

## **Relationship between Sense of Coherence, Positive Psychological Capitals and Mental Wellbeing: A Cross-Cultural Analysis**

**\*Abbasi, Najam ul Hasan**

Mianyang Normal University, Mianyang, Sichuan, China

**Saeed Anwar**

International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan

Sense of coherence is an individuals' ability reflected by a person's reaction in stressful situation. Psychological Capital (PsyCap) is an optimistic psychological reserve that has been arisen from the positive psychology. According to the Positive psychologist, well-being comes under the umbrella of positive psychology and it is interrelated to satisfaction of life of a person and positive feelings. The present research investigated the relationship between sense of coherence & positive psychological capitals and their effect on well-being among Chinese and Pakistani students. A sample of Chinese and Pakistani participants ( $N = 271$ ) through purposive convenient sample was used to gather the research data. Sense of coherence positive psychological capitals and Short Warwick Edinburgh well-being Questionnaire were used to collect the data regarding study variables. The findings suggest that the positive psychological capitals positively predict well-being among Chinese and Pakistani participants. The further analysis suggested that the Pakistani and Chinese males scored significantly higher on well-being as compared to their female counterparts. Findings also confirmed that positive psychological capitals positively predict well-being among study participants. This research analyzed sense of coherence alongside its three dimensions known as meaningfulness, manageability and comprehensiveness, and the findings are in line with the pervious literatures.

*Keywords:* Sense of Coherence, Positive Psychological Capitals, Mental Health, Wellbeing, China, Pakistan

Antonovsky (1987) discovered the theory of Sense of Coherence (SOC), which explains that the sense of coherence has three types of proportions which are comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness. He also believed that there is a positive relationship among sense of coherence and other three constructs: cultural stability, social support and well-being. A great deal of research determines the positive relationship between sense of coherence and wellbeing (Feldt, 1997; Richardson & Parker, 2003, Van der Colff & Rothmann, 2009). Positive psychology encompasses all the constructs of sense of coherence, and wellbeing and this discipline of psychology is now arising as a developing area of psychology with the notion of growth of psychological well-being in the society.

The construct of sense of coherence encompasses manifold domains. Comprehensibility is illustrated as the amount to which is single can examine the threatening stimuli that can be arisen from both environments inner as well as outer, by developing cognitive sense as a result the information gained is well-organized, trustworthy, prearranged, consistent, deliberate, and explicit, as opposed to the information that is messy, confused, illogical, unexpected and odd. Manageability is defined as the level to which one can examine that available resources which are

---

\* Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed Abbasi, Najam ul Hasan, Department of Academic Sciences, Mianyang Normal University, Mianyang, Sichuan, China. Email: [nhabasi@gmail.com](mailto:nhabasi@gmail.com)

sufficient to meet the challenges which the situational stimuli pose one when attack. Meaningfulness is the motivational component, illustrated as the degree to which is single feels that his life keeps some emotional meanings, or his life is meaningful and when one faces problems in his life, some of the problems (at least) should be considered as worthy and devotions, and one should take them as challenges not to be taken as burdens (Antonovsky, 1991). An individual should have an aim to solve problems of his life, and he also must be willing to put in his efforts to face and overcome the stress that can cause distress and disturbance in his life.

Youssef and Luthans et al. (2006) define Psychological Capital (PsyCap) as: an individual's optimistic psychological state of development that is denoted by: (i) having confidence (self-efficacy) to retain and put in the needed attempt to have a success at difficult tasks; (ii) developing a positive acknowledgment (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future; (iii) persistent toward goals and, when necessary diverting tracks to goals (hope) in order to be successful; and (iv) when troubled by problems and hardships, retaining and reflecting back and even beyond (resiliency) to get achievement.

In simple words, PsyCap can be comprehended as a person's optimistic developmental state which is specified by the four higher order constructs or capabilities: Hope: something making up one's Will and the Way; Self-Efficacy: also identified as self-confidence, is something which is required to succeed; Resiliency reflecting back and beyond in difficulties; and Optimism: being rational and elastic (Luthans & Youssef, 2004; Luthans, et al., 2007).

