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Subjective Well-being in High Assertive Women Managers

Abstract

The present study examines whether high assertive women managers have subjective well-being (SWB). Sixty women managers from the IT, IT-enabled services and manufacturing sectors were recruited for the study. Rathus Assertiveness Scale (RAS) and Subjective Well-Being Inventory were (SUBI) administered. The sample was split into low and high assertiveness groups, and they were compared on the 11 dimensions of SWB. ANOVA revealed that the high assertiveness group scored significantly higher on the dimensions of general well-being positive, expected achievement congruence, confidence in coping, and family group support. Social deficiency in social contacts and general well-being negative were higher in the low assertiveness group. The implications of the study are highlighted.

Introduction

Assertiveness has received abundant attention in the management literature. It has been extensively used in business, education and leadership training. Assertiveness is characterized by confidence in interpersonal relationships coupled with the capacity for spontaneous emotional expression (Osborne and Harris, 1975). Highly assertive individuals are more likely to engage in the following behaviours: acting in their own best interests, standing up for themselves, exercising personal rights, and expressing feelings honestly and comfortably (Alberti and Emmons, 1990). Assertive individuals are confident, cognizant and respectful of others' rights and power. Less assertive individuals exhibit more self-denial, allowing others to make choices for them, and seldom achieving their own goals.

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Assertiveness has been a very cardinal construct in the areas of conflict management (Bishop, 1997); leadership development (Bower and Bower, 1991; Faber, 2002); studying marital relations in cross-cultural settings (Farver, Narang and Bhadha, 2002; Hofstede, 1998; Rahman and Rao, 2004; Twenge, 2001); recovering mental health (Braiker, 2001; Enns, 1992); overcoming discrimination and prejudice, including violence and exploitation in gender relationships (Alberti and Emmons, 2001; Gallois and Wilson, 1993; Goodman and Fallon, 1998; Neff and Harter, 2002; Rudrappa, 2004); and personality characteristics needed for functioning in certain roles in society (Cooley and Nowicki, 1984; Costa, Terracciano and McCrae, 2001; Moskowsky, 1984).

In the last few decades, the increasing interest in the well-being of the individual has been reflected in the substantial increase in research activity in the area (Ellison and Levin, 1998). Subjective well-being (SWB) represents people's evaluation of their lives, and includes happiness, pleasant emotions, life satisfaction, and a relative absence of unpleasant moods and emotions (Diener and Biswas-Diener, 2000). In Western nations such as the USA, high levels of positive emotions appear to be related to many good outcomes—for instance, better health, less divorce, less job turnover, greater work productivity and more responsible behaviour at work. It is not known whether these findings will generalize to other less Westernized nations such as India. It will be a challenge for practicing psychologists (clinicians, personnel and organizational psychologists, and so forth) to help people and organizations to move in positive directions and live happier lives. An important element in developing positive psychology in India is to accumulate indigenous research findings (ibid.).

It is widely acknowledged that subjective well-being (SWB) comprises the closely related components of affect and cognition (Shmotkin, 1998). Although there has been some argument against the bipolarity of affect, the most common view is that the affect component comprises the bipolar dimensions of negative and positive emotionality (Russell and Carroll, 1999; Huelsman, Nemanick and Munz, 1998). The theory of positive and negative affectivity initially proposed by Watson and Tellegen (1985) posits that individuals are inherently endowed with a tendency toward experiencing either positive or negative emotions that, in turn, influence feelings of satisfaction. The proposal that affect influences feelings of satisfaction was demonstrated in a study by Fogerty et al. (1999), who found that orientations toward either positive affectivity or negative affectivity were able to predict levels of job satisfaction by way of job-related stress, strain and coping that were perceived and experienced by the participants. For example, participants with a high orientation towards

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positive affect were less likely to report experiencing stressors and were more likely to be positively associated with the use of cognitive coping strategies than negative affect-oriented participants, resulting in higher levels of job satisfaction.

