

Role of Hope in Job Satisfaction and Stress

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Abstract: The principal aim of this study is to assess the role of hope in job satisfaction and stress. Hope a positive psychological construct developed by Snyder in 1989. Hope refers to a positive motivational psychological resource that accompanies clear goal identification and involves multiple pathways planning. Stress minimization and enhancement of job satisfaction are important issues faced by human resource management practitioners. There is dearth of literature concerning to the relationship of hope construct with stress and job satisfaction in Indian context. This study was conducted on a sample of 255 employees from four large private sector life insurance companies situated in the eastern region of India. Correlation and structural equation modeling techniques were used to test the hypotheses. Results of this study demonstrate that hope is positively related to job satisfaction and hope is negatively related to stress symptoms. Lastly, theoretical and managerial implications of the study are discussed.

Key words: Hope, stress, job satisfaction, structural equation modeling, job

INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive business environment work place stress is increasingly experienced by the workforce. As a result of which psychosomatic ailments, job dissatisfaction, and employee attrition are the common problems encountered by the employees and employers. A study undertaken in India at HDFC standard life showed that 58% of the employees were not satisfied with their jobs and most of them reported work pressure (Yadav and Rokade, 2013). Hope construct is conceptualized as "the perceived capability to derive pathways to desired goals and motivate oneself via agency thinking to use those pathways" (Snyder, 2002). In simple words hope refers to goal identification and a high-hope individual gets motivated to plan different pathways to reach the goal. The primary aim of this research is to examine the relationship of hope with job satisfaction and stress. The result of this study is expected to suggest remedial measures to minimize stress and maximize job satisfaction in research place.

Even though hope has been researched in Western cultural context but there is dearth of empirical evidence pertaining to the relationship of hope with job satisfaction and stress in Indian context. Cronbach *et al.* (1972) in their generalizability theory claim that a construct needs to be

examined across multiple settings and cultures to obtain generalization. Similarly, contextual theory of John (2006) emphasizes that contextual factors can influence the nature and structure of a construct. Johns (2006) goes on to state that, "relationships theorized or found in Western cultures might not hold up in non-Western cultures such that the validity of Western theories is said to be culturally biased". Similarly, Luthans *et al.* (2007a, b) also argue that hope should be studied in non-Western cultures. Further, Gelfand *et al.* (2007) are of the view that Western developed constructs can be influenced by culture specific dimensions and therefore they need to be examined in a non-Western cultural context with reference to specific cultural dimensions. Given these scholarly arguments we propose that by examining hope construct with relation to job satisfaction and stress it would provide necessary evidence towards the external validity of hope construct in Indian cultural context. Service sector (life insurance sector) is particularly chosen for this study because researchers argue that research done by the employees in the service sector requires positive psychological resources and positive attitude to attain success in a given task (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987). To start with let us now critically examine the extant literature on hope construct and thereafter propose hypotheses of the study.

Historical origin of hope theory: Cognitive theory of hope was pioneered by Snyder (1989). Snyder (1989) argues that the propensity of people to attend desired goals lays the seeds for hope building. Conception of 'hope' has been in existence in human philosophy since traditional times. For example "in Greek mythology, hope was all that remained in Pandora's infamous jar after she unwittingly unleashed all of the evils into the world" (Rand and Cheavens, 2009). Importance of hope is found in famous quotes like "He that lives on hope will die fasting" (Benjamin Franklin quoted in Bartlett, 1968). Scholars during twentieth century wrote about the importance of human desire to achieve goals (Menninger, 1959; Melges and Bowlby, 1969; Frank, 1975; Frankl, 1984). Analysis of pertinent literature concerning to hope reveals that hope is associated with perception of goal identification and goal accomplishment (Rand and Cheavens, 2009). Snyder during his initial research on hope found that when individuals speak about hope they implicitly indicate two cognitive motivational components 'Pathways' and 'Agency' (Snyder, 1994a, b). Using Snyder's (2002) definition Rand and Cheavens (2009) noted that "hopeful thinking consists of belief that one can find pathways to desired goals and the belief that one can muster the motivation to use those pathways".

Hope theory: Hope is an important construct in positive psychology literature. Scholars are unanimous in their opinion that hope theory pioneered by Snyder is well established (Lopez *et al.*, 2004; Kauffman, 2006; Riskind, 2006). Snyder (2002) explained hope as a 'cognitive-motivational model and argued that hope construct consists of three cognitive components ('goals', 'pathways' and 'agency'). According to Snyder (2002) goals refer to the targets set by individuals and pathways reflect the strategies or multiple ways that an individual conceptualizes to attend the desired goals. Agency component of hope construct indicates the requisite motivational energy needed to pursue the conceptualized pathways to reach the desired goals. Snyder *et al.* (1991a, b) defined hope as "a positive motivational state supported by cognitive processes of agency (goal-directed motivational energy) and pathways (planning multiple paths to meet goals)".

