

NAOP 2017
SYMPOSIUM ON
POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY: APPLIED ASPECTS

Coordinator/ Proposer: Dr. Swati Patra

Presenters:

Dr. Swati Patra: Positive Psychology Approach to Clinical Psychology

Dr. Amrita Deb: Positive Education: Incorporating well-being into textbooks

Dr. Rabindra Kumar Pradhan: Positive Organisational Behaviour: Implications & Applications

Prof. Minati Panda: Orientalism in Positive Psychology

Abstract of the Symposium

Positive Psychology: Applied Aspects

Positive psychology as a new area of the Discipline of Psychology started in 1998 when Martin Seligman made it the theme of American Psychological Association during his presidency. However, the term was first used by Maslow in 1954 in his book 'Motivation and Personality' and many others have used it also (for instance, Rollo May, 1953 talked about 'meaning'; William James, 1902 talked about 'healthy mindedness'; Allport, 1958 referred to 'positive human characteristics'). The focus on positivity, happiness and wellbeing has also been integral to every culture and religion, e.g., Hinduism, Buddhism etc. have all talked about happiness and the meaning in life.

As a scientific area, however, positive psychology started around two decades back. Lots of researches have been done on positive psychology and its aspects, assessment and intervention since then. The need for positive psychology arose because of a lack of balanced approach to study the objectives of psychology.

As Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) point out, the preoccupation with repairing the worst thing in life needed to be balanced with a focus on building positive qualities. In addition to understanding and alleviating maladjustment, disability, suffering and hardships, psychology also needs to promote human strength and adaptation, and nurture personal and collective development.

Positive psychology endeavours in this regard by focusing on the strengths and virtues of the individual that make life worth living. Positive psychology thus tries to

complement the other areas of psychology by emphasizing the study of positive human development and functioning. It has implications for various fields ranging from education, work place, military to health and clinical set up. In the present symposium that deals with the applied aspects of positive psychology, the presenters will mainly discuss application and significant contribution of positive psychology in organizational, clinical and education context. However, one also needs to have a critical perspective towards positive psychology which has also been addressed in the symposium.

Positive Psychology Approach to Clinical Psychology

Clinical psychology mainly focuses on psychopathology. It is concerned about understanding human suffering, illnesses and repairing the weaknesses and damages in people. Focus is on what is wrong and what needs to be repaired. However, this indicates a one-sided approach. If all illnesses are cured, then what is it that will make life more meaningful and happier? Mental health is not merely the absence of mental disorders, but goes beyond that. Positive psychology tries exactly to address this by focusing on finding out the strengths and virtues of the individual that make life worth living.

Positive psychology has risen to bring about a balance in our approach to clinical psychology. As Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) point out, the current preoccupation with repairing the worst thing in life needed to be balanced with a focus on building positive qualities. Thus a reorientation to the field of clinical psychology, i.e., focusing on the positive in addition to the negative will lead to optimal balance in life.

As per Keyes model (2002) of mental health continuum, for so long we had focused on one end of the spectrum, mental disorder. At the same time, we also need to focus on flourishing. Ultimate aim is not the absence of mental illness, but presence of mental health and flourishing in life.

Positive psychology focuses on three aspects – positive emotions, positive individual traits and positive institutions. A review of studies is given highlighting the protective and preventive aspects of positive emotions on mental illness/disorders. Various positive interventions are discussed. Need for future research is emphasized integrating positive psychology approach to clinical psychology.

Keywords: Positive psychology, Clinical psychology, Positive interventions

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Individual Abstract 2: Dr. Amrita Deb*

Positive Education: Incorporating well-being into textbooks

The aim of this presentation is to discuss research and application in the area of positive education. Earlier, studies in the area of education were largely deficit based with more researches focusing on student's failures instead of successes. However, a paradigm shift brought in by the positive psychology movement resulted in active efforts towards incorporating strength-based practices in the educational context. Case studies from countries including Australia, Mexico, and UK show that skills enhancing well-being have been incorporated into the curriculum. In India, research in this area has resulted in several findings on positive strengths and outcomes among students from schools and colleges. Alongside such research investigations, engaging students in positive psychology courses maybe a directly applicable method to reach out to the target group. This is illustrated by presenting an analysis of courses (N=17) on varied positive psychology topics, offered to students in an institute of higher education from January 2011 to November 2017. Teaching methods used, challenges faced, and student's responses including positive feedback, criticisms, and suggestions for future classes have been detailed. Finally, priority areas for the application of positive education and directions for future research have been outlined.

Keywords: Positive education; positive psychology; well-being; positive outcomes and education; well-being of students

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Individual Abstract 3: Dr.Rabindra Kumar Pradhan*

Positive Organisational Behaviour: Implications & Applications

The purpose of positive organizational behavior is the study and application of positive optimal functioning in the workplace. It examines how employee strength can contribute to organizational success. It also aims to promote occupational health, wellbeing and flourishing, and examines how positive psychological phenomena such as organizational context and employees' personal resources can be utilized to deal with organizational demands. This new discipline of organizational behavior mostly focuses on how to build and enhance positive capacities of organizational employees to enhance their efficiencies and effectiveness rather than only focusing on how to repair their deficiencies. In recent times, the researches on positive organisational behavior have been enormous and multifold. However, due to lack of focus on theory building with proper measurement approach, the discipline needs more culture specific research to deal with the problems of global organizations in a local environment. The present study investigates some of the positively oriented human resources strengths that can influence positive organisational outcomes (employee wellbeing, employee engagement and organizational effectiveness). The study also brings out the theoretical implications and practical applications of researches on positive organisational behavior with reference to Indian workplace.

Key words: Positive organizational behavior, psychological capital, employee engagement, employee wellbeing, organisational effectiveness

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Individual Abstract 4: Prof. Minati Panda*

Orientalism in Positive Psychology

This paper critically examines the central concept of Seligman's Positive Psychology(PS), 'happiness' as an ontological category and shows how it is essentialised in ahistorical and asocial terms. The choice of the terms 'happiness' over 'meaning', 'being' over 'becoming, 'individual effort' over 'structural reform', 'harmony' over 'critical engagement with the concept of caste, class, gender and patriarchy' makes Positive Psychology an 'Oriental Subject' of colonial time. While the second wave of Positive Psychology moves away from this uncritical positivist project by picking up concepts from the works of Albert Camus, Roll and existentialism, it doesn't show how it differs from the already established concepts of 'Critical Psychology' except in harping on the God Particle, "Happiness". It's recent promise to combine humanistic-existential psychology which emphasizes meaning and tension with positive psychology and indigenous psychology (See Wong, 2012; 2016) appears rhetorical. The second wave to establish itself as a distinct approach needs to explicate the methods of reconciling the new dialectics with the old concepts of Positive Psychology like happiness and harmony. In other words, the second wave has to at the least distinguish itself from the 'Critical Psychology'.

Key words: Positive psychology, Critical psychology, Humanistic-existential psychology, Happiness

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