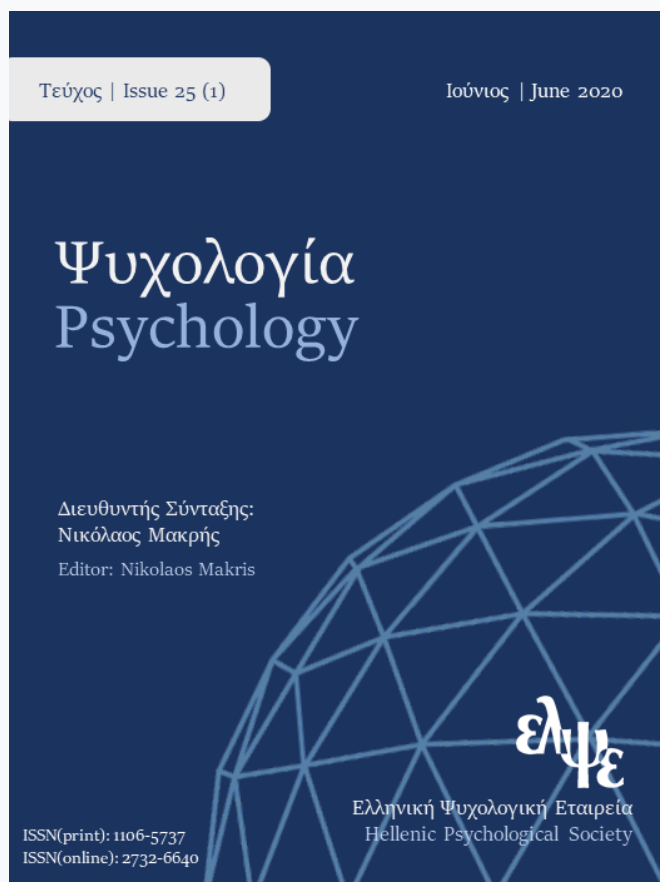


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## INTRODUCTION - Latest developments in Positive Psychology: The case of Greece

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## ΕΙΣΑΓΩΓΗ | INTRODUCTION

# Latest developments in Positive Psychology: The case of Greece

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Greece, positive education, Positive Psychology, Positive Psychology interventions, positive relationships, wellbeing	In the last two decades, there is a rapid growth of the research initiative on Positive Psychology not only internationally but also in Greece. The present special issue aims at bringing together, highlighting, and promoting research and applications of Positive Psychology in Greece. At first, the authors introduce readers to the history and roots of Positive Psychology and focus on how research on Positive Psychology flourished in Greece. Moreover, emphasis is given on the core concepts of Positive Psychology, namely wellbeing, experiencing positive emotions, psychological resilience, and character strengths. Authors focus on the research conducted in Greece, the psychological instruments that measure them, and the applications of Positive Psychology, e.g. positive education, positive organizations, positive psychotherapy, and positive psychology interventions. To close with, the authors introduce readers to the eleven articles, which are included in the present special issue by presenting their main findings.
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## Introduction to Positive Psychology in Greece

The birth of Positive Psychology came as a result of a series of worldwide social, economic, political, and historical changes. Before World War II, Psychology was focusing both on the prevention and treatment of psychological disorders as well as on the promotion of mental health. However, after WWII, Psychology focused almost exclusively on understanding and treating psychopathology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Stalikas & Mytskidou, 2011).

Positive Psychology was established in the American Psychological Association by Martin Seligman as a reaction to the almost exclusive focus of Psychology on the pathological aspects of life. The aim of Positive Psychology is to reveal, understand, and reinforce the factors, that make people flourish and function at their best as individuals, teams, and communities (Gable & Haidt, 2005). Thus, Positive Psychology focuses on the study of “normal” people’s abilities and characteristics by collecting and uniting scattered and dissimilar theories and research findings on what makes life worthwhile and on promoting research on wellbeing (Martela & Sheldon, 2019; Peterson & Park, 2003).

Since 1998, the research on wellbeing indices has flourished and Positive Psychology managed to highlight core, “positive” concepts, that were under-researched or forgotten (Diener, 2009). However, the new wave of Positive Psychology has been criticized because of initial missteps, such as the demonization of negative experiences and characteristics (Ivtzan et al., 2018). Over the years, though, and as a response to criticism, a second wave of research in Positive Psychology was born. The aim of the second wave is the

utilization of the existing findings regarding positive variables and the incorporation of the negative life factors. One of the most characteristic paradigms of the second wave of research in Positive Psychology concerns the recognition of the dialectical nature of wellbeing (Ivtzan et al., 2018; Lomas, 2016; Lomas & Ivtzan, 2016). According to this view, wellbeing and its components consist of two opposite poles, the positive and the negative, which are inextricably linked; in other words, one cannot exist without the other. The second wave of research in Positive Psychology, therefore, focuses on the beneficial effects of both the positive and negative aspects of human existence, on their composition and their dialectical relationship (Ivtzan et al., 2018).