High hope individuals proactively develop alternative plans as they apprehend negative consequence (Snyder *et al.*, 1991a-c; Snyder *et al.*, 1996; Snyder, 2000a, b, 2002). But for low-hope individual pathways thinking are much more challenging and such individual abstain from alternative pathways planning. Both the 'agency' and 'pathways' planning components are complementary to each other. Absence of any one of them does not operationalize the construct of hope

(Snyder *et al.*, 1996). In the event of adversity 'agency' component plays a crucial role and helps individuals to cultivate the required motivational energy to generate multiple pathways to achieve the desired goal. Hope theory is based on the realistic behavior aiming at achieving pragmatic goals (Snyder, 2000a).

Hope is a psychometrically validity construct (Snyder *et al.*, 1991a). Empirically, hope satisfies convergent validity (Snyder, 2002). Snyder (2002) claims that the 'pathways' component of hope in particular distinguishes hope construct from other related constructs like optimism. Empirically discriminant validity of hope has been demonstrated (Magaletta and Oliver, 1999; Carifio and Rhodes, 2002; Bryant and Cvenegros, 2004; Youssef and Luthans, 2007). Hope construct is measurable through trait hope scale (Snyder *et al.*, 1991a, b), state hope scale (Snyder *et al.*, 1996) and children's hope scale (Snyder *et al.*, 1997).

Components of hope construct

Goals: The basic foundation of hope theory rests upon the fact that human behavior is goal directed (Snyder, 1994a, 1998). Snyder (2002) argues that goals are the psychological targets that propel human action. Goal can be conceptualized in shape of mental image like "picturing that new coat you saw in a store window" or could be verbal in nature "I want to lose weight". Rand and Cheavens (2009) argued that goals can be categorized as both short term and long term goals. Snyder (2002) also hypothesized two types of goals namely "approach goals" and "avoidance goals". Example of an approach goal could be in shape of "getting into a medical school" and avoidance goals could be in terms of "not getting the flue" (Rand and Cheavens, 2009). Averill *et al.* (1990) suggest that longing for goal attainment intensifies when an individual feels that there is high probability of attaining the target goal.

Pathways: Another component of hope construct is pathways planning. Snyder (2002) emphasizes that in order to achieve goal various pathways generation is of great importance. High-hope individuals frame many alternative pathways to reach the goal but for low-hope individuals such pathway planning is cumbersome and they are very poor in articulating various alternative roots. In a laboratory task it was found that high-hope individuals could generate positive internal pathways but this was not possible for low-hope individuals (Snyder *et al.*, 1998). High-hope individuals generally are flexible in planning various pathways and they belief that alternative roots are possible to achieve a given goal (Irving *et al.*, 1998). Particularly in crisis situations high

hope individual resort to multiple pathways planning but low-hope individuals are less flexible and they do not express confidence in following alternative pathways (Snyder *et al.*, 1991a-c).

Agency: Snyder (2002) defined agency as, “the perceived capacity to use one’s pathways to reach desired goals is the motivational component in hope theory”. In simple words agency refers to the motivational energy required to pursue the conceptualized pathways to reach the goal. An example of agency thinking component could be “I am not going to be stopped”. Agency thinking takes a crucial role when an individual encounters obstacle and it is the agency thinking that motivates a high-hope individual to pursue alternative pathways (Snyder, 1994b; Snyder, 2002).

Interaction of pathways and agency thinking: Generation of both perceived pathways and agency thinking are essential components of the hope construct (Snyder *et al.*, 1991a-c). Absence of any one of them will not lead to hope generation (Snyder, 1995). Pathways and agency thinking are complementary to each other. Snyder (2002) emphasizes that “pathway and agency thoughts are iterative as well as additive over a given goal pursuit sequence”.

