

## **Influence of Optimism, Parental Expectations and Peer Attachment on Subjective Happiness of Female College Students**

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The essential ingredient for one's living is being happy, which is found in different forms and differs among individuals. It can be associated with purchase of inanimate objects or with someone else the person is associated with. On the whole, consistent feelings of happiness may be determined by individual factors as well as environmental factors. The importance of happiness is apparent in numerous life domains. Research with adolescents has revealed the importance of happiness in school as well as at home and in the community. Therefore, the present study aimed to identify the influence of certain factors namely optimism, parental expectations and peer attachment on the subjective happiness among female college students. 107 female college students were tested on Life-Orientation Test-Revised, Perception of Parental Expectations Inventory, Peer Attachment and The Oxford Happiness Scale. The results showed that the important factors that determine happiness result in better physical and psychological health among women in the later stages of life.

**Keywords:** Optimism, Parental Expectations, Peer Attachment, Happiness of Female Students

Through the past century, psychologists have mainly focused on human unhappiness (such as anxiety and depression) and neglected the positive aspect of human potential. Argyle, Martin and Crossland (1989) defined happiness as having three partly independent components: (1) the average level of satisfaction over a specific time period; (2) the frequency and degree of positive affect; and (3) the relative absence of negative affect. "Happiness" denotes a measure of an individual's evaluation of one's overall quality of life (Veenhoven, 1997). The term is usually used interchangeably with "life satisfaction". People reporting to be happy tend to smile more and show lower levels of stress responses (heart rate, blood pressure), and they are less likely to commit suicide (Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999). Research on happiness has identified a number of personal, demographic and socio-economic covariates of happiness that explain observed happiness patterns. Important personal and demographic characteristics, which affect happiness, are health, age, sex, marital status, the size and structure of the household, the education level, and the degree of urbanization (Clark, Frijters

& Shields, 2008; Frey & Stutzer, 2002; Welsch, 2007). The present study made an attempt to identify the relationship of optimism, parental expectation and peer attachment with happiness of female college students.

Optimism is the belief that things will turn out well. It is the expectation that good things will come your way and that you have the ability to control the direction of your life. Optimism is defined as, "a generalized expectancy that good, as opposed to bad, outcomes will generally occur when confronted with problems across important life domains" (Franken, 1994). In general, optimism is used to denote a positive attitude or disposition that good things would happen independent of one's ability. Optimism has been linked to better responses to various difficulties, from the more mundane, like transition to college (Brissette, Scheier, & Carver, 2002) to the extreme, like coping with missile attacks (Zeidner & Hammer, 1992). Optimism appears to play a protective role, assisting people in coping with extraordinarily trying incidents. Furthermore, optimism has been found to correlate positively with life satisfaction

and self-esteem (Lucas, Diener, & Suh, 1996). Segerstrom and Sephton (2010) also examined whether optimism predicted positive affect. Their hypothesis that changes in optimism would predict changes in positive affect was borne out, as increases in optimism were associated with increased positive affect, and vice versa. Interestingly, changes in optimism were not related to changes in negative affect. Thus, it appears that optimism is uniquely related to positive affect. This means that optimists are generally happier with their lives than pessimists.

Parental expectation seems to have positive influence on adolescent's growth and development. However, when it becomes unrealistic, adolescents tend to experience psychological distress such as anxiety, anger, depression, etc. Hence, it is very important to understand the impact of parental expectations on their children. Further, it is imperative to study whether the adolescents are able to fulfill or meet their parental expectations and whether it has a positive impact on them. Parents' support of their children can be in the form of positive, yet realistic expectations and aspirations for children, giving attention and responding appropriately to what's happening in children's lives and in the provision of information and experiences that foster development (Alexander & Entwisle, 1988; Marjoribanks, 1979, 1990; Scott-Jones, 1984). India being a predominantly collectivistic society, Indian parents emphasize the goals and interests of the group over those of individual members (Triandis, 1995). Further, the decisions, behavior, and self-definition of individuals within such a tradition are expected to reflect the needs, values, and expectations of the larger group (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988). Fulfilling the desire of the family members as expected would pave way for their happiness and satisfaction whereas unfulfillment of parental expectation makes them more dissatisfied and unhappy.

