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THE POWER OF POSITIVE THINKING IN REDUCING STRESS

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ABSTRACT

Perceived stress is an emotional wellbeing concern and recognition of its cognitive and affective indicator for enhancing effective coping and intervention strategies. The study explores the relationship between positive thinking and perceived stress among university students. A sample of 458 students, which include equal number of male and female participants, was selected using a purposive sampling technique. For data collection standardized psychological scales were used, including the Positive Thinking Scale (PTS) to measure optimism and constructive thought patterns, and the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) to assess the perception of stress of the individuals. Regression analysis showed that positive thinking significantly reduces perceived stress. A one-unit increase in positive thinking led to a 0.17 -unit reduction ($p = 0.008$), The variable accounted for 0.8% of the variation in perceived stress, highlighting their importance in mental health outcomes. The results of this study are consistent with the existing literature, emphasizing the protective role of positive thinking. The study emphasizes the need for mental health interventions incorporating positive psychology, and well-being strategies to mitigate perceived stress among young adults.

Keywords: Positive Thinking, Perceived Stress, University Students.

INTRODUCTION

Perceived stress is not just about the number of anxiety provoking events a person experiences but is more about how turbulent and chaotic their life feels, as well as their conviction in addressing complexities. Stress is anything that interrupts a person's somatic and mental wellbeing. It happens when someone struggles to meet demands placed on them. Stress can be positive, known as eustress, which can boost performance and focus, or negative, called distress, which can harm mental and physical health. Stress refers to a "state of imbalance within a person, elicited by an actual or perceived disparity between environmental demands and the person's capacity to cope with these demands" (Maes, Vingerhoets, & Van Heck, 1987, p. 567). Stress is often an important feature of emergency purchase [decision making](#) occurring from an event that has led to the need, which is exacerbated by the pressure (Lapisto et al. 1991). Definition of the stimulus usually emphasizes on ambient conditions that are in the form of circumstances or incidents. From this perspective change that is brought about by stressors is potentially harmful because in this people must or need to adjust to conditions. In contrast, the response definition emphasizes the individual's experience or perception of stress. From this perspective, stress is subjective and represents a reaction to specific conditions. Stress can either be acute or chronic, the subsequent is because of unexpected or accidental events. At the point a person recognized something is not working as expected then the individual need for products or offerings can also create stress together with other components for budgeting or financial planning, particularly if that causes disagreement.

When people are looking for the information, they may feel stressed because they are unsure about what they need or worried about making the wrong choice. The more uncertain they feel, the more stressful the process becomes. Later, when they are evaluating their options, they might feel overwhelmed if there is too much information or too many choices. It can be difficult to correlate options and decide which one is best, leading to irritation and stress. Finally, when it comes time to make a purchase, stress can arise if the product or service is not available or if there are

problems with the buying process, such as issues with payment or delivery. These challenges can make the experience more frustrating and difficult. The product of both the person and the situation is Perceived stress. The factors that contribute to an event's stressfulness include its significance, desirability, level of control, and whether it is expected or unexpected (Moschis, 2007). With respect to the last factor, stress results from a lack of preparation time: "A person has more time to prepare (e.g., seek more information to reduce risk) for important anticipatory consumer decisions than for decisions that are unexpected and must be made within a relatively short period (e.g., car replacement due to length of use versus unexpected severe damage)" Moschis (2007, p. 433).

Stress can make it more challenging for people to process and understand new information because it causes them to focus too much on one thing while overlooking other important details. This selective attention makes it difficult for them to fully process and absorb new ideas or facts. When stress is at a moderate level, people tend to think more thoroughly and evaluate information in depth. This means they take their time to reflect and make well-thought-out decisions. However, when stress becomes very high, people rely more on quick and instinctive thinking, known as heuristic processing. Instead of carefully analyzing details, they make decisions based on shortcuts, past experiences, or simple rules of thumb. This happens because their brains are under too much pressure to take in information deeply.

