



International Journal of Home Science

ISSN: 2395-7476
IJHS 2022; 8(2): 375-381
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www.home-sciencejournal.com
Received: 18-06-2022
Accepted: 21-07-2022

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Optimism and psychological well-being as predictors of happiness among police officers

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Abstract

The present study was investigated to assess the level of happiness among police officers and to examine the contribution of contextual factors such as, optimism and psychological well-being on the happiness levels of police officers. Oxford Happiness Inventory, Life Orientation Test and Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale were administered on 100 police officers including 50 male and 50 female police officers (20-60 years of age) living with their families and belonging to Chandigarh city. The results revealed that major proportion of the police officers revealed average levels of happiness. Gender differences revealed that female police officers perceived higher levels of happiness, more optimistic and perceived more psychological well-being as compared to male police officers.

Keywords: Happiness, optimism, psychological well-being, gender differences

1. Introduction

Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence (Aristotle, 2000) [2]. Anand (2016) [1] described happiness as a mental or emotional state of well-being which can be defined as positive or pleasant emotions ranging from contentment to intense joy. Happy mental status reflects judgments by a person about their overall well-being. Whereas, Sumner's (1996) [25] described it as certain kind of positive attitude towards life, which in the fullest form has both a cognitive and an affective component. The cognitive aspect of happiness consists in a positive evaluation of life, a judgment that at least on balance; it measures up favorably against standard or expectation. The affective side of happiness consists a sense of well-being, finding life enriching, rewarding and feeling satisfied or fulfilled by it.

There were many researches on happiness from which, a study conducted by (Ghasempour *et al.*, 2013) [7] observed that happiness lead to improve life satisfaction, self-efficacy, self-esteem, optimism, efficient and adaptive coping with negative events through positive emotions, balance of joy, creating laughter and humor.

Optimism has been defined as a mental attitude reflecting a belief or hope that the outcome of some specific endeavor or outcomes in general, will be positive, favorable, and desirable (Peale, 2003) [15]. A common idiom used to illustrate optimism versus pessimism is a glass with water at the halfway point, where the optimist is said to see the glass as half full and the pessimist sees the glass as half empty. Optimistic people tend to have more positive thoughts, be more hopeful, and view the future in a positive light. When a situation is neutral, a person who is optimistic will be more likely to see it as positive, while a pessimistic person is more likely to see it as negative. They also tend to see positive aspects of frustrating situations. Optimistic thinking can be a one-time event; it can also be a strategy for coping with stress or a personality trait. Peterson and Seligman (1987) [16] described optimism as an "attributional style" where the individual own an inner strength that facilitates to interpret failures and negative events as inconstant (negative events will not occur again and that too can be overcome), external (negative events occurring due to external factors) and that the event was specific (the event will not influence any other activity in one's life).

The previous researches carried out on optimism revealed that day to day job demands and being exhausted at work affects the optimistic behavior of police officers which also affects well-being and happiness levels of police officers (Padhy *et al.*, 2015) [14].

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The viewpoint of Social Cognition, (Weinstein, 1980) [28] assist that optimism was the outcome of a cognitive underestimation of risk, in other words, a “bias” for the Self. This bias reflects the optimist’s viewpoint that positive events were more likely to occur to him/her while negative events frequently affect others.

Psychological Well-being is understood as a healthy state of mind. In simple terms it is known as happiness, satisfied, welfare or prosperous. Psychological well-being refers to the perception of people to evaluate their lives. Diener (1997) [6] explained these evaluation may be in the form of cognition or affect. The cognitive part is: an information based appraisal of one’s life that is when a person gives conscious evaluative judgments about one’s satisfaction with life as a whole. The affective part is a hedonic evaluation guided by emotions and feelings such as frequency with which people experience pleasant/unpleasant moods in reaction to their lives.

Veenhoven (1997) [22] revealed that happiness causes positive emotions and psychological well-being to increase because it results to positivity for the individuals. Hence, happiness has a major role in psychological well-being of an individual. In another study by Veenhoven (2006) [23] described happiness prolongs the lifetime of healthy people in the society, in addition to improvement and decrease mental problems along with increasing the mental health.

