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Impact of positive psychological capital on the psychological well-being of Social workers: The role of hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism

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Abstract

The social work profession can be psychologically demanding, and social workers are at risk of experiencing burnout and poor psychological well-being. Psychological capital has been shown to play a protective role in the well-being of individuals. This study aimed to investigate the impact of psychological capital on psychological well-being among social workers and the role of its four dimensions. A sample of 100 social workers completed questionnaires, assessing their psychological capital and psychological well-being. The data were analyzed using correlation and regression analysis. The results of this study indicate that psychological capital is positively associated with psychological well-being of social workers. The findings of this study leave implications for the field of social work, as interventions aimed at enhancing psychological capital may be effective in promoting well-being among social workers.

Keywords: Psychological capital, psychological well-being, hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism, social workers

Introduction

Social work is a profession that involves helping individuals, families, groups, and communities improve their social functioning and overall well-being. This can include providing counseling and therapy, connecting clients with resources and services, advocating for policy changes, and working to address social problems such as poverty and discrimination. Social work professionals, also known as social workers, are trained professionals who provide these services. They may work in a variety of settings, such as schools, hospitals, government agencies, and non-profit organizations (Payne, 2006) ^[12]. Social workers in educational and community settings play a vital role in assisting individuals, families, and communities to navigate the complex social systems that impact their lives. They have a wide range of responsibilities that include providing counseling and therapy to students who are struggling with emotional, behavioral, and mental health issues (Northen & Kurland, 2001) ^[21]. Overall, social workers in educational and community settings play a critical role in supporting the well-being and success of individuals and communities (Northen & Kurland, 2001) ^[21]. Social work can be a demanding and emotionally taxing profession, and social workers who are not able to take care of their own well-being are at greater risk for burnout and turnover (Chiller & Crisp, 2012) ^[3]. This can have a negative impact on both the social worker and the clients they serve, as well as on the organization that employs them. Therefore, it is essential for social workers to practice self-care in order to be successful in their role as social workers.

Psychological capital (PsyCap) is defined as a state of positive growth and development in an individual's psychology (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017) ^[19]. PsyCap also contributes to an individual's robustness and adaptability, enabling them to adjust their goals and direction as required (Luthans *et al.*, 2007) ^[18]. The four constructs or dimensions of psychological capital are hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to successfully perform a specific task or complete a particular goal in a given context (Locke, 1997) ^[16]. Research has shown that employees who work in a positive

work environment, tend to have high levels of self-efficacy and are focused on achieving their goals and tasks (Karatepe & Karadas, 2015) ^[10]. Being resilient entails being able to respond to pressures in a flexible and successful manner. The ability to adapt and improvise in the face of challenges, to use discretion, control, and latitude in decision-making, and to further one's development through training, skills, and knowledge, as well as the capacity to respond successfully to trying circumstances, are highly valued at work (Graham, 2013) ^[9]. Making confident assumptions about one's capacity to succeed in the now and the future is referred to as "optimism" (Luthans & Youssef, 2007) ^[18]. A positive outlook and the conviction that a desired result may be obtained through focused work and strategic planning are known as "hope." Research has demonstrated that people who have optimism can change their goals as necessary, are less likely to feel emotionally exhausted, and perform better at work, even in demanding workplaces (Avey, Luthans, & Jensen, 2009) ^[2]. Psychological capital is positively associated with mental health, reflecting that social workers with higher levels of psychological capital were less likely to experience mental health problems. (Ho, Chui, & Chan, 2022)

The concept of psychological well-being is a multidimensional construct that encompasses several key dimensions. These dimensions include self-acceptance, which refers to an individual's acceptance and understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses, and a sense of self-worth. Positive relations with others, refer to the presence of positive and supportive relationships, including social support and feelings of connectedness with others. Personal growth refers to the ongoing process of personal development and self-improvement. Purpose in life refers to the sense of having meaning and direction in life and feeling that one's life has a purpose. Environmental mastery refers to the individual's ability to control and influence their environment, including the ability to set and achieve goals and solve problems. Autonomy refers to the individual's sense of self-determination, self-governance, and independence in life and decision-making. Together, these dimensions comprise the concept of psychological well-being, which is essential for an individual's overall well-being and happiness.

Positive psychological capital (PsyCap) is a concept that encompasses the use of positive psychological resources to promote personal and organizational well-being and success. The HERO acronym represents the four main components of PsyCap: Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, and Optimism. Hope is the belief that one's goals are achievable and the motivation to take the necessary steps to achieve them. Efficacy is the belief in one's own abilities and competence to handle challenges and achieve goals. Resilience is the ability to recover from setbacks and bounce back from adversity. Optimism is the belief that things will work out for the best even in the face of challenges. These four components of positive psychological capital are believed to create a proactive and positive mindset that can help individuals and organizations achieve success in various areas of life (Kinman & Grants, 2010; Youssef & Luthans, 2007; Collins, 2007) ^[11, 23, 4].

