Positive Psychology Research in India: A Review and Critique

Seema Mehrotra and Ravikesh Tripathi
NIMHANS, Bangalore

Rapid strides have been made in the field of positive psychology across the globe in the last one decade. The present paper reviews the published empirical literature from India that falls within the purview of positive psychology. The primary tool for extracting relevant studies was an electronic search of databases covered on EBSCOhost, using pre-determined criteria in addition to a supplementary manual search. The studies reviewed span the years from 1954 to the beginning of 2010. The themes covered ranged from folk notions of happiness, values and wellbeing, socio-demographic, intrapersonal and interpersonal correlates and predictors of subjective wellbeing, positive adaptation to illness, posttraumatic growth, perceptions and expressions of positive emotions, development of positive traits & strengths, to examining outcomes that go beyond subjective reports of wellbeing. A large proportion of intervention studies have been rooted in spiritual frameworks. The review indicates the nature of issues addressed in field while bringing to light some of the areas that require attention in further research. The paper highlights the critical need for cumulative building of knowledge base in the Indian positive psychology research through adequate linkages of studies from one to another.

Keywords: Positive Psychology, Indian research, Wellbeing, Psychological health

Inquiries in the 'good-life', the best in human behaviors and the highest levels of experiences have intrigued philosophers from times immemorial and have also long been the subject of attention for theorists and researchers in psychology. However, in the post world war era, psychology as a science began to focus largely on negative aspects of life (mental illness, distress and dysfunction) to the significant neglect of the positive aspects such as nurturing strengths, excellence and positive experiences. In the last one decade or so, there has been a growing recognition of the long-ranging implications of such a negative bias in the field of psychological inquiry. In fact, the advent of positive psychology, as a movement, may be traced back to Martin Seligman’s presidential address in 1998, to the American Psychological Association (Seligman, 1999). In a rapidly evolving field like that of positive psychology, it becomes crucial to periodically take stock of the nature of research that falls within its purview. Such an exercise is expected to provide a global view of the kind of research questions addressed, pitfalls and strengths of the research approaches used, hypotheses generated for future work as well as questions that are yet to be asked. The present paper is one of the first such attempts to provide a scan of the emerging empirical literature in the field from India.

Method

The approach adopted for search and selection of relevant articles was as follows. The primary source of data was EBSCOhost