Police work is known to be fraught with a wide range of dangerous situations. These include high-speed automatic chases, highly emotional and menacing domestic situations, the stress dealing with people who are irrational due to alcohol, drugs or mental instability, and the unpredictable armed confrontations with criminals. The participation of police in these high-risk activities is taken for granted and regarded as being part of their job (Buhrmaster, 2006 [4]; Mangwani, 2012) [11]. Clohessy and Ehlers (1999) [5] revealed that there was nothing surprising about police officers as they were considered ‘at risk’ with higher lifetime mental health difficulties such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) rather than common people.

Whereas, Moran and Colless *et al.*, (1995) [12] expanded to above research that whether they are exposed to various traumatic events, they do not express or show any type of sign of psychological distress. In fact they show positive psychological wellbeing. In a research by Helliwell (2003) [8] reported that the social relationships were very important determinants of happiness and subjective well-being of the employees. Well-being has direct relationship with employee’s performance.

Considering the above theoretical basis, the present study aims to investigate the level of happiness among police officers experiencing tough situations. It also assesses the gender differences in optimism and psychological well-being as predictors of happiness among police officers.

1.1 Rationale of the study

This study was an effort to explore the contribution of factors such as optimism and psychological well-being as predictors of happiness among police officers. The above documented research evidence provided an insight that optimism and psychological well-being has a significant effect on police officers. But due to dearth of research studies in the Indian context, it became pertinent that a scientific study in Indian context on happiness among police officers should be carried out. This study considered the relation between levels of happiness, optimism and psychological well-being among police officers (age ranging from 20-60 years). Thus, this

study focused on trying to understand why some police officers were happier than others. The present study will provide an insight for knowing the reasons which might affect the levels of happiness among police officers living with their families. The study will also be helpful in providing strategies to police officers, both male officers and female officers which will promote well-being amongst them and their relationship with others.

1.2 Objectives of the study

- To assess the level of happiness among police officers.
- To assess the contribution of optimism and psychological well-being as psychological factors among police officers.
- To examine the gender differences in perception of happiness, optimism and psychological well-being among police officers.

1.3 Hypothesis

H₁: Male police officers will have higher happiness levels as compared to female police officers.

H₂: Male police officers will have higher optimism and psychological well-being as compared to female police officers.

2. Methodology

A systematic procedure was designed for conducting the investigation, analysis and interpretation of the grouped data. The areas where police officers were working in Chandigarh City were shortlisted. Then, a list of 100 police officers (N=100) including 50 male officers and 50 female police officers was prepared. 100 police officers who were interested to become a part of this study as a sample were selected randomly. In each selected area, the investigator approached police officers and sought their help to prepare a list of police officers fulfilling the following criteria:

- Police officers living together with their families.
- Police officers in the age range of 20-60 years.
- Belonging to Chandigarh City.

These subjects were purposively selected to complete a sample of 100 police officers (N=100).

2.1 Tools/Measure

The Oxford Happiness Inventory developed by Argyle (2001) was administered to assess the perception of happiness among police officers. It is a 29 item questionnaire measuring the components of happiness *i.e.* achievement, and satisfaction, enjoyment, vigour and health. The test-retest reliability coefficient of the scale was 0.90.

The Life Orientation Test developed by Scheier and Carver (1985) [24] was used to measure the optimism/pessimism dimension of police officers. It is a close ended questionnaire that contains 12 items about optimistic and pessimistic traits of personality. Respondents selected their response to each item from a 5 point-Likert type scale ranging from 0 to 4. These points indicate the degree of severity from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”.

The Ryff’s Psychological Well-Being Scales developed by Carol Ryff (1989) [21] was used to measure the psychological well-being of police officers working under tough conditions. The scale is a 42 item scale designed to measure the six dimensions *i.e.* Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relations, Purpose of life and Self-acceptance. Each dimension includes 6 items. Respondents

responded on to each item from a 6- point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to ”Strongly Agree”.

