

ESTABLISHING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GENERAL SELF-EFFICACY AND SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study is to determine the relationship of general self-efficacy and subjective well-being among Filipino college students in both private and public institutions. It was hypothesized in this study that general self-efficacy and life satisfaction has a positive relationship. Two measures, namely, the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES) and Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) were administered to 969 college students in different schools in the Philippines. This study employed a descriptive-predictive design to measure the degree of correlation between variables. Results of the study showed that general self-efficacy and subjective well-being has a positive relationship. Participants with higher levels of general self-efficacy reported higher levels of subjective well-being. Research results indicated that age, gender and socio-economic status (based on enrollment in public or private institution) had an important impact on general self-efficacy and subjective well-being. Implications for schools, educators, counseling interventions and parents were also discussed.

Keywords: General self-efficacy, subjective well-being, adolescents, satisfaction with life

INTRODUCTION

“Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony.”

Mahatma Gandhi

College life is not an easy journey. College students face different challenges in their life. Aside from their academic requirements, they also have different responsibilities brought about by their different life roles. Young adults experience many changes in all aspects of their lives (Schulenberg, Bryant, & O'Malley, 2004). Adolescence is the transition stage from childhood to adulthood and this is the period of life characterized by a barrage of challenges. Moreover, it is the transition or adjustment period to adulthood when ethical values acquired in childhood are compared with the set of values gained as they were growing (Ozby, 1997).

Given that adolescence is the time of change that is exemplified by increased levels of personal searching (Jessor, Donovan, & Costa, 1991) and taking on of more mature life roles (Erikson, 1968), it is important for adolescents to have increased belief in their capacity to control one's environment or self-efficacy since this would pave the way for carrying out task with confidence and belief in oneself which would tend to lead to improved subjective well-being. This is an important stage in these young adults' life since they are about to experience career exploration in preparation for their graduating year. Self-efficacy beliefs have been shown to play a pivotal role in protecting children and adolescents in counteracting depressive states (Bandura, Pastorell, Barbaranelli and Caprara, 1999).

The current study was conceptualized as an attempt to examine the relationship between self-efficacy and subjective well-being among students. Given that, low self-efficacy is related to more symptoms of anxiety and depression (Faure & Loxton, 2003; Kashdan & Roberts, 2004; Shnek, Irvine, Stewart, & Abbey, 2001) and that emotional states is believed to be one of the substrates of self-efficacy (Bandura, 2001), this paper will examine the link between the two constructs.

The researchers previously published a paper on the relationship of Meaning in Life and Subjective Well-Being (Journal of Arts, Science & Commerce, 2012) utilizing the same respondents. This present study, however, focuses on the link between the constructs General Self-Efficacy and Subjective Well-Being. As stressed by Seligman (2002), much of the role of prevention in this new century should be to create a science of human strength with the mission of understanding and learning how to nurture the virtues and skills of young people.

The findings in this study will be relevant and helpful to counselors, educators and even parents in assisting and helping out students in developing their sense of belief in oneself as well as in their ability to control or alter life's situations or events by focusing on what they "can do" rather on what they "cannot do", since this may eventually lead to a more relaxed or less stressful academic and personal life. Adolescents are bombarded with a barrage of challenges from the portrayal of different life roles (student, leader, son, daughter, friend, athlete), thus it is important to equip them with the necessary life skills such as pursuing happiness and being confident or believing in oneself in order for them not only to survive but even to thrive in their different life roles. It is hypothesized in this study that general self-efficacy predicts the subjective well-being of adolescents.

Subjective Well-Being

People strive to be happy and appear to be in constant search and pursuit to be happy. Happiness as described by Seligman, Parks & Steen (2004) is the "very thing which makes life worth living." Subjective well-being is defined as "a person's cognitive and affective evaluations of his or her life (Diener, Lucas & Oishi, 2002, p. 63). "The cognitive component (of subjective well-being) usually corresponds to the individual's evaluation of life satisfaction, according to subjectively determined standards, that may be formulated at a general level when they refer to life as a whole, or at more specific levels when they refer to particular life domains" (Caprara, Steca, Gerbino, Paciello, Vecchio, 2006). The affective element refers to emotions, moods and feelings. In essence, subjective well-being or life satisfaction refers to the satisfaction experienced by an individual in his or her life as a whole (global terms) and in domain terms (specific areas of life). According to Veenhoven (2007), there are numerous precursors to the attainment of happiness. High self-efficacy is said to be related to positive well-being, regulation of stress, higher self-esteem, better physical condition, better adaptation to and recovery from diseases (Bandura, 1997; Bisschop, Knegsman, Beekman, & Deeg, 2004; Kuijer & de Ridder, 2003).