In Greece, Positive Psychology has already made its appearance and influenced research and clinical practice. In the last twenty years, Greek researchers are studying the beneficial role of positive emotions, characteristics, and attitudes in education, mental health, and work settings. As a result, a division of Positive Psychology was established in the Hellenic Psychological Society. As early as 2001, Professor Anastassios Stalikas established a research team with the exclusive aim to study positive psychological variables at Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences. This research team was named “the Research Team for the Study of Positive Emotions” and gave birth in 2010 to the Hellenic Association of Positive Psychology (HAPPSY, [www.positiveemotions.gr](http://www.positiveemotions.gr)), which has significant social, educational, and research activities in the field of Positive Psychology in Greece. Apart from the aforementioned researchers, an increasing number of scholars conduct research on Positive Psychology variables in Greece. The present special issue is a tribute to their work and aims to bring it together, highlight it, and promote research and applications of Positive Psychology in Greece.

## **Core concepts of Positive Psychology**

Positive Psychology has highlighted, redefined, or enriched several concepts. The main ones are a) wellbeing, b) experiencing positive emotions, c) psychological resilience, and d) good character.

### ***Wellbeing***

The concept of wellbeing is at the heart of Positive Psychology research. The concept of wellbeing has been first studied in ancient Greece, it has been forgotten over the years, and Positive Psychology brought it back to the forefront.

To describe wellbeing in ancient Greece, they used the term eudaimonia (Greek word: *εὐδαιμονία*). Etymologically the adjective *εὐδαίμων* arises from the compound of *εὖ* and *δαίμων* and means: a) the lucky ones, the blessed, b) the truly and absolutely happy one, and c) the wealthy one, the well-to-do, the rich (Symeonidis et al., 2017). The philosophical study of wellbeing in ancient Greece was based on two traditions, hedonic and eudaimonic (Grinde, 2012). The hedonic tradition was developed by philosophers, such as the Cynics, the Sceptics, and the Epicureans (Waterman, 2008) and emphasizes the experience of a simple and natural life, where individuals maximize their experience of pleasure and minimize pain by achieving a state of quietism (Diener, 2009). The eudaimonic tradition, on the other hand, is often contrasted and considered philosophically opposed to hedonism. Eudaimonic philosophers, such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, are interested in discovering the authentic components of wellbeing. They argue that wellbeing is more than happiness, it is the supreme good that makes people flourish and self-actualize (Ryan et al., 2008).

Similarly, in the modern field of Positive Psychology, the hedonic and eudaimonic traditions have influenced the attempts of theoreticians to explain and study wellbeing (Martela & Sheldon, 2019).

Researchers focused at first on the hedonic tradition to explain the wellbeing components, while the eudaimonic tradition eventually prevailed in the definition of wellbeing. However, the hedonic tradition still influences the literature describing specific wellbeing components (Heintzelman, 2018; Martela & Sheldon, 2019; van de Weijer et al., 2018).

According to Ryan and his colleagues (2008), the two traditions are complementary. The eudaimonic approach focuses on determining the components of wellbeing and its effects on individuals. These components include experiencing positive emotions and hedonic satisfaction. However, the eudaimonic theories also focus on components, such as mental health, vitality, intimacy in relationships, and sense of meaning. The hedonic variables are considered equally important for wellbeing, as they promote the emergence of other wellbeing components (King et al., 2006). Thus, the hedonic approach has been entrenched in the eudaimonic as an integral part of it, while at the same time is being studied separately (Heintzelman, 2018).

The study of wellbeing under the scope of Positive Psychology has significantly flourished. For instance, while research on wellbeing, happiness, and life satisfaction was over 2,100 articles between the years 1980 and 1985, the first five years of 2,000 has exceeded 35,000 articles (Diener, 2009). However, many scientists in order to study the concept of wellbeing are focusing on measuring either wellbeing or happiness and life satisfaction, confusing the concept of wellbeing (Butler & Kern, 2016; Martela & Sheldon, 2019; Reitzner, 2014).

Even though the study of wellbeing has developed rapidly in the last twenty years, its functional definition remains a point of study and discussion (Forgeard et al., 2011). For this reason, many theories have been developed to describe the concept of wellbeing and its components (Heintzelman, 2018; Hone et al., 2014; Martela & Sheldon, 2019; Reitzner, 2014; van de Weijer et al., 2018). In an effort to converge the various models, it has been proposed that wellbeing consists (among others) of the experiencing of positive emotions, life satisfaction, positive relationships with others, engagement, a sense of competence or achievement, and a sense of meaning in life (Diener et al., 2010; Disabato et al., 2019; Huppert & So, 2013; Keyes, 2005; Ryff, 1989; Seligman, 2011).

