

Effect of sense of Humour on Positive Capacities: An Empirical Inquiry into Psychological Aspects

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Abstract

“Sense of humour” refers to a personality trait which enables an individual to understand, produce and appreciate amusement for the purpose of enjoyment and laughter. As researchers have shifted their focus on adaptive coping mechanisms for the attainment of psychological well-being, humour has emerged as a significant coping strategy. The present study attempts to examine the effect of humour and gender on positive psychological capacities like resilience, hardiness and experiential acceptance. Young adult sample of 70 subjects (35 males and 35 females) of 18-22 years was randomly drawn from female students residing at Banasthali University Campus and male students from New Rajasthan College, Jhunjhunu. Standardized psychological tools were used to assess sense of humour, resilience, experiential acceptance and hardiness. Results obtained by conducting two way analysis of variance reveal a significant effect of sense of humour on resilience ($p < .01$), and hardiness ($p < .01$). Significant individual effect of gender was observed on hardiness ($p < .05$) and experiential acceptance ($p < .01$). Significant Interaction of sense of humour and gender was also found on resilience ($p < .05$) and experiential acceptance ($p < .05$). As humour emerged as an important factor in promoting positive characteristics, the present study emphasizes on the need of developing sense of humour for adaptive coping and maintaining positive mental health.

Keywords: Sense of humour, resilience, hardiness, experiential acceptance.

Introduction and review of literature:

According to the Oxford English Dictionary [1], the meaning of humour is “quality of action, speech, or writing which excites amusement,” which is “the faculty of perceiving what is ludicrous or amusing, or of expressing it in speech, writing, or other composition; jocose imagination or treatment of a subject.” In other words,

Sense of humour can be defined as a personality trait which enables an individual to understand, produce and appreciate amusement for the purpose of enjoyment and laughter. As humour is associated with pleasant emotional state, some psychologists believe that it can be explained as both a trait and a state.

With the spurt in positive psychology research, humour gained researchers' attention [2] and has been acknowledged as an important factor in promoting overall psychological well-being. Consequences of humour in life include increase in positive affective states and decrease in negative affective states [3].

Sense of humour has emerged as an adaptive coping mechanism for stress and anxiety. Although a bulk of literature is being accumulated regarding the contribution of humour in enhancing positive psychological factors, little research focuses on its effect on important factors like psychological resilience, hardiness and acceptance. Resilience and hardiness are the key factors acting as protective shields against difficult situations. While the former refers to the "bouncing back to normal functioning" from highly stress and adversity, the latter indicates towards the *mental toughness* which almost disables the attack of unpleasant and difficult situations. The third important factor on which the present study focuses is- *experiential acceptance*- which has been defined as willingness to experience psychological events (thoughts, feelings, memories) without having to avoid them or let them unduly influence behavior" [4]. Researchers' interest in *experiential acceptance* was kindled in late 1980s (after development of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy) and since then researchers have acknowledged its role in promoting psychological well-being especially in the last decade [5].

As already stated, higher scores on humour have been found to be related with higher levels of emotional health, positive mood and zest of life [3]. Following the previous studies, the current study aims to investigate the effect of humour on other positive psychological capacities like resilience, hardiness and experiential acceptance.

Objectives

1. To examine the effect of sense of humour on psychological resilience, hardiness and experiential acceptance.
2. To examine the effect of gender on psychological resilience, hardiness and experiential acceptance.
3. To examine the interaction effect of sense of humour and gender on psychological resilience, hardiness and experiential acceptance.

Hypotheses:

1. There would be significant effect of sense of humour on psychological resilience.
2. There would be significant effect of sense of humour on psychological hardiness.
3. There would be significant effect of sense of humour on experiential acceptance.

4. There would be significant effect of gender on psychological resilience.
5. There would be significant effect of gender on psychological hardiness.
6. There would be significant effect of gender on experiential acceptance.
7. There would be significant interaction effect of sense of humour and gender on psychological resilience.
8. There would be significant interaction effect of sense of humour and gender on psychological hardiness.
9. There would be significant interaction effect of sense of humour and gender on experiential acceptance.

Method:

Design: Factorial design

Variables:

Independent variables: Sense of humour, Gender

Dependent variables: Resilience, hardiness, experiential acceptance

Sample: Total 70 subjects (35 males and 35 females) of 18-22 years were randomly selected for the purpose of the study. The female sample was taken from Banasthali Vidyapith and male sample was taken from New Rajasthan College, Jhunjhunu (Rajasthan).

