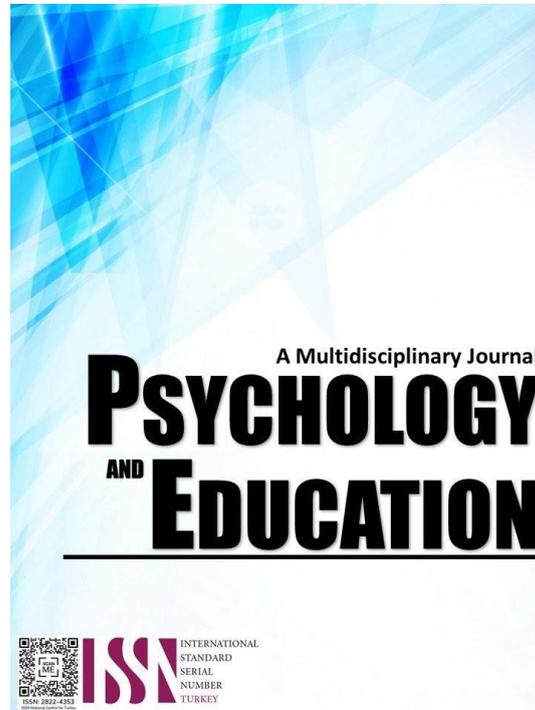


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Integration of Current Trends of Positive Psychology in Clinical Practice: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the utilization of positive psychology interventions in clinical settings through a comprehensive literature review. The objective of this review was to critically analyze and synthesize existing studies for integration of current trends of positive psychology that can be applied in the clinical practice. Based on the findings, numerous studies have suggested a significant relationship between concepts within positive psychology, such as higher psychological well-being, positive affect, self-esteem, optimism, self-efficacy, resilience, and gratitude, to constructs such as increased life satisfaction. Conversely, these variables are negatively correlated with negative constructs such as psychological distress, stress, and depression. Furthermore, several studies have revealed the significant impact of positive psychology on mental health. This study has found that incorporating positive psychology principles in clinical interventions and treatment has the potential to promote overall well-being and enhance mental health. Positive psychology interventions play a role in reducing symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. However, more evidence-based research is needed to strengthen empirical support for these interventions that effectively promote well-being and address the unique challenges faced by individuals with severe mental illness.

Keywords: *positive psychology, clinical practice, mental health, positive psychology interventions, well-being, depressive symptoms*

Introduction

Positive psychology is the scientific study of positive individual traits and character strengths. It focuses on one's inner strengths and the ways on how these factors influence human behavior and how a person navigates the different areas of life. It gives emphasis on the positive states and wellbeing of individuals aimed at achieving optimal functioning (Duckworth, Steen, & Seligman, 2005). This new branch of Psychology aimed to identify, develop, and evaluate interventions that could help improve human functioning (Wood & Johnson, 2016).

Nowadays, there have been many researches trying to explore the impact of these positive individual traits on the various aspects of life. Some of the constructs being highlighted are happiness, subjective wellbeing, optimism, mindfulness, engagement, empathy, resilience, self-efficacy, and more. Studies have shown how strengthening these traits can help individuals achieve optimal level of functioning and how they can effectively cope with the challenges in life. Positive psychology may be seen as lying at the outer part of clinical psychology (Duckworth et al., 2005), but several studies have already explored the correlation between some of the positive traits and psychological distress and even psychopathology and other problems. They have revealed that strengthening these traits can lessen suffering and even alleviate its roots.

Traditionally, it has been a practice to focus on the negative aspects and other problems alleviating them as treatment to problems like psychopathology instead of focusing on the positive aspects of life and fostering inner strengths. Key findings and theories have emerged from positive psychology research. For instance, the theory of subjective well-being proposed by Diener, Lucas, and Oishi (2018) posits that well-being consists of three components: positive emotions, engagement in life, and a sense of meaning and purpose. The practical applications of positive psychology research are evident in various domains, such as education, organizational psychology, counseling, and clinical psychology. Interventions and practices based on positive psychology principles have been developed to enhance well-being, including mindfulness-based stress reduction, gratitude exercises, and positive psychotherapy.

