

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY INTERVENTION ON SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING AND PSYCHOPATHOLOGY OF LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract

A model of mental health, dual factor model, imagines the status of mental health as a mixture of psychopathology and subjective well-being. To make lower secondary school students not only decrease their psychopathology in which externalizing and internalizing behavior but also increase subjective well-being including negative and positive affect and life satisfaction. Thus, to examine the effect of positive psychology intervention (PPI) program on students' subjective well-being and psychopathology required. Therefore, this study was conducted as an investigation of the effectiveness of positive psychology intervention (PPI) on subjective well-being and psychopathology of grade 6 students. In this study, the equal number of boys and girls in Grade 6 (76 students) and 6 teachers in Grade 6 are participated. Pre-test post-test control group design and purposive sampling method were used. Experimental and control groups were assigned equally based on the results of pre-test. To improve students' subjective well-being and to reduce psychopathology, the PPI was used in the experimental group. Results showed that participants in the experimental group showed significant lower level of psychopathology (the behaviors of externalizing and internalizing) and negative affect and higher levels of life satisfaction and positive affect than control group. Thus, it can be said that subjective well-being and psychopathology of lower secondary school students can be promoted and reduced by PPI program.

Keywords: Positive Psychology Intervention, Subjective Well-Being, Psychopathology

Introduction

Mental health has been approached from the viewing without involving psychopathology as the same meaning of psychological wellness. Not only it solely focuses on psychopathology to clarify mental health standing is insufficient but also it should be investigated positive aspects of human functioning according to the results of the growing consensus and the argument among psychologist. In this situation the dual factor model of mental health is needed as support. Greenspoon and Saklofske (2001) assumed that although the presence of subjective well-being (SWB) and the absence of psychopathology were associated, these facts has not evidenced consistently via research. Therefore, psychopathology and subjective well-being are same poles on the same spectrum. However, it is more nuanced on the mental health status and sometimes it can have both levels (high and low). Support for a dual-factor model initially helped as a provider for a system integration to assess mental health which includes four separate mental health categories based on psychopathological levels and SWB mainly life satisfaction. The findings of research recommended that student with low and high level of psychopathology and SWB show superior academic, social, and physical health results and outcomes associate with those students who have low SWB and without psychopathology.

Diener (2000) stated that subjective well-being "scientific term for happiness" is a combination of three distinct which are interrelated parts: life satisfaction, the affects of positive and negative. Diener (2000) defined that life satisfaction is the cognitive appraisal of person's life that is a global evaluation of overall life and within each component specially friends, family or school. Positive affect is the frequency with which people experience

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positive feelings. Negative affect is the frequency with which one faces negative emotion. Children who are high SWB experience positive emotions which is ongoing frequency highly while negative emotions are low and have high satisfaction with their whole life.

“Architecture of sustainable happiness” is for shedding light on first mechanisms affecting individual’s chronic level of happiness in order to improve SWB (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon & Schkade, 2005). This model demonstrates that one’s chronic level of happiness can be classified by three components such as life circumstances, genetic set point and intentional activity. A sizable portion can be attributed to purposeful activities although heritability accounts for the biggest variance percent among individuals’ levels of happiness. Moreover, this model postulates that people participating in brief, scripted activities created to mimic the behaviors and thoughts of happy one can develop their personal levels of happiness (Layous & Lyubomirsky, 2014). PPIs engage individuals’ behaviors to foster malleable factors relative to high well-being with the generating goal a lasting effect on their happiness. The popularity of research studies on PPI have been increased in recent years. Most studies revealed the efficacy of multicomponent PPIs in adult sample while few researches had explored the effect of PPIs in school children. To handle this gap, the purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of positive psychology intervention at increasing subjective well-being and reducing psychopathology of lower secondary school students. This study aims to investigate the effect of positive psychology intervention on subjective well-being and psychopathology of lower secondary school students. By examining the impact of PPI on the success of students as indicators, it can inform key stakeholders with the evidence of positive outcomes as positive intervention. Moreover, PPI programs aligns with an ecological framework consistent with best practices in school psychology service delivery by involving teachers and parents in this intervention activities.

Aim and Objectives

This study aims to examine the effect of positive psychology intervention on subjective well-being and psychopathology of lower secondary school students. The specific objectives were:

- (1) To investigate the differences in components of subjective well-being (i.e., life satisfaction, positive affect, negative affect) of students who participated in experimental group and control group.
- (2) To explore the differences in internalizing behavior and externalizing behavior of students who participated in experimental group and control group.

Hypotheses of the Study

The hypotheses of the study were as follows.