In Greece, many studies have been conducted, mainly the last five years, exploring the relations of wellbeing and its components to physical health (Boufali-Bavella et al., 2017), positive emotions (Karademas et al., 2019; Kyriazos et al., 2018), character strengths (Leontopoulou & Triliva, 2012; Pezirkianidis et al., present issue), social support, self-efficacy (Kafetsios, 2006, 2007; Kafetsios & Sideridis, 2006; Karademas, 2006; Karademas et al., 2007), and marital and friendship quality (Karademas, 2014; Pezirkianidis et al., in preparation).

### ***Positive emotions***

The field of Positive Psychology places great emphasis on the role of emotions in maintaining and promoting mental health. According to Fredrickson (2004), emotions are defined as the reaction to an external or internal stimulus, usually short-lived, that manifests on multiple levels (physiological, cognitive, facial expressions, social, psychological, etc.). Thus, emotions are being studied as evolutionary adaptations that have helped individuals to survive (Fredrickson, 2003).

Traditional Psychology has primarily focused on the experience of negative emotions, which have been linked to action toward threatening stimuli for an individual's mental or physical homeostasis. For example, anger creates a tendency to attack, fear creates a tendency to escape, disgust creates a tendency to vomit, etc.. In fact, these tendencies are not mere thoughts but are accompanied by simultaneous changes at different levels of an individual's physiology (Fredrickson, 2003).

Positive emotions function differently, since they do not create the tendency for specific and unavoidable actions, but, on the contrary, they expand the field of thought and action of individuals. More specifically, according to Fredrickson's Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions (Fredrickson, 1998), the experience of positive emotions (joy, hope, gratitude, pride, interest, serenity, love), cause broadening of the individual's cognitive potential and the feeling that they have plenty of options to act. As a result, people can be more creative, more flexible, think "out of the box", find more alternatives to a problem, learn information more easily and quickly, and adopt unprecedented adaptive behaviors (Fredrickson, 2004; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005).

The new information, ideas, attitudes, initiatives, and approaches, which are a result of the broadening process, lead to the construction of physical, cognitive, mental, and interpersonal resources. Although experiencing positive emotions is instantaneous or limited in duration, these resources are enduring. In other words, resources are being stored in the system and act as protective factors for the individual against future difficulties, adversities, or traumas. This repository increases an individual's chance to adapt to new challenges and make them more psychologically resilient (Fredrickson, 2003; Fredrickson et al., 2003; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Not only that, but the broaden-and-built mechanisms promote psychological and physical wellbeing and protect individuals from psychopathology. This chain of processes results in experiencing new positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2000; Kok et al., 2013).

Additionally, positive emotions cancel the unpleasant effects of experiencing negative emotions (Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson et al., 2000; Fredrickson & Levenson, 1998). The experience of negative emotions results in experiencing more and deeper negative emotions, making ominous thoughts, and adopting rigid behaviors. These mechanisms facilitate the appearance of psychological, social, physical, and cognitive declines and the increase of pathological symptoms (Garland et al., 2010).

In line with the aforementioned findings, research studies in Greece have validated the close relationship of experiencing positive emotions with higher levels of wellbeing and psychological resilience, and better psychosomatic health (Karademas et al., 2019; Karampas et al., 2016; Kyriazos et al., 2018), stronger presence of meaning in life, lower depression, anxiety, and stress levels, lower levels of economic crisis effects (Pezirkianidis et al., 2016), and more positive relationships (Pezirkianidis, 2020).

### ***Psychological resilience***

The concept of psychological resilience is being studied since the second half of the last century in an attempt to understand mental illness. Along with the birth of Positive Psychology, however, the research on resilience has changed focus. It is currently examined not in terms of disease but in terms of the capabilities that help people to successfully cope with adversity (Lakioti, 2016; Reich et al., 2010).

To better understand the concept of psychological resilience, as a term has its etymological roots in the Latin verb *resilire*, which means bounce. Thus, resilience was later defined as the individual's ability to successfully adapt to significant adversity and bounce back to previous levels of mental, physical, and social functioning (Connor & Davidson, 2003; Masten, 2011; Masten & Gewirtz, 2006; Southwick et al., 2014).

A number of studies over the past twenty years have focused on identifying the factors that act protectively on a person facing adversity. Researchers have concluded that resilience is a dynamic and multidimensional process, in which a variety of protective factors take place depending on the circumstances (Bonanno & Diminich, 2013; Connor & Davidson, 2003). Protective factors mediate and facilitate the positive adaptation of individuals to adversity and could be distinguished in those relating to individual characteristics, and those relating to environmental characteristics (Lakioti, 2016; Masten, 2001,

2007). The main protective factors against adversities are cognitive abilities, self-regulation (Masten & Obradovic, 2008; Masten & Wright, 2010), a positive self-image (Liu et al., 2014), optimism (Kleiman et al., 2017), coping strategies against stress (Kraemer et al., 2011; Mayordomo et al., 2016), experiencing positive emotions (Fredrickson et al., 2003; Meneghel et al., 2016) and positive relationships with others (Karadag et al., 2019; Sippel et al., 2015).