Diener pointed out that well-being is a subjective experience focusing on the quality of life and emotional states as perceived, evaluated and reported by the person (Diener, 1984; 1994; 2000; Diener, Lucas, Oishi, 2002; Diener, Suh, Smith, 1999). Subjective well-being refers to the self-evaluation of life satisfaction (Robbins & Kliever, 2000). When subjective well-being is being assessed, what is being assessed is how people think and feel about their lives. In this study, subjective well-being was measured using a questionnaire such as the 5-item Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) by Diener, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin (1985) and Pavot & Diener (1993).

Self-Efficacy Beliefs

“Self-efficacy beliefs”— an individual’s evaluations of his or her specific competence — are integral to one’s ability to self-regulate behavior and learning (Gregg, 2009). There are two (2) types of efficacy: “Global self-efficacy” (general self-efficacy) refers to an individual’s ability to effectively predict problem-solving solutions and strategies to cope with life changes; these are not domain-specific behaviors (Schwarzer & Born, 1997 cited in Gregg, 2009). On the other hand, “Specific self-efficacy” refers to one’s confidence about using various strategies in particular life domains. Three types of specific self-efficacy beliefs have been identified by researchers: academic, social, and emotional (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001).

Bandura (2001) defined self-efficacy as “people’s beliefs in their capacity to exercise some measure of control over environmental events.” It was observed that self-efficacy influences the way one thinks and it determines individuals’ motivations and behavior (Bandura, 1994). Self-efficacy expectations are judgments about how well a person can act in a certain way in order to meet a goal or cope effectively with stressful situations (Bandura, 1997).

Self-Efficacy and Subjective Well-Being

High self- efficacy is related to positive well-being, regulation of stress, higher self-esteem, better physical condition, better adaptation to and recovery from diseases (Bandura, 1997; Bisschop, Knegsman, Beekman, & Deeg, 2004; Kuijer & de Ridder, 2003). On the other hand, low self-efficacy is related to more symptoms of anxiety and depression (Faure & Loxton, 2003; Kashdan & Roberts, 2004; Shnek, Irvine, Stewart, & Abbey, 2001), as well as to lower levels of subjective well-being (Barlow, Wright, & Cullen, 2002; Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Gerbino, & Pastorelli, 2003; Caprara, 2002).

Cakar (2012) pointed out that individuals with high self-efficacy can be more comfortable and productive when faced with harsh working conditions as compared to those with low self-efficacy who believe that what they will do or engage in is a lot harder than the actual task is in reality. People with low self-efficacy, having such kind of thought pattern, would tend to increase anxiety and stress, since it narrows their point of view in solving a problem ideally (Pajares, 2002).

In this vein, Dora (2003) stressed that in life one has to overcome problems in order to achieve life satisfaction and happiness. One’s level of self-efficacy determines psychological well-being (Magaletta & Oliver, 1999) and psychological harmony (Cutler, 2005). High self-efficacy can contribute to the increase of activity level of young adults and to their being pleased with themselves, their lives and other conditions in their lives (Cakar, 2012). Thus, high self-efficacy or an increased belief in one’s capacity to control events in one’s environment may tend to increase subjective well-being. The goal of this study is to establish the link between self-efficacy and subjective well-being among Filipino young adults.

METHOD

Research Design

The predictive cross-sectional research design was utilized in this study. Predictive designs are a form of correlational research that use calculated information about the relationships between variables to forecast outcomes (Sheperis, Young & Daniels, 2010). It is cross-sectional because data was collected from participants at a single point in time. Data will be compared and analyzed across the variables in a relatively brief time period (Johnson, 2001).

Participants

The total sample size was 969. The participants of the study were college students both from private and public institutions in the National Capital Region (NCR). The ages of the students range from 15-21 years old and above. The participants were composed of 469 males and 500 females. These participants were also utilized in a previously published paper on Meaning in Life and Subjective Well-Being (Journal of Arts, Science & Commerce, 2012).

Instruments

There were two (2) instruments used in this study. The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) was used to measure subjective well-being. The General Self-Efficacy Scale was used to measure optimistic self-beliefs used to cope with a variety of demands in life.