POSITIVE THINKING

Positive thinking refers to having positive thoughts or beliefs. It is different from emotions (which are feelings), behaviors (which are actions), and long-term effects like overall happiness or depression. Positive thinking is specifically about how a person mentally evaluate or interprets situations in an optimistic or resilient way, rather than how they feel or act in response to them. Researchers are still working on a clear and widely accepted definition of positive thinking. Different studies describe it in various ways, and experts have not yet fully agreed on a single definition. As research continues, the understanding of what positive thinking truly means is still developing and changing over time. These ideas may

include positive thinking, but they are also usually seen as the favorable results that can come from practicing positive-thinking techniques.

In other words, while positive thinking is a way of thinking, things like happiness, success, or improved well-being are often considered the outcomes that may happen when someone consistently applies positive-thinking strategies. Some researchers have provided a more defined and detailed description of what positive thinking includes. Instead of using broad or general explanation, they have specifically structured the key aspects, characteristics, and thought patterns that make up positive thinking. Bekhet and Zauszniewski (2013) identified eight key skills that contribute to positive thinking, which can be easily remembered using the acronym THINKING. The first skill is Transforming negative thoughts into positive thoughts, which involves consciously shifting one's mindset from dwelling on negativity to focusing on constructive and hopeful perspectives. Next is Highlighting positive aspects of the situation, which encourages individuals to actively seek out the good in any circumstance, even when facing difficulties.

Another important skill is Interrupting pessimistic thoughts by using relaxation techniques and distraction. When negative thinking becomes overwhelming, engaging in relaxation methods like deep breathing or meditation, or simply shifting attention to a different activity, can help break the cycle. Similarly, Noting the need to practice positive thinking highlights the fact that developing a positive mindset requires continuous effort and self-awareness. Additionally, knowing how to break a problem into smaller parts to be manageable makes challenges feel less overwhelming by allowing individuals to tackle one step at a time. Alongside this, initiating optimistic beliefs with each part of the problem encourages maintaining a hopeful attitude while working through each step.

A crucial part of positive thinking is Nurturing ways to challenge pessimistic thoughts, which involves questioning negative assumptions and replacing them with more balanced, realistic perspectives. Finally, generating positive feelings by controlling negative thoughts helps individuals create a more uplifting

emotional state by consciously redirecting their focus toward encouraging and supportive thoughts. It is important to note that while these skills emphasize cognitive strategies, some techniques, such as relaxation and distraction, extend beyond thoughts and also involve emotional and physical approaches to fostering a more positive mindset. Self-encouragement thinking refers to the ability to motivate oneself, acting as one's own cheerleader (Tsutsui & Fujiwara, 2015). This means using positive and supportive thoughts to build confidence and push forward, even in challenging situations.

Self-assertive thinking, on the other hand, focuses on doing well not just for oneself but also for others. It involves thoughts about making a positive impact, meeting expectations, and contributing in meaningful ways. Self-instructive and control thinking involves guiding one's actions and decisions through inner dialogue. This type of thinking helps individuals stay focused, organized, and in control of their behavior, ensuring they perform tasks effectively. Meanwhile, self-affirmative thinking is about maintaining confidence by reinforcing one's strengths and abilities. It includes reminding oneself of past successes and believing in one's potential. Overall, positive thinking about oneself plays an important role in improving well-being. When people think positively about their abilities, actions, and worth, they tend to feel happier, more motivated, and better equipped to handle life's challenges. Having optimistic thoughts is generally seen as beneficial for overall well-being. When people think positively about the future, they tend to feel happier and more motivated, even if those thoughts are not entirely realistic. What matters most is the positive mindset itself, as it can help reduce stress, boost confidence, and encourage a hopeful attitude toward life's challenges. Optimistic thinking tends to help people feel better, have more positive social relationships, and cope better with stress (Taylor & Brown, 1994). Positive beliefs about control can be beneficial. For instance, believing we have control during stressful situations appears to enhance our ability to cope effectively (Taylor & Brown, 1994). The advantage of having positive thoughts about control aligns with research on the challenge mindset. This

mindset means believing that we have the skills and abilities to handle difficult situations.