In Greece, studies concerning psychological resilience have focused on its relationships with protective factors against adversities, such as experiencing positive emotions (Karampas et al., 2016), meaning in life, positive relationships (Lakioti et al., 2020), locus of control, coping strategies (Leontopoulou, 2006), positive identity development (Motti-Stefanidi, 2015), and positive school climate (Hatzichristou et al., 2014, 2017).

### ***The good character***

The concept of character and specifically of “good character” exists since antiquity and references to the good character can be found in the works of many thinkers and philosophers from the period of ancient Greece and Rome.

The term character has undergone an interesting etymological evolution over the years. At first, it was used to describe a sign engraved on a coin. Subsequently, its definition was generalized by stating a characteristic of something and it ended up meaning a group of characteristics or qualities of an individual (Homiak, 2015). In ancient times and until recently, the concept of character was inextricably linked to the normative criteria of human behavior and was often associated with the moral qualities and virtues of an individual. This is the reason why it was associated with the ancient Greek word *ethos*. Also, Socrates and Aristotle introduced the concept of character virtues, which lead a person to eudaimonic life (Banicki, 2017).

Even though the concept of character has significantly influenced psychology, over the last two centuries it has been replaced by the concept of personality. The reason for this is that the notion of character had over the years been linked to religious aspects and preconceived notions of later eugenics. Thus, the less studied concept of personality has been chosen to interpret the differences in individual characteristics (Danziger, 1990, 1997).

Positive Psychology reintroduced the concept of good character through systematic research and theoretical attempt to study the elements of character and their beneficial effects on people's wellbeing. The studies of Peterson and Seligman (2004) led to the categorization of Values In Action (VIA), which recognizes 24 character strengths. The strengths of character are categorized into six broader and more abstract entities, the virtues. Virtues depict the moral nuclear characteristics of individuals, which are universal and have a biological-evolutionary basis. These virtues prevailed over others as predispositions that are necessary for the survival and wellbeing of human beings. The virtues included in the VIA categorization are wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, restraint, and transcendence.

The character strengths, on the other hand, are the constituent elements of virtues or, in other words, the ways in which the good character is expressed (Macdonald et al., 2008). Character strengths affect the way people act, think, and feel, causing involvement in positive experiences. Character strengths are the key to being our best selves, they are “the good in our core” and they lead us to do the right thing. They are different from other strengths, such as skills, abilities, interests, and talents, and their application is beneficial to both individuals and society (Linley & Harrington, 2006; Park et al., 2004; Peterson & Park, 2006; Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Cultivating and applying character strengths in everyday lives leads to experiencing positive emotions (Güsewell & Ruch, 2012). The experience of positive emotions in turn helps individuals experience even more positive emotions, eliminate the unpleasant consequences of negative emotions, broaden their repertoire of thought and behavior and build mental, cognitive, and social resources (Fredrickson, 1998, 2004). These resources are associated with increased levels of psychological resilience, which increase when character strengths are applied in practice (Martinez-Marti & Ruch, 2017). Last but not least, character strengths have a strong connection with happiness and wellbeing (Niemi, 2013). The character strengths that relate to higher levels of wellbeing are hope, zest, curiosity, love, and gratitude (Hausler et al., 2017; Park et al., 2004).

## **Measuring Positive Psychology variables in Greece**

During the last decade, research in Greece focused on adapting and validating psychometric instruments, that measure the aforementioned concepts and other Positive Psychology variables. These studies aim at promoting the research of Positive Psychology in Greece and its applications on contexts, such as clinical, educational, and workplace settings.

Specifically, three wellbeing measures have been validated, namely: a) the PERMA Profiler (Pezirkianidis et al., 2019), which measures five pillars of wellbeing (positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishment), b) the Mental Health Continuum-Short Form (Ferentinos et al., 2019) measuring emotional, social, and psychological wellbeing, and c) the Flourishing Scale (Kyriazos et al., 2018) providing an overall estimate of wellbeing.

