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Nurturing connections: Influence of self-compassion, mental health, and happiness on positive relationships in adults

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ABSTRACT

The present study explored the predictive role of self-compassion, subjective happiness, depression, anxiety and stress onpositive relationships among adults aged 18-65. Despite substantial research on these individual variables, their predictive role on positive relationships, still need to be explored. This research employed a cross-sectional, correlational design with a diverse sample of 536 participants. Self-compassion, subjective happiness, depression, anxiety, stress, and positive relationships were measured using established scales. Results revealed that subjective happiness and depression significantly predicted positive relationships. Notably, as subjective happiness increased, so did the quality of positive relationships. In contrast, an increase in depression scores was associated with decreased positive relationships. This research contributes to understanding the complex associations among positive and negative psychological constructs in predicting the quality of positive relationships. Findings have implications for interventions promoting positive relationships and overall psychological well-being. Future research could delve further into these relationships, potentially including additional variables or employing longitudinal or experimental designs.

Various interconnected variables influence the landscape of psychological well-being and mental health. Among these, self-compassion (SCS), subjective happiness (SHS), mental health, specifically depression, anxiety, and stress, and positive relationships (PR) play a significant role. The present research seeks to explore the associations and predictive value of these variables, with a particular emphasis on their impact on the quality of positive relationships. PR are fundamental to human well-being and a cornerstone of mental and physical health (Gander et al., 2016; Mertika et al., 2020; VanderWeele, 2017). Consequently, investigating how SCS, SHS, depression, anxiety, and stress predict PR is highly relevant, as it contributes to understanding the mechanisms underlying successful relationships and offers avenues for promoting individual and social well-being. While prior research has often explored these constructs in isolation, their collective influence on PR remains underexplored. To strengthen the theoretical foundation of the present study, three well-established psychological theories offer a guiding framework for understanding how these variables may predict the strength of PR: Fredrickson's Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions (2001), Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), and Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

The Broaden-and-Build Theory posits that positive emotional states such as SHS and SCS broaden individuals' thought–action repertoires, thereby fostering adaptive coping strategies and the development of long-term social resources. Within this framework, SHS may enhance openness, empathy, and sociability—qualities that are fundamental for initiating and maintaining PR. Similarly, SCS supports emotional resilience and self-regulation, which may further facilitate healthy interpersonal dynamics.

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From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), PR fulfill the basic psychological need for relatedness, one of the three core human needs (alongside autonomy and competence). SDT suggests that individuals who experience high levels of SHS and SCS may be better equipped to meet their relational needs, leading to stronger, more fulfilling connections. In contrast, psychological distress—including depression, anxiety, and stress—can undermine the satisfaction of these basic needs and erode relational quality.

Additionally, Attachment Theory highlights the role of internal working models—shaped by early relational experiences—in guiding adult social behavior and relationship expectations. High levels of SCS may reflect or reinforce secure attachment patterns, promoting trust and emotional closeness in PR. Conversely, elevated levels of depression, anxiety, and stress are often associated with insecure attachment styles, which may hinder the development of positive social bonds.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives suggest that positive psychological traits such as SCS and SHS are likely to support PR quality, while negative emotional states like depression, anxiety, and stress may compromise it. The integration of these frameworks provides a strong rationale for investigating the predictive role of these variables in understanding PR.

PR refer to social connections characterised by mutual respect, understanding, and a balance of give and take (Pezirkianidis et al., 2023). They are a core element of psychological well-being, offering individuals a sense of belonging, support, and shared identity (Pezirkianidis et al., 2023; Ryff, 1989). Holt-Lunstad and colleagues (2010) and Trompetter and colleagues (2016) found that PR improves subjective well-being and acts as a buffer against various mental health issues, including depression and anxiety. Public relations can boost subjective well-being, life satisfaction, and pleasure. Positive social connections can also buffer against psychological distress, decreasing the likelihood of mental health issues such as depression and anxiety (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010; Trompetter et al., 2016), which aligns with Self-Determination Theory's emphasis on the need for relatedness as a core component of well-being.

Research has shown that individuals with strong social relationships have a lower risk of chronic illnesses and a higher likelihood of longevity (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015). Positive relationships can improve immune functioning, reduce inflammation, and improve cardiovascular health (Uchino, 2006).Social support can provide resources (emotional, instrumental, informational) that assist in coping with stressful situations (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Interpersonal relationships, particularly supportive and affirming ones, can contribute to personal development, self-esteem, and self-efficacy (Harris & Orth, 2020; Lee et al.). Through PR, individuals can learn new perspectives, skills, and roles, enhancing personal growth (Ryff, 1989). This variable is crucial as it represents the social dimension of well-being. However, less is known about how SCS, SHS and mental health conditions might predict the strength and quality of these relationships.