Relationship of hope with emotions: Some researchers for example, Farina *et al.* (1995) have explained hope purely as an emotion but Snyder (2002) has primarily conceptualized hope as a cognitive resource however, Snyder (2002) asserts within the domain of his hope theory that when an individual achieves the desired goal it results in germination of positive emotions but when an individual has unsuccessful perception of goal pursuits it results in negative emotion. There is empirical evidence towards Snyder (2002)’s claim that those individuals who successfully pursued goals under adverse situations expressed positive emotions whereas those persons who did not pursue goals in view of the negative circumstances reported negative emotions and poor well-being (Diener, 1984; Emmons, 1986; Snyder *et al.*, 1996, 1999). Scholars are of the view that thoughts, motivational state and expectations of outcomes are the causal factors that result in emotion and not vice versa (Snyder, 2002; Roseman and Evdokas, 2004).

Developmental potential of hope: Snyder (2000a) argues that hope can be developed through training interventions (e.g., ‘stretch-goaling’; ‘graduated mastery’; ‘re-goaling’). Further, hope was empirically found to

be developed through training interventions like goal identification training, pathways planning and by training individuals for facing and coping with obstacles (Luthans *et al.*, 2006, 2008a, b; Dello and Stoykova, 2015).

Hope and its correlates: According to Snyder’s (2002) hope theory, hope is an outcome of goal-related experiences. Hope as a psychological resource propels individual to sustain motivation. It helps to exert effort to pursue goals and helps in overcoming barriers. Hope also results in positive emotional experiences. It has been found that high-hope individuals are motivated towards achieving success when working for future goals. Such individual experiences less of stress and negative affect. However, individuals with lower levels of hope report more negative affect and are less optimistic in approach (Snyder *et al.*, 1991a-c). Hope was positively associated with performance and positive work attitudes (Peterson and Luthans, 2003; Luthans *et al.*, 2005, 2008a, b, 2015; Larson and Luthans, 2006; Youssef and Luthans, 2007; Combs *et al.*, 2010). Hope is also positively related to firm’s profitability (Adams *et al.*, 2002).

Longitudinal studies have also found that hope was positively associated with academic performance (Snyder *et al.*, 2002; Rand *et al.*, 2011). Further, hope was also found to be positively related to sport achievement (Curry *et al.*, 1997). Those individuals who had high-hope were less prone to anxiety, depression, and reported well-being (Lopez *et al.*, 2004; Snyder and Lopez, 2006). It has been observed that high-hope persons display better psychological adjustment (Kwon, 2002). It has also been found that success in different types of psychotherapies was associated with high levels of hope (Snyder and Taylor, 2000; Irving *et al.*, 2004).

Relationship of hope with job satisfaction and stress: The probable relationship between hope and job satisfaction can be linked with motivational propensities of hope construct. A hopeful individual does successful goal identification and gets engaged in multiple pathways planning to achieve the goal (Snyder, 2000a, b; Rand and Cheavens, 2009; Avey *et al.*, 2011, 2009). Further, a hopeful person brings in the requisite motivational energy (agency) to pursue the pathways and attend the goal (Snyder *et al.*, 1991; Snyder, 2000a, 2002; Youssef and Luthans, 2007; Rand and Cheavens, 2009). These three components of hope construct (‘goals’, ‘pathways’ and ‘agency’) are likely to generate positive expectations, responsibility and will help to generate meaningfulness in research. These resultant positive expectations, motivation, responsibility and meaningfulness at research are likely to generate job satisfaction. Study conducted in Western cultural context has found positive association of hope with job satisfaction (Larson and Luthans, 2006).

Let us now critically evaluate how hope can influence stress symptoms. Folkman in 2010 defined stress as “a situation that is appraised by the individual as personally significant and as having demands that exceed the person’s resources for coping”. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) acknowledged in their seminal search (Stress, Appraisal and Coping) that individuals are affected from stress when they consider that they do not have adequate resource to face the challenging situation. Therefore, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) suggested that coping is an important cognitive mechanics that influence stress perception. Lazarus (2003) and Folkman in 2010 argue that hope being a positive psychological resource can play a beneficial role in successful coping and adoption in challenging situation. Researchers claim that when individuals high on hope face stressful situations they are likely to use multiple pathways to cope with challenging stressful situations (Snyder *et al.*, 1991a-c; Snyder, 1994a, b, 2000a, b). Research conducted by Snyder *et al.* (1991) found that anxiety is negatively related to hope. Further, a substantial amount of research suggests that high-hope persons can bounce back from failure and such individuals are less prone to anxiety and depression (Lopez *et al.*, 2004; Snyder and Lopez, 2006). Snyder (2002) noted that hope being a positive psychological resource; it helps individuals to cope with life demands. In line with the said theoretical and empirical evidences concerning to stress, coping and hope we posit that hope will have a negative relationship with stress.