Positive constructs such as hope, optimism, efficacy, and resiliency are the factors that identify a person's reaction to a variety of tense situations at workplace (Luthans & Youssef, 2004). In this case, the investigator utilizes these constructs within an educational environment. Moreover, the sub-constructs of hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism (HERO) are explained in detail. Positive psychologist Snyder (2000) developed the construct of Hope. It is defined as an optimistic motivational state that is founded on an interactively derivative sense of successful (1) agency (goal administered energy) and (2) pathways (setting up to achieve goals).

Well-being comes under the umbrella of positive psychology and it is interrelated to satisfaction of life of a person and positive feelings and well-being is also a representative of joyful life and feelings pleasure (Diener, et al., 2003; Emmons & Diener, 1985). Ryff and Keyes (1995) considered well-being as a psychological well-being. Moreover, psychological well-being comprises of optimistic association with other people, goals in life and feelings of independency as well as the inner feelings, emotion of person (e.g , successful coping strategy) and it is also associated with culture and cultural effects (Diener, et al., 1999). Psychological well-being also plays a vital role particularly for therapists and counselors in the field of clinical psychology and counseling. Through degree of well-being, clinical psychologists evaluate psychopathology in the client and help them to get rid of the disturbances from client's life (Christopher, 1999).

Recently collaborations between Chinese and Pakistani governments calls for extensive research in order to understand the patterns of thinking and other behavioral analysis between the two nations. A lot of research needs to done and to find out the differences and similarities between the younger population of two countries in important areas and that too in the way these youth deal with and approach day to day life. Current study wishes to help educationists, clinicians as well as other researchers to assist young people to enhance their self-esteem, outlook towards life and the

meaning of life, and to gain self-confidence. It also aims to suggest and contribute towards improving individual thought, knowledge, positive behaviors and positive feeling. Pakistan currently is facing several problems like terrorism, violations of law, electricity crises, poverty increase and economic collapse which has direct effect on Pakistani people and ultimately affecting the well-being and quality of life among them. The people hardly understand and use the positive psychological capital which can help combat the stressful situation in their day-to-day life. Inability to understand and implement positive PsyCap on the other hand may be one of the reasons towards increased stressful lives. The issue also directly and indirectly affects sense of coherence of individual. People having positive PsyCap, sense of coherence and positive outlook towards life can ultimately find true meaning and positive relations with fellow being. China on the other hand is doing fairly better on basic living standards. So, it would be interesting to see how young people among two countries respond to these variables.

The current study aims to investigate the sense of coherence and its influence on wellbeing as well as outcomes of positive psychological capital and its impact on the wellbeing among Pakistani and Chinese adolescents. The current study also intends to explore whether there are gender differences on the study variables as well as cultural difference among study participants.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

The present study was based on survey research design. A total of 271 male and female students, participated in the present study comprising  $n=157$  (57.9%) of students from Pakistan and  $n=114$  (42.1%) from China. The age range of the study participants ranged between 21 to 35 years.

#### **Measures**

Following measures were used in current study:

##### ***Sense of Coherence Scale***

Antonovsky (1993) developed the Sense of Coherence Scale. There are different version of scale are available but in this study we will use short version of this scale which consist of 13 items. This is a 7-point Likert-type scale. Alpha coefficient of Sense of coherence of 13 items scale is ranged from 0.70 to 0.92. Test-retest reliability of this scale is ranged from 0.69 to 0.78.

##### ***Short Warwick Edinburg Well-being Scale***

In this Study Short Version of Warwick Edinburg well-being scale was used to investigate the wellbeing among study participants. This is scale of seven items, with five categories, which have been specifically designed to measure both the feeling and functioning aspects of positive mental well-being (Stewart-Brown et al., 2009).

### *Positive Psychological Capital Questionnaire*

Positive psychological capitals was measured utilizing the PsyCap-24 (Youssef & Luthans, 2007) which comprises the whole 24 positive psychological capital items. PsyCap 24 contains four subscales, each consisting of six items i.e. Hope, Self-efficacy, Resilience, and Optimism. Add up to items were measured using a 6-point Lik-ert size of questionnaire one strongly disagree to six strongly agree. Alpha reliability for Positive psychological capital 24 questionnaires is .9.