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)

The internal consistency of the SWLS was reported to be .87 and the test-retest correlation is .82 (Diener, 1984). The SWLS was developed by Diener, Emmons, Larson, and Griffin (1985). This does not assess satisfaction with specific life domains (e.g., Health and Finances), but it allows respondents to integrate and weigh these domains in whatever way. This is a 5-item self-report measure of overall satisfaction with life. Questions are answered on a 7-point Likert Scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree,” and responses are summed to provide an overall score.

General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE)

The GSE is a 10-item scale designed to assess optimistic self-beliefs used to cope with a variety of demands in life. The scale was designed to assess self-efficacy, i.e., the belief that one’s actions are responsible for successful outcomes. The scaled score for each question ranges from 1 to 4. Higher scores indicate stronger patient’s belief in self-efficacy. The scale was originally developed by Jerusalem and Schwarzer in 1981 in Germany and has been translated into many languages. Studies have shown that the GSE has high reliability, stability, and construct validity (Leganger, Kraft, Roysamb, 2000; Schwarzer, Mueller, & Greenglass 1999). Cronbach alpha ranges from 0.75 to 0.94 across a number of different language versions (Rimm and Jerusalem 1999; Luszczynska, Scholz, Schwarzer, 2005).

Data Gathering Procedure

The two assessment tools were administered to different schools during one class period. Students were asked if they are willing to participate in the study. Before the administration, the participants were instructed to answer the items as honestly as possible and not to skip any items or leave any items blank. After completing the assessment tools, they were thanked and debriefed about the objectives of the study.

Ethics

Permission was sought from the different Universities. Written informed consent for the participation was obtained from the parents of the students (if they are below 18) and the students themselves (if they are 18 and above) before they could participate in the study. The students were informed that their responses will be treated anonymously and confidentially.

RESULTS

Relationship of General Self-Efficacy and Subjective Well-Being

The results showed moderate to strong correlation between variables. Results indicate that there is a predictive relationship between general self-efficacy and subjective well-being. It

shows a positive or direct relationship. A better understanding of the relationship between general self-efficacy and subjective well-being has implications relative to developing and/or achieving a greater sense of happiness and satisfaction in living.

Table 1. Correlations of General Self-Efficacy and Subjective Well-Being

		<i>GSE</i>	<i>Subjective Well-Being</i>
GSE	Pearson Correlation		0.721**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.003
	N		969
Subjective Well-Being	Pearson Correlation	0.721**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.003	
	N	969	

Note: ** significant at 0.05

Gender Differences in GSE

Gender differences between males and females were found ($t = 1.01$, $p < 0.05$). It appears that males have higher GSE scores in the SWLS as compared as to females.

Table 2. Gender Differences in GSE

<i>N</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>
469	Male	32.49	4.258	0.235
500	Female	30.96	4.208	0.193

Age Differences in GSE

Age differences were found in both freshmen (15-16 years of age) ($F=2.33$, $p<0.05$) and Fourth year graduating students (21 and above). It appears that students age 21 and above have higher GSE as compared to students age 15-16.

Table 3. Age Differences in GSE

<i>Age</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Dev.</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>
15 – 16	317	28.16	4.416	0.218
17 – 18	250	30.28	4.302	0.209
19 – 20	228	33.12	4.004	0.227
21 and above	174	35.33	4.210	0.186

Private and Public Institutions (SES) and GSE

Scores in GSE differ significantly for students enrolled in private and public institutions ($t = 1.43$, $p < 0.05$). Results suggest that students enrolled in private institutions have higher GSE as opposed to students enrolled in public institutions.

Table 4. Private and Public Institutions and GSE

<i>Type of School</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Dev.</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>
Public	479	29.76	4.075	0.297
Private	490	33.69	4.391	0.200

The researchers published a paper on the relationship of Meaning in Life and Subjective Well-Being utilizing the same respondents thus tables 5-8 were based on that published journal article (Journal of Arts, Science & Commerce, 2012).

Overall Life Satisfaction

The respondents of the study showed that they had an average score of (24) for life satisfaction. Scoring in this range means that they are generally satisfied, but have some areas where they would like some improvement. Persons scoring in this range is normal and that they have their areas of their lives that need improvement. However, an individual in this range would usually like to move to higher level by some light changes.

