

# Subjective Happiness as Mediator between Personal Growth Initiative and Life Satisfaction in Adolescents

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** This study was carried out to assess the mediating role of subjective happiness in relationship between personal growth initiative and life satisfaction. The relationship between personal growth initiative, subjective happiness and life satisfaction was also explored.

**Basic procedure:** The study involved 200 adolescent students from Jammu and Rajauri (India). Pearson's correlation, regression analysis and Sobel test were used for statistical analysis.

**Main findings:** Results revealed positive relationship between all the three variables in study. Partial mediation role of subjective happiness was confirmed in this study.

**Principle conclusions:** The findings of study reveal that efforts made to seek change develop feelings of happiness which in turn is responsible for life satisfaction. The results obtained emphasize on developing certain interventions to enhance subjective happiness in adolescent students for greater satisfaction in life. Findings of the study might be particularly useful for education system.

**Keywords:** adolescents, life satisfaction, personal growth initiative, subjective happiness

## 1. Introduction

Adolescence is a transitional phase of life full of stress and strife. It is characterized by struggle to understand one's identity. The adolescent strives to bring changes in self and tries to cope with the stress and strife created during this crucial period. In adolescence, the personal growth initiates which capacitates an individual to cope up with the growing demands, particularly the stressful ones. When such growth is not pursued, there is an increased risk of mental health problems. Personal growth initiative (PGI) is an intentional inclination to improve on one's self in various areas of life (Robitschek, 1998). It comprises of cognitive and behavioural components (Robitschek, 2003). Personal growth experiences largely depend on the manner in which an individual carries out an evaluation of past, present and future likely experiences. An attempt is made to seek out and capitalize on opportunities for growth. PGI is aimed at bringing improvement and growth in an individual. PGI has been associated with both increase in well being and decrease in distress (Robitschek & Kashubeck, 1999); feeling satisfied with life (Hardin, Weigold, & Robitschek, 2007; Sood, Gupta, & Bakhshi, 2012; Stevic & Ward, 2008). People who interpret their life transitions in terms of growth have higher levels of life satisfaction (Bauer & McAdams, 2004; Brink, 2012). Review of literature reflects the linkage between PGI and happiness as well (Hardin, Weigold, & Robitschek, 2007; Neff, Rude, & Kirkpatrick, 2007).

According to Diener, Suh, Lucas, and Smith (1999) life satisfaction is person's subjective as well as global evaluation of the positivity of her/his life as a whole or with specific life domains. As per Shin and Johnson (1978), life satisfaction is a global assessment of a person's quality of life and it is based on the criteria set by individual. It is a cognitive component of wellbeing and is more or less subjective in nature. Positive psychology is focused on application of scientific methods to understand the factors responsible for well being. It explores subjective well being of an individual which is related to happiness. Happiness is voluntary (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005), subjective and positive (Veenhoven, 2010) byproduct of an attempt to elevate general well being (Akhtar, 2012). It provides platform for life satisfaction. It is a state which is attained by the individual by the standards of own faith, power and convictions subject to certain essential requirements being fulfilled. Happiness is like a pipeline through which strength, healing, inspiration, whatever it may be can flow

into us. It is like an equation: put efforts and apply means it will equal to desirable results. Life satisfaction might result out of seeing oneself as being in state of happiness (Cohn, Fredrickson, Brown, Mikels, & Conway, 2009). Nathawat (2012) stated that happy people pursue life with satisfaction. Poursardar, Sangari, Abbaspour, and Alboukurdi (2012) in a study demonstrated effect of happiness on life satisfaction. Barrett (1980, Unpublished Master's Dissertation) also reported positive relationship between happiness and satisfaction in life. Life satisfaction certainly is an important aspect of adolescent's well being but it tends to decrease during this stage of life (Goldbeck, Schmitz, Besier, Herschbach, & Henrich, 2007). This decrease in happiness could be because of either some of these factors viz. involvement in problems, due to absorption in pleasures or sorrows, because of personal stress, state of confusion, terrific pressures, acute mental or emotional agony, and tremendous centrifugal force latent in ultra civilized life full of diversions which tends to upset the equilibrium.

