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Well-being and personality: Facet-level analyses

Subjective well-being, also known as SWB, covers two components: a cognitive one, and an affective one. The cognitive component regards life satisfaction, while the affective one regards positive and negative affect. Positive affect is constituted by feelings of joy, enthusiasm, hope. Negative affect is constituted by feelings of fear, despair or anger. And there is also another construct, which is happiness. The Big Five factors of personality are Extraversion, Neuroticism, Openness, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness. This study has concentrated on the four main indicator of subjective well-being: happiness, life satisfaction, postive affect, negative affect, as well as on the facets of the Big Five traits with the addition of perceived social support, self-esteem and optimism.

Research questions: Do the global indicatiors of subjective well-being have a closer relationship with the Big Five traits than the specific indicators? Do the Big Five facets explain the relationship between personality and the subjective well-being better than Big Five personality traits? Do other personality measures such as self-esteem, optimism and social support and the Big Five facets differentially predict the subjective well-being indicators?

Previous studies has focused on the link between the Big Five personality factors (not on the facets) and subjective well-being. Costa and McCrae (1980, in Marrero Quevedo, R.J., Carballeira Abella, M., 2010) found that the negative affect is correlated to Neuroticism and that the positive affect is correlated to Extraversion. Costa and McCrae (1991, in Marrero Quevedo, R.J., Carballeira Abella, M., 2010) also discovered that Openness correlates with negative affect and positive affect, however Agreeableness and Coscientiousness are more related to life satisfaction and happiness. Steel, Schmidt and Shultz (2008, in Marrero Quevedo, R.J., Carballeira Abella, M., 2010) has discovered in their meta-analyses that Extraversion correlates with the positive affect and Neuroticism correlates with happiness, life satisfaction and negative affect.

Methods

The research was constituted by students of the University of La Laguna, Canary Islands, Spain and people from their families and social environment. There were 554 participants (35.6% men, 64.4% women), between the age of 17-66 with a mean of 27,70 and standard deviation of 10,04. For measurement there were used the following scales: The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), The Subjective Happiness Scale, The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS), The Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R), The Life Orientation Test Revised (LOT-R), Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and Sarason's Social Support Questionnaire (SSQ-6). The participants also had an interview in which they stated their sociodemographic informations about gender, age, relationship and employment status. Pearson correlation coefficients were used to examine the correlation between SWB measures with sociodemographic and personality characteristics. They used hierarchical multiple-regression analyses for the Big Five as a predictor and SWB measures as a criteria, with p=.01 as the inclusion criteria. All the 30 personality facets were entered in different blocks to SWB. And in the final blocks they included self-esteem, optimism and social support separetely. Stepwise regression analyses were made for each indicator of SWB. When they added a new set of variables, the model got re-tested. The variables that did not contribute significantly were removed. To descrease the possibility of Type 1 error, a probability for F of p=.01 was created as the inclusion criteria, and p=.05 as the exclusion criteria.

Results

Results show that demographic variables were not strongly related to SWB measures.

Big Five personality traits: Neuroticism, Extraversion and Conscientiousness have a high correlation with SWB indicators, however Extraversion did not correlate with the negative affect. Agreeableness weakly correlated to life satisfaction and happiness. Openness correlated only to the positive affect.

Big Five personality facets: All Neuroticism facets correlated to SWB, depression and vulnerability had the higher scores. All Extraversion facets correlated to SWB, with the higher scores in positive emotions and warmth. All Conscientiousness facets correlated with life satisfaction and positive affect, where competence and self-discipline correlated to SWB. Openness was weakly related to SWB. Optimism, self-esteem and perceived social support correlated to all indicators of SWB, with higher scores on happiness an life satisfaction.

For happiness, the main predictors were optimism, depression, positive emotions and social support (explained 43% of the variance). For life satisfaction the main predictors were optimism, depression, social support and achievement striving (explained 29% of the variance). For positive affect the main predictors were vulnerability, warmth and impulsiveness (explained 24% of the variance). And for negative affect the main predictors were self-esteem, activity and vulnerability (explained 24% of the variance).

Strenghts and weaknesses

The study was stuctured well, and in accordance with previous studies. Lots of previous studies got comfirmed. The biggest strenght of the study is probably the analyses of all the facets plus optimism, self-esteem and social support with the indicators of SWB, because they went into details and tested every possible association. The weakness of this study is, that they used a convenience sample, where 71.2% of the participants were under the age of 30, therefore it can't be generalized to other populations. Also the shared variance of the facets were not investigated, which may have given a different outcome of the study.

Contribution

The first proposition was not confirmed, due to similar percentages of variance in happiness and positive affect. The second proposition was confirmed, as they demonstrated that the Big Five facet-level analyses is relevant to understanding the relationship between personality and SWB, because not all the facets has the same relationship to SWB indicators. Also the third proposition was confirmed, that optimism, perceived social support and self-esteem were better predictors to SWB than personality facets. Surprisingly, impulsivity was significantly correlated with positive affect and activity was associated with negative affect, which all previous studies found to be the opposite, so there is possibility for future research to discover these new found relationships, as well as to find new traits to include in the study.

Reference:

Marrero Quevedo, R. J., Carballeira Abella, M. (2010). Well-being and Personality: Facet-level analyses. *Personality and Individual Differences*. Vol. 50, Issue 2, p206-p211.