



A Comparative Study of Happiness, Self Esteem & Optimism Among College Students

RANI SINGH

Ph. D. Research scholar in Psychology
Sona Devi University, Ghatshila

DR. KAMAL KUMAR MAHATO

Assistant professor, Department of Psychology
Patamda Degree College, Jhalla

Abstract:

This study examined gender differences in happiness, self esteem, and optimism among college students studying in different colleges of Bokaro. A total of 180 students (90 males, 90 females) were selected for the study by using purposive sampling method. All of them are from arts stream. Happiness scale by Rastogi and Moorjani Singh and Narayanan, self-esteem by Dhar and Dhar and Optimism scale by used for the data selection. Descriptive statistics, independent sample t-tests, and Pearson correlation analyses were performed. Results indicated that female students reported higher happiness and self esteem scores than male students, whereas optimism did not differ significantly by gender. Moderate positive correlations among happiness, self esteem, and optimism were observed. These findings highlight the need for gender-sensitive socio-emotional interventions and contribute to understand college student's wellbeing in.

Keywords: *Happiness, Self-Esteem, Optimism*

1. Introduction

The college years represent a critical developmental stage characterized by increased academic demands, identity exploration, and psychosocial adjustment. During this period, students often experience heightened levels of stress and emotional challenges, which can significantly influence their psychological well-being. In response to growing concerns regarding student mental health, contemporary psychological research has increasingly focused on positive psychological constructs such as happiness, self-esteem, and optimism. These constructs are central to the field of positive psychology, which emphasizes strengths and factors that enable individuals to function effectively and lead meaningful lives (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Happiness, commonly conceptualized as subjective well-being, refers to individuals' cognitive and affective evaluations of their lives, including life satisfaction and emotional experiences (Diener, 1984). Research has demonstrated that higher levels of happiness are associated with better psychological adjustment, improved physical health, and stronger interpersonal relationships (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Recent studies have further indicated that happiness among college students is influenced by multiple contextual factors such as stress, lifestyle behaviors, and social environments (Majauskiene et al., 2024). Additionally, emerging evidence suggests that modern influences, including social media engagement, can shape students' perceptions of happiness and emotional well-being (Heliyon Study, 2024).

Self-esteem refers to an individual's overall evaluation of their worth and value and is considered a fundamental component of psychological functioning. Rosenberg (1965) conceptualized self-esteem as a stable sense of personal worth, which influences behavior, motivation, and emotional well-being. High self-esteem has been associated with positive outcomes such as resilience, academic success, and life satisfaction, whereas low self-esteem is linked to anxiety, depression, and maladaptive coping (Orth et

al., 2008). Recent research has reinforced the importance of self-esteem in student populations, indicating that it is negatively associated with depression and positively related to emotional intelligence and adaptive functioning (Majauskiene et al., 2024; Checa-Domene et al., 2022).

Optimism is defined as a generalized expectation that positive outcomes will occur in the future and plays a significant role in shaping individuals' coping strategies and emotional responses. Scheier and Carver (1985) conceptualized optimism as a dispositional trait that influences how individuals approach challenges. Empirical evidence suggests that optimism is associated with better psychological well-being, lower levels of distress, and greater persistence in goal-directed behavior (Carver et al., 2010). Recent studies have further demonstrated that optimism is negatively associated with anxiety and depression among college students, with factors such as stress and sleep quality acting as mediators (Lai et al., 2024). These three constructs are interrelated and collectively contribute to overall psychological well-being. Individuals with higher self-esteem are more likely to experience greater happiness, while optimism influences how individuals interpret and respond to life events. Despite extensive research on each construct independently, there is a need for comparative studies that examine happiness, self-esteem, and optimism simultaneously within specific populations such as college students. Therefore, the present study aims to compare these variables to better understand their role in student well-being.

Happiness reflects subjective wellbeing and satisfaction with life domains, including school, family, and social relationships (Lyubomirsky, 2001). **Self esteem** is an individual's evaluation of self-worth, affecting motivation and emotional regulation (Rosenberg, 1965). **Optimism** represents a general expectation of positive outcomes and is linked to adaptive coping strategies (Carver & Scheier, 2014). While prior studies suggest that these constructs are interrelated, Indian research examining gender differences in Standard IX students remains limited.