Table 5. Overall Life Satisfaction

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
Life Satisfaction	24.1204	5.2347

Gender Differences in Life Satisfaction

Gender differences between males and females were found($t = 1.107, p < 0.05$). It appears that males have higher life satisfaction scores in the SWLS as compared as to females.

Table 6. Gender Differences in Life Satisfaction

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>N</i>
Male	25.3822	5.3785	469
Female	23.8586	5.0909	500

Age Differences in Life Satisfaction

Age differences were found in both freshmen (15-16 years of age) ($F = 2.908, p < 0.01$) and Fourth year graduating students (21 and above). It appears that students age 21 and above have higher life satisfaction as compared to students age 15-16.

Table 7. Age Differences in Life Satisfaction

	<i>Age</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>N</i>
Life Satisfaction	15 – 16	22.3447	5.2784	317
	17 – 18	23.3993	5.3468	250
	19 – 20	24.3478	5.2422	228
	21 and above	26.3898	5.0714	174

Private and Public Institutions and Life Satisfaction

Scores in life satisfaction differ significantly for students enrolled in private and public institutions ($t = 1.051, p < 0.05$). Results suggest that students enrolled in private institutions have higher life satisfaction as opposed to students enrolled in public institutions.

Table 8. Private and Public Institutions and Life Satisfaction

<i>School</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>N</i>
Public	22.6619	5.3406	479
Private	25.5789	5.1288	490

DISCUSSION

The results of the study show significant relationships between general self-efficacy and subjective well-being among college students which is consistent with previous findings. The variable general self-efficacy provides conditions for subjective well-being to arise. High self-efficacy is related to positive well-being, regulation of stress, higher self-esteem, better physical condition, better adaptation to and recovery from diseases (Bandura, 1997; Bisschop, Knegsman, Beekman, & Deeg, 2004; Kuijer & de Ridder, 2003). Self-efficacy beliefs have been shown to play a pivotal role in protecting children and adolescents in counteracting depressive states (Bandura, Pastorell, Barbaranelli and Caprara, 1999). The participants' score for general self-efficacy paves the way for positive well-being as validated by the results of the SWLS. This suggests that participants believe in their capacity to exercise control over events in their lives. Given the age of the students (15 – above 21 years of age), they already see their capacity in exercising some measure of control over life's events and as a consequence they become satisfied with their life. Results show a trend that as these students become older their level of general self-efficacy tends to increase as well. The result is noteworthy given that adolescence is the time of change that is exemplified by increased levels of personal searching (Jessor, Donovan, & Costa, 1991) and taking on of more mature life roles (Erikson, 1968), thus it is important for adolescents to have increased levels of general self-efficacy.

The findings in this study are relevant and helpful to counselors in assisting and helping out Filipino adolescents in developing their sense of belief in oneself as well as in their ability to control or alter life's situations or events by focusing on what they "can do" rather on what they "cannot do", since this may eventually lead to a more relaxed or less stressful academic and personal life. Adolescents are bombarded with a barrage of challenges from the portrayal of different life roles (student, leader, son, daughter, friend, athlete), thus it is important to equip students with the necessary life skills such as pursuing happiness and being confident or believing in oneself in order for them not only to survive but even to thrive in their different life roles.

As children grow and mature, their world widens and many elements would shape or have a great impact on their level of self-efficacy—this is where the role of the school and the educators come in. Schools have a great impact in the cognitive, social and emotional development of students. Thus, school settings are areas with a potential for changes that can improve children's self-efficacy. Thus, intervention strategies that are aimed at improving self-efficacy are needed in schools. More programs or interventions are needed such as discussion groups that aim to help school children to reach their goals and strengthen their self-efficacy, with support from school staff, family and peers.

Furthermore, parental influence plays a key role in the development of their children's self-efficacy. Thus, it is important for parents to be reminded about their role in shaping their child's sense of self-efficacy since the family is the first element that influences self-efficacy. Bandura (1994) pointed out that our initial efficacy experiences are centered in the family, and parental influences are extremely important because they can begin to instill a sense of competence in the child. He further explained that "*parents who are responsive to their infants' behavior, and who create opportunities for efficacious actions by providing an enriched physical environment and permitting freedom of movement for exploration, have infants who are accelerated in their social and cognitive development*" (v. 4, p. 77). Thus, parents should be more autonomy enhancing and less controlling to promote self-efficacy of children. This study also imparts the message to parents to strive to work for an enriched environment for their children where they are trusted to explore and have freedom since this enhances their development.

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