

# Well-being as Health Promoting Behaviour: Positive Psychology Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

The present study addresses to an imperative fundamental goal i.e. everyone wants to live in happy, healthy and fulfilling ways. Health and well-being do not belong to books and newspapers rather it belongs in our everyday life, where it can matter so much. Cultivating its components should be an important goal for all- parents, educators, citizens and in particular youth as these goals are fundamental human desires and rights. Hence, within vicinity of Positive psychology, the first generation of research arrived as an identification of authentic happiness theory (the pleasant life, the good life, the meaningful life). The second generation of research draws closer to the notion of well-being as it refers to both, a person's state of happiness and health. Thus, the present study is at an advanced league of the second generation of research where in an effort is made to reflect and utilize positive psychological tools i.e. positive belief, positive education and positive nutrition which if cultivated and imbibed would help pave way towards health promoting behaviour, life satisfaction and well-being.

**Keywords:** Well-being, health promotion, happiness

It is quite evident that consistently living under stress can lead to chronic health problems such as depression, anxiety disorders, heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes (NIMH, 2015). Mental Health is one of the toughest challenges we face in today's world. Most psychologists such as clinical psychologists are working mainly in the disease model with a goal of reducing suffering, curing illness and achieving an absence of symptoms (reaching 'neutral'). A positive psychologist, on the other hand, works in the health model with a goal of moving from whatever the starting point, beyond neutral and into the plus scale of well-being (as suggested by Narula in her book Happiness Quotient, 2016). Today, Positive psychology can be called as a part and parcel of psychology. Being human includes ups and downs, opportunities and challenges. Positive psychology devotes somewhat more attention to the ups and the opportunities, whereas traditional psychology – at least historically – has paid more attention to the downs (Fredrickson, 2003).

Health is more than the absence of disease; it is a resource that allows people to realize their aspirations, satisfy their needs and to cope with the environment in order to live a long, productive, and fruitful life (Breslow, 2006). In this sense, health enables social, economic and personal development fundamental to well-being (Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion, 1986). Health promotion is the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve their health. Environmental and social resources for health can include: peace, economic security, a stable ecosystem, and safe housing (Green & Kreuter, 1990). Individual resources for health can include: physical activity, healthful diet, social ties, resiliency, positive emotions, and autonomy. Health promotion activities aimed at strengthening such individual, environmental and social resources may ultimately improve well-being (Herrman *et al.*, 2005).

However, looking at the history of research in Positive psychology, it has allowed individuals, groups and organisations to flourish. The first

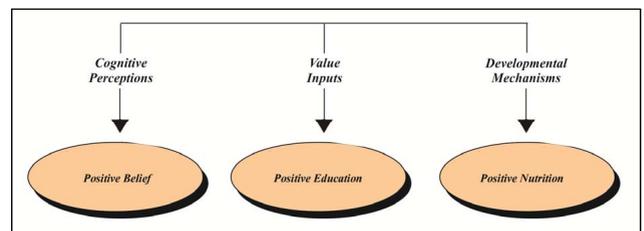
concept studied by Seligman (1991) that contributed to the development of his notions on happiness was that of learned optimism. The highlight of the study was that optimists tend to assume that the problems experienced are temporary and due to external causes, seeking solutions that do not place them as guilty or as failures, and internalizing positive events. Further, deeper analysis of the research by Seligman (2002) gives an insight that Positive Psychology relates with Authentic Happiness Theory in three aspects i.e. the pleasant Life, the good life and the meaningful life. The Pleasant Life is about happiness in Hedonism's sense, the Good Life is about happiness in Desire's sense, and the Meaningful Life is about happiness in Objective List's sense. To top it off, Authentic Happiness further allows for the "Full Life," a life that satisfies all three criteria of happiness. Also, an eminent positive psychologist, Lyubomirsky (2008), presented a scientific method for people to achieve happiness, supported by exercises and strategies to promote positive emotions, such as expressing gratitude, cultivating optimism and positive social relationships, manage stress and adversities, develop focus on the present and commit to their goals.

Furthermore, Seligman went beyond Authentic Happiness Theory and extended the horizon with yet another theory called Well-being Theory; The PERMA Model (Seligman, 2011). The term Well-being refers to a persons' state of happiness and health. It is important to have good wellbeing so you can live a longer, happier and healthier life. Just as exercise and good diet can reduce our risk of illness, investing in our wellness can reduce our risk of developing a mental illness (Fredrickson, 2009). Well-being takes a broad view of happiness. Well-being stems from *happiness*, which stems from *satisfaction with life*, further stemming from the feelings of *positive affect* which ultimately impinge on an individual's emotional, social and physical and *mental health*.