3 Research Findings and Discussion

Considering the objectives of the present study, the results are presented in two sections: The first section reports the distributions of the sample as per level of happiness, optimism

and psychological well-being and the second section reports gender differences in perception of happiness, optimism and psychological well-being among male and female police officers. The results are mentioned below to show the impact of optimism and psychological well-being among police officers.

3.1 Happiness profile of police officers

Table 1: Distribution of the sample as per level of happiness perceived by police officers

Happiness Score	Male Police Officers (N ₁ =50)		Female Police Officers (N ₂ =50)		Total (N=100)	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Low	14	28.0	15	30.0	29	29.0
Average	23	46.0	16	32.0	39	39.0
High	13	26.0	19	38.0	32	32.0

Total Sample (N) = 100; Male Police officers (N₁) = 50; Female Police officers (N₂) = 50

Table 1 reveals the distribution of the sample across different levels of happiness as perceived by police officers. In the total sample, 39 percent of the police officers reported happiness at average level followed by 32 percent who perceived high level of happiness. Only 29 percent of the total sample recorded low level of happiness.

Majority of female police officers (38%) reported happiness at high levels. Whereas, only 26 percent of male police officers recorded high levels of happiness. 32 percent of female officers and 46 percent of male officers reported happiness at average levels, whereas 30 percent of female police officers and 28 percent of male police officers

perceived happiness scores at low levels. The findings of the present study were contrary to the findings of a research conducted in University of Cambridge and University of Southern California which was published in the Journal of Happiness studies (2008) found that women were happier in early adulthood and experience greater level of unhappiness in later life as compared to men.

The present study concluded that females revealed higher levels of happiness as compared to male police officers. Thus, it also revealed that age was not a barrier for women, they were able to live a happy life even when they were living in a sandwich generation.

Table 2: Gender differences in the perception of happiness (Mean ± SD) by police officers

Variables	Male Police Officers n ₁ = 50		Female Police officers N ₂ =50		T-Value	P-Value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Happiness	3.71	.84	4.04	.94	1.819	.072

Total Sample (N) =100; Male (N₁) =50; Female (N₂) =50

Table-2 presents gender differences in the mean scores of happiness as perceived by police officers. It revealed that female police officers (mean scores=4.04) perceived more happiness as compared to male police officers (mean scores=3.71). Yet, the results reported that the female police officers perceived more happiness as compared to male police officers. A number of studies have revealed significant differences in happiness scores between male and female police officers. The findings of Urry and Gross (2010) [27] which documented that women were more likely to fulfill their goals in earlier life by increasing their life satisfaction and overall happiness. However, men fulfill their goals and were more satisfied with their family and financial situation in later life. Tkach and Lyubomirsky (2006) [26] revealed in a

research where men and women were equally happy, they usually uncovered such gender differences in the use of happiness- enhancing strategies. Females were more satisfied than males in learning, family and friends towards life satisfaction and males were more satisfied in physical activities. Thus, the present study revealed that age is not a major factor, but female officers are able to adjust themselves in a better way even after experiencing bad events. Because of this reason women revealed more happiness as compared male police officers. It was hypothesized in the present study that male police officers would perceive higher happiness levels as compared to female police officers. Hence, according to the findings, the hypothesis was proved to be rejected.

3.2 Perception of optimism among police officers

Table 3: Distribution of the police officers across different levels of optimism

Optimism	Male Police Officers (N ₁ =50)		Female Police officers (N ₂ =50)		Total (N=100)	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Low	17	34.0	13	26.0	30	30.0
Average	20	40.0	18	36.0	38	38.0
High	13	26.0	19	38.0	32	32.0

Total Sample (N) = 100; Male Police officers (N₁) = 50; Female Police officers (N₂) = 50

Table 3 Represents distribution of the respondents across different levels of the optimism as perceived by police officers. Optimism refers to the mental attitude reflecting a

belief or hope that outcome of some specific endeavor will be positive, favorable and desirable.

