

BRIEF REPORTS

Happiness and Resilience among Young Physically Disadvantaged Employees in India: A Pilot Study

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: *The study aimed to examine and compare the happiness and resilience of disadvantaged employees and non-disadvantaged employees.*

Method: *The study sample included 37 young employees, between 20 and 30 years of age. Among them, 17 were with physical disadvantages of one type or the other, and 20 had no physical disadvantages.*

Results: *Mann-Whitney U test showed that there is no difference in resilience and happiness between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged employees. Among the non-disadvantaged employees, there is a relationship between happiness and resilience. However, among the disadvantaged employees, this relationship is not there.*

Conclusions: *Disadvantaged employees in the present sample do not differ from the non-disadvantaged in their happiness and resilience. However, it cannot be assumed that happiness is a contributing factor to the resilience of the disadvantaged employees. Also, it is not possible to generalise the results of the study due to the small sample size.*

Key words: *Happiness, resilience, disadvantaged, employees.*

INTRODUCTION

Happiness involves the experience of frequent positive affect, high life satisfaction, and sporadic negative affect (Diener et al, 1999; Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999; Diener et al, 2009). Physical disability can have psychological consequences involving various symptoms of depression and behavioural issues (Elliott &

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Frank, 1996; Lawrence et al, 2006; Turner et al, 2006). However, according to the disability paradox (Albrecht & Devlieger, 1999), many individuals with disability have an excellent quality of life, even if they seem to experience an undesirable daily existence. For instance, Hartoonian et al (2014) identified that quality of life had not been affected by the degree of functional impairment among individuals with spinal cord injury. Resilience is the capacity for a successful adaptation with the environment despite challenging or threatening circumstances (Masten et al, 1990). Physically disadvantaged employees who feel adequate happiness and resilience would continue in their profession despite the adversities within the organisations.

In the business sector, happiness studies have been of great importance. According to Pryce-Jones and Lindsay (2014), happiness at the workplace is the mentality that allows people to achieve better performance and potential. Happiness in the workplace is also the worker's feeling of safety and health in the work environment. It includes good leadership, competency and change management (Päätaalo et al, 2011). Happy individuals typically enjoy success (Lyubomirsky et al, 2005). Happiness contributes to positive emotions, which will broaden the thought-action repertoires of the employees, making them excel in social, physical, and intellectual resources (Isen, 1999; Fredrickson et al, 2000; Fredrickson, 2001; Bahari et al, 2016). Employee happiness leads to better productivity for the organisations as well as for the individuals (Flynn & MacLeod, 2015; Guzi & Gracia, 2015). A higher level of distress in the physically disadvantaged employees is linked with a lower level of happiness (Terrill et al, 2015). Happiness imparts meaning to life and thus mediates the link between distress and age (Terrill et al, 2015).

Observations of Diener and Diener (1996) based on cross-national data indicated that individuals are generally happy, regardless of the fact that they are disadvantaged or non-disadvantaged. However, according to Albrecht and Devlieger (1999) physically disadvantaged individuals are not as happy as the non-disadvantaged. For instance, individuals with spinal cord injury have a lower level of happiness and life satisfaction than the normal individuals (Mehnert et al, 1990). Quoting Lipowski (1975), Thurer and Rogers (1984) note that they are more prone to psychological issues, experience emotions of giving up, and anxiety. As Dunn and Brody (2008) observed, they have a higher level of depression than non-disadvantaged individuals. Based on the 1991 Health and Activity Limitation Survey, Uppal (2006) stated that individuals who are physically disadvantaged by birth have a higher level of happiness than those

who become disadvantaged due to mishaps. However, it is the attitude that plays an important role, more than any predetermined set of physical attributes, in experiencing happiness (Brickman et al, 1978; Bizer et al, 2002).

Physically disadvantaged employees would have limitations in their sensory or motor skills. They may be prevented from taking an active part in the organisation due to the unfavourable attitudinal, socio-cultural, economic and environmental forces. If their work attitude involves commitment, control and ability to meet the challenges, then it would make them resilient (Garmezy, 1991). A physically disadvantaged employee who possesses these work attitudes will be productive even in adverse situations and will try to make a success out of the adversity. However, the literature lacks appropriate information to show that happiness is a factor that would lead to the resilience of physically disadvantaged employees. At the same time, the link between resilience and happiness can be speculated on by examining factors and sources of happiness, including coping ability, self-regulation, life satisfaction and social support (Fujikawa et al, 2013; Cheung et al, 2014; Ngamaba, 2016). These are the characteristics of resilient individuals who effectively bounce back from suffering, establish strong social connections, and possess the capacity to manage their emotions, behaviour, and impulses (Connor & Davidson, 2003; Reivich & Shatte, 2003).