Positive psychology research continues to evolve, offering valuable insights into human well-being and fostering the development of interventions that can improve individuals' lives and promote thriving societies. This study looked into the role that positive psychology can play in the field of clinical psychology. It attempted to uncover how the positive aspects of life can be a person's armor against life's challenges and emotional battles that a person may go through. Moreover, this paper aimed to identify the different trends on interventions based on applied positive psychology that can be used in the clinical practice.

Research Questions

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the common themes in the current trends of positive psychology and the role it plays in the field?
2. How can positive psychology be integrated in the clinical practice?
3. What are the possible clinical interventions that can be utilized based on the current trends of applied positive psychology?

Methodology

The research data were gathered through a literature review that consisted of studies published in journals and different websites. The review of literature and studies focused mainly on the researches that explored the application of positive psychology as intervention for psychological problems. The recent trends and practices that emerged from the data gathered were discussed in the following section.

Results and Discussion

After the comprehensive gathering of relevant literatures and studies, as well as the thematic analysis and evaluation of the contents, the current trends and practices in applying positive psychology in clinical practice have been identified. The following themes have emerged:

Positive Psychology Constructs

Positive psychology has been growing fast and has gained increased attention of many researches. Studies on this area have continuously grown and have produced promising results and significant contributions to the progress of this field. Studies have focused on the different constructs within positive psychology and their correlation with other positive variables. Some of these positive constructs are hope, optimism, locus of control, and self-determination. In a study that focused on building on adolescents' strengths and abilities, it was revealed that these constructs were strongly correlated, while hope and

optimism predicted life satisfaction in adolescents with and without cognitive disabilities (Shogren et al., 2006).

While positive psychology continuously grows, as a scientific study it constantly utilizes scientific methods with its goal to promote and understand well-being, excellence, and optimal human functioning (Stewart et al., 2015), and recognize the impact it can make.

Positive affect, autonomy, generosity, and social support was closely associated to well-being and quality of life, according to the 2016 update of the World Support. Moreover, they found out that there was almost no correlation between negative affect – an important criterion in the definition of psychiatric disorders – and overall happiness (Hasler, 2016). In addition, a model of psychological well-being proposed by Dr. Carol Ryff differs from other models in a way that she defined well-being as multidimensional, and not merely about happiness, or positive emotions. Each of its aspects must be engaged to achieve a good life which is balanced and whole. The six dimensions of psychological well-being are: a) self-acceptance which refers to having a positive attitude toward oneself; b) personal growth or a sense of realizing one's potentials; c) purpose in life which refers to having goals and a sense of directedness in life; d) positive relations with others which refers to having warm, satisfying, trusting relationships with others; e) environmental mastery which means a sense of mastery and competence in managing the environment; and f) autonomy or independence which also refers to one's ability to regulate his behaviors from within (David, 2014).

Several studies showed that psychological well-being has a significant correlation with other positive psychological constructs. According to research, people with higher psychological well-being have higher level of life satisfaction, positive affect, self-esteem and lower negative affect and depression (Winefield et al., 2015).

On the other hand, several researches also showed that psychological well-being is also negatively correlated with negative constructs like psychological distress and stress. The link between psychological well-being and psychological discomfort was investigated in a self-report measure for psychological well-being. Using a standardized measure of psychological distress and three quick scales to assess different aspects of psychological well-being—Positive Relations with Others, Environmental Mastery, and Satisfaction with Life—this study was conducted on a representative

sample of 1933 adults over the telephone. Additionally computed and investigated as a gauge of general well-being was the sum of these three measures. It was concluded that the variables that are positively associated with psychological well-being were negatively associated with psychological distress and vice versa (Winefield, Gill, Taylor, & Pilkington, 2015).

Positive Psychology and Mental Health

Clinical and translational researchers seem to miss a great opportunity by neglecting the concept of well-being in psychosomatic research and psychiatric neuroscience (Hasler, 2016). They failed to recognize the significant impact of paying attention to and strengthening positive traits, emotions, and experience, and well-being. Building on these positive psychological constructs has emerged as a tool that can cause the lessening of various psychological problems especially when cultivated and strengthened.