### **Procedure**

For the current study first of permission for the scales were taken. After that permission for data collection was obtained. Data was collected from different universities of Pakistan and China. The participants were briefed about the study and were asked about their demographic details. After that they were given Sense of Coherence Scale, Short Warwick Edinburg Well-being Scale and Positive Psychological Capital Questionnaire. After the data collection it was analyzed through SPSS.

### **Results**

The data was analyzed while using SPSS. Descriptive Analysis, Pearson Moment Correlation, Simple Linear Regression and Independent Sample t-test was computed.

**Table 1**

*Psychometric Properties of Study Variables of Pakistani and Chinese Students (N=271)*

Variables	M	SD	$\alpha$	Range		Skewness	Kurtosis
				Potential	Actual		
Positive PsyCap	64.80	11.36	.85	24-144	28.109	.97	3.52
Well-being	24.59	6.17	.89	7-35	9-35	-.62	-.34
Sense of coherence	39.42	8.69	.66	13-91	17-84	.83	3.50

Table one shows different psychometric properties of variables under study. Alpha reliability coefficients for all scales indicate satisfactory internal consistency. Value of skewness is less than 1 which indicates that universal normality is not problematic.

**Table 2**

*Simple Linear Regression Analysis indicating effect of Positive Psychological Capital as Predicting Variable and Well-being as Outcome Variable of Pakistani & Chinese Students (N=271)*

Predictor	Model $\beta$	Outcomes: Wellbeing
		95% CI
		LL, UL
(Constant)	33.77***	[30.262, 37.280]
Positive psychological capital	-.16***	[-.231, -.105]
$R^2$	.09	
F	27.87***	

\*\*\* $p < .001$

The table shows Linear Regression analysis of positive psychological capital as predicting variable and well-being as outcome variable.  $R^2$  value .091 Shows that 9.1% variance in the dependent variable can be accounted for by predictors with  $F(1,266) = 27.879^{***}$   $p < .001$ . Results show that positive psychological capital has significant positive effect on well-being ( $\beta = .168^{***}$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

**Table 3**

*Linear Regression Analysis Showing the Effect of Sense of Coherence on The Prediction of Well-Being of Pakistani and Chinese Students (N=271)*

Predictor	Model $\beta$	Outcome: wellbeing	
		95% CI	
		LL	UL
(Constant)	18.46***	[15.102, 21.826]	
Sense of coherence	0.11***	[.072, .239]	
$R^2$	0.04		
$F$	13.45***		

\*\*\* $p < .001$

Table above displays Linear Regression analysis for well-being as outcome variable & sense of coherence as predicting variable. The  $R^2$  value .044 shows 4.4% variance in the dependent variable can be accounted by predictors with  $F(1,266) = 13.459^{***}$ ,  $p < .001$ . Results indicate that sense of coherence has significant positive effect on well-being ( $\beta = .115^{***}$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

**Table 4**

*Standard deviation Mean and t-values for Pakistani & Chinese Students on Positive Psychological Capital & Sense of Coherence (N=271)*

Variables	Pakistan(n = 157)		China(n = 114)		$t(266)$	$P$	95% CI		Cohen's $d$
	$M$	$SD$	$M$	$SD$			LL	UL	
PPC	52.27	10.69	58.48	11.34	4.61	.000	-8.94	-3.58	0.56
SOC	39.73	9.83	39	6.85	.72	.01	-1.38	2.833	0.86

Table below shows the standard deviation, mean and t-values for Chinese & Pakistanis students on PPC & SOC Results. Students from China scored significantly higher on positive psychological capital ( $M = 58.48$ ,  $SD=11.34$ ) as compared to students from Pakistan ( $M = 52.27$ ,  $SD=10.69$ ) where  $t(266) 4.61$   $p < .001$ . Whereas students from Pakistan significantly scored higher on sense of coherence ( $M = 39.73$   $SD=9.83$ ) as compared to students from China ( $M = 39$ ,  $SD=6.85$ ) where  $t(266) 4.61$   $p < .01$ , which shows significant differences among both groups.