Moreover, a series of instruments have been validated in the Greek cultural context measuring core and upcoming Positive Psychology concepts, such as subjective happiness (Karakasidou et al., 2016), satisfaction with life (Galanakis et al., 2017), experiencing positive emotions (Galanakis et al., 2016), the presence of meaning in life (Pezirkianidis et al., 2016), psychological flow (Kyriazos et al., 2018), self-compassion (Karakasidou et al., 2017), stress mindset (Karampas et al., 2020), nostalgia proneness (Petratou et al., 2019), positive parenting (Kyriazos & Stalikas, 2019), psychological resilience (Kyriazos et al., 2018), and character strengths (Pezirkianidis et al., present issue)

Overall, these studies boost the development of Positive Psychology in Greece by facilitating the design and implementation of further studies, interventions, and applications, encouraging new researchers to study Positive Psychology variables and creating the conditions for the study of individual differences.

## **Applications of Positive Psychology**

Theory and research of Positive Psychology in Greece, in addition to studying individual variables, focus on their inherent application in different contexts, such as school, work, and psychotherapy. Below we present the main applications of Positive Psychology in these specific contexts.

### ***Positive education***

Education is a field that has already benefited from the integration of principles and interventions of Positive Psychology. In particular, Positive Education aims at two levels: a) teaching conventional skills to students, such as mathematical thinking, discipline, and problem-solving strategies, so as to enrich learning and academic achievement, and b) teaching the necessary skills for improving students' wellbeing and resilience, such as kindness, positive relationships, grit, experiencing positive emotions, cultivating character strengths, and finding positive meaning in everyday (Bott et al., 2017; Christopoulou et al., 2018;

Norrish & Seligman, 2015; Norrish et al., 2013; Seligman et al., 2009). In other words, Positive Psychology principles can be integrated into traditional teaching, so that emphasis is placed not only on knowledge acquisition but also on psychological resilience and mental health. Seligman and his colleagues (2009) argue, that there are three important reasons for teaching wellbeing in schools: “as an antidote to depression, as a vehicle for increasing life satisfaction, and as an aid to better learning and more creative thinking” (p. 295).

These claims are supported by research findings. In fact, several positive Psychology interventions in schools have been scientifically tested with promising results in increasing students’ wellbeing, improving their academic performance, and enhancing the relationships among school members and the liaison between school and parents (Norrish & Seligman, 2015; Slemp et al., 2017).

In terms of prevention, Positive Psychology interventions in schools have resulted in a significant reduction in symptoms of depression and anxiety, and behavioral problems (Brunwasser et al., 2009; Seligman et al., 2009). Moreover, Positive Education has also been found to promote mental health and wellbeing (Marques et al., 2011; Shoshani & Slone, 2017). Finally, in terms of school achievement, research has shown that school programs aimed at enhancing and learning positive variables can have a positive effect on performance, lesson attendance, and discipline, as well as on the adoption of more positive learning school behaviors (Shoshani & Slone, 2017; Snyder et al., 2013).

The above research findings demonstrate the multiple benefits that result from the integration of Positive Psychology in education. In Greece, many studies have conducted aiming at introducing the principles of Positive Psychology in schools resulting amongst others in enhancing positive emotional experiences, optimism, self-efficacy in peer interactions, positive school climate, and psychological resilience (Dimitropoulou & Leontopoulou, 2017; Hatzichristou et al., 2014, 2017; Hatzichristou & Lianos, 2016).

### ***Positive organizations***

Positive Psychology principles and interventions have been, also, applied in work settings. The term "Positive Organization" refers to organizations or companies where culture, climate, and practices create an environment that aims to enhance the health, safety, and wellbeing of employees and increase organizational efficiency (Di Fabio, 2017).

In Positive Organizations, emphasis is given on employees’ strengths and the organization’s resilience, so as to effectively deal with any crisis (Salanova et al., 2013). The main concepts behind the term Positive Organization are social support, trust, work commitment, respect for family life, effective leadership, high performance, and social responsibility (Salanova et al., 2016). Examples of the positive processes that take place in Positive Organizations are the recognition and cultivation of employees' character strengths, the expression of gratitude to the colleagues-benefactors, the cultivation of forgiveness after disagreements or failures at work, the sharing of positive and fun moments with co-workers, and the enhancement of psychological flow and goal-directed behaviors (Meyers et al., 2013; Salanova et al., 2016; Yotsidi et al., 2018).

The studies that test the effectiveness of Positive Psychology interventions in organizations have shown that enhancing the positive elements of employees and work environment leads to lower levels of depression, anxiety, and job-related stress, increased commitment, and employee efficiency enhanced self-efficacy and feelings of self-worth and pride, increased presence of meaning at work and more positive relationships with others (Bakker & van Woerkom, 2018). In the case of Greece, studies have focused on the relationships of Positive Psychology variables with positive change in organizations. An example is the



relationship between experiencing positive emotions at work, higher levels of team effectiveness, and lower levels of occupational stress (Galanakis et al., 2011; Galanakis & Stalikas, 2007).