According to this new proposition, is a well-being theory that highlights the five elements together form the foundation upon which a happy and flourishing life is build. "PERMA" stands for Positive Emotions (P), which have an impact that goes far beyond bringing a smile to our faces. Engagement (E), i.e. we don't thrive and feel useless

when we are doing nothing, but when we engage with our life and work, we become absorbed. In Positive Psychology, 'flow' describes a state of blissful immersion in the present moment. Positive Relationships (R), i.e. key to all relationships is balance. Meaning (M), i.e. people who belong to a community and pursue shared meaningful goals are happier than people who don't. Lastly, Achievement/Accomplishment (A) i.e. creating and working toward goals helps us anticipate and build hope for the future.

It is vital to address the question 'What promotes health'? The researcher attempts to put forward the reply in form pictorial presentation the 'Cognitive Perceptions, Value Inputs and Developmental Perceptions' that have received attention across the discipline of Positive Psychology i.e. positive belief, positive education and positive nutrition respectively. Though, these can be inculcated at any age, in this study the researcher focuses primarily on school students.



The first and foremost evidence of Cognitive Perception in terms of 'Positive Belief' comes from The Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions proposed by (Fredrickson, 2001). When people feel positive emotion, they are jolted into a different way of thinking and acting. Their thinking becomes creative and broad-minded, and their actions become adventurous and exploratory (Fredrickson and Joiner, 2002). This expanded repertoire creates more mastery over challenges, which in turn generates more positive emotion, which further broadens and builds thinking and action, and so on" (Seligman, 2002). The theory carries an important prescriptive message that people should create positive emotions in their own lives and in the lives of those around them, not just because doing so makes them feel good in the moment, but also because doing so transforms people for the better and sets them on paths toward flourishing, happiness and healthy longevity.

Secondly, dissemination of Value Inputs in form of 'Positive Education' that incorporates well-being along with academic curriculum in schools can ideally prevent depression, increase life satisfaction, encourage social responsibility, promote creativity, foster learning and even enhance academic achievement (Waters, 2014).

Recently, Geelong grammar School (GGS), in Australia, has been the model school for positive education and has been one of the first schools in applying positive psychology in a whole-school approach. (Norrish *et al.*, 2013). O'Shaughnessy and Larson (2014) claim positive education as a paradigm shift in educational approach where education traditionally focuses on academic accomplishment only. White and Waters (2015) describe it as an "an umbrella term used to describe empirically validated interventions and programs from positive psychology that have impact on student well-being." It has an approach characterized as education for both traditional skills and character development (Seligman 2013). White and Murray (2015) have noted, "Positive education programs in schools appear in three forms:

1. Empirically validated and scientifically informed well-being intervention programs that have impact on well-being.
2. Scientifically-informed proactive strategies to the whole school mental health programs in schools.
3. Specific virtues or values and character-based education lessons based in philosophy or values-based learning.

Thirdly, Developmental Mechanisms through 'Positive Nutrition', a focus that recently is added to the field of Positive Psychology. Findings certainly indicate a relationship between nutrition (that is, aspects such as diet and exercise) and self-esteem and well-being (Joaquin, 2016). Nutrition can affect self-esteem, particularly in children and adolescents. For example, a program promoting and educating minority children on healthy living found that it could increase self-esteem in those children (Wong *et al.*, 2015). That is, simply teaching minority children about the way nutrition works is enough to increase how they feel about their physical appearance, their social standing, and their overall

global self-worth. Having high self esteem, being confident about one's own self leads to enhanced well-being.

*The three psychological tools under the umbrella of 'Cognitive Perception, Value Input and Developmental Mechanisms' comprising of 'positive belief, positive nutrition and positive education' respectively can be utilized by anyone irrespective of one's age, i.e. one need not be a student only to be educated about positive concepts, also knowledge regarding positive nutrition is not limited to youth and positive belief can help reap benefits at old age too. Hence, the present study can help fill in the gaps by reaching out to many people and probe its relevance in Indian context. Thus, the present study is a complete package which acknowledges the presence and influence of self in the pursuit of well-being; and how would these constructs promote health among students, youth and individual's life in general.*

### Final Remark!

It would be quite apt to quote from Indian context here, that peace of mind and free from worries have been emphasized as aspects of self in India (Roland, 1984). Living in the present is an essential key to happiness and stress free life. As per Salve, "Discarding all prejudices ideologies, presumptions and assumptions, living, in the present moment and giving the credits of the final results to the Almighty, one can definitely experience bliss-a state that is beyond happiness" Salve (2000). Positive Psychology principles definitely have its roots in Eastern perspective and so can be well suited to Indian mindsets.

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