Based on the theoretical foundation of hope, job satisfaction and stress following hypotheses are proposed:

- H₁: hope will have positive relationship with job satisfaction
- H₂: hope will have negative relationship with stress symptoms

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Design and procedure: This study involved a sample of 255 respondents (198 males and 57 females) from four large private life insurance companies situated in eastern part of India. All the respondents were Indian nationals. Participants had an average age of 38.7 years (SD = 7.5). Response rate for this study was 64%. Questionnaires were distributed and collected by hand and participants filled out the questionnaires using paper and pencil. At first, hope questionnaire responses were obtained at time 1 and later on criterion variables (job satisfaction and stress symptoms) responses were collected at time 2. This separation in time period for data collection was followed as per the guidelines of Podsakoff *et al.* (2003) to keep away from “common method variance bias” problem.

Measures hope: We adopted the hope scale of Snyder *et al.* (1996) to measure hope. It is a 6 item and a 6 point Likert-type scale. Responses are recorded in the following pattern: (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = somewhat agree, 5 = agree, 6 = strongly agree). This scale displayed sufficient reliability (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.92). Snyder *et al.* (1996) have demonstrated the psychometric validity of the said scale. An example item of this scale is “There are lots of ways around any problem”. We conducted a cross-cultural adaptation of the said scale as per the recommendations of Beaton *et al.* (2000). As it is a validated scale we conducted Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) using maximum likelihood technique to examine the factor structure in Indian sample. Factor loadings ranged from 0.79-0.91 $p < 0.01$ with the following fit indices: (Chi-square = 25.048, DF = 9, $p < 0.01$; (CFI = 0.975); (RMSEA = 0.081); (NFI = 0.975); (GFI = 0.960). This indicates a good fit with the data. Exploratory factor analysis was not deemed appropriate to be conducted because a prior factor structure has been found (Snyder *et al.*, 1996).

Job satisfaction: Hackman and Oldham (1980)’s job satisfaction scale was used to measure job satisfaction. It is a 3-item, 6-point Likert-type scale and responses are measured using the following pattern: 1(strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). An example item of this scale is “Generally speaking, I am very satisfied with this job”. In this study we found Cronbach’s alpha (0.81) for this scale.

Stress symptoms: We used the widely accepted Lovibond and Lovibond (1995)’s stress symptoms scale to measure stress symptoms. It is a 4 point Likert-type scale. Scales items describe various symptoms of stress and responses are measured in the following pattern: “0 = Did not apply to me at all”; “1 = Applied to me in some degree or some of the time”; “2 = Applied to me a considerable degree or a good part of the time”; “3 = Applied to me very much or most of the time”. Four items were used to measure stress symptoms. An example, item of this scale is “I found it difficult to relax”. We found Cronbach’s alpha of 84 for this scale.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of this study was to evaluate the relationship of hope with job satisfaction and stress symptoms. As can be seen in Table 1 that there is evidence of significant positive correlation between hope and job satisfaction ($r = 0.516$, $p < 0.01$). It is also seen in