SCS is a multifaceted construct that involves treating oneself with kindness, recognising one's suffering as part of the shared human experience, and maintaining a balanced perspective toward negative experiences (Neff, 2003). It extends beyond mere self-acceptance, encouraging individuals to soothe and comfort themselves actively in distress. From an attachment theory perspective, SCS may reflect or promote secure attachment patterns, facilitating emotional regulation and trust in interpersonal contexts. Previous research has shown that SCS can significantly influence psychological well-being, including reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety, increasing life satisfaction, and enhancing resilience (MacBeth & Gumley, 2012). This variable is important because it taps into how individuals treat themselves in times of difficulty. High levels of SCS have been associated with better psychological well-being and resilience (Neff, 2011; Warren et al., 2016), suggesting that SCS may play a protective role in life's challenges.

Neff and Beretvas (2013) investigated the role of SCS in romantic relationships. They found that it was positively associated with relationship satisfaction, suggesting that those who show more kindness and understanding towards themselves may have healthier relationships. Yarnell and Neff (2013) examined SCS,

interpersonal conflict resolutions, and well-being. SCS was associated with more constructive conflict resolution strategies and overall relationship well-being. Breines and Chen (2013) suggested that giving others social support can promote state SCS, hinting at the interconnectedness of interpersonal relationships and SCS. Crocker and Canevello (2008) explored the relationship between SCS and two distinct types of friendship goals among first-year college students: self-image goals, which pertain to the desire to maintain a positive social image, and compassionate goals, which revolve around assisting friends without any self-centred expectations. Their longitudinal findings revealed that individuals with elevated levels of SCS consistently exhibited a stronger inclination towards compassionate friendship goals over ten weeks.

Further shedding light on the role of SCS in conflict resolution, a study by Yarnell and Neff (2013) found that college students with higher SCS levels reported enhanced relational well-being. These individuals were more predisposed to compromise during conflicts with best friends than resorting to self-subordination. Additionally, they experienced diminished emotional turmoil when navigating conflicts, underscoring the potential of self-compassion as a buffer against interpersonal strife. In a related vein, Raque-Bogdan and colleagues (2016) investigated the association between SCS and peer attachment anxiety among college students. Their findings indicated a negative correlation, suggesting that individuals with pronounced SCS experienced reduced attachment anxiety in their peer relationships. This aligns with the broader understanding that SCS can foster a sense of security and reduce stress in interpersonal contexts (Neff, 2003). These findings lend support to both Broaden-and-Build and Attachment Theory frameworks, showing how SCS contributes to interpersonal resilience and emotional closeness.

In conclusion, the burgeoning body of research underscores the positive influence of SCS on friendship dynamics, from goal-setting to conflict resolution and attachment security. As the understanding of SCS deepens, its potential as a tool for enhancing interpersonal relationships becomes increasingly evident. SCS might interact with other variables in ways that influence its predictive power for positive relationships. For example, while SCS could benefit personal resilience and well-being (MacBeth & Gumley, 2012; Neff, 2003), it might not directly translate into relationship quality unless combined with other interpersonal skills or traits. Thus, exploring how SCS predicts the quality of PR can provide insights into enhancing interpersonal dynamics and well-being. However, the directionality of these associations (whether SCS leads to better relationships or vice versa) remains unclear and may be reciprocal.

SCS has gained attention in psychological research due to its beneficial implications for mental health. For instance, Neff and Dahm (2015) highlighted the potential of SCS as a protective factor against psychological distress, including depression and anxiety. Despite these advances, fewer studies have considered how SCS could promote positive psychological states like happiness and positively impact the quality of relationships. Research by Neff (2003) established SCS as an essential construct related to psychological well-being, resilience, and reduced psychopathology. While SCS has been associated with reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression (MacBeth & Gumley, 2012), the link between SCS and PR warrants further exploration.