One of the concepts being studied within positive psychology is mindfulness, a tool being used to overcome psychological distress. It predicts self-regulated conduct and happy emotional states, according to research. Similarly, when mindfulness develops over time, negative emotions, mood disorders, and stress levels decrease. On the other hand, it is also linked to other psychological constructs such as anxiety and depression (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

In a meta-analysis conducted by Pan, Ali, Kahathuduwa, Baronia, and Ibrahim (2022), the efficacy of positive psychology interventions (PPIs) in treating depression was examined. Studies on persons with (a) depressed symptoms or (b) clinical depression were considered. According to their research, PPIs are useful in alleviating the symptoms of depression. In all but one trial, they discovered significant reductions in depression levels when compared to control groups. Additionally, they contend that PPIs can increase the availability and affordability of therapy for depression.

The goal of positive psychology is to refocus psychological study and practice on the positive aspects of experience, strengths, and resources, according to a literature review on the topic that had a particular focus on people with mental illness. Additionally, it discovered that both healthy individuals and those who suffer from depression benefit from positive psychotherapy, which has been shown to lessen depression and improve wellbeing. As a result, it was argued that positive psychotherapy and positive psychology may benefit those who are

suffering from mental illness by emphasizing their strengths and resources. It may be a way to help people recover from depression, substance abuse disorders, and psychosis (Schrank, Brownell, Tylee, & Slade, 2014).

Another meta-analysis of 51 therapies using positive psychology with 4,266 participants indicated that these interventions significantly improved wellbeing and reduced depressive symptoms. Researchers of this study suggested that clinicians should utilize these techniques and incorporate them into their clinical practice for the interventions of clients suffering from depression, who are relatively older, or even those who are very motivated to improve. They also mentioned that positive psychology interventions would do well when delivered as individual therapy and for relatively longer periods of time (Sin and Lyubomirsky, 2009).

In addition, in a study that focused on psychological intervention that increase individual happiness, it was revealed that positive interventions decreased depressive symptoms and can supplement traditional interventions that relieve suffering. (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). Furthermore, positive psychology-based interventions can also be effective for children. Effects of these interventions on children's subjective well-being, mental health, and learning habits were examined in a study carried out in Israel. Randomly chosen children between the ages of three and six and a half were either placed in the intervention condition or the control condition. The findings of this study showed that children in the intervention condition had an increased level of subjective well-being and positive learning behaviors while there was no change in the control group (Shoshani and Slone, 2017). Another study looked at how mindfulness training affected the psychological health and perceived stress of 70 women and 1 man who had previously been diagnosed with cancer. The intervention had significantly decreased the perceived stress and posttraumatic avoidance symptoms and increased positive states of mind of the participants (Bränström, Kvillemo, Brandberg, & Moskowitz, 2010).

Positive Psychology Interventions

Apparently, many treatments and interventions for various psychological problems developed were focused on the negative factors such as stress and its consequences rather than on strengthening the positive characteristics to combat these problems. Thus, results in reinforcing the negative aspects of life (Hasler, 2016).

Although it is essential to eradicate or lessen negative symptoms, it would not be adequate to attain overall wellbeing. That is why it is also important that health-care practitioners and researchers also prioritize the development of prevention and intervention strategies that foster and improve wellbeing. Instead of just focusing on directly alleviating or decreasing negative symptoms, positive psychology interventions (PPIs), which are also brief and easy to follow, and can be self-administered, must be developed and promoted to supplement other methods utilized to address poor health (White et al., 2019).

Positive Activity Intervention (PAI). Furthermore, due to the high cost of effective treatment, lack of access to health care, and stigma, many people do not get treated and do not receive proper care. The necessity for creating affordable, efficient interventions that can be applied as initial therapy for minor symptoms or as supplemental therapy for patients who respond only partially is also extremely great. Hence, it would be a great help to promote positive activity interventions (PAI) wherein individuals are taught ways to increase their positive thinking, positive affect, and positive behaviors. Besides, these interventions have reported promising initial findings on studies in patients with mild clinical depression. The study was done to propose neural models for how PAIs might relieve depression, and how it can serve as clinical treatments for individuals with major and minor depressive disorders (Layous, Chancellor, Lyubomirsky, Wang, & Doraiswamy, 2011).