Hypothesis 1: Students who participate in intervention program will demonstrate significantly higher levels of life satisfaction and positive affect than students who participate in the control group while they will demonstrate significantly lower level of negative affect than control group students.

Hypothesis 2: Students who participate in the positive psychology intervention program on promoting happiness will demonstrate significantly lower levels of internalizing behavior and externalizing behavior than students who participate in the control group.

Definitions of Key Terms

Subjective well-being. Subjective well-being is the term of happiness comprising of three distinct and unique components which are positive affect, negative affect and life

satisfaction (Diener, 2000).

Psychopathology. Psychopathology refers to externalizing disorders such as conduct disorder, oppositional defiant disorder and internalizing disorders such as anxiety and depression (Suldo et al., 2016).

Positive psychology interventions. Positive psychology interventions (PPIs) is a type of programs, activities or practices designed to increase positive feelings, behaviors and thoughts (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009).

Review of Related Literature

Positive Psychology

The field of positive psychology scientifically studies the numerous factors and traits that contribute to the thriving and optimal functioning of individuals. Positive psychology emerged in response to pathology-focused traditional models of mental health, which have largely sought to remedy and heal human deficits and weaknesses in order to improve human functioning (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Thus, positive psychology conceptualizes mental health in terms of not only having or not positive indicators of mental health, but also the presence or absence of psychopathology (Greenspoon & Saklofske, 2001).

Subjective Well-Being and Psychopathology

Subjective well-being is combined of three components: life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect (Diener, 2000). Life satisfaction is operationalized as one's cognitive appraisal of their life, which may refer to a global evaluation of life overall or within a single domain such as family, friends, or school (Diener, 2000). Positive and negative affect are described as the frequency with which one experiences negative emotions such as fear, sadness and disgust, positive emotions such as contentment, love, and joy.

The research of positive psychology has called into question the traditional one-dimensional approach to mental health indicating the superior psychological functioning equates with absence of psychopathology. According to subjective well-being and levels of psychopathology, mental health can be classified four groups determined (Greenspoon & Saklofske, 2001).

Methodology

The design used in this study was pre-test post-test control group design.

Participants of the Study

The sampling method used in this study was purposive sampling method. This study participated 76 Grade 6 students and 6 Grade 6 teachers. A prior power analysis revealed that a total of samples size 70 participants is required in this study design. Therefore, a total of 76 Grade 6 students (38 boys and 38 girls, Mage = 11.3 years old) and 6 teachers from school of practicing Taungoo Education Degree College participated in this study and the sample size is sufficient. After recruitment was complete, students completed a pre-test of subjective well-being and their teachers completed students' internalizing and externalizing behavior for their students. The students were divided into two groups based on pre-test scores. The selected students were assigned as the experimental group and the control group. Each group consisted of 38 students.

Measures of the Study

Life satisfaction. The Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (Huebner, 1991) was used to investigate students' life satisfaction. (e.g., **"I am pleased with my life," "I have what I want in life"**). The internal consistency in this study was 0.73.

Positive and negative affect. To examine positive affect and negative affect of the students, the present study used Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (Ebesutani et al., 1999). (**positive affect e.g., cheerful, happy, proud and negative affect e.g., mad, afraid, sad**). Cronbach's Alpha for positive affect was 0.71 and negative affect was 0.70.

Internalizing and externalizing behavior. In the present study, Student Internalizing Behavior Screener (SIBS; Cook et al., 2012) was used to examine students' student internalizing behavior. (e.g., **anxiety, bullying victimization, isolation or peer rejection**). The internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha) in this study was 0.76.

Student Externalizing Behavior Screener (SEBS; Cook et al., 2012) was used to examine students' student externalizing behavior. (e.g., **defiance or adult opposition, aggression, bullying**). The internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha) in this study was 0.75.

Instrumentation

All the measures used in this study were adapted to Myanmar version. After preparing the measuring scales, expert review was conducted for face validity and content validity by twelve experts who have special knowledge and close relationship in the field of educational psychology and educational test and measurement. Next, revisions in item length, the wording of items, and content were made during preliminary administrations of the questionnaire. And then, a pilot study was conducted with a sample of 30 Grade 6 students, and 6 respective teachers from practicing school of Hpa-An Education Degree College to test whether the wording of items, statements and instructions had their clarity in Myanmar version and were appropriate and relevant to Grade 6 students. Then, the wording and phrases of some items were modified since they were inappropriate with children's understanding level. Cronbach's alphas for all the measures in this study were above 0.7, hence having satisfactory reliability.