SHS, conversely, pertains to the individual's global assessment of whether they are happy or unhappy (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). Unlike objective indicators of well-being, SHS accounts for personal interpretations and emotional experiences, thereby adding a crucial subjective dimension to the understanding of well-being. Higher levels of SHS have been linked to better physical health, successful social relationships, and improved mental health outcomes (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). SHS is essential for evaluating well-being as an indicator of an individual's perceived happiness or contentment with life. It offers a subjective measure of positive emotional experience and life satisfaction, providing insight into how individuals perceive happiness irrespective of their circumstances. Hence, understanding how SHS translates into positive relationships can offer valuable strategies for fostering happiness and satisfaction in interpersonal contexts.

Concerning SHS, Lyubomirsky and colleagues (2005) found that happier people are likely to be more successful across multiple life domains, including relationships. As an individual's happiness assessment, SHS has been associated with positive outcomes such as better physical health, successful social relationships, and improved mental health (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). The Broaden-and-Build Theory posits that positive emotions such as happiness increase cognitive and social flexibility, which may strengthen relational bonds. While there is abundant research on SHS, its role as a predictor of PR has not been extensively studied.

Depression, Anxiety, and Stress are common forms of psychological distress captured by the DASS-21. Depression includes hopelessness, low self-esteem, and a lack of interest or pleasure in usual activities (APA, 2013). Anxiety involves physiological hyperarousal, panic, and fear (Schmidt, 2023). Stress is characterised by difficulty relaxing, nervous arousal, and easily upset/agitated (Deshpande & Shah, 2022). These constructs, while indicative of mental health challenges, can serve as significant barriers to personal well-being and the establishment of healthy relationships. These constructs represent the negative aspects of emotional experiences and are critical for a holistic understanding of mental health. High levels of depression, anxiety, and stress can significantly impact an individual's quality of life and well-being (Evans-Lacko et al., 2018). These emotional states often undermine psychological functioning and impair interpersonal connections (Evans-Lacko et al., 2018). According to Self-Determination Theory, such distress may disrupt the satisfaction of core psychological needs, including relatedness, which in turn can erode relationship quality. Additionally, Attachment Theory posits that chronic negative emotional states are linked with insecure attachment styles, which can compromise relationship quality. While previous studies have examined the individual impacts of these variables (e.g., Basha et al., 2021; Cassano & Fave, 2002; Costello et al., 2003), few have investigated their combined influence on PR. By integrating the Broaden-and-Build Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Attachment Theory, this study offers a comprehensive conceptual foundation to examine how psychological strengths and vulnerabilities together shape relationship quality. By including these variables, the study can examine the negative spectrum of emotional experiences alongside the positive constructs of SCS and SHS. By exploring how these variables predict the quality of relationships, we can work towards developing intervention strategies to mitigate their potential detrimental effects.

Existing research using the DASS-21 (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) has primarily focused on adverse outcomes associated with depression, anxiety, and stress (Gilbody et al., 2003; Mohler, & Henkel, 2005; Wittchen, & Pittrow, 2002). However, understanding how these variables interact with positive constructs like self-compassion and happiness and how they influence relationship quality could provide a more holistic perspective. Numerous studies have highlighted the detrimental impact of depression, anxiety, and stress on well-being and social interactions (Basha et al., 2021; Cassano & Fave, 2002; Costello et al., 2003). These constructs impede PR formation (Stice et al., 2004). However, the converse, i.e., the potential effect of PR on these negative emotional states, remains under-researched.

Current Study

In the current study, we seek to elucidate the complex associations among these key concepts, exploring how SCS, SHS, and mental health indicators (depression, anxiety, and stress) can predict the strength and quality of PR among adults aged 18-65. The present study delves into an intricate network of psychological constructs that collectively contribute to our understanding of mental health and well-being. Each variable represents a unique facet of human experience, making this research fascinating and crucial in psychology.

The core intrigue of this research lies in its comprehensive exploration of both positive and negative psychological phenomena and their associations among interpersonal relationships. While there is extensive research on these constructs individually (Gan-der et al., 2016; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; MacBeth & Gumley, 2012; Mertika et al., 2020; Neff, 2003; Pezirkianidis et al., 2023; Ryff, 1989; VanderWeele, 2017), studies

examining their collective influence and predictive power on PR are sparse. This exploration can reveal nuanced dynamics that might be overlooked when these variables are studied in isolation. Moreover, the topic is worthy of investigation because of its practical implications. The constructs under study are not abstract or removed from daily life; they are deeply ingrained in people's everyday experiences and perceptions of well-being. Understanding these dynamics can lead to practical applications, including designing effective psychological interventions, mental health policies, and wellness programs. Besides, this research is vital from a societal perspective as well. With increasing awareness and emphasis on mental health, they understand how self-perceptions (like SCS and SHS) and emotional states (like depression, anxiety, and stress) influence and are influenced by our social connections, which can lead to more resilient, empathetic, and cohesive societies.