2. Objectives

The objectives of the study were as follows:

1. To examine gender differences in happiness, self esteem, and optimism among students studying in different colleges of Bokaro and
2. To explore the interrelationships among happiness, self esteem, and optimism among students studying in different colleges of Bokaro.

3. Hypotheses

On the basis of above objectives following Null Hypotheses were formulated and tested:

- H₀₁: Male and female college students would not differ significantly on their level of Happiness.
- H₀₂: Male and female college students would not differ significantly on their level of Optimism.
- H₀₃: Male and female college students would not differ significantly on their level of Self esteem.
- H₀₄: There would be no significant relationship between Happiness and Self-esteem.
- H₀₅: There would be no significant relationship between Happiness and Optimism.
- H₀₆: There would be no significant relationship between Self-esteem and Optimism.

4. Literature Review

Happiness has been widely studied as a central component of subjective well-being and an important indicator of mental health. Diener (1984) conceptualized subjective well-being as comprising both cognitive evaluations, such as life satisfaction, and affective components, including positive and negative emotions. Subsequent research has consistently supported the association between happiness and positive life outcomes, including better health, improved social relationships, and enhanced coping abilities (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Recent studies have expanded this understanding by examining contextual influences on happiness among college students. For instance, Majauskiene et al. (2024) found that happiness is significantly influenced by factors such as stress, lifestyle behaviors, and emotional functioning. Additionally, research examining digital contexts has indicated that social media usage can impact students' perceptions of happiness and overall well-being (Heliyon Study, 2024).

Self-esteem has been extensively researched as a key determinant of psychological functioning and well-being. Rosenberg's (1965) conceptualization of global self-esteem remains foundational, and subsequent studies have consistently demonstrated its importance in predicting mental health outcomes. Orth et al. (2008) provided longitudinal evidence that low self-esteem is a significant predictor of depression. More recent research has reinforced these findings, indicating that self-esteem is negatively associated with depression and positively related to emotional intelligence and adaptive coping among students (Majauskiene et al., 2024). Furthermore, studies conducted in the post-pandemic context have highlighted the role of self-esteem in promoting resilience and emotional adjustment among college students (Checa-Domene et al., 2022).

Optimism has also been identified as a significant factor in promoting psychological well-being, particularly in the context of stress and coping. Scheier and Carver (1985) introduced the concept of dispositional optimism and demonstrated its role in influencing coping strategies and health outcomes. Carver et al. (2010) further emphasized that optimism is associated with adaptive coping, resilience, and improved mental health. Recent empirical studies have provided additional support for these findings. For example, Lai et al. (2024) found that optimism is negatively associated with stress, anxiety, and depression among college students and that this relationship is mediated by factors such as sleep quality and stress levels.

The interrelationship among happiness, self-esteem, and optimism has been increasingly emphasized in contemporary research. Diener and Diener (1995) found that self-esteem is strongly associated with life satisfaction and subjective well-being across cultures. Similarly, optimism contributes to well-being by shaping individuals' expectations and interpretations of life events (Carver et al., 2010). Recent studies have further demonstrated that these constructs are interconnected and collectively contribute to psychological resilience and emotional well-being among students (Majauskiene et al., 2024; Lai et al., 2024). These findings suggest that happiness, self-esteem, and optimism function as complementary components of overall well-being rather than independent variables.

Despite the substantial body of research on these constructs, much of the existing literature has examined them in isolation rather than within a comparative framework. There is limited research that simultaneously investigates happiness, self-esteem, and optimism among college students. Furthermore, cultural and contextual factors may influence these variables, highlighting the need for studies conducted in diverse settings. Therefore, the present study seeks to address this gap by providing a comparative analysis of these constructs, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of student well-being.

5. Happiness in Adolescence

Happiness, or subjective wellbeing, is associated with positive emotional experiences and satisfaction with life circumstances (Diener et al., 2018). Cross-cultural studies indicate that happiness contributes to academic engagement and emotional resilience (Seligman et al., 2009). In India, parental support, peer acceptance, and school environment significantly influence adolescents' happiness (Ramasubramanian & Parameshwaran, 2019). Kumar and Singh (2020) found that Indian adolescents who reported higher happiness also demonstrated greater life satisfaction and lower academic stress. Gender differences in happiness have been observed in some Indian studies, with females often reporting higher emotional expressiveness and relational satisfaction (Varma & Gupta, 2021).