In the total sample, majority of the police officers (38%)

perceived average level of optimism followed by 32 percent police officers who perceived optimism at high levels. Only 30 percent of police officers in the overall sample reported optimism at low level. Amongst male police officers, 40 percent of them perceived optimism at average levels followed by 34 percent male police officer who perceived optimism at low levels. Only 26 percent of male police officers reported high levels of optimism. Interestingly, on the other hand, major proportion of female police officers (38%) recorded optimism at high levels followed by 36 percent female officers who perceived average levels of optimism.

Only 26 percent female officers were in the low category in this dimension. The results were in line with findings of Peterson and Avila (1995) [17] who described that the optimistic people were those who believed that positive events were more stable and frequent than negative ones. They think that they can deal with problems in daily life and prevent them from happening, and therefore they cope with stressful situations more successfully than people who think pessimistically. Thus, the above data revealed that police officers revealed average levels of optimism. Whereas, female officers reported a slightly rise in the optimism.

Table 4: Gender differences in the perception of optimism (Mean ± SD) by police officers

Variables	Male Police Officers N ₁ = 50		Female Police officers N ₂ =50		T-Value	P-Value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Optimism	17.14	4.34	18.54	4.57	1.571	.119

Total Sample (N) = 100; Male Police officers (N₁) = 50; Female Police officers (N₂) = 50

Table-4 Gives the gender differences in mean scores in perception of optimism by police officers. The results inferred that female police officers (Mean=18.54) reported significantly higher optimism as compared to male police officers (Mean=17.14). The findings of the present study were similar to the results reported by Rudow (2011) [20] which documented women were more optimistic than men because of their close relationships with their close friends and hence, women were more likely to feel positive about their environmental surroundings. The findings were contrary to researches of Jacobsen and Zhang (2014) [9] which reported

that men tend to be more optimistic than women regarding a broad range of issues including economy and financial markets. Thus, the findings of the present study concluded that, if a person is surrounded with positive people who can understand him and can help for inner development then a person can obviously become more optimistic than others and develops an inner strength to stay positive even in hard times. It was hypothesized that male police officers would perceived higher optimism as compared to female police officers. Hence, according to the findings, the hypothesis was proved to be rejected.

3.3 Perception of psychological well-being among police officers

Table 5: Distribution of the sample in the levels of different subscales of psychological well-being perceived by police officers

		Gender					
		Male Police Officers (N ₁) =50		Female Police Officers (N ₂) =50		Total (N) = 100	
		No	%	No	%	No	%
Autonomy	Low	19	38.0	14	28.0	33	33.0
	Average	17	34.0	16	32.0	33	33.0
	High	14	28.0	20	40.0	34	34.0
Environmental Mastery	Low	21	42.0	12	24.0	33	33.0
	Average	17	34.0	12	24.0	29	29.0
	High	12	24.0	26	52.0	38	38.0
Personal Growth	Low	13	26.0	17	34.0	30	30.0
	Average	24	48.0	15	30.0	39	39.0
	High	13	26.0	18	36.0	31	31.0
Positive Relations	Low	19	38.0	12	24.0	31	31.0
	Average	19	38.0	16	32.0	35	35.0
	High	12	24.0	22	44.0	34	34.0
Purpose in life	Low	15	30.0	16	32.0	31	31.0
	Average	19	38.0	11	22.0	30	30.0
	High	16	32.0	23	46.0	39	39.0
Self-acceptance	Low	15	30.0	13	26.0	28	28.0
	Average	24	48.0	17	34.0	41	41.0
	High	11	22.0	20	40.0	31	31.0

Total Sample (N) = 100; Male Police officers (N₁) = 50; Female Police officers (N₂) = 50

Table 5 shows the distribution of the sample in the levels of different subscales of psychological well-being perceived by police officers. Psychological well-being is defined as individual's internal view of his/her perceived mental health leading to a healthy state of mind. Hedonic well-being refers to the subjective feeling of happiness and Eudemonic well-being refers to the purposeful aspect of psychological well-being.