### ***Positive interventions and psychotherapy***

Positive Psychology has focused on the application and effectiveness of interventions in both healthy and clinical samples. Positive psychology interventions (PPIs) include any kind of psychological intervention (i.e., training, exercise, or therapy) that have been developed in line with the theoretical premises of Positive Psychology and are aimed at increasing positive feelings, cognitions, or behaviors (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). According to recent research data from several meta-analyses (Bolier et al., 2013; Chakhssi et al., 2018; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009; Weiss et al., 2016), PPIs have been shown to be effective in improving wellbeing and mental health. In Greece, many studies have shown the effectiveness of PPIs that focus on a single component approach, e.g. gratitude, kindness, and forgiveness (Symeonidou et al., 2019; Zichnali et al., 2019), or a pool of component-specific exercises, e.g. wellbeing interventions (Athanasakou et al., 2020; Karakasidou & Stalikas, 2017; Kotsoni et al., 2020; Leontopoulou, 2015).

The finding that PPIs both enhance wellbeing and reduce the symptoms of psychopathology was encouraging and in addition to findings that Positive Psychology factors generate positive change in psychotherapy (Fitzpatrick & Stalikas, 2008; Lakioti & Stalikas, 2018; Stalikas & Fitzpatrick, 2008), resulted in systematic efforts to create a model of Positive Psychology applied to psychotherapy. Thus, the model of Positive Psychotherapy has emerged (Rashid & Seligman, 2018). Positive Psychotherapy is applied as a medium-term intervention and its principles could permeate the existing psychotherapeutic approaches and practice.

More specifically, Positive Psychotherapy is a psychotherapeutic approach that aims to build positive emotions, character strengths, and meaning in a client's life with the ultimate goal to reduce psychopathology levels and promote wellbeing (Rashid, 2008). Positive Psychotherapy is based on the groundbreaking reasoning of Chris Peterson, one of the pioneers of Positive Psychology, who emphasized that Psychology should deal with weaknesses as much as it deals with strengths, build positive elements in people's lives as much as it corrects the consequences of the negatives and make the lives of ordinary people flourish as much as it cures pathology (Rashid, 2015). Thus, Positive Psychotherapy is based on the basic theories of Positive Psychology, namely Barbara Fredrickson's Broaden-and-Build Theory of positive emotions (2004), Martin Seligman's Theory of Authentic Happiness and PERMA Theory for the Wellbeing (2002, 2011), and the "Values in Action" categorization of character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Every step and intervention in Positive Psychotherapy, therefore, sets as its ultimate goal the strengthening of positive individual resources and, in particular, the experiencing of positive emotions, the cultivation and application of character strengths, finding meaning, building positive relationships, and achievements guided by internal motivations (Rashid, 2015; Rashid & Baddar, 2019; Rashid & Seligman, 2018).

Positive Psychotherapy is based on three assumptions regarding the nature, etiology, and treatment of specific behavioral patterns (Rashid, 2015; Rashid & Baddar, 2019; Rashid & Seligman, 2018). The first assumption postulates that psychopathology is born, when individuals' innate potential for growth, self-realization, and wellbeing is overturned by psychological and social factors. Psychotherapy should focus on strengthening the positive factors that lead the person to development and wellbeing, in order to counter psychopathology. The second assumption of Positive Psychotherapy states that positive emotions and character strengths are real and authentic, same as symptoms and disorders, they are not defense mechanisms and should be identified and fostered. The third assumption states that the effective

therapeutic relationship is structured by dealing with positive individual characteristics and experiences and not by analyzing problems.

The process of Positive Psychotherapy is divided into three phases. In the first phase, it focuses on creating a balanced narrative by the client and exploring his or her character strengths from different perspectives. These character strengths are then transformed into personally meaningful goals. In the second phase, the focus is on cultivating positive emotions and dealing with negative memories in adaptive ways. Finally, exercises to strengthen positive relationships and positive meaning in life are applied (Rashid, 2015; Rashid & Baddar, 2019; Rashid & Seligman, 2018).

Positive Psychotherapy is considered to add to the effectiveness of traditional psychotherapy in four ways (Rashid & Seligman, 2018). First, it expands the view of psychotherapy by decentralizing the negative and emphasizing mainly the positive. Secondly, it dissociates psychotherapy from the medical model, according to which all symptoms are mainly due to brain disorders. Third, it widens the therapeutic effect by adding to the elimination of symptoms the achievement of psychological wellbeing and, fourth, it minimizes the negative impact of the psychotherapeutic process on the therapist, who is constantly burdened with negative experiences (Lakioti et al., 2020; Rashid & Seligman, 2018).