Review carried out to assess an association between PGI, subjective happiness, and life satisfaction provides sufficient evidence of presence of positive relationships. These studies show the possible role of PGI in promoting life satisfaction and increasing happiness. The studies also reflect that feeling of happiness contributes in life satisfaction. On the basis of the fact that there is a positive impact of PGI and subjective happiness on life satisfaction and it tends to independently influence the life satisfaction, the current study was undertaken to address the research question whether PGI promotes subjective happiness which in turn increases satisfaction in life or not?

This study aims to determine if the relationship between personal growth initiative and life satisfaction is mediated by subjective happiness. The following objectives were laid for this study:

- 1) To find out the relationship between personal growth initiative and life satisfaction.
- 2) To explore the association between personal growth initiative and subjective happiness.
- 3) To explore the association between subjective happiness and life satisfaction.
- 4) To find out if subjective happiness mediates the relationship between personal growth initiative and life satisfaction.

#### *Hypotheses:*

**H1** There will be significant positive relationship between personal growth initiative and life satisfaction.

**H2** There will be significant positive relationship between personal growth initiative and subjective happiness.

**H3** There will be significant positive relationship between subjective happiness and life satisfaction.

**H4** Subjective happiness will mediate the relationship between personal growth initiative and life satisfaction

## **2. Method**

### *2.1 Sample*

The sample of this study were 200 adolescent students in age range 12 to 19 years studying in various schools in Jammu and Rajauri district of the state Jammu and Kashmir (India). Though the data was collected from only two districts, the students studying in these schools belonged to all the three regions of the state Jammu and Kashmir namely; Leh, Kashmir, and Jammu. The mean age of participants was 14.11. Of the total number of participants 100 (50%) were male and 100 (50%) were female. Area wise, 79.5 percent (159 of 200) came from rural areas and 20.5 % (41 of 200) came from urban areas. Forty four percent of participants (n = 88) were in 6-8 grade and 56 percent (n=112) were in grade 9-12. As per the religious affiliation, 153 of 200 (76.5%) were Hindu, 29 of 200 (14.5%) were Muslim, 8 of 200 (4.0%), 9 of 200 (4.5%) were Sikh and only 1 of 200 (.5%) was Christian.

### *2.2 Procedure*

Data collection was done using simple random technique from the adolescent students of grade sixth through twelfth studying in various private schools of district Jammu and Rajauri (Jammu and Kashmir, India). The purpose of the study was spelled out clearly and only those who consented to participate were included in the study. Maintenance of confidentiality was assured and authenticity of the research was given from the very outset. The measures were administered and collected as soon as they were filled in. The tools were subjected to screening and coding. Thereafter, results were obtained.

### *2.3 Tools*

Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) by Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1999) is a unidimensional and a global measure of subjective happiness. The scale consists of four items with response options on seven point likert scale. The

subjects have to endorse the right option reflecting what one feels is most appropriate in describing them. Single composite score is obtained with possible range as 1-7. Higher the score greater is the level of happiness felt. The scale has been standardized on different age groups and can be used in different cultures. The reliability of the scale is .79 to .94. The alpha value for school students is .81. The internal consistency of the scale is good to excellent. The convergent validity of scale is .52 to .72.

Personal Growth Initiative Scale (PGIS) by Robitschek (1998) is a unidimensional self report measure of cognitive and behavioral aspects of intentional self change. The scale comprises of nine items on six point likert type scale with possible score range from nine to 54. Higher the score higher is the PGI. The internal consistency of PGIS is from .79 to .90 and test retest reliability is .74 (Robitschek, 1999). The convergent and discriminant validity of the measure is reported to be high (Robitschek, 1998). There is a strong positive association in PGIS and psychological well being.

