

Periodic Research

Relationship between Resilience, Optimism and Psychological Well-being among Widows and Widowers



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Abstract

Widowhood is regarded as one of the most distressing events of one's life. The present study is an attempt to explore relationship between resilience, optimism and psychological well-being among widows and widowers. A sample of 40 widowed persons, 20 widows and 20 widowers, aged 55-62 years and 55-65 years respectively were selected incidentally from the Lucknow city, U.P. Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC), Life orientation test-Revised (LOT-R) and The Scales of Psychological Well-Being were conducted. Results revealed positive relationship between resilience, optimism and psychological well-being among widows and widowers.

Keywords: Resilience, Optimism, Psychological Well-being, Widows and Widowers.

Introduction

The agony of losing one's life partner is unparalleled in the human experience. Without one's life-long partner, it certainly becomes important for one to redefine one's place in the world. This leads to adjustment problems in widowhood.

Review of Literature

Widowhood is the status that a man or a woman attains once his or her spouse has died. A woman is called a widow when her husband has died while a man is called widower when his wife has died. Widowhood is one of the most traumatic of all life transitions (Holmes & Rahe, 1967).

As per Census 2011, there are around 5.6 crores widowed persons in India. The number of widows exceeds that of widowers. The increase in the number of widows can be attributed to increasing life expectancy of women in India. In addition, there is most often an age gap between men and women during marriage.

There are few exemplary studies on bereavement which are noteworthy because they have highly affected research in widowhood. One such research is by Freud (1917). Freud (1917) described the differences between grief and melancholia and elaborated that death of loved one sometime caused depression.

Lindemann (1944) did a study on the after effects of bereavement. This study identified two types of grief i.e. normal and morbid grief. This very study formed the foundation of much of the later studies in bereavement in general and widowhood in particular. Normal grief is one which people generally experience following the loss of a loved one while morbid grief is one that lasts for a longer duration and is more serious and sometimes pathological.

Parkes (1996) identified the features of grief and the factors that contributed to the nature of grief. This study was focused on young widowed people. Therefore, it drew attention on the commonalities and the differences in bereavement at different ages.

Recent years have witnessed a paradigm shift in psychology, which focuses on creating well-being, happiness and life satisfaction. This budding field of psychology is named as "Positive Psychology". Traditional psychology focused on identifying and curing mental illness and fixing what was wrong while positive psychology focuses on "what is right" and promoting wellness. In this regard, positive psychology pays emphasis on resilience, optimism, hope, gratitude and other positive constructs.

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Resilience is defined as positive adaptation, or the ability to maintain or regain mental health, in spite of experiencing hardship. Although, many definitions of resilience have been proposed, the most accepted definition of resilience is to bounce back (Agnes, 2013). Resilience is often described as a dynamic development process of responding more positively than expected after facing risk (Glennie, 2010). It is manifested by how well one reacts to a threat using one's own abilities and available support systems (Condly, 2006).

Optimism can be regarded as rather an ill-defined concept. In the first half of the twentieth century, research studies highlighted that optimism was a characteristic to be controlled because it encouraged the illusion of positive outcomes that could not always be demonstrated in real life. Being extremely optimistic and unrealistically optimistic can be dangerous for one's mental well-being. In the second half of the twentieth century, due to the paradigm shift in within psychology, the research related to optimism began to shift from the negative perspective, and started focusing on the positive impact of optimism on well-being. The most accepted definition of optimism is given by Scheier and Carver (1985), that optimism is "the stable tendency [to] believe that good rather than bad things will happen." Studies also differentiate between types of optimism. Scheier and Carver (1985) coined the term dispositional optimism to describe a general sense of optimism or a generally optimistic outlook on present and future events whereas situational optimism means optimism directed towards a specific event or eventuality.

Psychological well-being is conceptualized as a state, characterized by acceptance, actualization, contribution, coherence, and integration with others (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). It is defined as an amalgamation of positive affect such as happiness and pleasure (the Hedonic perspective) and functioning with optimal effectiveness in personal and social life and realizing one's potentials (the Eudemonic perspective) (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Ryff (1989) defined Psychological well-being and emphasized that it has six dimensions, namely, autonomy, personal growth, self-acceptance, life purpose, mastery, and positive relatedness. It is defined as a *proactive* and *intentional aspect* of one's life consisting of autonomy, self-acceptance and mastery, and personality characteristics such as curiosity, integrity, spirituality, and forgiveness (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Seligman, 2002, 2011). The final model of psychological well-being propounded by Ryff consists of six factors, which are as follows (Ryff, 1989):

1. Self-acceptance: it means to have a realistic perception of oneself, comprising of both positives and negative, and still be able to accept oneself.
2. Positive relations with others: it means to be able to form sound, warm, caring relationships with others; it is the capability to develop intimacy and to show empathy towards others.