Resilience is the capacity to handle stress and deal with problems in a successful manner by the process of adapting to the requirement of the task (Wagnild & Young, 1993; Henderson & Milstein, 1996). In organisations, resilience shown by the employee will impact the level of job satisfaction (Ebrahim & Hasan, 2011). Resilient employees can adapt and still maintain their performance even though the situation is unfavourable (Garmezy, 1991). Studies on physically disadvantaged employees have shown their potential for resilience to be high. For instance, the study by Bonanno (2004) indicated that congenitally blind people have higher resilience in comparison to sighted people.

Studies have suggested that in spite of adverse and difficult situations, disadvantaged individuals who are high achievers and lead a successful life, would have higher levels of happiness and resilience (Garmezy & Masten, 1991; Luthar et al, 2000; Ungar, 2010; Ahmadi et al, 2015). Personal and environmental factors play a key role in developing resilience and happiness. Instead of succumbing to adverse situations, achievers who have high levels of resilience and happiness will fight back. Skills and attitudes associated with resilience can be learned and applied in dealing with challenges. Having a support system, for

example family and colleagues who encourage and reassure them, can go a long way in building the person's resilience (Kessler et al, 1985). Taking care of one's health helps build resilience; also, being able to care for others physically and emotionally can often build resilience. Resilience refers to the long-term positive effects – involving achievement, well-being and health (Bartley et al, 2010), sustaining positive relationships and financial freedom (Masten et al, 2009).

Objective

The present study questions whether happiness is a factor that has a relationship with resilience among physically disadvantaged individuals. The study also assesses whether physically disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged individuals differ in happiness and resilience.

METHOD

Participants

Data was collected from 37 young employees, in the age group of 20 – 31 years, from various private organisations in Bengaluru city in India. Among them, 17 were disadvantaged and 20 were non-disadvantaged. Among the disadvantaged employees, there were individuals who had problems such as blindness, hearing impairment, and motor disability. Information regarding the study and the measures to which they would have to respond were shared briefly. The consent of each participant was taken before handing over the questionnaires. After signing the informed consent form, participants were requested to fill in their questionnaires individually. They were informed that they were free to withdraw from the research, without any pressure to proceed, or could withdraw their responses even after the data had been provided.

Ethical Considerations

The study received ethics clearance from the Institutional Review Board, CHRIST (Deemed to be) University. It was ensured that participation in the study occurred with the explicit consent (obtained using consent forms) of the respondent, after explaining individually about the study, its importance, its purpose and what was required of him/her. The responses and personal details of the participants were protected, and the results were presented in a format that preserved anonymity.

It was ensured that no fear, embarrassment, anger or distress was caused to the participants, and their privacy and dignity were diligently protected.

Measures

A brief orientation about the measuring tools was given to the participants. The data was then collected using the Resilience scale and Happiness measure.

Happiness was measured using the Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) is a measure of global subjective happiness which consists of a 4-item scale. The authors felt the Scale was suited to different ages, occupations, and cultures, and had good internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.83). The Scale showed adequate internal consistency in the current sample, with an alpha score of 0.73. The Scale had four items with response categories from 1 (less happy) to 7 (happier). In two of the four items, the respondents are asked to describe themselves by the use of ratings and absolute ratings. In the other two items, there is a brief description of both happy and unhappy individuals, and the respondents are asked to extend the characteristics that best describe them.

Resilience of the participants was assessed using the Resilience Scale (RS) developed by Wagnild and Young (1993). The Scale comprised 25 items, based on five essential characteristics of resilience - meaningful life, perseverance, self-reliance, equanimity, and existential awareness - assessed using two subscales, namely personal competence and acceptance of self. Each item has a 7-point Likert-type response category, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree, to 7 = strongly agree. The Resilience Scale (RS) is reliable and valid as proven from various studies (Ahern et al, 2006; Ryan & Caltabiano, 2009). In the present sample, the Scale showed good internal consistency with an alpha score of 0.91.

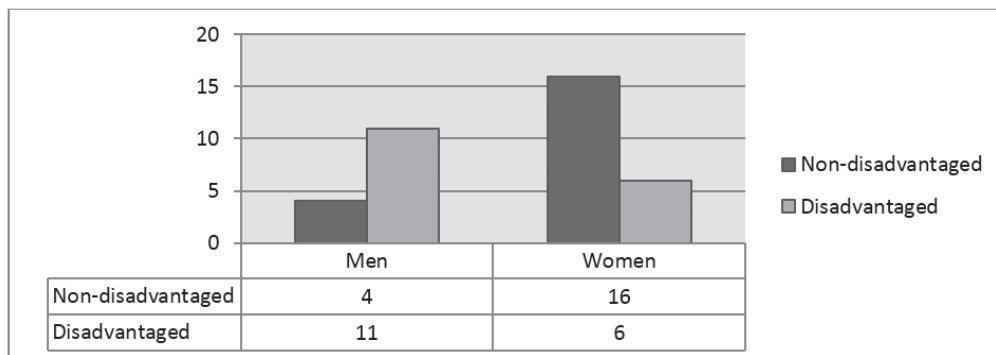
Statistical Analysis

Using the Shapiro-Wilk test, the normality of the scores of happiness and resilience was assessed. As the data was found to be not normally distributed, the differences in happiness and resilience between the disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged employees were tested using Mann-Whitney U statistics. Spearman rank order correlation analysis was used to determine the relationship between happiness and resilience among the physically disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged employees.