Positive Psychology Intervention Program

(i) Sessions 1-2: Building Positive Relationships

The aim of this session is students to establish good relationships with their classmates and teachers and provide information to the parents.

In session 2, the students need to memorize times when classmates were supportive of each other and when the teacher was supportive of his/her students, as well as when students demonstrated care for their teacher.

(ii) Sessions 3-5: Positive Emotions about the Past

The objective of sessions is to create positive interpretation of past events and the goal of session 5 is to test the feelings, comments and feedback of teachers about the intervention.

(iii) Sessions 6-10: Positive Emotions about the Present

The main aim of sessions is to discuss about the positive emotions related to the present by involving students in activities through which they practice, interpret and identify by using character strengths.

(iv) Session 11: Positive Emotions about the Future

The objective of the session is to improve students’ positive emotions of the future by increasing goal-directed thinking and hope.

(v) Session 12: Termination

The aim of the final session is to summarize about the meetings and improve students continued use of the strategies learned throughout the program implementation

Procedures

Participants completed a brief survey of demographics and SWB for pre-test after the recruit mentation process was finished. The Grade 6 teachers who participated in this study completed survey of their students’ internalizing and externalizing behavior. Based on the baseline measurement results, students were randomly selected for control group and experimental group. Then PPI program was implemented in the experimental group. It took 16 weeks (one hour in a week) for PPI program. After this intervention, post-test that is the same questionnaire with pre-test was examined.

Results

Comparison of Pre-test Results Between Control Group and Experimental Group

Preliminary data analyses included calculating descriptive statistics (i.e., means, SD) for all variables in pre-test. In order to know the equivalency or not between control and experimental groups before the intervention, the pre-test result for both groups were tested. The independent samples t test was calculated comparison of the differences between two group. The analyses showed that the mean value of control group in students’ negative affect was slightly lower than other group whereas the mean values of control group in students’ life satisfaction and positive affect were slightly higher than experimental group.

Table 1 The Independent Samples *t* test Results of Pre-test for Life Satisfaction, Positive Affect and Negative Affect

| Variables | Groups | Mean | SD | t | Df | p |
|-------------------|--------------|-------|------|------|----|-----|
| Life Satisfaction | Control | 30.45 | 3.29 | 1.38 | 74 | .17 |
| | Experimental | 30.32 | 5.05 | | | |
| Positive Affect | Control | 13.61 | 0.97 | .21 | 74 | .83 |
| | Experimental | 13.32 | 1.74 | | | |
| Negative Affect | Control | 9.13 | 1.55 | .42 | 74 | .67 |
| | Experimental | 8.24 | 1.15 | | | |

To make more detailed investigation on the control group and experimental group, the independent samples t test was conducted (see Table 1). According to Table 1, there were no significant differences of life satisfaction, positive affect and negative affect between control group and experimental group. It can be said that students from both groups had the same level of subjective well-being before positive psychology intervention.

The mean value of student internalizing behavior for control group was higher than experimental group while the mean value of student externalizing behavior for experimental group was higher than control group. To make more detailed investigation on the control group and experimental group, the independent samples t test was conducted (see Table 2). According

to Table 2, there were no significant differences between control group and experimental group for student internalizing and externalizing behaviors of pre-test.

Table 2 The Independent Samples t test Results of Pre-test for Student Internalizing and Externalizing Behavior

| Variables | Group | Mean | SD | t | df | p |
|------------------------|--------------|-------|------|------|----|-----|
| Internalizing Behavior | Control | 9.74 | 1.41 | .22 | 74 | .88 |
| | Experimental | 9.71 | 1.45 | | | |
| Externalizing Behavior | Control | 10.03 | 1.75 | -.15 | 74 | .88 |
| | Experimental | 10.31 | 1.40 | | | |

Comparison of Post-test Results Between Control Group and Experimental Group

To make more detailed investigation on the control and experimental group difference of post-test in the variables (i.e., life satisfaction, positive affect, negative affect, internalizing and externalizing behavior), the independent samples t test was conducted.

Results indicated that the mean values of the experimental group for life satisfaction and positive affect were higher than the control group whereas the mean value of the control group for negative affect was higher than the experimental group. To make more investigation on the difference between control group and experimental group, the independent samples t test was conducted. The results of t test stated that there was a significant difference of life satisfaction between control group and experimental group at 0.001 level. The mean value of life satisfaction for control group was higher than experimental group (see Table 3). The results showed that the level of students' life satisfaction who received positive psychology intervention (experimental group) was significantly higher than students who participated in control group ($df = 74$, $p < .001$). This result is consistent with previous researches of Mercer (2014) that he found that primary students who participate in experimental group experienced a significant increase in life satisfaction than those in control group in the Well-Being Program.