### Discussion

The current study aimed at exploring the sense of coherence and positive psychological its effect on psychological wellbeing among Chinese and Pakistani students. The findings of the study indicated strong correlation among all variables, for both the Chinese and Pakistanis. Alpha reliability further showed the coefficient also displayed satisfactory internal consistency for both group of participants.

The findings on overall sample as well as finding of Chinese and Pakistani samples separately revealed that the sense of coherence is an important predictor of well-being. These outcomes are consistent with Antonovsky's Model, which proposes that sense of coherence promotes overall well-being (Antonovsky, 1987; Van der Colff & Rothmann, 2009) there are considerable amount of literature which provides strong support for the sense of coherence as an indicator of well-being and expands the person's adapting recourses to manage with stressful conditions (Bezuidenhout & Cilliers 2010; Mostert & Rothmann, 2006; Rothmann, 2003).

Findings from the current study suggests that Chinese student's sense of coherence significantly higher on well-being as compare to Pakistani students. In Pakistan political instability, war of terrorism, corruption, economic recession has been stake on well-being for long time. This is the major finding of this study of students and well-being can be promoted and installing sense of coherence

The findings that the positive psychological capital positively predicts well-being among study participants are also supported by previous study (Avey, et al., 2008). Luthaans (2017) suggested that there is a strong positive relationship between positive psychological capitals, physical health and well-being. This means that as an individual's positive psychological capitals increases, it increases his/her well-being and decreases the stress.

The impact of demographical factors explored in the current study included: gender and cultural differences among Pakistani and Chinese students on well-being. The findings of the current study suggest that Chinese male and female student scored significantly higher on well-being as compared to their Pakistani counterparts. These result are in line with the previous research, as Fujita, et al. (1991) expressed in their research that female are generally high on positive psychological outcomes, well-being and life satisfaction than their male counterparts. These results are similarly predictable with different research that clarify that female utilized positive re-centering as an adapting approach more prominent than male, this may explain the reasons why female score higher on well-being scale (Garnefski, et al., 2004).

## **Implications**

Current study is based on cross-cultural study between Pakistani and Chinese culture. The implications of the current study can be divided into two elements: theoretical significance and applied significance. As far as the theoretical significance of the present study is concerned, it supports the existing literature (Antonovsky 1987). The applied significance of the current research is aimed at the efforts that can be taken with respect to the people of Pakistan and China. The findings provide a detailed basis for the universities and policy makers who work with youth regarding the importance of sense of coherence in reducing the stress and improving the well-being among students in both countries. The findings from the current study are additionally valuable to understand the role of culture in shaping up the behavior of the Pakistani students and calls for the attention to different cultural practices in relation to other cultures. The current study tried to understand this very objective and compared the Pakistani students with the Chinese students, since both belong to the Asian cultures and are considered to be collective societies and tried to understand the 'protocols' that are comparable to each other