According to Bowlby (1977, 1988), attachment is adaptive and significant because it involves a process of natural selection that yields survival advantage. Friendship has been

found to be one of the predictors of happiness (Argyle, 1987). There is a significant evolution in the characteristics that define friendships from infancy to older adolescence, evolving from common interest for games and activities, to the sharing of feelings, emotions and self-disclosure (Berndt, 1982). Peer friendship has been found to play an important role in adolescence, mainly in providing social support and shared interests and joined activities (Argyle, 1987). Parent and peer attachment relations served as predictors of happiness (Barrera & Garrison-Jones, 1992; Furman & Buhrmester, 1992; Greenberg, Siegel, & Leitch, 1983). Research has provided evidence for positive associations between both parent and peer attachment relationships and adolescent happiness. Based on a sample of 213 adolescents of ages 12 to 19, Greenberg et al. (1983) found that both parent attachment and peer attachment accounted for variance in adolescent's happiness.

Taking into consideration of all the above mentioned facts on happiness the present study intended to identify the influence of optimism, perceived parental expectation, unfulfillment of parental expectation and peer attachment on happiness of female college students.

#### **Objectives:**

- To identify the relationship of optimism, parental expectations and peer attachment with subjective happiness of female college students.
- To find out the significant predictors of happiness of female college students

#### **Hypotheses:**

1. Optimism would be positively related to happiness of female college students
2. Parental expectation would not be significantly related to happiness of female college students.
3. Unfulfillment of parental expectation would not be significantly related to happiness of female college students.
4. Peer attachment would be positively related to happiness of female college students.

## Method

### Participants:

The participants included female college students from Chennai. The sample comprised of under-graduates and postgraduates. Convenience sampling technique was used to select the sample. The estimated sample size for the present study was 150 of which 43 participants' data was found to be incomplete. Hence, the sample comprised of 107 female college students.

### Tools:

*Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R)* by Scheier, Carver, and Bridges (1994): It is a ten item inventory with a five-point Likert scale that ranges from "Strongly agree" to "Strongly disagree". The scoring was done using 0 - Strongly disagree, 1 - Disagree, 2 - Neutral, 3 - Agree and 4 - Strongly agree. Items 2, 5, 6, and 8 are fillers, which are not considered for scoring. Item numbers 3, 7 and 9 are scored in reverse direction. Responses to "scored" items are to be summed up so that high values imply optimism. The test-retest reliability showed .69 indicating good reliability.

*Perception of Parental Expectations Inventory* (Sasikala & Karunanidhi, 2011): It is a 30 item inventory measuring the perceived parental expectations (PPE) and perception of fulfillment of parental expectations (PFPE). The items were scored according to the dimensions using 5 (all the time), 4 (most of the time), 3 (sometimes), 2 (very rarely) and 1 (not at all). The scores were added to get a composite score of the overall perception of parental expectations. High scores on PPE indicate perception of high level of parental expectations. The test-retest reliability coefficient for the total PPE was .76 and the total PFPE was .71.

*Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment* (Greenberg & Armsden, 2009): It is a 50 item inventory measuring the attachment to parents and peers. IPPA consists of three subscales, namely Trust, Communication and Alienation. Items are rated on a Likert type scale ranging from 1 (Almost never or Never) to 5 (Almost Always or Always). In the present study, only 25 items assessing peer attachment was used. High

Scores on the Inventory of Parental and Peer Attachment indicate a participant with relatively higher perceived quality of attachment. Test-retest reliability was established.

*The Oxford Happiness Scale* (Hills & Argyle, 2002): It consisted of 29 items with six response categories: 1 - strongly disagree, 2 - moderately agree, 3 - slightly disagree, 4 - slightly agree, 5 - moderately agree and 6 - strongly agree. Reverse scoring is done for the negative items. The sum of the item scores is an overall measure of happiness, with high scores indicating greater happiness.

## Results and Discussion

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics for variables chosen in the study**

Variables	Mean	SD
Optimism	13.61	3.587
Perception of parental expectation	111.07	17.55
Un-fulfillment of parental expectation	8.96	29.45
Peer Attachment	71.25	13.55
Happiness	117.41	28.55

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation for the variables chosen in the study.