The effectiveness of Positive Psychotherapy has been tested by at least twenty studies so far with encouraging and often unexpected positive findings. In general, the findings show that it is effective in reducing the symptoms of depression and stress, reducing discomfort and negative emotions, but mainly in enhancing positive indicators, such as life satisfaction, wellbeing, social skills, adaptive stress management mechanisms, hope, and self-esteem (Rashid & Baddar, 2019). Also, the effectiveness of Positive Psychotherapy has been shown to be similar to traditional approaches, such as Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (Pintado et al., 2018). Moreover, the effectiveness of Positive Psychotherapy has been tested in specific, clinical populations, such as patients with psychosis with significant results in increasing wellbeing and reducing symptoms (Schrank et al., 2016; Slade et al., 2016). These findings are particularly important for psychiatric patients, who need to develop new meaning in their lives (Stylianidis et al., 2016). Overall, Positive Psychotherapy is proving to be a successful ground for the application of the principles of Positive Psychology.

## **The present special issue**

In the last twenty years, an increasing number of scholars conducts research on Positive Psychology variables in Greece. The present special issue is a tribute to their work and aims to bring it together, highlight it, and promote research and applications of Positive Psychology in Greece.

In total, eleven articles are included in the present special issue presenting findings of studies conducted by Greek researchers that aim to: a) implement the principles of Positive Psychology in Clinical, Counselling, Educational, Health, and Social Psychology, b) investigate and redefine concepts of Positive Psychology in the Greek cultural context, c) highlight the gaps in the Greek literature, and d) suggest where future studies should focus on.

In the first article of this issue, Motti-Stefanidi, Pavlopoulos, Papathanasiou, and Mastrotheodoros, focus on the resilient adaptation of immigrant and refugee youth in Greece and its relationships to the wellbeing of the youth and the prosperity of the receiving society. This manuscript presents an innovative, integrative model for conceptualizing immigrant-youth resilience in the case of Greece, which synthesizes developmental, acculturation, and social psychological perspectives. On the other hand, Pezirkianidis, Karakasidou, Stalikas, Moraitou, and Charalambous (present issue) attempt to investigate another core concept of Positive Psychology in the Greek cultural context, the construct of the “good character”. After

validating the Values In Action-120 inventory of character strengths in a lifespan sample, the authors trace the relationships between the character strengths in Greece and their relationship to wellbeing components, while they map the character strengths of Greek adults per gender and age group.

Moreover, Stasinou, Hatzichristou, Lampropoulou, and Lianos (present issue) aim at investigating the protective factors, that facilitate adolescent's psychosocial adjustment. Specifically, they found that school climate dimensions, such as peer relations and social-emotional support, act protectively on the effects of school performance on adolescent's social and emotional health highlighting environmental factors that affect adolescent's wellbeing levels. Additionally, Leontopoulou's focal point (present issue) is to explore the operational application of the PERMA theory of wellbeing (Seligman, 2011) within the Positive Education paradigm in higher education in Greece. The author examines the relationships between the PERMA components of wellbeing, underpinning character strengths, and other wellbeing indices to map wellbeing and the issues of its multidimensionality in a sample of university students.

On the other hand, Yotsidi (present issue) aims at a) reviewing the conceptual trajectories of Positive Psychology in the clinical domain throughout the last twenty years, b) providing a comprehensive perspective toward Positive Psychology-oriented psychotherapy, and c) suggesting ways of integrating evidence-based PPIs into clinical practice in order to broaden the role of clinical psychologists in promoting wellbeing along with treating distress. Similarly, Mertika, Mitskidou, and Stalikas (present issue) focus on reviewing the existing literature to conceptually investigate one of the main pillars of wellbeing, the "positive relationships", and their impact on wellbeing. In this way, the authors attempt to integrate the existing knowledge from the field of Social Psychology to the research of conceptually revisited constructs by Positive Psychology and suggest new ways to enhance the study of positive relationships in Greece and worldwide.

Giapraki, Moraitou, Pezirkianidis, and Stalikas (present issue) examine the effects of a humor intervention on community-dwelling older adults' wellbeing. The results showed that the participants in the experimental condition scored higher in the posttest assessment compared to the control group and these results remained relatively unaffected after a month of no intervention. Hence a humor-based intervention could contribute to the improvement of wellbeing in aging. Moreover, Karademas and Thomadakis (present issue) examine the relation of dispositional optimism, to physical and emotional wellbeing and positive affect in a sample of chronic cardiac patients and their partners. The results indicated that in almost all cases, patient and spouse baseline optimism was positively related to own wellbeing and positive emotions, while patient optimism positively predicted spouse outcomes. These findings indicate that, even when dealing with severe chronic disease, there are still positive personal characteristics, like dispositional optimism, which may help patients and their partners achieve better adaptation and higher levels of wellbeing.