Satisfaction with life scale (SWLS) developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin (1985) is a five item unidimensional measure of global life satisfaction based on seven point likert scale. The measure can be administered on individuals at any age. It has demonstrated to have favourable psychometric properties. It has high internal consistency and temporal reliability. It has good convergent validity with the scales measuring subjective well being. It has discriminant validity from emotional well being scales (Pavot & Diener, 1993).

#### 2.4 Statistical Analysis

Statistical Package for Social Sciences for Windows Version 20 was used for the calculations. Pearson's correlation and regression were applied. An important statistical test called as "Sobel test" for determining significance of mediation was carried out using Sobel test calculator available online.

### 3. Results

For mediation analysis conditions laid down by Baron and Kenny (1986) were checked. Correlation analysis was carried out using Pearson's Product Moment method. In the first step, relationship between the independent variable and the mediator was assessed. PGI is found to be significantly correlated with subjective happiness ( $r=.346, p<.01$ ). The next step was to confirm the relationship between the mediator and the dependent variable. The mediating variable "subjective happiness" is significantly correlated with dependent variable "life satisfaction" ( $r=.388, p<.01$ ). The relationship between independent and dependent variable was also calculated. The PGI and life satisfaction is also significantly correlated ( $r=.343, p<.01$ ). The hypotheses H1, H2, and H3 are confirmed. All the variables show significant positive relationships. Similar findings were reported in previous studies for PGI and life satisfaction (Bauer & McAdams, 2004; Brink, 2012; Hardin, Weigold, & Robitschek, 2007; Sood, Gupta, & Bakhshi, 2012; Stevic & Ward, 2008); for PGI and happiness (Hardin, Weigold, & Robitschek, 2007; Neff, Rude, & Kirkpatrick, 2007); for happiness and life satisfaction (Barrett, 1980, Unpublished Master's Dissertation; Poursardar, Sangari, Abbaspour, & Alboukurdi, 2012) in a study demonstrated effect of happiness on life satisfaction.

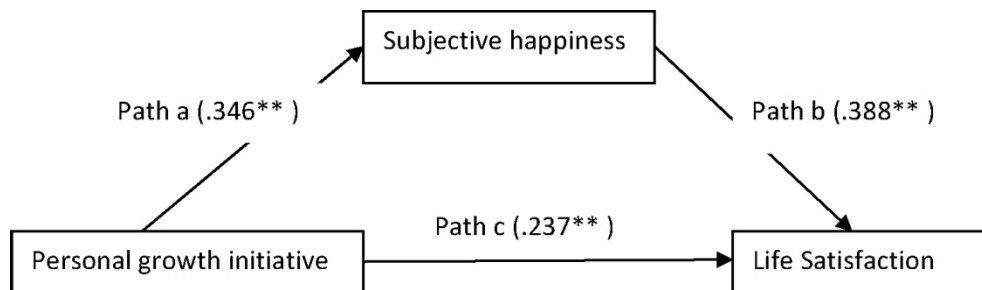
The relationship between the study variables signify that the three paths (path a, path b, path c) are independently significant. In the final step for testing the main hypothesis on subjective happiness mediation of the PGI and life satisfaction, regression equations were estimated. It was to check that when the mediator and the independent variable are used simultaneously to predict the dependent variable, the previously significant path between the independent and dependent variable (path c) has become non significant or reduced (Table 1).

Table 1. Regression analysis examining contribution of PGI and subjective happiness on life satisfaction

| Model | Independent Variable | B    | Standard Error | Beta | t     | Significance |
|-------|----------------------|------|----------------|------|-------|--------------|
| 1     | PGI                  | .293 | .057           | .343 | 5.146 | .000         |
|       | PGI                  | .202 | .058           | .237 | 3.497 | .001         |
| 2     | SH                   | .391 | .087           | .306 | 4.508 | .000         |

In the first equation, the dependent variable (Life Satisfaction) was regressed on the independent variable (PGI). Regression coefficient for PGI was significant ( $\beta=.343, p<.01$ ). Results are supportive of relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable. In the second equation, the dependent variable (life satisfaction) was regressed on both the independent variable (PGI) and the mediating variable (subjective

happiness). When subjective happiness was added to PGI, which was clearly significant when used alone to predict life satisfaction, PGI though remained significant ( $\beta=.237$ ,  $p<.01$ ) became lower in magnitude (Figure 1).