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3. Autonomy: it is the capability to make one's own decisions without relying on, or waiting for, the other's approval; the ability to assess oneself according to one's own beliefs and not the other's beliefs.
4. Environmental mastery: it is the capability to manage and mould the environment which aligns with one's needs and values.
5. Purpose in life: it means having goals in life and a sense that one's life has purpose and meaning
6. Personal growth: it means to continuously grow and develop as a person and maximize one's capabilities.

The Present Study

The demise of any loved one is highly stressful, but loss of spouse has been found to be most difficult for older adults (Arbuckle & de Vries, 1995). Most of the researches focusing on widowhood have focused on stress and depression during widowhood rather than the wider positive construct of well-being. Variables like resilience, optimism and psychological well-being are less probed in this regard. Moreover, most of the studies in this domain are done in western context. Keeping this view in mind, present study is an attempt to explore relationship between resilience, optimism and psychological well-being among widows and widowers. The researcher is influenced by the very basic premise of positive psychology that positive emotions can undo the effects of a stressful traumatic experience. Therefore, present study is an attempt to explore relationship between resilience, optimism and psychological well-being among widows and widowers.

Objectives of the Study

Following were the objectives of the present study-

1. To explore the relationship between resilience, optimism and psychological well-being in widows.
2. To explore the relationship between resilience, optimism and psychological well-being in widowers.

Hypotheses

1. There would be positive relationship between resilience, optimism and psychological well-being in widows.
2. There would be positive relationship between resilience, optimism and psychological well-being in widowers.

Method and Procedure

The present study was a correlational design involving two groups' widows and widowers. The sample comprised 40 widowed persons- 20 widows and 20 widowers incidentally selected from the Lucknow city, U.P. The age of widows ranged from 55-62 years with average age of 58.75 while the age of widowers ranged from 55-65 years with average age of 60.30. All the participants were at least graduate. Only such individuals were included in the study who have suffered spouse loss at least two years ago. Apart from this they had been married for at least 15 years. An additional criterion was followed that they remained widowed and didn't remarry, as

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the effects of second marriage would affect participants' responses. Individuals who suffered spouse loss less than two years ago were excluded

from the study. Individuals who had been married for less than 15 years were also excluded from the study.

Demographic Details of the Sample

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Widows (N=20)		
Age	58.75	3.12
Year Married	33.65	5.74
Year Bereaved	5.8	1.64
Widowers (N=20)		
Age	60.30	2.40
Year Married	31.25	4.47
Year Bereaved	5.10	2.19

Rapport was established with the participants and they were briefed that their responses would be kept confidential and would be solely used for research purpose. Consent was taken from the respondents and they were instructed as per the instructions given in the questionnaire. Data was collected individually from each participant.

Measures

Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC)

CD-RISC developed by Connor and Davidson (2003) was used in this study to assess the level of resilience. It is a 25 items scale that measures the ability to cope with stress and adversity. Respondent's rate items on a scale from 0 ("not true at all") to 4 ("true nearly all the time"). Score Range is 0-100 and high score suggests high resilience. Chronbach's alpha of this scale is 0.89. The scale has stable discriminant and convergent validity (Singh et al., 2010).

Life orientation test-Revised (LOT-R)

LOT-R developed by Scheier, Carver & Bridges (1994) was used in this study to assess the level of optimism. LOT-R has 10 items (3 positively worded, 3 negatively worded and 4 filler items). This scale measures dispositional optimism. Only 6 items out of 10 are to be used to derive a score of optimism,

fillers are not to be scored. Respondent's rate items on a scale from 0 ("strongly disagree") to 4 ("strongly agree"). Scoring of negatively worded items is done in reverse order. Scoring of these 6 items is then summed up to compute an overall optimism score. Score Range is 0-24 and higher score implies greater optimism. LOT-R has good internal consistency (alpha coefficient ranging from .70 to .80) and the test-retest correlation is from .68 to .79 for intervals of 4 to 28 months (Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994).