Prior research has indicated that social workers with higher levels of psychological capital are better able to handle the emotional demands of their job and maintain a positive outlook, leading to improved psychological well-being. A

study was conducted on 193 Romanian social workers to investigate the role of Psychological Capital (PsyCap) in protecting social workers from developing burnout and Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS). The results suggest that PsyCap is the critical link between personal resources and STS. A number of studies have shown that higher levels of psychological capital, composed of hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism, are associated with better well-being, job satisfaction, and reduced burnout among social workers. For example, Chang and Chen (2018) found that psychological capital had a positive relationship with work engagement and reduced burnout among social workers. Koyuncu and Baturay (2019) found that psychological capital was negatively associated with burnout and positively associated with well-being among social workers. Furthermore, García-Sánchez and Peiró (2019) found that psychological capital is positively related to job performance through the mediating role of work engagement. Manzano-García & Ayala (2017) ^[20] examine the relationship between psychological capital, psychological well-being, and burnout in the direct support staff of specialist autism services. The study results revealed that there is a positive correlation between psychological capital and psychological well-being, and a negative relationship with burnout. They also found that burnout mediates the relationship between psychological capital and psychological well-being. Kun and Gadanez (2022) ^[14] examine the relationship between workplace happiness, well-being, and psychological capital in Hungarian teachers. The authors found that psychological capital is positively associated with workplace happiness and well-being. They also found that psychological capital is very important for employees' happiness. Virgă, Baci, Lazăr, and Lupşa (2020) ^[22] examine the relationship between psychological capital, burnout, and secondary traumatic stress in social workers. The authors found that psychological capital is negatively associated with burnout and secondary traumatic stress, meaning that social workers with higher levels of psychological capital were less likely to experience burnout and secondary traumatic stress. This study highlights the protective role of psychological capital in preventing burnout and secondary traumatic stress, which are common issues among social workers. Ho & Chan (2022) found similar results in their study they examine the relationship between psychological capital and well-being in social workers by using a mixed-methods approach, which included both quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate the impact of psychological capital on the well-being of social workers. They found that psychological capital is positively associated with well-being and that psychological capital plays a protective role in the well-being of social workers. The findings of the study by Koller & Hicks (2016) ^[13] suggest that psychological capital qualities (hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism) are positively associated with psychological well-being in Australian mental health professionals. The study also suggests that psychological capital may play a role in promoting positive outcomes in mental health professionals. The previous studies also showed that psychological capital is associated with better performance at work. Abukhalifa, Mohd Kamil, & Yong (2022) ^[1] conducted a study on 433 social workers in Palestine; the results highlight the importance of psychological capital in the improvement of job performance in the social work field. Results revealed

that psychological capital positively affects the job performance of social workers through their work engagement as mediators. Lee & Shin (2021) ^[15] also found similar results in their investigation, which aimed to find the relationship between psychological capital and job performance among welfare center social workers. These studies suggest that psychological capital can be an important asset for social workers, as it can provide them with the psychological resources needed to handle the challenges more effectively at their work. The study by Manzano-García and Ayala (2017) ^[20] investigated the relationship between psychological capital (optimism, hope, resilience, and efficacy) and psychological well-being of direct support staff working in specialist autism services. The study found that psychological capital has a positive effect on psychological well-being, and burnout mediates this relationship. The results suggest that promoting psychological capital can improve the psychological well-being of direct support staff and reduce burnout in this population. The study by Kim and Kweon (2020) investigated the relationship between job stress, burnout, and psychological capital among Korean psychiatric nurses. The results showed that job stress had a negative impact on burnout, and this relationship was partially mediated by psychological capital. The study highlights the importance of psychological capital in mitigating the negative effects of job stress and burnout among psychiatric nurses.

Method

Aim

To study the psychological capital and psychological well-being among professional social workers.

Objective

1. To study the relationship between psychological capital (hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism) and psychological well-being among social workers.
2. To find out the impact of psychological capital (hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism) on the psychological well-being of social workers.

Hypotheses

1. There will be a positive relationship between dimensions of psychological capital and psychological well-being among social workers.
2. Dimensions of psychological capital (hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism) will significantly predict the psychological well-being of social workers.

Design

The quantitative research design was used in the present study, to examine the impact of psychological capital on the psychological well-being of social workers. The independent variable in this study was psychological capital, which consists of four dimensions, hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism. The dependent variable was psychological well-being. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analysis.

Participants

The sample for this study included 100 non-clinical social workers from various organizations and NGOs from Uttar-Pradesh. They were contacted through online media and

personally to collect data. Only social work professionals (employees) were recruited for the study.

Measures

Participants completed self-report measures of psychological capital and psychological well-being. Participants also provided demographic information such as age, gender, and years of experience in the field. The followings are the self-report measure used-

The psychological capital questionnaire is a measure four dimensions of psychological capital, hope efficacy, resilience, and optimism developed by Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio (2007) ^[17]. The reliability of this questionnaire is 0.75.