The study explores the relationship between perceived stress and positive thinking, examining how different levels of stress influence decision-making and well-being. By understanding these connections, we can develop better strategies to help people manage stress and improve their thinking.

HYPOTHESIS

H1: An increase in positive thinking will lead to a decrease in perceived stress.

METHODOLOGY

PARTICIPANTS

The study used a sample that was easily accessible, specifically university students who were invited to take part in the research. A total of 458 undergraduate students participated, with an average age of 22. These students were selected from various faculties and academic departments to ensure diversity in the sample. To maintain gender balance, an equal number of male and female participants were included in the study. Strict ethical guidelines were followed throughout the research process. Participants' identities were kept completely anonymous, and their personal information remained confidential. Additionally, each student provided free and informed consent before taking part, ensuring they fully understood the purpose and procedures of the study. For selecting participants, a purposive sampling technique was used.

PERCEIVED STRESS SCALE (PSS)

The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), developed by Cohen et al. in 1983, consists of 14 items designed to measure an individual's perception of stress. Each item is rated on a Likert scale, reflecting the degree to which respondents find their lives unpredictable, uncontrollable, or overwhelming. In the present study, the reliability of the scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a value of 0.80, indicating good internal consistency.

POSITIVE THINKING SCALE (PTS)

Positive Thinking Scale (PTS) is developed by (Diener et al.2009) The Positive Thinking Scale (PTS) is composed of 22 items, 11 of which represent positive thoughts and perceptions and 11 of which represent low negative thinking. The 22 items are answered on a

yes–no format. After reversing the negative items, the 22 items are added, thus yielding scores that range from 0 to 22.

PROCEDURE

The data collection process was carried out in multiple phases to ensure smooth and organized participation. In the first phase, formal approval was obtained from Institutional Heads, as it was a necessary requirement before initiating the data collection process. In the second phase, a purposive sampling technique was used to select and approach students who met the study's criteria. This method ensured that the selected participants were relevant to the research objectives. In the third phase, students were provided with a detailed briefing about the study. They were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary, meaning they had the choice to participate or decline without any consequences. Additionally, it was explicitly stated that completing the research survey would not result in any academic credit or reward, ensuring that participation was based solely on willingness. The survey questionnaires were then distributed during regular class sessions, and each student was given 15 minutes to complete the form. This structured approach helped maintain consistency in the data collection process. Once all 458 responses were collected, the data was carefully compiled and entered into SPSS software for further statistical analysis and computation. This step was crucial for organizing the responses systematically and preparing them for meaningful interpretation.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

Informed consent was obtained from the participants and briefed the participants about the purpose of the current research. No such committee exists in our institute; therefore, all the ethical considerations were kept under consideration during the complete process.

RESULTS

Table 01 Simple linear regression showing positive thinking and perceived stress

<i>C</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant			35.30	.000	
33.41	.94				

PT	-		-.09	-2.67
.17	.06		.008	

The results indicate that positive thinking has a significant negative impact on perceived stress. The constant value (33.41, $p = .000$) suggests that when positive thinking is at zero, perceived stress is relatively high. The regression coefficient (-0.17, $p = .008$) shows that for every unit increase in positive thinking, perceived stress decreases by 0.17 points. The negative beta value (-0.09) confirms this inverse relationship. With a t-value of -2.67 and a statistically significant p-value (.008), the findings support the hypothesis that increasing positive thinking helps reduce perceived stress.