Although a rich body of literature examines each of the variables – SCS, SHS, depression, anxiety, stress, and PR- in isolation or pair-wise associations, a relative dearth of research considers all these constructs in a single comprehensive mode (Gander et al., 2016; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; MacBeth & Gumley, 2012; Mertika et al., 2020; Neff, 2003; Pezirkianidis et al., 2023; Ryff, 1989; VanderWeele, 2017). This results in a fragmented understanding of how these variables interact with each other and collectively influence well-being and PR. One significant gap in the literature is understanding how SCS and SHS, generally associated with positive personal outcomes, can predict the quality and strength of one's relationships. While SCS has been linked with improved resilience and reduced psychopathology, and SHS with enhanced life satisfaction and better health outcomes, their direct impact on the quality of interpersonal relationships remains less explored.

This prediction is grounded in existing literature suggesting that self-compassion fosters emotional regulation and relational harmony (Neff, 2003; Neff & Beretvas, 2013), that subjective happiness is associated with greater social success and interpersonal satisfaction (Lyubomirsky, et al., 2005; Fredrickson, 2001), and that depression, anxiety, and stress are negatively associated with social functioning and relationship quality (Cassano & Fava, 2002; Evans-Lacko et al., 2018; Stice, et al., 2004).

Although the model included three distinct predictors—self-compassion, subjective happiness, and psychological distress (depression, anxiety, and stress)—these were combined into a single hypothesis to reflect the study's integrated theoretical framework and analytical approach. Previous literature supports the interrelated nature of these constructs in shaping relationship quality (Fredrickson, 2001; Neff, 2003; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005), and the use of a multiple regression model allowed for examining their joint and unique predictive effects within one hypothesis. This approach ensures coherence between the conceptual model and statistical testing.

Hypothesis

SCS (as indicated by SCS scores), lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress (as indicated by DASS-21 scores), and SHS (as indicated by SHS scores) will positively predict the strength of PR among adults aged 18-65.

Method

The present research adopted a cross-sectional, correlational design to investigate the interrelationships among predictive variables, SCS, SHS, depression, anxiety, stress (scale variables), and outcome variable PR (scale variables).

Participants

The sample for this study consisted of 536 participants, ranging in age from 18 to 65 years old, drawn from the general population. The sampling period was December 2022 – May 2023. The participants were diverse in terms of gender, socio-economic status, race, and ethnicity, thereby representing a broad spectrum of backgrounds and experiences. Participants were recruited through a combination of online strategies to ensure a diverse sample. Online recruitment was conducted via social media platforms, community boards, and email newsletters, inviting

individuals within the specified age range to participate in a study about psychological well-being and relationships. The only inclusion criteria for the study were that participants had to be between 18 and 65 years old and able to read and write in Greek to ensure comprehension of the survey questions. All interested individuals were directed to an online informed consent form, which, upon agreement, led to the survey. The survey was designed to be anonymous to ensure the confidentiality and privacy of the participants. Participants were not offered financial compensation for their participation. The demographic characteristics of participants are documented below in Table 1.

Table 1. *Demographic characteristics of the participants (N = 536).*

Demographic variables	**Participants (*N* =536)**
Age, Mean (SD)	36.45 (13.72)
Gender	
Male	155 (28.9%)
Female	381 (71.1%)
Relationship status	
Single	232 (43.3%)
In a relationship	273 (50.9%)
Divorced	31 (5.8%)

Measures

Self-Compassion Scale (SCS). The SCS, developed by Neff (2003), is a 26-item measure using a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always). It assesses SCS through six dimensions: self-kindness "I try to be loving towards myself when I'm feeling emotional pain", self-judgment "I'm disapproving and judgmental about my own flaws and inadequacies", common humanity "When things are going badly for me, I see the difficulties as part of life that everyone goes through", isolation "When I think about my inadequacies, it tends to make me feel more separate and cut off from the rest of the world", mindfulness "When something painful happens I try to take a balanced view of the situation'', and over-identification. "When I'm feeling down I tend to obsess and fixate on everything that's wrong". To compute a total self-compassion score, items from the negatively worded subscales (self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification) were reverse scored, and then the mean of all subscales was taken. A higher total score indicates a higher level of SCS. The measure has been validated in arelated Greek sample, showing excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .92) and good construct validity (Karakasidou et al., 2017)

Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS). The SHS, created by Lyubomirsky & Lepper (1999), is a 4-item measure on a 7-point Likert scale with scale points anchored according to the item content (e.g., from *not a very happy person* to *a very happy person*). Two items ask respondents to characterize themselves (e.g., "In general, I consider myself…"), while the other two present brief descriptions of hypothetical individuals and ask participants to indicate how much they identify with each. An example item is: *"Some people are generally very happy. They enjoy life regardless of what is going on, getting the most out of everything. To what extent does this characterization describe you?"* It evaluates global SHS, with higher scores reflecting more happiness. Scores are averaged across the four items, with higher scores indicating greater subjective happiness. It has demonstrated good internal consistency, test-retest reliability, and construct validity and the psychometric properties have been tested in a related Greek sample (Karakasidou et al., 2016).

Depression, anxiety, and Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21). The DASS-21, devised by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995), is a 21-item measure using a 4-point scale. It assesses three related negative emotional states: depression "I couldn't seem to experience any positive feeling at all", anxiety "I was aware of dryness of my mouth", and stress "I found it hard to wind down". Each subscale includes seven items . Items are scored from 0 (did not apply to me at all) to 3 (applied to me very much, or most of the time). To calculate subscale scores, the sum of the relevant items is multiplied by two. Higher scores indicate more severe symptoms. The measure has been shown to have high internal consistency and concurrent validity and the psychometric properties have been tested in a related Greek sample(Pezirkianidis et al., 2018).

Positive Relationships Questionnaire (PRQ): The Positive Relationships Questionnaire by Mitskidou et al. (2021) was developed to assess the qualities and content of PR. This 35-item scale measures the participants' relationship characteristics, the participants; characteristics and the number of meaningful relationships they have. The participants rate the extent of their agreement with statements related to their interpersonal relationships on a 10-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 10 (always). Higher scores indicate more PR. Factor analysis identified four key dimensions of positive relationships, Self-Improvement (e.g., "I have relationships with people that help me to become a better person"), Practical Support (e.g., "I have relationships from which I receive practical support"), Emotional Support (e.g., "I have relationships with people that support me in difficult times"), and Shared Enjoyment (e.g., "I have relationships with people that make me laugh"). The scale has demonstrated good internal consistency, discriminant, and predictive validity in past research. The psychometric properties have been tested in a related Greek sample Mitskidou et al. (2021).

Demographic questionnaire. Participants completed a demographic questionnaire concerning age, gender, and relationship status.

Procedure

Upon expressing interest in the study via the recruitment channels, participants were directed to a secure online platform hosting the study survey. The initial page provided an overview of the study, ensuring that the participants understood the nature of the research, the voluntary nature of their participation, the estimated time for completion, and details about the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. Those willing to proceed had to provide electronic consent by clicking a checkbox before moving to the main survey.

The survey consisted of demographic questions followed by the SCS (Neff, 2003), the SHS (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999), the DASS-21 (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995), and the Positive Relationships with PRQ (Mytskidou et al., 2021). The measures were presented in a randomised order to control for any potential order effects.

Upon completion of the measures, participants were directed to a debriefing page, which provided further details about the aim of the study and the constructs being measured. It also emphasised the importance of mental health. It offered resources for psychological support, such as contact details of mental health helplines and recommended websites for mental health information. Participants were thanked for their time and contribution to the study. They were also informed that a summary of the research findings would be available upon request once the study was completed. The entire process was designed to be completed within 30-45 minutes. The data were automatically collected and stored securely on the online platform's server, which was later downloaded for analysis. All processes were under the ethical standards of the Institutional Review Board.

Results

Data Screening and tests for statistical assumptions

The present study used multiple regression analysis to explore the unique contribution of SCS, SHS, stress, anxiety and depression to PR in the general population. Demographic information, SCS, SHS, stress, anxiety and

depression scores were collected, analysed and calculated for each participant. The data were screened for statistical requirements. No extreme values were detected according to calculated z-scores, varying from -3.29 to +3.29 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). The assumption of linearity was also met.