Autonomy refers to a sense of self-determination and being able to resist social pressure to think and behave in certain

ways. In this dimension, the police officers (34%), including female police officers (40%) and male police officers (28%) perceived autonomy at high levels which means that officers have self-determination to think and behave in certain ways. Whereas, male officers 34 percent perceived average autonomy as compared to female officers (32%). However, Male officers (38%) perceived low autonomy than female officers (28%).

Environmental Mastery refers to mastery and competence in managing the environment so as to meet personal needs,

desires and values. The major proportion of police officers (38%), including, female police officers 52 percent and male police officers 24 percent perceived environmental mastery at high levels. On the other hand, male police officers 34 percent perceived average level of environmental mastery than female police officers 24 percent in this level of dimension. Whereas, 42 percent of male police officers perceived lower levels of environmental mastery, only 24 percent female police officers reported their environmental mastery at lower levels.

Personal Growth refers to a sense of improvement and development in self overtime and making the most of one's talent and capacities. The (39%) police officers including 48 percent male officers and 30 percent female officers perceived personal growth at average levels. Whereas, 26 percent male officers and 36 percent female officers perceived improvement and development in self at high levels. However, 34 percent female officers and 26 percent male officers perceived lower levels of personal growth in this dimension.

Positive Relations refers to maintaining warm, satisfying and trusting interpersonal relationships with others. The major section of police officers (35%) perceived positive relations at average level, including 38 percent male officers and 32 percent female officers. Whereas, 44 percent of female police officers and 24 percent of male police officers perceived positive relations at high levels by maintaining warm, satisfying and trusting relationships with others. On the other hand, 38 percent male police officers reported positive relations at lower levels as compared to female officers with only 24 percent who perceived positive relations at low levels in this dimension of psychological well-being.

Purpose in life refers to the positive feeling about oneself to maintain goals in life and a sense of direction that there is a

meaning towards present and past life which holds beliefs and objectives for living. The major section of police officers (39%), including 46 percent female police officers and 32 percent male police officers perceived purpose in life at high levels. On the other hand, 38 percent male officers and 22 percent female officers perceived purpose in life at average levels. However, 30 percent male officers and 32 percent female officers perceived purpose in life at lower levels.

Self-Acceptance refers to the positive attitude towards oneself, accepting multiple aspects including good and bad qualities and feeling positive about one's past life. The major section of police officers (41%), including 48 percent male police officers and 34 percent female police officers perceived self-acceptance at average levels. Whereas, 40 percent female police officers and 22 percent male police officers perceived positive attitude towards oneself at high levels.

Only, 30 percent male police officers and 26 percent female police officers perceived self-acceptance at lower levels.

The findings of the present research were in the line with the findings of Ghasempour *et al.*, (2013) [7] revealed happiness as a positive adaptability and psychological well-being through improving the components and individuals with higher psychological well-being were satisfied with their life and were less affected by negative events. Similarly, Omar *et al.*, (2011) [13] documented police officers with high psychological well-being, feel happy about themselves and wanted to live their lives on high notes, whether they have too much workload, working in stressful situations, extended duty hours and emergency calls. Yet, they perform their duties effectively because of their better levels of psychological well-being. Thus, the present research revealed that positive attitude towards self and maintaining positive relations with others will automatically lead to fruitful life.

Table 6: Gender differences in the perception of psychological well-being (Mean \pm SD) by police officers

Psychological well-being	Male Police Officers N ₁ = 50		Female Police officers N ₂ =50		T-Value	P-Value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Autonomy	25.92	4.86	27.44	5.36	1.486	0.141
Environmental Mastery	24.84	4.73	27.70	4.76	3.012	0.003**
Personal Growth	27.90	4.29	27.86	5.76	0.039	0.969
Positive Relations	25.76	5.59	27.64	5.33	1.721	0.088
Purpose in life	25.36	5.67	26.52	5.23	1.063	0.291
Self-acceptance	26.16	4.74	28.18	4.97	2.081	0.040*

Total Sample (N) = 100; Male Police officers (N₁) =50; Female Police officers (N₂) =50