**Table 2. Relationship among Optimism, Perception of Parental expectation, Unfulfillment of parental expectation, Peer Attachment and Happiness of Female College Students**

Variables	Happiness 'r' value
Optimism	0.373**
Perception of parental expectation	0.121
Un-fulfillment of parental expectation	0.015
Peer Attachment	0.278**

\*\*p>0.01

Table 2 shows that optimism and peer attachment was positively related to happiness of female college students. This indicates that if optimism and peer attachment is high then

happiness also tends to be high. It can be inferred that highly optimistic female college students and female college students with high peer attachment tend to experience more happiness. Hence, the hypotheses stating that, "Optimism would be positively related to happiness of female college students" and, "Peer attachment would be positively related to happiness of female college students" is proved. Further, it also shows that perception of parental expectation and un-fulfillment of parental expectation was not significantly related to happiness of female college students. Hence, the null hypotheses stating that, "Perception of parental expectation would not be significantly related to happiness of female college students" and, "Un-fulfillment of parental expectation would not be significantly related to happiness of female college students", is proved.

**Table 3. Multiple Linear Regression Co-efficient, Beta Value and 't' Value**

Variable	Happiness	
	Standardized Beta Coefficients	t
Constant	81.173 (B)	8.99
Optimism	0.314	3.269**
Peer Acceptance	0.166	1.733
R	0.404	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.163	
F	10.134**	
N	107	

\*\*p<0.01

In the Multiple Linear regression (table 3), the variables namely optimism and peer attachment is included as independent variable as they were significantly correlated with happiness. It is also observed that optimism was found to be the significant predictor of happiness of female college students.

### Discussion

Correlation analysis revealed that optimism was positively related to happiness of female college students. This implies that highly optimistic female tend to experience more happiness. This could be due to the reason

that, Optimism is a positive attitude that good things will happen independent of one's ability. Having a positive attitude towards any event that occur in one's life, might give an individual the ability to withstand tough situations and move forward. When an individual has this positive and meaningful approach towards life then it might help them to progress in life and pave way for being happy rather than being sad and worrying about the bad things encountered in life. This finding of the study is in line with the earlier research findings of (Lucas, Diener, & Suh, 1996), which indicated that optimism as positively related with life satisfaction and self-esteem. It was also found that optimism is uniquely related to positive affect (Segerstrom & Sephton, 2010).

Analysis also revealed that perception of parental expectation and un-fulfillment of parental expectation was not significantly related to happiness of female college students. This could be probably due to the fact that even though parental expectation was found to have certain positive outcomes like helping the child to excel at par with the child's abilities mostly it tends to have a more negative impact like experiencing psychological distress such as anxiety, anger, depression, etc. especially when it comes to perception of unrealistic expectations of the parents and the un-fulfillment of the same by the child. In earlier studies (Siu & Watkins, 1997; Archer & Lamnin, 1985), it has been discovered that high levels of demands and pressure from the parents to perform well negatively affects children's' psychological functioning and also causes stress. The findings of Sasikala and Karunanidhi (2011) revealed that parental expectation and perception of un-fulfillment of parental expectation were positively related to the behavior problems of adolescents. In the present research, it is found that there was no significant relationship between parental expectation and un-fulfillment of parental expectation on the positive affect i.e. happiness.

The study also found that peer attachment was positively related to happiness of female college students. This indicates that when peer attachment is high then the happiness of female college students also tends to be high. This finding is substantiated with the fact that,

college life is a phase, in which students give more importance to friendship and spend most of their time with them. While in college, female students generally share all their problems with their friends and seek their support. This support that they receive from their friends gives them a positive feel to face all their problems and resolve it. In addition to this, college students spend most of their college days with fun activities with the peer group. Having a closed attachment with their peer groups could have made them feel happier. This finding is supported by the earlier research findings, which assured that friendship has been found to be one of the predictors of happiness (Argyle, 1987; Barrera & Garrison-Jones, 1992; Furman & Buhmester, 1992; Greenberg, Siegel, & Leitch, 1983). Even though optimism and peer attachment were included as independent variable only optimism was found to be a significant predictor of happiness of female college students.

### Conclusion

The study emphasises the importance of consistent feeling of happiness, which would result in better productive living. Individual factors like optimism and interpersonal factor like peer attachment was found to be positively related to subjective happiness. The study revealed the importance of the field of positive psychology wherein the importance of positive psychological approach, particularly, optimistic outlook in dealing with life events and promoting happiness in life is highlighted. Therefore, it is concluded that having a more positive approach towards life like high optimism will enable an individual to be happier and that in turn could provide the path to achieve greater success in life.

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