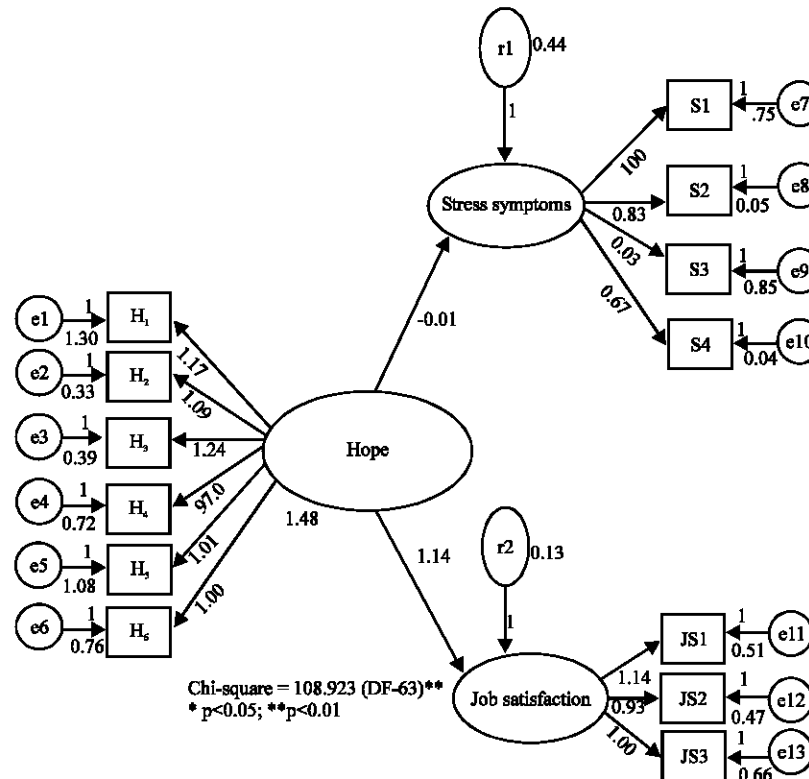


Fig. 1: Results of structure equation model

Table 1: Means, standard deviations and intercorrelations

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3
Hope	4.682	0.938	1		
Job satisfaction	2.431	0.578	0.516**	1	
Stress symptoms	1.819	0.348	-0.112*		1

Table 2: Regression analysis results

Predictor	Predictant	β	F	R ²
Hope	Job satisfaction	0.318**	122.497**	0.266
Hope	Stress symptoms	-0.042*	4.283*	0.013

N = 255; *, **p<0.05, 0.01

Table 3: Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) fit Indices

Variables	Fit value
Chi-square	108.923 (DF = 63)**
CFI	0.980
RMSEA	0.057
NFI	0.955
GFI	0.933

*, **p<0.05, 0.01

Table 2 (regression results) that hope significantly predicted job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.318$, $p < 0.01$; $F = 122.497$, $p < 0.01$; $r^2 = 0.266$). Given these findings Hypothesis 1 is supported. Further, it can be observed from Table 1 that there is significant negative correlation between hope and stress symptoms ($r = -0.112$, $p < 0.05$). Similarly, Table 2 regression results depict that that hope predicted a negative relationship with stress symptoms ($\beta = -0.042$, $p < 0.05$; $F = 4.283$, $p < 0.05$; $r^2 = 0.013$) therefore, there is supportive evidence towards Hypothesis 2.

Further, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) (Joreskog and Sorbom, 1993) was employed to analyze the data. AMOS (v.4) software was used to conduct SEM analysis. It can be seen in Fig. 1 path diagram that there is positive relationship of hope with job satisfaction and there is negative relationship of hope with stress symptoms. We obtained the following model fit indices as seen in Table 3 (Chi-square = 108.923, DF = 63p $p < 0.01$); (CFI = 0.980); (RMSEA = 0.057); (NFI = 0.955); (GFI = 0.933). These model fit indices support an overall good fit with the data as per Hair *et al.* (2006). Findings of the present study, also support findings of earlier studies (Luthans *et al.*, 2007a, b; Avey *et al.*, 2009). Hence, this study provides evidence towards external validity of hope construct with relation to job satisfaction and stress symptoms in Indian cultural context.

CONCLUSION

Findings of this study indicate managerial as well as theoretical implications. Considering the positive association of hope with job satisfaction and evidence from the literature that hope is subject to development (Luthans *et al.*, 2010), human resource management professionals can take help of researchers to develop training modules for improving hope levels. Enhancement

of hope levels in employees will foster job satisfaction, minimize attrition and enhance well-being of the workforce. This study also found that high-hope individuals report less symptoms stress. Given the evidence from literature that hope can be increased, managers can help employees to develop hope levels through training programs. Such initiatives would help in stress reduction. Decrease in stress levels would result in minimization of psychosomatic diseases of employees. Taking the said measures would help develop and nurture a healthy and productive workforce. Apart from the discussed managerial implications this study also has theoretical implications because this study provided supportive evidence towards the external validity of hope construct with reference to job satisfaction and stress symptoms in Indian cultural context. Hope being a crucial psychological resource, its identification and improvement would remain an important subject matter both for human resource management professionals and scholars in times to come.

LIMITATIONS

There are some limitations of this study however, the strength of the study lies in terms of being free from “common method variance bias” problem. We followed the recommendations of Podsakoff *et al.* (2003) to avoid the said problem and accordingly there were two separate time periods of data collection. At first the predictor variable (hope) data was collected at a time 1 and later on criterion variables data were collected at time 2. This study is also free from the problem of “instrumentation threat” because the scales used to measure hope, symptoms of stress and job satisfaction are psychometrically valid scales and have strong theoretical foundations. In terms of limitations, this study being cross-sectional and correlational in nature, accurate causality between the predictor and criterion variables can not be ascertained. Therefore, further longitudinal and experimental investigations are needed to find out causality between the variables. Moreover, this study was restricted to only respondents from four private life insurance companies located in the eastern part of India. To obtain greater generalization of the results, studies having larger sample size, involving participants from various sectors and regions are needed.

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