Table-6, gives gender differences in mean scores in perception of psychological well-being among police officers. Findings revealed to be significant ($p < 0.01$) at 1% level of significance for environmental mastery and 5% level of significance for self-acceptance only and non-significant for autonomy, personal growth, positive relations and purpose in life. According to the results, female police officers perceived high level of autonomy (Mean=27.44) as compared to male police officers (Mean=25.92) followed by environmental mastery which recorded that female police officers (Mean=27.71) to have higher level of environmental mastery as compared to male police officers (Mean=24.84). In the dimension of personal growth male officers perceived slightly higher scores (Mean=27.91) as compared to female police officers. In positive relations, female officers (Mean=27.64) reported more positive relations with others as compared to Male officers (Mean=25.76). Female police officers (Mean=26.52) perceived slightly high in purpose in life than male police officers (Mean=25.36). In the self-acceptance, again female officers (Mean=28.18) perceived greater level of

self-acceptance as compared to male officers (Mean=26.16) in this dimension.

The findings of the present study were similar in few dimensions with respect to the findings of Li *et al.*, (2015) [10] which depicted that women police officers reported more environmental mastery, self-acceptance and positive relations with others than male officers. The findings were contrary to the findings of Li *et al.*, (2015) [10] where men reported higher autonomy than women. The findings were also contrary to researches of Roothman *et al.*, (2003) [19] which reported that men scored higher on physical self-concept, positive thoughts, constructive thinking, cognitive flexibility, total self-concept and fortitude, and scored higher on the expression of affect, somatic symptoms and religious well-being.

The findings of the present study concluded that female police officers perceived greater levels of psychological well-being as compared to male police officers. Thus, if a person has a positive attitude towards life and make efforts to built self-acceptance that would certainly help to make better relationships with others and it will lead to a healthy state of

mind and holistic well-being.

It was hypothesized that male police officers would perceived higher psychological well-being as compared to female police officers. Hence, according to the findings, the hypothesis was proved to be rejected.

4. Conclusion

1. In the total sample, major proportion (39%) of the police officers reported happiness at average levels followed by 32 percent who perceived high levels of happiness. Whereas, 29 percent police officers perceived lower levels of happiness.
2. The female police officers perceived more happiness as compared to male police officers. It was hypothesized in the present study that male officers will have higher happiness levels as compared to female police officers. Hence, according to the findings, the hypothesis was proved to be rejected.
3. Majority of the police officers (38%) perceived optimism at average level followed by 32 percent police officers who perceived optimism at high levels. Whereas, 30 percent total police officers in the total sample perceived lower level of optimism.
4. The total sample of police officers (40%) female police officers perceived autonomy to be at high levels. Only 28 percent male police officers were at high levels of autonomy which means that police officers who resisted social pressure to think as per societal norms were found to be on high levels.
5. The major section of police officers (38%) perceived high levels of environmental mastery in their psychological well-being.
6. In the total sample (39%) police officers including 48 percent male officers and 30 percent female officers perceived average levels of personal growth.
7. The major section of police officers (35%) perceived average levels of positive relations including 38 percent male officers and 32 percent female police officers.
8. In the dimension of purpose in life, the total sample of police officers 39 percent including 46 percent female police officers and 32 percent male police officers reported high levels.
9. The major proportion of police officers (41%) including 48 percent male police officers and 34 percent female police officers, perceived self-acceptance at average levels.
10. Majority of the police officers perceived average levels of happiness.
11. The findings in gender differences were revealed to be significant at 1% level of significance for environmental mastery and 5% level of significance for self-acceptance only.
12. The female police officers perceived more psychological well-being as compared to male police officers

5. Recommendations

More in depth studies may be conducted by taking into account other variables which includes psychological factors like self-esteem and self-confidence, life satisfaction, resilience of police officers, attitude towards life and contextual factors like socio economic status, values perceived by police officers and religious influences and spirituality in which police officers are living. Comparative studies can also be conducted on singles married police officers, type of police officers (traffic police vs firefighters),

and urban vs rural (demographic area). Intervention studies can also be conducted to alleviate stress and promote happiness among police officers. Despite these limitations, the present study contributes to the existing knowledge of optimism and psychological well-being as predictors of happiness.

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