satisfaction r (204) = .329, p < .01. Apart from this, multiple regression analysis revealed that Optimism and Stress are statistically significant predictors of Life Satisfaction. These findings are supported by various previous researches in the literature; Weinstein & Laverghetta, (2009), Puri, Yadav, Shekhawat, (2016) Holinka, (2015), Ünüvar, Avsaroglu, Uslu, (2012), Rezaei & Khosroshahi, (2018), Hassan, Sadaf, Saeed, Idrees, (2018), Huan, Yeo, Ang, & Chong, (2006), Morton, Mergler, Boman, (2014), González, Hernández, Torres, (2015).

Implications of Findings:

The findings of this study contribute to the growing body of research on psychological well-being in college students, particularly in the Indian context. The significant negative correlation between stress and life satisfaction aligns with previous research, reinforcing that high stress levels adversely impact overall well-being. Similarly, the positive correlation between optimism and life satisfaction suggests that an optimistic outlook plays a crucial role in enhancing students' quality of life. These results have several important implications for mental health professionals, educators, and policymakers.

Psychological Interventions: The study underscores the need for interventions that target stress reduction while fostering optimism among college students. Universities and counseling centers could implement cognitive-behavioral techniques, resilience training, and mindfulness programs to help students manage stress and develop a more optimistic perspective.

Educational Policies and Well-being Initiatives: Institutions should integrate mental health awareness programs within the academic curriculum to equip students with coping strategies. Initiatives such as peer mentoring, stress management workshops, and support groups can be valuable in improving life satisfaction among students.

Interpretation in the Broader Context of the Field:

These findings align with previous studies that emphasize the detrimental effects of stress and the protective role of optimism in life satisfaction. Previous research have highlighted how stress negatively influences life satisfaction, while optimism serves as a psychological buffer. This study extends these findings to an Indian college student population, reinforcing the universality of these relationships while considering the cultural context. In the broader field of positive psychology, these results support the notion that individual psychological traits—such as optimism—can serve as resilience factors that mitigate the effects of stress. This aligns with Seligman's theory of learned optimism, which posits that optimism is a modifiable trait that can be cultivated to enhance life satisfaction. Additionally, the findings are consistent with the stress-buffering

hypothesis, which suggests that positive psychological attributes help individuals cope with stress more effectively.

Significance of the Results:

The study contributes to the field of well-being research by providing empirical evidence on how optimism and stress interact with life satisfaction in Indian college students. While much research has been conducted in Western contexts, studies in India remain limited. This research highlights the importance of considering cultural and environmental factors when examining psychological well-being. Furthermore, the study provides actionable insights for universities and policymakers to prioritize student mental health. Given the high academic and societal pressures in India, interventions that enhance optimism and manage stress could have a profound impact on students' overall life satisfaction and academic performance.

Limitations:

Despite its contributions, the study has certain limitations:

The use of self-reported questionnaires may introduce response biases such as social desirability or inaccurate self-perceptions. The use of only quantitative measures is also a limitation. Future research could incorporate mixed-method approaches and qualitative research to get in-depth information.

Future Research Directions:

Longitudinal Studies: Future research should explore how optimism and stress influence life satisfaction over time, examining potential changes across different academic years.

Intervention-Based Studies: Experimental studies could assess the effectiveness of optimism-building interventions in improving life satisfaction and reducing stress.

Qualitative Research: Incorporating qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, could provide deeper insights into students' lived experiences regarding stress and optimism.

Conclusion:

This study examined the relationship between stress, optimism, and life satisfaction among Indian college students. The findings revealed that stress negatively correlates with life satisfaction, while optimism positively correlates with life satisfaction. Additionally, both stress and optimism were found to be significant predictors of life satisfaction.

These results highlight the importance of fostering optimism and implementing stress management strategies to enhance student well-being. Educational institutions, mental health professionals, and policymakers can use these insights to develop targeted interventions that support students in navigating academic and personal challenges. By addressing stress and promoting a positive outlook, institutions can contribute to improved life satisfaction and overall psychological well-being among college students.

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