As tested by the normal P-P plot and the scatterplot, the assumptions of linearity, homoskedasticity, and normality regarding residuals were satisfied. Finally, no multicollinearity was found (Vittinghoff et al., 2006). As part of the test of statistical assumptions, a correlational matrix was produced to check the association between variables before prediction. The correlations between the variables are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *Descriptive statistics and correlations for study variables*

Variable	*n*	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	
1. SCS	536	80.73	16.93	-					
2. SHS	536	18.59	5.01	.67	-				
3. Stress	536	8.65	5.33	-.53	-.46	-			
4. Anxiety	536	5.46	5.44	-.45	-.44	.78	-		
5. Depression	536	6.44	5.52	-.60	-.63	.78	.75	-	
6. PR	536	255.33	52.94	.29	.40	-.27	-.24	-.37	-

The data suggest that the study participants had moderate levels of SCS, moderate SHS, low stress, anxiety, and depression, and moderate levels of PR. No extremely high correlations were found (Vittinghoff et al., 2006). Significant correlations were found between all study variables, allowing for multiple regression analysis.

Examining the research hypothesis: Predicting positive relationships

To investigate the research question, a multiple regression analysis using the force entry method was used to determine whether higher SCS and SHS scores and lower stress, depression, and anxiety scores predicted higher scores of PR in a sample of the general population in Greece. A forced entry method was used for multiple regression analysis, as all predictor variables (SCS, SHS, depression, anxiety, and stress) were theoretically grounded and supported by previous research (Fredrickson, 2001; Neff, 2003; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). This method allows for examining the unique contribution of each variable while controlling for the effects of others. Unlike stepwise regression, which is largely data-driven and may inflate Type I error rates, the forced entry approach is more appropriate for hypothesis-driven models and enhances the theoretical robustness and generalizability of findings (Field, 2013; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).As shown in Table 1, the value $R^2 = .19$, $R^2_{adj} = .18$, which is a medium effect size (Cohen, 1988), revealed that the predictor variables, that is, SCS, SHS, stress, anxiety and depression, explained 17.8% of the variance of the outcome predictor variable, that is PR with F (5, 531) = 24.59, $p < .001$. Findings revealed that SHS significantly and positively predicted PR: B= 2.95, t = 4.89, df = 5, p = .000. Specifically, the research showed that for each unit increase in SHS, PR increased by 2.95 units. Furthermore, depression significantly and negatively predicted PR: B = -2.51, t = -3.48, df = 5, p = .001. For each unit increase in depression, there was a corresponding decrease in PR by 2.51. Regarding SCS, stress and anxiety, no significant results were revealed. The results showed that the happier a person is, the more likely they are to experience PR.

Discussion

The present research sought to explore associations between variables (SCS, SHS depression, anxiety, stress) and predictive value, particularly emphasising their impact on the quality of PR. According to the hypothesis, SCS,

lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress, and higher SHS would positively predict the strength of positive relationships among adults aged 18-65. The findings were partially aligned with our initial hypothesis, which stated that higher SCS scores, lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress, and higher SHS scores would predict stronger PR among adults aged 18-65.

Data showed that higher levels of SHS and lower levels of depression significantly predicted stronger PR. This is consistent with previous research, which suggests positive emotions can promote healthier interpersonal relationships (Fredrickson, 2001). For instance, individuals with higher levels of SHS were more likely to have stronger PR. This aligns with the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001), which suggests positive emotions can broaden an individual's capacity to build interpersonal connections, enhancing PR. This theory posits that positive emotions like happiness expand an individual's momentary thought-action repertoires and build personal resources for coping, which could encompass the ability to form and maintain positive relationships. The results add empirical support to this theoretical proposition.

Conversely, it was found that increased depression levels were associated with a decrease in PR. This aligns with previous research by Joiner and Timmons (2009), suggesting that depression often results in social isolation and deterioration of interpersonal relationships. The results underscore the need for therapeutic interventions targeting depression to improve the quality of interpersonal relationships. Thus, this study extends this body of work by quantifying the impact of depression on PR. This suggests the need for strategic interventions to manage depression to enhance interpersonal relationships' quality.

Contrary to the initial expectations and prior research suggesting SCS vital role in promoting interpersonal relationship quality (Jacobson et al., 2018; Lathren et al., 2021; Neff & Beretvas, 2013), SCS did not significantly predict PR in the current study. This divergence could be due to several reasons: perhaps the influence of SCS on relationships is more context-dependent (such as during conflicts or adversity) and was, therefore, not captured in our broad evaluation of PR. Also, this unexpected finding could imply that self-compassion may play a partial mediating or a moderating role in the relationship between perceived happiness/depression and positive relationships. This discrepancy calls for further studies to examine the conditions under which SCS might contribute more strongly to PR.