The psychological well-being scale developed by Ryff(2007) measures well-being on six dimensions, autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. The reliability of the questionnaire is 0.70.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through personal contacts and referrals. After presenting the purpose of the study, informed consent was obtained from each participant. Data was collected through a Google Form consisting of questionnaires on psychological well-being, psychological capital, and demographics. The collected data were analyzed using correlation and regression analysis with the help of SPSS (25).

Results

Descriptive results

The descriptive results reveal that the sample of 100 social workers had moderate to high levels of hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism, with mean scores ranging from 23.73 to 27.46 and standard deviations from 4.14 to 5.45. Additionally, the mean score for psychological well-being was found to be 90.21 with a standard deviation of 10.63 which indicate relatively high levelof psychological well-being.

Table 1: Descriptive results of psychological capital and psychological well-being of social workers (N=100)

Variable	Mean	SD
Hope	27.46	5.45
Efficacy	23.73	5.38
Resilience	25.48	4.41
Optimism	24.74	4.14
Psychological well-being	90.21	10.63

Correlation results

Table 2 shows the correlation matrix for the study variables, which shows a significant relationship between the study variables. Psychological well-being of social workers significantly and positively correlated with dimensions of psychological capital, hope ($r=0.357$, $p<0.01$), efficacy ($r=0.452$, $p<0.01$), resilience ($r=0.297$, $p<0.01$), and optimism ($r=0.610$, $p<0.01$). Optimism is significantly correlated with all the six dimensions of psychological well-being. Additionally environment mastery, personal growth, and positive relation with all the four dimensions of psychological capital.

Table 2. Correlation between psychological capital and psychological well-being among social workers

Variables	Hope	Efficacy	Resilience	Optimism
Autonomy	.043	.182	.127	.216*
Environment mastery	.282**	.369**	.277**	.431**
Personal growth	.266**	.236*	.343**	.518**
Self-acceptance	.223*	.239*	.022	.278**
Purpose in life	.090	.183	.164	.204*
Positive relations with others	.282**	.369**	.277**	.431**
Overall well-being	.357**	.452**	.297**	.610**

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Regression results

The regression analysis was conducted to examine the impact of hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism on psychological well-being of social workers. The analysis revealed that except for hope all the dimensions of psychological capital, efficacy ($r=2.74$, $p<0.01$), resilience ($r=2.32$, $p<0.05$), and optimism ($r=6.21$, $p<0.01$) are significant predictors of psychological well-being of social workers. The constant was also significant ($r=9.85$, $p<0.01$). the model explain 44% of variance in psychological well-being among social workers. F value=18.69**

Table 3: Regression table for psychological capital and psychological well-being among social workers

Predictor	β	SE	t	sig.
Constant	53.37	5.41	9.85**	.000
Hope	.13	.22	.65	.538
Efficacy	.57	.20	2.74**	.007
Resilience	.61	.26	2.32*	.022
Optimism	1.73	.27	6.21**	.000
R-square				.44
Adj. R-square				.41
F	18.69**			.000

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Discussion

Social workers often face challenging situations and job-related stress in their daily work. Psychological capital, which includes qualities such as optimism, hope, resilience, and self-efficacy, can help social workers deal with stress and sustain their positivity. By enhancing their psychological capital, social workers can improve their overall well-being and better handle the demands of their profession. Findings from this study indicate that psychological capital, composed of hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism, is positively associated, and except for hope, each dimension of psychological capital significantly predicted psychological well-being among social workers. The correlation analysis revealed a moderate-to-strong positive relationship between psychological capital and psychological well-being. The findings of the present study support previous research on the relationship between psychological capital and psychological well-being. For instance, found a positive association between psychological capital and well-being and a negative association with burnout among healthcare workers. Similarly, found a positive association between psychological capital and well-being among educators. Our results reinforce these findings by showing a positive association between psychological capital and well-being among social workers. Furthermore, our study found that all components of psychological capital (hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism) were positively correlated with the six dimensions of well-being (autonomy, self-acceptance,

purpose in life, positive relation with others, environment mastery, and personal growth), in line with the findings of Manzano-García & Ayala (2017) [20], Kun & Gadanez (2022) [14], and Koller & Hicks (2016) [13]. The studies also show the protective role of psychological capital on the well-being of social workers (Virgă, Baciú, Lazăr, & Lupşa, 2020; Ho & Chan, 2022) [22, 7, 8]. These findings suggest that interventions that aim to enhance psychological capital may have a positive impact on well-being among social workers. In conclusion, the present study provides further evidence for the positive association between psychological capital and well-being among social workers and highlights the potential utility of interventions aimed at enhancing psychological capital in promoting well-being among this population.

Conclusion

The present study aimed to examine the impact of psychological capital on the psychological well-being of social workers. Results of the study revealed that psychological capital is positively associated with the psychological well-being of social workers, additionally, efficacy, resilience, and optimism significantly predicted the psychological well-being of social workers. The results of this study contribute to our understanding of the impact of positive psychological capital on the well-being of social workers and highlight the importance of promoting positive psychological resources in this occupational group. Interventions aimed at enhancing hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism among social workers may help to improve their well-being and performance.

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