RESULTS

Figure 1 summarises the frequency of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged men and women in the sample.

Figure 1: Graphical Summary of the Disadvantaged and Non-disadvantaged Men and Women in the Sample



In the sample, 4 men and 16 women were non-disadvantaged, and 11 men and 6 women were disadvantaged.

Table 1: Correlation between Resilience and Happiness among the Disadvantaged and Non-disadvantaged Participants

Happiness	Resilience
Disadvantaged	0.454
Non-disadvantaged	0.464*

* $p < .05$

There is a moderate correlation between happiness and resilience of the disadvantaged ($r = .454$), and non-disadvantaged ($r = 0.464$). However, there is no significance in the relationship between happiness and resilience in the disadvantaged group (Table 1). The relationship between happiness and resilience is significant in the non-disadvantaged group.

Table 2: Difference between Disadvantaged and Non-disadvantaged in Resilience and Happiness

Variables	Mean ranks		U	z
	Non-disadvantaged (n = 20)	Disadvantaged (n= 17)		
Resilience	20.18	17.62	146.5	0.72
Happiness	18.68	19.38	163.5	0.2

Not significant

DISCUSSION

Results showed that there was no significant difference in happiness between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged groups. As quoted by Diener and Diener (1996) from Allman (1990), a person who is fated to remain in a wheelchair his whole life is as healthy as a non-disadvantaged person. Bahari et al (2016) also had noted this lack of difference in happiness between the physically disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged individuals. As per the findings of Brickman et al (1978), individuals who had acquired spinal cord injuries and those who could walk were both equal in happiness. However, this contradicts the findings of Mehnert et al (1990) that life satisfaction is lower and adaptation incomplete among the physically disadvantaged.

There is no significant difference in resilience between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged groups. This shows that physically disadvantaged employees are equally as able as the non-disadvantaged in navigating and negotiating protective resources and making the employment experiences meaningful (Ungar, 2010). This finding seems to be a contribution to the literature, as there is a lack of information regarding the difference in resilience between the disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged employees. A study by Ahmadi et al (2015) has designated the similarity of resilience between the individuals who were disadvantaged in hearing and the non-disadvantaged. Support groups such as family members, society and culture and so on were assumed to be the factors that helped in maintaining the resilience of the non-disadvantaged (Ahmadi et al, 2015). In the present sample, support groups from the organisations may also be contributing to the resilience of the disadvantaged. Apart from the support groups, a stable environment where the disadvantaged could interact well, disregarding the

disadvantages, also might have added to resilience (Ahmadi et al, 2015), as it would help them overcome the feelings of isolation.

The relationship between happiness and resilience is different among the disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged employees. Among the non-disadvantaged, resilience and happiness have a significant relationship. At the same time, there is no relationship between happiness and resilience among the disadvantaged. This finding is intriguing, as it contradicts the observations of Fujikawa et al (2013) that life satisfaction of the people with spinal cord injuries correlates with resilience. Happiness is one of the major components of life satisfaction (Ngamaba, 2016). However, even if happiness is not a significant factor, the disadvantaged employees are as resilient as the non-disadvantaged and, like the non-disadvantaged, will also be contributing to the organisation, with job satisfaction (Rahmawati, 2013), flexibility (Siu et al, 2010) organisational citizenship behaviour (Toor & Ofori, 2010), performance and effectiveness, motivation (Youssef & Luthans, 2007), self- efficacy (Rees et al, 2015), work happiness and well-being (Wilson & Ferch, 2005; Youssef & Luthans, 2007).

CONCLUSION

Young physically disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged employees in the present sample did not differ in happiness and resilience. Speculatively, disadvantaged employees experience independence, acceptance, social support, and self-efficacy (Furnham & Cheng, 2000) like the non-disadvantaged in their organisation. Despite their disadvantage, they might feel equal among peers in achievement and support from the organisation. Stability in employment also might have contributed to their happiness and resilience. Hence, there will be no difference between the disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged employees in their positive growth within the organisation. However, happiness in the disadvantaged group did not show a significant correlation with resilience. On the other hand, among the non-disadvantaged group, there is a significant positive correlation between happiness and resilience. According to Abbe et al. (2003), happy individuals tend to engage in positive self-reflection, which support them to rebound faster from the adversity. Self-reflection of the physically disadvantaged, even if they are happy, need not be positive as the non-disadvantaged. More studies are recommended to expand the information on the probable resources that may contribute to the resilience of the physically disadvantaged employees. The present research has been a pilot attempt with a minimal sample size. Future studies, with a larger

sample, could focus on the numerous protective factors that may be shielding young disadvantaged employees.

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