Table 02 Correlation between perceived stress and positive thinking

variable	1	2
PS	1	-.90**
PT	-.90**	1

Note. ** = $p < .01$, PS=perceived stress , PT= positive thinking

The results show a negative significant co-relation between perceived stress and positive thinking ($r = -.90$, $p < 0.01$), suggest that individuals with higher level of positive thinking tend to report lower levels of perceived stress. Which means that individuals who has good positive thinking will experience reduced stress level.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study demonstrate a significant negative relationship between positive thinking and perceived stress. Specifically, the results signify that individual with higher levels of positive thinking experience lower levels of perceived stress. The regression analysis confirmed this inverse relationship, as indicated by the negative beta coefficient (-0.09) and the statistically significant p-value (.008). This assist the hypothesis that an increase in positive thinking is associated with a reduction in perceived stress. These results provide empirical support for the idea that cultivate a positive mindset can be an effective coping mechanism for managing stress.

The results of this study are aligned with prior research suggesting that positive thinking act as a psychological shield against stress, aiding individuals in managing challenging situations with more effective greater resilience. Numerous studies have consistently revealed that individuals with positive cognitive patterns tend to

find stressful situations more manageable, which contributing to lower stress levels and improved overall well-being (Fredrickson, 2001; Seligman, 2011). Positive thinking encourages individuals to concentrate on potential solutions instead of obstacle and difficulties, enabling them to respond to difficulties more effectively.

The finding closely aligns with Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory, which argues that positive emotions enhance an individual's cognitive and behavioral capacities, fostering for more versatile and creative problem-solving approaches. This theory suggests, when individuals experience positive emotions, they develop a more expansive mindset, which enhances their ability to build personal resources, such as social support networks and coping mechanisms, that ultimately enhancing their psychological resilience over time. By promoting a broader perspective, positive thinking allows individuals to see stressors in a more balanced and flexible way, which decreases the chances of overwhelming by distress.

Furthermore, these results are aligning with the cognitive-behavioral model proposed by Beck (1976), which posits the key role of cognitive patterns in determining emotional responses. The model suggests that, negative automatic thoughts amplify to stress and emotional distress, while positive cognitive reframing enables individuals to reinterpret stressful situations in a way that reduce their emotional impact. Researches has demonstrated that individuals with an optimistic mindset experience less stress because these individuals engaging themselves in adaptive cognitive restructuring, a process that allows them to replace irrational or overly negative thoughts with more constructive and balance interpretations (Carver & Scheier, 2014). For example, rather than viewing a setback as a personal failure, optimistic individuals tend to interpret it as an opportunity, which reducing their vulnerability to stress-induced emotional distress.

The thing which is important to recognize is that, while positive thinking has shown considerable psychological benefits, its ability in reducing stress may be shaped by individual differences and environmental factors. Studies has shown that factors such as personality traits, coping stargies, and environmental stressors may

be influenced by the relationship between positive thinking and stress resilience. For example, Norem and Cantor (1986) proposed the idea of defensive pessimism, suggesting that some individuals manage stress more effectively by preparing for negative outcomes and potential challenges, rather than depending solely on optimistic thinking. In these situations, an excessively positive outlook may lead to unrealistic expectations, increasing the likelihood of frustration or disappointment when desired goals are not achieved.

The situational factors play a critical role in assessing whether positive thinking is beneficial. In highly-stress conditions, such as ongoing financial hardship, severe trauma, or workplace burnout, excessive optimism may lead individuals to overlook risks or fails to adopt necessary problem-solving strategies, which intensify stress. Additional studies could investigate these complexities in greater detail by examining how different populations, personality profiles, and stress-inducing contexts affect the effectiveness of positive thinking as a coping strategy. This research would provide a detailed understanding of the role of positive cognitive patterns contribute in stress reduction, offering valuable insights for personalized mental health approaches.

LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

1. Our study depends on self-reported measures, which may be affected by participants' subjective perceptions and potential biases.
2. Our sample consists solely of university students, limiting the diversity of the participant pool.
3. The relatively small sample size restricts the broader applicability of the results.
4. Our study does not consider cultural differences in positive thinking, and perceived stress, which could influence the findings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- In future the same study may be expanded to other cultures and regions.
- Students from other fields should need to include in future study.
- The longitudinal study is suggested for future study.

- The study needs to be conducted on large sample size to increase its generalization.
- People with disabilities should need to include in future study.

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