Table 3 The Independent Samples t test Results of Post-test for Life Satisfaction, Positive Affect and Negative Affect

| Variables | Groups | Number | Mean | SD | t | df | p |
|-------------------|--------------|--------|-------|------|-----------------|----|-------------|
| Life Satisfaction | Control | 38 | 29.79 | 2.61 | -6.36*** | 74 | .000 |
| | Experimental | 38 | 33.47 | 2.44 | | | |
| Positive Affect | Control | 38 | 14.21 | 2.16 | -4.70*** | 74 | .000 |
| | Experimental | 38 | 16.24 | 1.56 | | | |
| Negative Affect | Control | 38 | 9.00 | 1.79 | 5.67*** | 74 | .000 |
| | Experimental | 38 | 7.05 | 1.14 | | | |

Note. *** Mean difference is significant at the 0.001 level.

The result showed that there were significant differences in positive and negative affect between control and experimental group at 0.001 levels ($df = 74$, $p < .001$). According to Table 3, the mean value of positive affect for experimental group ($M = 16.24$) who received positive psychology intervention was higher than control group ($M = 14.21$) while the mean value of

negative affect for experimental group (M = 7.05) was lower than control group (M= 9.00). These findings showed significant increase in positive affect and decrease in negative affect among older students in treatment group than those in control group in PPI program which consistent with previous studies (Roth, Suldo & Ferron, 2017).

Table 4 The Independent Samples t test Results of Post-test for Internalizing and Externalizing Behaviors (Teacher Report)

| Variables | Groups | Number | Mean | SD | t | df | p |
|------------------------|--------------|--------|------|------|---------|----|------|
| Internalizing Behavior | Control | 38 | 9.58 | .83 | 7.24*** | 74 | .000 |
| | Experimental | 38 | 8.05 | .77 | | | |
| Externalizing Behavior | Control | 38 | 9.47 | 1.08 | 8.33*** | 74 | .000 |
| | Experimental | 38 | 7.97 | .75 | | | |

Note: ***Mean difference is significant at the 0.001 level.

The results indicated that there were significant differences of internalizing and externalizing behavior between control group and the experimental group (see Table 4). The results revealed that students in the experimental group who received positive psychology intervention had lower internalizing and externalizing behavior than students who did not receive intervention program (df = 74, p < 0.001). This study finding is consistent with the recent study of the promoting student’s well-being program with secondary school students demonstrated a significant decrease in externalizing and externalizing behaviors and showed statistically decrease among the intervention group than those in control.

Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Results for Control Group

The mean scores and standard deviations of life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect of pre-test and post-test for control group are described in Table 5. According to the Table 5, there were no significant differences of all variables (life satisfaction, positive affect, negative affect) between pre-test and post-test results in the control group.

Table 5 The Paired Samples t test Results for Life Satisfaction, Positive Affect and Negative Affect (Control Group)

| Variables | Groups | Number | Mean | SD | t | df | p |
|-------------------|-----------|--------|-------|------|-------|----|-----|
| Life Satisfaction | Pre-test | 38 | 30.45 | 3.29 | 1.00 | 37 | .32 |
| | Post test | 38 | 29.79 | 2.61 | | | |
| Positive Affect | Pre-test | 38 | 13.61 | 0.97 | -1.51 | 37 | .14 |
| | Post test | 38 | 14.21 | 2.16 | | | |
| Negative Affect | Pre-test | 38 | 9.13 | 1.55 | .41 | 37 | .68 |
| | Post test | 38 | 9.00 | 1.79 | | | |

The mean score for pre-test and post-test results of internalizing and externalizing behavior are described in Table 6. Findings indicated that there was no significant difference between pre-test and post test results of internalizing behavior in the control group but there was a significant difference between pre-test and post-test results of externalizing behavior at 0.05 level.

Table 6 The Paired Samples t test Results for Students' Internalizing and Externalizing Behaviors (Control Group)

| Variables | Groups | Number | Mean | SD | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>p</i> |
|------------------------|-----------|--------|-------|------|--------------|-----------|------------|
| Internalizing Behavior | Pre-test | 38 | 9.74 | 1.41 | 0.80 | 37 | .43 |
| | Post test | 38 | 9.58 | 0.83 | | | |
| Externalizing Behavior | Pre-test | 38 | 10.03 | 1.75 | 2.17* | 37 | .04 |
| | Post test | 38 | 9.47 | 1.08 | | | |

Note. * Mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Results for Experimental Group

The mean scores and standard deviations of life satisfaction, positive affect, negative affect of pre-test and post-test for the experimental group are described in Table 7.