Literature relates assertiveness to variables like locus of control, self-confidence, self-concept and self-esteem. It is argued that if one is high on assertiveness, one tends to have high self-confidence, positive self-esteem and an internal locus of control. The relationship between assertiveness and subjective well-being (SWB) is no less complex theoretically, and less understood. This has received little attention in the research literature. It is particularly important for those who are facing prejudice, discrimination and such other adverse situations at the workplace to have high assertive skills to enable them to manage effectively. As opposed to those who lack assertive skills, high assertive managers enjoy a better SWB. Hence, there is a need to examine the distinctive dimensions of low and high assertiveness with reference to subjective well-being.

Aim

The aim of the present study is to examine whether high assertive women managers have better subjective well-being.

Method

Sample

Sixty women managers working in the information technology (IT), information technology-enabled services (ITES), and manufacturing sectors, in the age range of 23–56 years (mean age=29.4; SD=6.87), were recruited for the study. They were all English-speaking and had graduate or postgraduate professional qualifications (BE, MBA, MTech). They signed an informed consent statement, which specified the study's general purpose and the procedures involved.

Instruments

(i) The Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS), a 30-item self-report inventory developed by Rathus (1973), was used to measure assertiveness. It covers situations that may be handled by either inhibiting feelings or by responding assertively. The responses were scored on a 6-point scale, with some items keyed in the reverse direction. The total score was the sum of the individual item scores. A test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.78 over a two-month interval

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was reported. Several authors (Appelbaum, Tuma and Johnson, 1975; Hollandsworth, Galassi and Gay, 1977; Rathus and Nevid, 1977) have reported significant correlations between RAS and behavioural performance.

(ii) The Subjective Well-Being (SWB) Inventory developed by Sell and Nagpal (1992) was used to measure an individual's overall feeling about life—feelings of well-being or ill-being as experienced by an individual, in various day-to-day life concerns. This instrument has 40 questions and has been found to have high inter-rater and test-retest reliability. It has also proved its validity through many experiments (ibid.). The inventory gauges 11 factorial dimensions: general well-being positive affect, expectation-achievement congruence, confidence in coping, transcendence, family group support, social support, primary group concern, inadequate mental mastery, perceived ill-health, deficiency in social contacts, and general well-being negative affect.

Statistical Analysis

The sample was split into low ($n=29$) and high ($n=31$) assertiveness groups on a median split (median=12) of assertiveness scores; these scores ranged from -33 to +71. ANOVA and discriminant function analysis (DFA) of the two groups were performed in addition to a univariate comparison.

Results

Low and high assertiveness groups were compared on each of the 11 dimensions of SWB.

ANOVA reveals that the high assertiveness group scored significantly higher on the dimensions of general well-being positive, expectation-achievement congruence, confidence in coping, and family group support. Scores on deficiency in social contacts and general well-being negative were higher in the low assertiveness group.

The results of the discriminant function analysis are shown in Table 2.

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Table 1: Differences between Low and High Assertive Groups on Dimensions of SWB

Dimensions of SWB	Assertiveness				Wilks' Lambda	F (df) (1,58)	Sig.
	Low (n=29)		High (n=31)				
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
General well-being positive	6.28	1.36	7.09	1.54	.924	4.78	.033
Expectation-achievement congruence	6.13	1.27	6.93	1.29	.909	5.79	.019
Confidence in coping	6.68	1.25	7.87	1.26	.814	13.22	.001
Transcendence	6.86	1.21	7.03	1.40	.996	.25	.619
Family group support	7.68	1.28	8.35	.79	.908	5.88	.018
Social support	7.20	1.67	7.29	1.69	.999	.04	.849
Primary group concern	2.68	2.87	2.06	2.63	.987	.77	.383
Inadequate mental mastery	14.48	3.04	13.22	3.39	.962	2.27	.137
Perceived ill-health	9.75	2.23	8.77	2.41	.956	2.67	.107
Deficiency in social contacts	5.51	1.92	4.74	1.48	.949	3.09	.084
General well-being negative	4.65	1.17	3.84	.93	.866	8.95	.004

Table 2. Goodness of Fit of Canonical Discriminant Function

Function	Eigenvalue	Percentage of Variance	Canonical Correlation	Wilks' Lambda	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
1	.451	100	.56	.69	19.53	11	.052

In view of eigenvalue, Wilks' lambda, canonical correlation, and goodness of fit for Chi-Square being significant; it was accepted that some dimensions of SWB significantly discriminated between the high and low assertiveness groups.