Similarly, our study's absence of a significant relationship between stress, anxiety, and PR contrasts with the general understanding that these negative emotional states tend to deteriorate relationship quality. Elevated stress and anxiety have been linked to interpersonal withdrawal, conflict, and diminished emotional availability, all of which can impair the development and maintenance of close relationships (Randall & Bodenmann, 2009; Papp, et al., 2010). For instance, a 2024 study of middle-aged Iranian women found that higher stress and anxiety levels were significantly associated with lower marital satisfaction and quality (Rakhshani et al., 2024). Moreover, pandemic-era research demonstrated that couples reporting stronger relationship quality experienced notably less stress and anxiety, while greater COVID-related stress predicted poorer dyadic adjustment and increased interpersonal conflict (Pieh et al., 2020). A recent systematic review of dyadic coping highlights how chronic stress impairs partners' ability to respond supportively to one another, reducing emotional availability and increasing conflict and relationship dissatisfaction (Landolt et al., 2023). Additionally, meta-analytic work confirms that high relationship quality often functions as a buffer against anxiety, whereas increased anxiety symptoms in one partner predict declines in relationship satisfaction for both (Postler et al., 2022). These robust empirical findings sharply contrast with our null results, which suggest context-specific dynamics or alternative mediating factors may be at play. The nonsignificant findings might be due to uncontrolled moderating factors such as coping strategies, social support, or personality traits, suggesting the need for more comprehensive models in future studies. In summary, our research aligns with some previous findings while offering new perspectives on others, thereby contributing to the nuanced understanding of these psychological constructs and their influence on interpersonal relationships.

Regarding research, these findings emphasise the need for additional investigation into the underlying mechanisms and context-specific nuances that govern these relationships. Future research may consider potential moderators and mediators, such as coping strategies, personality traits, and resilience, to determine why self-compassion did not substantially predict positive relationships in this study.

In a practical sense, the study emphasises the significance of subjective happiness promotion as a strategy for strengthening PR. Positive psychology interventions, emphasising gratitude, mindfulness, optimism, and resilience-building, can be used to cultivate happiness. In addition, the negative impact of depression on public relations highlights the need for comprehensive mental health support in relationship counselling and therapy.

This study contributes to a comprehensive understanding of interpersonal relationship dynamics by examining positive and negative psychological constructs. These findings affect positive psychology and mental health theory, research, and practice. They provide valuable insights for individuals seeking to improve their well-being and for professionals and policymakers working to promote psychological health at both the individual and societal levels.

Despite this study's significant contributions, several limitations that might have influenced the findings should be noted. The findings should be interpreted within the limitations of the study. First, the research utilised a cross-sectional design, limiting our ability to make causal inferences about the relationships among the variables. Although we found associations between SHS, depression, and positive relationships, we cannot definitively assert that one variable causes changes in another. Longitudinal or experimental designs would provide stronger evidence for causal relationships.

Although our sample was relatively diverse regarding age, gender, and socio-economic status, it may not represent the broader population's experiences. The study mainly utilised online recruitment strategies, which may have resulted in a sample biased towards individuals with internet access and digital literacy. Moreover, cultural, regional, or country-specific factors may also limit the generalizability of our findings to other contexts or populations.

Acknowledging that the model explained a moderate proportion of the variance in PR suggests that other unmeasured variables might also be significant predictors. Moreover, SCS, anxiety, and stress did not significantly predict PR in this study, which may be due to the complex interplay of these constructs with other individual or contextual factors not included in our model. The researchers did not control for other potentially relevant factors, such as personality traits, relationship status, or social support, which might influence the relationships between the study variables. Future research could control for these and other potential confounding variables.

While the findings provide valuable insights into the associations between SHS, depression, and PR, further research is needed to address these limitations and deepen our understanding of these complex relationships.*Suggestions for future research*

Given the current study's findings and limitations, the following directions could be beneficial for future research. Future research could use longitudinal or experimental designs to provide stronger evidence for causal relationships. For instance, it would be insightful to see whether interventions to increase subjective happiness or reduce depression over time also improve positive relationships.

Future research should aim for more diverse and representative samples. Studies could be conducted across various cultural contexts to understand the universality or cultural specificity of the findings. It would also be beneficial to conduct research among specific populations that might be underrepresented or face unique challenges, such as people with disabilities or individuals in marginalised communities. Our model explained a moderate proportion of variance in PR, suggesting other unmeasured variables might also significantly influence positive relationships. Future research could incorporate additional potential predictors, such as personality traits, relationship status, social support, or coping mechanisms, to develop a more comprehensive model of positive relationships.