International studies corroborate that happy adolescents exhibit better coping mechanisms, social functioning, and physical health outcomes (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). This suggests that happiness may serve as both a predictor and outcome of positive adolescent development.

6. Self Esteem and Academic Contexts

Self esteem reflects self-evaluation and is central to adolescent identity formation (Rosenberg, 1965). Higher self esteem has been associated with better academic performance, lower anxiety, and enhanced

social competence (Mruk, 2013). Indian research demonstrates that self esteem is influenced by parental encouragement, teacher feedback, and peer support (Kaur & Singh, 2020). Sharma and Verma (2019) found that Indian adolescents with higher self esteem were more likely to engage in goal-directed behaviors and exhibit adaptive coping under academic stress. Gender differences are context-dependent, with females often showing higher self relational self-esteem and males reporting higher achievement-related self-esteem (Rosenfield & Mouzon, 2013).

7. Optimism and Positive Development

Optimism, defined as generalized positive expectancies, is linked to resilience and proactive coping (Carver & Scheier, 2014). Optimistic adolescents tend to reframe challenges positively and are less prone to depression or academic anxiety (Magyar & Keyes, 2019). In India, studies have shown that optimism buffers the negative impact of academic stress and enhances motivation in secondary school students (Sharma & Verma, 2019). Positive psychology interventions targeting optimism have demonstrated effectiveness in increasing students' wellbeing (Seligman et al., 2009).

8. Interrelationships among Happiness, Self Esteem, and Optimism

Extensive literature supports correlations among happiness, self esteem, and optimism. Happier individuals tend to evaluate themselves more positively and maintain optimistic outlooks (Carver & Scheier, 2014; Diener et al., 2018). Meta-analytic findings indicate moderate to strong positive correlations between these constructs across adolescent populations (Rasmussen et al., 2019). Indian studies highlight that enhancing one dimension (e.g., self esteem) can positively influence others (Varma & Gupta, 2021).

9. Gender Differences in Psychological Constructs

Empirical findings on gender differences in adolescent wellbeing are mixed. International research often suggests females report higher emotional expressiveness and relational wellbeing, whereas males report higher confidence in achievement domains (Rosenfield & Mouzon, 2013). In India, socio-cultural expectations may influence gendered expressions of happiness and self-esteem, necessitating context-specific investigations.

10. Methodology

10.1 Participants

A total number of 180 college students (90 males, 90 females) were selected as sample. The age range was between 20 to 25 years. All of them are studying in different colleges of Bokaro. Purposive sampling technique was applied for sample selection. All of them were residing in urban areas and having both parents alive.

10.2 Tool used

1.Happiness Scale (HS–RHMJ). The present study employed the Happiness Scale developed by Himanshi Rastogi and Janki Moorjani (2017), hereafter referred to as HS–RHMJ. This instrument consists of 62 items distributed across five subscales: Subjective Well-being, Social Well-being, Career Well-being, Emotional Well-being, and Spiritual Well-being (Rastogi&Moorjani, 2017). With total scores ranging from 62 to 310; higher scores reflect greater perceived happiness. In normative and applied research, mean and standard deviation values for subscales and total scores have been used to interpret participants' levels of happiness. The scale has high reliability and validity. This scale is used by various scholars in their researches.

2.Self-Esteem Scale: Self-Esteem Scale developed and standardized by Dhar and Dhar (2015) to assess individual self-esteem. The scale consists of **23 items** organized into **six dimensions**: Positivity, Openness, Competence, Humility, Self-Worth, and Learning Orientation. Participants respond to each item on a **5-point Likert scale**, where 1 corresponds to “strongly disagree” and 5 corresponds to “strongly agree.” The total self-esteem score is calculated by summing responses to all 23 items, yielding a possible range from **23 to 115**, with higher scores indicating higher self-esteem. The scale has **high**

reliability and validity. Split-half reliability, corrected via the Spearman–Brown formula, has been reported as $r = .87$, while validity coefficients in previous studies have reached $r = .93$, supporting robust construct validity.