In addition, Karakasidou, Raftopoulou, and Stalikas (present issue) investigate the individual differences in self-compassion levels, which is a recently developed construct of high importance for psychological flourishing and means to behave in a compassionate manner towards yourself. The results of their study indicate that self-compassion levels are higher for men, and especially older men, of 50 years and above. These findings contribute to the design of more informed, structured, and well-established intervention planning, targeting groups according to age and gender. On the other hand, Kafetsios and Kateris (present issue) focus on examining how adult attachment orientations, a seminal aspect of relating, and independent and interdependent self-construal, a cultural category of social relations, interrelate to explain wellbeing in Greece. The findings of their study indicate that secure attachment and independent and interdependent cultural orientations were all positively associated with wellbeing, while higher levels

of anxiety and interdependence related to higher wellbeing and the inverse is true for participants higher in anxiety and independence. These results point to culture-specific patterns in how central relating schemas contribute to wellbeing.

Last but not least, Galanakis, Kyriazos, Tsoli, and Stalikas (present issue) provide a critical review of the existing literature on the subject of happiness and suggest a new psychometric tool to measure it. Moreover, the authors recommend the application of the more comprehensive Psychological Equilibrium Model (PEM) to the research and interventions on the field of Positive Psychology. According to PEM, happiness is defined as the psychological result of growth in four areas. In particular, if a person experiences a) high levels of self-acceptance, b) positive relationships with family, and c) friends, and d) is able to set goals and plans for the future, he or she will experience higher levels of happiness.

The current special issue includes a critical commentary of the eleven articles by two distinguished discussants. Dr Maria Malikiosi-Loizos is a Professor Emeritus of Counselling Psychology in the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and is considered to be the founder or “mother” of Counselling Psychology in Greece. In this special issue, she discusses the first five articles, while Dr Panagiotis Kordoutis discusses the six articles that follow. Dr Kordoutis is a Professor of Social Psychology of Interpersonal Relationships and was the Chair of the Psychology Department of the Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences of Athens. These two discussants provide new insights and a critical review of the articles included in the present special issue and enrich its significance for educational programs, clinical and work settings, and social politics.

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## ΕΙΣΑΓΩΓΗ | INTRODUCTION

# Πρόσφατες εξελίξεις στη Θετική Ψυχολογία: Η περίπτωση της Ελλάδας

Χρήστος ΠΕΖΗΡΚΙΑΝΙΔΗΣ<sup>1</sup>, Αναστάσιος ΣΤΑΛΙΚΑΣ<sup>1</sup><sup>1</sup> Εργαστήριο Θετικής Ψυχολογίας, Τμήμα Ψυχολογίας, Πάντειο Πανεπιστήμιο Κοινωνικών και Πολιτικών Επιστημών, Αθήνα, Ελλάδα

ΛΕΞΕΙΣ ΚΛΕΙΔΙΑ	ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ
Ελλάδα, ευ ζην, θετική εκπαίδευση, θετικές σχέσεις Θετική Ψυχολογία, παρεμβάσεις θετικής ψυχολογίας	Τις τελευταίες δύο δεκαετίες υπάρχει μια αλματώδης ανάπτυξη της ερευνητικής πρωτοβουλίας στο πεδίο της Θετικής Ψυχολογίας όχι μόνο διεθνώς αλλά και στην Ελλάδα. Στόχος αυτού του ειδικού αφιερώματος είναι συγκεντρώσει τις σημαντικότερες έρευνες στην Ελλάδα, να αναδείξει τα ευρήματά τους και να προάγει την έρευνα και τις εφαρμογές της Θετικής Ψυχολογίας στο ελληνικό πλαίσιο. Αρχικά, οι επιμελητές του ειδικού αφιερώματος εισάγουν τους αναγνώστες στις αρχές της Θετικής Ψυχολογίας μέσω μιας ιστορικής αναδρομής κι εστιάζουν στην ανάδυση της έρευνας στη Θετική Ψυχολογία στην Ελλάδα. Στη συνέχεια, δίνεται έμφαση στις πυρηνικές έννοιες της Θετικής Ψυχολογίας, όπως το ευ ζην, η βίωση θετικών συναισθημάτων, η ψυχική ανθεκτικότητα και τα δυνατά στοιχεία του χαρακτήρα. Οι επιμελητές εστιάζουν στην έρευνα, που έχει διεξαχθεί στην Ελλάδα, στην παρουσίαση των εργαλείων, που χρησιμοποιούνται για τη μέτρηση αυτών των εννοιών, και στις εφαρμογές της Θετικής Ψυχολογίας, όπως η θετική εκπαίδευση, οι θετικοί οργανισμοί, η θετική ψυχοθεραπεία κι οι παρεμβάσεις θετικής ψυχολογίας. Κλείνοντας, οι επιμελητές εισάγουν τους αναγνώστες στα έντεκα άρθρα, που περιλαμβάνονται σ' αυτό το ειδικό αφιέρωμα παρουσιάζοντας τα κύρια ευρήματά τους.
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