Tools: For fulfilling the purpose of the study, the following tests were used

Multidimensional Sense of Humour Scale (MSHS): The scale was developed by Thorson & Powell in 1993[6]. The scale possesses good internal consistency reliability ($\alpha = .92$).

Brief Resilience Scale:

The Brief Resilience Scale was developed by Smith et al. in 2008 [7]. The scale possesses good internal consistency reliability ($\alpha = .80-.91$).

Personal Views Survey III R (PVS): The tool was developed by Maddi & Khoshaba in 2001[8]. Studies have shown the PVS III-R to have acceptable validity and internal consistency (total hardiness—0.88; commitment—0.75; control—0.84; challenge—0.71).

Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (AAQ-II): It was developed by Bond et al. in 2011[9]. Cronbach's alpha indicated high reliability ($\alpha = .84$)

Procedure: Informed consent was taken from all subjects before administering the tests. The questionnaires were administered to each subject. After scoring, data were entered and results were interpreted with the help of SPSS software.

Result: Descriptive statistics (Mean, S.D) and two-way ANOVA were used in the study. Median split technique was used to categorize humour scores into high and low groups.

Table 1: Mean (S.D.) of 2(Humour: high, low) \times 2 (gender: male, female) scores on DVs

	Median of humour scores= 54.00			
	High humour		Low humour	
	Mean	(S.D.)	Mean	(S.D)
Resilience	20.62	4.52	17.54	3.73
Hardiness	20.43	7.2	16.45	5.25
Acceptance	39.51	6.97	40.15	8.09
	Males		Females	
	Mean	(S.D.)	Mean	(S.D)
Resilience	18.6	3.96	19.74	4.83
Hardiness	20.11	7.79	17.00	4.82
Acceptance	37.14	5.78	42.14	6.50

Table 2: Summary of the 2 (Sense of humour: high, low) \times 2 (Gender: male, female) analysis of variance on resilience, hardiness and acceptance

Source		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Sense of humour	Resilience	158.01	1	158.01	9.56 ^{**}	.003
	Hardiness	314.08	1	314.08	8.35 ^{**}	.005
	Acceptance	23.14	1	23.14	0.29	0.59
Gender	Resilience	10.06	1	10.06	0.61	0.44
	Hardiness	197.31	1	197.31	5.25 [*]	.02
	Acceptance	569.21	1	569.21	7.15 ^{**}	.009
Humour \times Gender	Resilience	78.47	1	78.47	4.75 [*]	.03
	Hardiness	56.68	1	56.68	1.50	0.22
	Acceptance	452.15	1	452.15	5.68 [*]	.02

**p < .01; *p < .05

Table 1 shows the median of humour scores as well as mean scores and S.Ds of humour (high, low) \times gender (male, female) groups. Table 2 shows the summary of two way ANOVA and the result suggests that significant individual effect of sense of humour was found on resilience ($p < .01$) and hardiness ($p < .01$). Significant effect of gender was found on hardiness ($p < .05$) and acceptance ($p < .01$) and significant interaction effect of sense of humour and hardiness was found on resilience ($p < .05$) and acceptance ($p < .05$).

Discussion

According to the results, sense of humour has a significant effect on resilience. Few earlier studies also suggest a link between sense of humour and psychological recovery [3]. The second finding suggests that sense of humour significantly affects hardiness. This means developing a good sense of humour might make a person

mentally *strong* towards challenging situations by enabling him/her to brighten the stressful dark days with smiles and amusement. The finding is supported by few recent studies [10]. Result suggests that gender significantly affected hardiness as well as acceptance. Mean scores indicate that males scored more on hardiness and females scored more on acceptance. Higher scores of males on hardiness might be due to the fact that while dealing with a stressful situation, females automatically choose emotion-focused coping while males employ problem focused coping [11]. Dealing with problems by applying a problem-focused approach can make individuals less vulnerable to emotional breakdowns leading to exhibiting hardiness. Gender significantly affected experiential acceptance and mean scores indicate that females scored higher than males on acceptance. Surprisingly, very skimpy literature is available on gender differences pertaining to experiential acceptance. The possible reason behind the present finding may be that as few researchers believe that females have better public and private self-consciousness [12]; they may develop acceptance of social and personal issues more easily than males. However, to provide sound conclusions, more research work is required especially in Indian context so that socio-cultural factors may be taken into account. The results also indicated significant interactive effect of sense of humour and gender on resilience and acceptance. There is a dearth of studies reporting such interactive effects. Significant interaction of sense of humour and gender imply that although both these variables do not independently affect DVs but their interaction with each other exerts effect on DVs.

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