3. The Learned Optimism Scale (LOS) employed in the present study was developed by Pethe, Chaudhari, Dhar, and Dhar (1999) for the Indian context (Pethe, Chaudhari, Dhar, & Dhar, 1999). The LOS comprises 22 items, each rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree”. This is a reliable and valid scale used by various scholars in their researches.

11. Results

11.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Presenting Mean, SD and t value for Happiness, Self Esteem, and Optimism by Gender

| Variable | Males (n = 90) | Females (n = 90) | t | df | p | Total (n = 180) |
|-------------|----------------|------------------|------|-----|------|-----------------|
| Happiness | 127.0 (14.5) | 133.2 (12.9) | 3.03 | 178 | .01 | 130.1 (13.8) |
| Self Esteem | 83.7 (4.4) | 80.8 (4.1) | 4.57 | 178 | .01 | 82.8 (4.3) |
| Optimism | 89.6 (4.0) | 88.1 (3.9) | 1.09 | 178 | .277 | 90.9 (3.9) |

Table 1 presents Mean, SD and t value for Happiness, Self Esteem, and Optimism by Gender. Table clear shows that the mean and SD of male students on happiness is 127(14.5) and mean and SD of female students on happiness is 133.2(12.9). The t value of both variables shows that both genders significantly differ on their level of happiness and females are having higher level of happiness as compared to their male students’ counterpart. Thus, null hypothesis H_{01} “Male and female college students would not differ significantly on their level of Happiness” stands rejected. Further the table reveals that both genders differ significantly on their level of self-esteem at .01 level of significance and male students are experiencing higher level of self esteem as compared to their female students’ counterpart. Their mean and SD are 83.7 (4.4) and 80.8 (4.1) respectively. Thus H_{03} “Male and female college students would not differ significantly on their level of Self esteem” stands rejected. Further the table shows t value 1.09 on optimism this signifies that both gender not differ significantly on their level of optimism. Thus, null hypothesis H_{02} “Male and female college students would not differ significantly on their level of Optimism” not to be rejected. This may be attributed to chance factor.

Table 2: Presenting the correlation among Happiness, Self Esteem, and Optimism

| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|----------------|--------|--------|---|
| 1. Happiness | — | | |
| 2. Self Esteem | .53*** | — | |
| 3. Optimism | .48*** | .45*** | — |

Note. $p < .01$

Table 2 presents the correlation among Happiness, Self-esteem and optimism among school students. It is clear from the table that happiness and self-esteem significantly and positive correlated with each other thus null hypothesis H_{04} “**There would be no significant relationship between Happiness and Self-esteem**” stands rejected. Further the table reveals that happiness and optimism both are significantly and positively correlated each other. Thus, null hypothesis H_{05} “**There would be no significant relationship between Happiness and Optimism**” stands rejected. Furthermore, a positive and significant relationship is observed between self-esteem and optimism. Thus, null hypothesis H_{06} “**There would be no significant relationship between Self-esteem and Optimism**” stands rejected. In summing it is said

that all three variables were positively correlated, suggesting that higher happiness is associated with greater self-esteem and optimism.

12. Discussion

The study revealed that **female students reported higher happiness** than male students, this finding contradicts the previous finding by Rupali (2023) and support the previous finding by Namazi (2022) that female students experiencing higher happiness as compared to male students.–Further the result shows that **male students are experiencing higher self esteem and optimism than female students.** The observed **positive correlations** among happiness, self esteem, and optimism corroborate theoretical and empirical evidence indicating the interconnected nature of positive psychological constructs (Carver & Scheier, 2014; Diener et al., 2018; Rasmussen et al., 2019). These results suggest that interventions enhancing one dimension (e.g., self esteem) may have cascading benefits for happiness and optimism.

Implications for the Indian educational context include integrating **socio-emotional learning programs** targeting self awareness, emotional regulation, and positive future thinking. Mindfulness exercises, peer mentoring, and positive psychology interventions may enhance students' overall wellbeing.

13. Conclusion

This study highlights gender differences in happiness and self esteem among college students, with female students scoring higher. Optimism did not differ by gender. The positive associations among happiness, self esteem, and optimism emphasize the interrelated nature of adolescent wellbeing. College policymakers should consider gender-sensitive socio-emotional programs to enhance student wellbeing during critical educational transitions.

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