Future research could examine possible interaction effects moderating or mediating mechanisms. For instance, it could examine whether the impact of SHS on PR depends on SCS levels. These questions could shed light on the complex associations among these variables. By addressing these directions, future research could make even more significant contributions to understanding the factors that promote positive relationships and overall psychological well-being.

The current study made significant strides in examining the associations among SCS, SHS, stress, anxiety, depression, and PR. The results highlighted the critical role of SHS and depression in predicting PR, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of these constructs and their relationships.

Our findings offer critical insights into positive psychology theory and research. The study reinforced the notion that psychological well-being is not merely about the absence of negative states but also the presence of positive qualities. Subjective happiness stood out as a strong predictor of PR, underscoring the significance of positive emotions in fostering interpersonal bonds and supporting the theoretical claim that positive affect broadens interpersonal capacities. The significant negative association between depression and PR also aligns with the broader literature on the detrimental impact of negative psychological states on interpersonal relationships.In terms of practice, our results underscore the value of interventions that seek to increase subjective happiness and manage depression to enhance relationship quality. This could have many applications, from individual counselling and couples therapy to interventions to improve social dynamics in group settings, such as schools or workplaces. In conclusion, this study underscores the multi-dimensional nature of psychological well-being. It highlights the complex associations among between positive and negative states in shaping the quality of our interpersonal relationships. As we continue to investigate these dynamics, we deepen our understanding of human flourishing and how we can best nurture it in ourselves and others.

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ΕΜΠΕΙΡΙΚΗ ΕΡΓΑΣΙΑ | RESEARCH PAPER

Ενδυναμώνοντας τις συνδέσεις: Αποκάλυψη της επιρροής της αυτοσυμπόνιας, της ψυχικής υγείας και της ευτυχίας στις θετικές σχέσεις στους ενήλικες.

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ΛΕΞΕΙΣ ΚΛΕΙΔΙΑ

Θετικές σχέσεις
Αυτοσυμπόνια
Υποκειμενική ευτυχία
Κατάθλιψη
Άγχος
Στρες

ΕΠΙΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ

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ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Η παρούσα μελέτη διερεύνησε τις σχέσεις μεταξύ της αυτοσυμπόνιας, της υποκειμενικής ευτυχίας, της κατάθλιψης, του άγχους, του στρες και των θετικών σχέσεων μεταξύ ενηλίκων ηλικίας 18-65 ετών. Παρά την εκτεταμένη έρευνα σε αυτές τις μεμονωμένες μεταβλητές, οι αλληλεπιδράσεις τους, ιδιαίτερα με τις θετικές σχέσεις, πρέπει ακόμη να διερευνηθούν. Αυτή η έρευνα χρησιμοποίησε έναν συγχρονικό, συσχετιστικό σχεδιασμό με ένα ποικίλο δείγμα 536 συμμετεχόντων. Η αυτοσυμπόνια, η υποκειμενική ευτυχία, η κατάθλιψη, το άγχος, το στρες και οι θετικές σχέσεις μετρήθηκαν χρησιμοποιώντας σταθμισμένες κλίμακες. Τα αποτελέσματα αποκάλυψαν ότι η υποκειμενική ευτυχία και η κατάθλιψη προέβλεπαν σημαντικά τις θετικές σχέσεις. Αξίζει να σημειωθεί ότι όσο αυξανόταν η υποκειμενική ευτυχία, αυξανόταν και η ποιότητα των θετικών σχέσεων. Αντίθετα, η αύξηση των βαθμολογιών κατάθλιψης συνδέθηκε με μειωμένες θετικές σχέσεις. Αυτή η έρευνα συμβάλλει στην κατανόηση της περίπλοκης αλληλεπίδρασης μεταξύ θετικών και αρνητικών ψυχολογικών δομών στην πρόβλεψη της ποιότητας των θετικών σχέσεων. Τα ευρήματα μπορούν να συμβάλουν σε παρεμβάσεις που στοχεύουν στην προώθηση θετικών σχέσεων και της συνολικής ψυχολογικής ευεξίας. Η μελλοντική έρευνα θα μπορούσε να εμβαθύνει περαιτέρω σε αυτές τις σχέσεις, ενδεχομένως να συμπεριλάβει πρόσθετες μεταβλητές ή να χρησιμοποιήσει διαχρονικά ή πειραματικά σχέδια.

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