### References

- Antonovsky, A. (1987). *Unraveling the mystery of health: How people manage stress and stay well*. San Francisco.
- Antonovsky, A. (1991). The structural sources of salutogenic strengths. In C. L. Cooper & R. Payne (Eds.), *Personality and stress: Individual differences in the stress process* (pp. 67–104). John Wiley & Sons.
- Antonovsky, A. (1993). The structure and properties of the sense of coherence scale. *Social Science & Medicine*, 36(6), 725-733. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536\(93\)90033-Z](https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536(93)90033-Z)
- Avey, J. B., Wernsing, T. S., & Luthans, F. (2008). Can positive employees help positive organizational change? Impact of psychological capital and emotions on relevant attitudes and behaviors. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 44(1), 48-70. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021886307311470>
- Bezuidenhout, A., & Cilliers, F. V. N. (2010). Burnout, work engagement and sense of coherence in female academics in higher-education institutions in South Africa. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology [SA Tydskrif vir Bedryfsielkunde]*, 36(1), 1-10. <http://www.sajip.co.za/>
- Christopher, J. C. (1999). Situating psychological well-being: Exploring the cultural roots of its theory and research. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 77(2), 141-152. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.1999.tb02434.x>
- Diener, E., Oishi, S., & Lucas, R. E. (2003). Personality, culture, and subjective well-being: Emotional and cognitive evaluations of life. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 54(1), 403-425. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.54.101601.145056>
- Diener, E., Suh, E. M., Lucas, R. E., & Smith, H. L. (1999). Subjective well-being: Three decades of progress. *Psychological Bulletin*, 125(2), 276-285. <https://doi.apa.org/doiLanding?doi=10.1037%2F0033-2909.125.2.276>
- Emmons, R. A., & Diener, E. (1985). Personality correlates of subjective well-being. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin*, 11(1), 89-97. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167285111008>
- Feldt, T. (1997). The role of sense of coherence in well-being at work: Analysis of main and moderator effects. *Work & Stress*, 11(2), 134-147. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02678379708256830>
- Fujita, F., Diener, E., & Sandvik, E. (1991). Gender differences in negative affect and well-being: the case for emotional intensity. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 61(3), 427 – 434. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.61.3.427>
- Garnefski, N., Teerds, J., Kraaij, V., Legerstee, J., & van Den Kommer, T. (2004). Cognitive emotion regulation strategies and depressive symptoms: Differences between males and females. *Personality & Individual Differences*, 36(2), 267-276. <https://scholarlypublications.universiteitleiden.nl/access/item%3A2860414/view>
- Luthans, F. & Youssef, C. M. (2004). Human, social, and now positive psychological capital management: Investing in people for competitive advantage. *Organizational Dynamics*, 33(2), 143–160. <https://doi.10.1016/j.orgdyn.2004.01.003>
- Luthans, F. & Youssef C. M. (2017). Psychological capital: An evidence-based positive approach. *Management Department Faculty Publications*, 165-170. <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/managementfacpub/165>
- Luthans, F., Youssef C. M., & Bruce J. A. (2007). *Psychological capital: Developing the human competitive edge*. Oxford Academic Press: New York. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195187526.001.0001>

- Mostert, K., & Rothmann, S. (2006). Work-related well-being in the South African Police Service. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 34(5), 479-491. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2006.09.003>
- Richardson G. L. M., & Parker, V. (2003). Inner resources as predictors of psychological well-being in middle-income African American breast cancer survivors. *Cancer Control*, 10(5\_suppl), 52-59. <https://doi/pdf/10.1177/107327480301005s08>
- Rothmann, S. (2003). Burnout and engagement: A South African perspective. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 29(4), 16-25. <http://sajip.co.za/index.php/sajip/article/download/121/117>
- Ryff, C. D., & Keyes, C. L. M. (1995). The structure of psychological well-being revisited. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 69(4), 719 –727. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.69.4.719>
- Snyder, C. R. (2000). The past and possible futures of hope. *Journal of Social & Clinical Psychology*, 19(1), 11-28. <https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.2000.19.1.11>
- Stewart-Brown, S., Tennant, A., Tennant, R., Platt, S., Parkinson, J., & Weich, S. (2009). Internal construct validity of the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS): a Rasch analysis using data from the Scottish health education population survey. *Health & Quality of Life Outcomes*, 7(1), 1-8. <https://hqlo.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1477-7525-7-15>
- Van der Colff, J. J., & Rothmann, S. (2009). Occupational stress, sense of coherence, coping, burnout and work engagement of registered nurses in South Africa. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 35(1), 1-10. [http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?pid=S2071-07632009000100001&script=sci\\_arttext&tlng=es](http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?pid=S2071-07632009000100001&script=sci_arttext&tlng=es)
- Youssef, C. M., & Luthans, F. (2007). Positive organizational behavior in the workplace: The impact of hope, optimism, and resilience. *Journal of Management*, 33(5), 774-800. [https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1035&context=managementf\\_acpub](https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1035&context=managementf_acpub)