The results of t test stated that there were significant differences for all variables at 0.01 and 0.001 levels (see Table 7). Findings showed that the mean values for life satisfaction and positive affect of post-test were higher than pre-test and the mean value of negative affect of post-test was lower than pre-test in the experimental group. Therefore, after the positive psychology intervention, students in the experimental group had higher level of life satisfaction and positive affect in post-test than pre-test whereas they had lower level of negative affect.

Table 7 The Paired Samples t test Results for Life Satisfaction, Positive Affect and Negative Affect (Experimental Group)

| Variables | Groups | Number | Mean | SD | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>p</i> |
|-------------------|-----------|--------|-------|------|-----------------|-----------|-------------|
| Life Satisfaction | Pre-test | 38 | 30.32 | 5.05 | -3.53** | 37 | .001 |
| | Post test | 38 | 33.47 | 2.44 | | | |
| Positive Affect | Pre-test | 38 | 13.32 | 1.74 | -8.15*** | 37 | .000 |
| | Post test | 38 | 16.24 | 1.55 | | | |
| Negative Affect | Pre-test | 38 | 8.24 | 1.15 | 5.57*** | 37 | .000 |
| | Post test | 38 | 7.05 | 1.14 | | | |

Note. ** Mean difference is significant at the 0.01 level.

*** Mean difference is significant at the 0.001 level.

There were significant differences of internalizing and externalizing behavior between pre-test and post test results of experimental group (see Table 8). The results showed that the mean values of internalizing and externalizing behavior of experiment group at post-test were lower than pre-test results. The finding stated that students who participated in experimental group showed lower internalizing and externalizing behaviors at post-test results. This suggests the effectiveness of positive psychology intervention program on promoting happiness.

Table 8 The Paired Samples t test Results for Internalizing and Externalizing Behaviors (Experimental Group)

| Variables | Groups | Number | Mean | SD | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>p</i> |
|------------------------|-----------|--------|-------|------|----------------|-----------|-------------|
| Internalizing Behavior | Pre-test | 38 | 9.71 | 1.45 | 6.32*** | 37 | .000 |
| | Post test | 38 | 9.58 | 0.83 | | | |
| Externalizing Behavior | Pre-test | 38 | 10.31 | 1.40 | 7.74*** | 37 | .000 |
| | Post test | 38 | 9.47 | 1.08 | | | |

Note. *** Mean difference is significant at the 0.001 level.

Discussion

The current study has discussed the existed research literature by making an investigation into the efficiency of a positive psychology intervention on lower secondary school students' subjective well-being and psychopathology. This study especially made a comparison between levels of life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect, internalizing and externalizing behaviors between students in treatment group who took part in PPI that focused on a numerous way of positive psychological constructs which include hope, gratitude, positive relationship, character strengths and kindness with their parent and teacher to those who are in control group.

According to the results of post-test, students involved in the positive psychology intervention program demonstrated apparent improvement in life satisfaction, positive affect, negative affect, internalizing and externalizing behaviors than students in the control group. This result is the similar finding of the studies of Savage and Mercer (2014) and Roth et al., (2017) that they found a significant increase in life satisfaction of students in experimental group. Students involving in the intervention group have a significant decrease in negative affect and increase in positive affect than other group in this study. This finding is similar of the study of Roth et al., (2017). The results give suggestion on the intervention which was possibly most efficient for school children who experienced in the fluctuation of their emotions at the beginning of school year and students can get the effectiveness of PPI program.

Limitations and Future Research

In this study, a purposive sampling with a school which stakeholder showed an interesting in PPI program. Therefore, the sampling in this study cannot represent accurately the general population of secondary school students. Second limitation of this study is that the differences made during the initial plan to keep session 1b, parents to give a provision of discussion and answer questions. Due to the attendance of parents at the session 1b, information was only distributed to parents through written format.

Future studies should use with a large sample to obtain more dependable, validity of findings and lead to the inferences drawn to explore the improvement in the outcomes of student's subjective well-being and psychopathology with PPI program. Furthermore, the future directions could present further analysis on the groups of students such as other graders, high vs. low socio-economic status of lower secondary school students) so as to get better results.

Conclusion

To sum up, it is more consistent with emphasizing on youth happiness with making efforts to view children. It is more effective focusing only to mental health problems of students. School-based mental health providers can be able to assess the psychological functioning and evaluate the needs of students by assessing positive indicators of well-being. Thus, intervention

support can be designed to target with the absence of subjective well-being and presence of mental health problems to improve optimal outcomes for students.

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