\*\* $P<.01$

Figure 1. Subjective happiness as mediator of the personal growth initiative and life satisfaction

Results indicate that mediating variable relates to the dependent variable and the relationship of the independent variable with the dependent variable is weakened. This suggests presence of partial mediation.

As the direct path remained significant, though it is weakened, mediating relationship needs to be ascertained by checking if the complete mediating path from independent variable to mediator to dependent variable is significant. The regression coefficients and their standard errors for the two paths in the mediating chain were calculated. The mediating variable (Subjective happiness) was regressed on the independent variable (PGI). Regression coefficient ( $\beta=.346$ ,  $p<.01$ ) was significant. Results confirm the relationship between independent variable and the mediating variable. The important statistics from the two regressions, the standard error of Beta, were also calculated (Table 2).

Table 2. Regression coefficients and standard errors for two parts of mediating path

| Path A   |       | Path B                                    |       |
|--|-------|---|-------|
| Personal Growth Initiative to Subjective Happiness |       | Subjective Happiness to Life Satisfaction |       |
| $\beta$  | .346  | $\beta$                                   | .388  |
| $S_a$  | .067  | $S_b$                                     | .065  |
| t  | 5.195 | t   | 5.931 |

With the path coefficient (.65) and its standard error (0.224), “t” ratio (2.92) was obtained. To support the mediation model, Sobel test (1982) was conducted. It assessed whether a mediating variable (subjective happiness) carries the effects of the independent variable (PGI) to a dependent variable (life satisfaction). The Sobel test was significant ( $z=3.905$ ,  $p<.01$ ). The computed statistic indicates support for mediation as it reveals significant indirect effect of the PGI on the life satisfaction by way of the subjective happiness. This provides support for the study’s major hypothesis H4 “Subjective happiness will mediate the relationship between PGI and life satisfaction”. It is concluded that the relationship between PGI and life satisfaction is mediated by subjective happiness.

#### 4. Discussion

The findings of this study provide an evidence for mediating role of subjective happiness in PGI and life satisfaction in adolescent students. Positive psychology focuses on optimal development and urges to apply its principles and findings for the enhancement of positive attributes among people. The results of this research can be used to make important implications about developing certain measures to enhance factors contributing to subjective happiness in school going adolescents. Subjective happiness appears to play an essential role between constant efforts to bring growth oriented changes and life satisfaction. It shows that an adolescent involved in bringing transformation in self is likely to experience positive emotions such as happiness which in turn would

result into satisfaction in life. The adolescents engaged in evolving as an individual seeking growth and independence may experience satisfaction in life if they perceive themselves to be happy.

The results of this study have provided new information pertaining to linkages between PGI, subjective happiness and life satisfaction. As such in previous studies, exploration on these variables in adolescents is nearly missing. The relationships between life satisfaction, happiness and PGI gives an idea that positive tendencies within people is worth noticing and it is important to tend these to evolve as a fully functioning being. Sharing the results of this study with the schools and trainers of adolescents might develop an insight in them to incorporate growth enhancing features while designing their curriculum and making the schools supportive in approach. Since during adolescence substantial development of personality takes place, the congenial atmosphere of the school, focused on developing positive aspects in the student will help in shaping up an individual, teeming with positivity.

### 5. Directions for Future Research

Several limitations may have influenced the results of the study. For example, the sample was primarily composed of students from only private schools in two regions of the state Jammu and Kashmir, India. Therefore, future research should examine students from government schools situated in other regions of the state so that diverse sample is incorporated. Future research should examine ways to either providing optimum environment congenial for development of PGI in school or finding out factors strengthening feelings of subjective happiness. It may be important to find out which factors tend to increase subjective happiness as it may play a crucial role in accelerating growth experiences which further contribute to life satisfaction.

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