Further analysis established the validity of the classification of individuals on the basis of low or high assertiveness. It was found that 78.3 per cent of the original cases and 60 per cent of the cross-validated grouped cases was correctly classified into their respective groups.

Discussion

Research in the area of assertiveness and subjective well-being is in a nascent stage. The present study is the first of its kind in which the authors have examined the association between SWB and assertiveness in women managers in the

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Indian context. Although the sample size does not allow for strong inferences and conclusions, a few findings are particularly noteworthy. First, it is found that high assertive women managers have high general well-being positive, expectation-achievement congruence, confidence in coping, and family group support. Second, women managers who are low on assertiveness are deficient in social contacts and are general well-being negative. While categorical conclusions cannot be drawn, it can be safely assumed that general well-being positive, expectation-achievement congruence, confidence in coping and family group support are associated with high assertiveness. Third, discriminant loadings on the correlates of well-being—such as confidence in coping (.711), general well-being negative (-.585), family group support (.475), expectation-achievement congruence (.471), general well-being positive (.428), deficiency in social contacts (-.344), perceived ill-health (-.320)—demonstrate significant differences between the low and high assertiveness groups. Although more research is warranted, the sample studied shows that correlated well-being is associated with low/high assertiveness.

These findings have several practical implications. Learning organizations and human resources practitioners may consider including dimensions of SWB, such as general well-being positive, expectation-achievement congruence, confidence in coping, and family group support, in their module on assertiveness training for women. Similarly, practitioners must make an attempt to alleviate deficiencies in social contacts and general well-being negative. Behavioural scientists and training managers who offer assertiveness training programmes need to conceptualize and contextualize cognitive and behaviourally oriented assertiveness training programmes for women groups rather than merely give information or impart crude methods of only skill acquisition in the absence of a knowledge base.

A huge increase in the women workforce, particularly at the managerial level, has been witnessed in recent decades across the globe and in India, in particular. Women managers are required to interact and co-ordinate with their co-workers and carry out their job responsibilities during night shifts as well. This is the very reason why the present study consciously chose to look at women managers, which is a significant contribution to the existing literature.

Women in general lack assertiveness because they have traditionally been socialized into passive and non-assertive roles, especially in India. Much of the published literature on assertiveness is aimed specifically at women. Indeed, several popular books have claimed that women are in need of assertiveness

training. According to Crawford (1995), several researchers draw heavily on stereotypes of female passivity. Traits related to assertiveness, such as dominance, aggression, autonomy, achievement and endurance, are ascribed to men; and traits related to non-assertiveness, such as deference, nurturance and abasement, to women (Williams and Best, 1989). Hofstede (2001) notes that assertiveness seems to be a trait or behaviour that people associate more with men than women. The present study partially supports the findings of Crawford (1995) and those of Hofstede (2001) completely.

The limitations of the present study are its small sample size and that it is biased towards women managers. Hence, the conclusions may not be applicable to male managers. If several other behavioural measures had been used, a comprehensive picture would have emerged. This study sheds light on the following future research opportunities.

One, assertion is not an enduring personality trait. It is a behavioural repertoire that is largely, if not completely, learnt and therefore changeable. Since SWB is documented to be related to personality traits, especially mood stability, it is important to have relevant personality measures in future studies to hopefully identify if there is any common basis for both assertiveness and SWB. If it is found that personality traits are the common determining factor, then the interventions have to be addressed to strengthen these traits for more effective, long-term sustenance of both assertiveness and SWB.

Two, on the basis of the present data, it is not possible to infer a cause-effect relationship. Do managers improve in their SWB as a consequence of assertiveness training? It would be interesting to examine this issue in a prospective design on low assertiveness subjects undergoing assertiveness training.

Three, a study similar to the present one may be conducted using male managers to determine the generalisability of the findings. In spite of its limitations, the present study provides the groundwork for proactively addressing the need for conducting assertiveness training programmes for women in organizations. As Diener and Biswas-Diener (2000) rightly put it, organizational psychologists have a challenge before them in terms of helping people and organizations to move in positive directions and live happier lives.

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