The Scales of Psychological Well-Being

The short form of the Ryff inventory which consists of 18 items was used. There are six dimensions. 3 items in each dimension. The dimension is: positive relations with others, Environmental mastery, Self-Acceptance, Autonomy, Personal Growth, and Purpose in life. Respondent's rate items on a scale from 1("strongly disagree") to 6("strongly agree"). Range is 3-18 on each dimension. There are few negatively worded items which are to be scored in reverse order. The overall Chronbach's alpha $\alpha=0.85$. The psychometric properties of the scale have been evaluated and supported by several studies (Clarke et al, 2001; Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

Results

Table-1

Coefficient of Correlation between Resilience, Optimism and Psychological Well-Being in Widows (N=20)

Variables	Resilience	Optimism	Psychological Well-Being
Resilience		0.67**	0.22
Optimism			0.41**
Psychological Well-Being			

**significant at 0.01level

Table-1 indicates the correlation coefficient between resilience, optimism and psychological well-being in widows. It depicts that optimism; resilience and psychological well-being have positive relationship with each other in case of widows. The correlation coefficient of resilience-optimism was high

and significant. Correlation coefficient of optimism-psychological well was moderate and was found to be significant while the correlation coefficient of resilience and psychological well-being was low and not significant.

Thus, first hypothesis is confirmed.

Table-2

Coefficient of Correlation between Resilience, Optimism and Psychological Well-Being in Widowers (N=20)

Variables	Resilience	Optimism	Psychological Well-Being
Resilience		0.28	0.73**
Optimism			0.53**
Psychological Well-Being			

**significant at 0.01level

Table-2 indicates that there is positive relationship between resilience, optimism, and psychological well-being in case of widowers. The correlation coefficient of resilience and psychological well-being was found to be high and significant. Correlation coefficient of optimism-psychological well-being was found to be moderate and significant while the coefficient of correlation between resilience-optimism was low and was not significant.

Thus, second hypothesis is confirmed.

Discussion

The present study is an attempt to explore relationship between resilience, optimism and psychological well-being among widows and widowers. The findings of the present study are discussed in the following paragraphs.

The first objective of the study was to investigate relationship between resilience, optimism and psychological well-being among widows. Results revealed positive relationship between resilience, optimism and psychological well-being in case of widows. These results were consistent with the previous research findings that psychological resilience (hardiness) (as explained by Kobasa and colleagues 1982) is significantly associated with the well-being of widowed women (O'Rourke, 2004). Previous findings also suggest that a positive orientation to the future is a significant aspect of widows' adaptation to loss and well-being i.e., a positive future orientation appears to prevent a negative preoccupation with the past (i.e., demise of one's husband) (O'Rourke, 2004). Studies also suggest importance of optimism, personal meaning and other personal factors in predicting psychological well-being (Fry, 2001).

Second objective of present study was to investigate relationship between resilience, optimism and psychological well-being among widowers. Positive relationship has been found between resilience, optimism and psychological well-being among widowers. Previous studies have highlighted that resilience is not only positively related to psychological well-being but also enhances well-being. Moore and Stratton (2003) talked about *resilient widowers* who bounced back from the stressor i.e. spouse loss and are well adjusted to life following the spouse loss. Research findings in this context, found resilient responses to spouse loss by widowed persons. There were no significant difference found in levels of depression between pre-loss (prior to the death of spouse) and 6 and 18 months post loss (after the death of spouse).(Bannano et al., 2002)

Conclusion

On the basis of above results following conclusions can be drawn:

1. There is positive relationship between resilience, optimism and psychological well-being among widows.
2. There is positive relationship between resilience, optimism and psychological well-being among widowers.

Limitations and Suggestions

The present study was done on a small sample and was limited to a small geographic location so the findings cannot be generalized. Present study is entirely quantitative in nature. Future researches can follow qualitative approach in studying widowhood. Effect of other variables such as, social support, economic support, age of bereaved person, circumstances of the death of the partner could also be studied in further researches. Future research shall also examine how being depended upon within marriage affects survivors' adjustment to loss. Future research can also focus on other aspects of adjustment to widowhood such as, pursuit of new relationships and interests or rekindling of old interests or relationships that may have been neglected during one's marriage. Further research shall also identify additional predictors of personal growth following spouse loss.

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