Additionally, a study looked at the impact of PPIs on stress, anxiety, and depression in clinical samples of people with psychiatric or physical illnesses that had significant results. It was a systematic review and meta-analysis including 1864 patients with clinical disorders. PPIs that focused on eliciting positive feelings, cognitions or behaviors were examined. It discovered that PPIs not only have the potential to enrich well-being, but can also diminish distress not only in non-clinical populations but in populations with clinical disorders too (Chakhssi, et al., 2018).

Best Possible Self (BPS). In an article written by Oades & Mossman (2017), several studies have examined the efficacy of various positive psychology interventions. One of these interventions was the Best Possible Selves (BPS) which has shown as producing greater increases in positive affect and decreases in negative affect.

Forgiveness Intervention. Another was the

"forgiveness intervention," which was used to a wide spectrum of clinical clients and was found to improve quality of life and subjective well-being when paired with memories and thankfulness in an intervention.

Gratitude Intervention. Aside from that, there is also what was called the gratitude intervention. It has been demonstrated that visits of gratitude increase happiness and lessen depression in adults. Studies revealed that this intervention leads to increases in positive affect and lowers negative affect. A gratitude condition also showed lower depression symptoms and a decrease in felt stress, according to results. Another one was called hope intervention. Study has revealed that it can improve anxiety, self-esteem and purpose in life.

Mindfulness. Another one was mindfulness which is one of the popular tools used in positive psychology. According to the results of the study, adolescent males' psychological wellbeing and mindfulness both improved the more time they spent practicing mindfulness.

Positive Psychotherapy (PPT). On the other hand, effectiveness of positive psychotherapy (PPT) on groups of university students with mild to moderate depression was also studied. In comparison to the control group, it demonstrated a statistically significant decline in depression levels over the course of a year of follow-up. It also showed significant results when delivered to outpatients with unipolar depression. It revealed a significant increase in remission rates compared with the usual treatments given or even with medication. Moreover, these findings suggest that exercises that focused on stimulating and enhancing depression treatment may benefit from promoting pleasant feeling, participation, and meaning.

Savoring. Another positive psychology intervention used and studied was savoring. This can be past-focused which means reminiscing about positive experiences, or present-focused which refers to savoring the moment, or it can also be future-focused which means anticipating positive experiences yet to come. Study has revealed that this exercise significantly increased happiness and significantly decreased depression.

Self-Compassionate Writing. Lastly, effectiveness of self-compassionate writing was also explored. Study on this has revealed that this exercise significantly improved mood of the undergraduate psychology students with reported past diagnosis, and some with reported current diagnosis of depression. They noticed a rise in their good emotions and a decline in their

negative ones. In addition, the study found out that high ruminators experienced a huge decline in their feelings of sadness than low ruminators.

Online Positive Psychology Interventions. Now that there is a pandemic and most transactions are done online, and face to face interactions are limited, online positive psychology interventions can also be employed especially for young people in school. Furthermore, in an article published in the *International Journal of Wellbeing*, it is suggested that online school-based positive psychology interventions may be more effective when conducted through brief and more frequent sessions compared with less frequent and longer sessions (Francis et al., 2021).

Conclusion

There have been numerous and continuously growing number of health care practitioners who value positive psychology interventions that can give way to its utilization in the clinical setting. Positive psychology, positive psychotherapy and other positive techniques are now being incorporated into the clinical work in the mental health setting as research evidence show beneficial effects on mental health in non-clinical populations (Chakhssi, et al., 2018). However, research on its application in severe mental illness is still lacking (Schrank et al., 2014). Studies and literatures regarding its effectiveness in clinical settings are still inadequate (Chakhssi, et al., 2018).

People recovering from mental illnesses like substance use disorders, depression, and psychosis may find it very useful to concentrate on the positive aspects, like strengths and resources, in positive psychology. Hence, more research are needed to develop strong approaches in developing and implementing positive psychology interventions applicable to this population (Schrank et al., 2014). This invites for the creation of therapeutic strategies or deliberate practices which is aimed at nurturing positive thoughts, feelings, and actions, that would improve wellbeing and lessen depression symptoms.

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