

Positive Psychology and the Promotion of Positive Emotions and Well-Being in Contemporary Children

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Abstract — In contemporary society, fostering positive emotions among children has emerged as a significant developmental challenge. Positive emotions include joy, gratitude, hope, curiosity, resilience, and empathy that play prominent role in promoting psychological well-being, social competence, academic engagement, and overall healthy development. However, rapid advancement of technology has heightened academic expectations, and changing family dynamics have altered children's emotional experiences. From the perspective of positive psychology, the cultivation of positive emotions is essential because they broaden children's cognitive and behavioural capacities, strengthen resilience, and facilitate coping with everyday challenges. Consequently, educational institutions, families, and communities must adopt evidence-based strategies that promote emotional literacy, supportive relationships, mindfulness, gratitude, prosocial behaviour, and balanced use of technology. Such interventions are crucial for nurturing emotionally competent, resilient, and socially responsible individuals who can thrive in an increasingly complex and demanding world. This paper explores the conceptual foundations, historical development, major theoretical perspectives, and applications of positive psychology. It further highlights the contributions of Martin E. P. Seligman and other scholars in advancing a strengths-based approach to human development and well-being.

Keywords— Positive Psychology, Well-being, Flourishing, Character Strengths, Happiness, Resilience.

I. INTRODUCTION

The formal emergence of positive psychology occurred in 1998 when Martin E. P. Seligman, during his presidency of the American Psychological Association, proposed a shift from a deficit-oriented model to a strengths-based approach. Seligman advocated the scientific study of positive emotions, character strengths, virtues, engagement, and meaningful living. This movement emphasized that psychological well-being is not merely the absence of mental illness but the presence of positive functioning and human flourishing. As positive psychology evolved, researchers increasingly applied its principles to child and adolescent development. Developmental psychologists and educators recognized that childhood represents a critical period for cultivating positive emotions, character strengths, and social-emotional competencies. Demonstrated that positive emotions broaden children's thinking, enhance creativity, improve problem-solving abilities, strengthen social relationships, and build enduring psychological and social resources. These findings highlighted the importance of promoting positive emotional experiences during childhood as a foundation for lifelong well-being.

Today, positive psychology provides a comprehensive framework for understanding and promoting children's holistic development. By integrating evidence-based interventions into homes, schools, and communities, it supports not only academic success but also emotional well-being, social

competence, moral development, and lifelong flourishing. Consequently, the historical evolution of positive psychology reflects a gradual shift from treating psychological problems to proactively nurturing children's strengths, positive emotions, and overall well-being.

Major Concepts in Positive Psychology

A fundamental assumption of positive psychology is that every child possesses inherent strengths and potentials that can be nurtured through supportive environments and positive experiences. These strengths promote psychological well-being, healthy social relationships, academic engagement, and overall life satisfaction. Among the core concepts of positive psychology, positive emotions—such as joy, gratitude, hope, curiosity, and contentment—play a vital role in broadening children's cognitive and behavioural capacities, enhancing creativity, strengthening resilience, and fostering effective learning and social interaction.

Another central concept is character strengths, which include wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. These universal virtues, identified by positive psychology, provide the foundation for moral development, responsible behaviour, empathy, and prosocial relationships. Encouraging children to recognize and apply their strengths contributes to greater self-confidence, motivation, and emotional well-being.

Resilience is another key construct that refers to the capacity to adapt positively in the face of adversity, setbacks, or stressful life events. In childhood, resilience enables individuals to cope effectively with academic pressures, family changes, peer conflicts, and other developmental challenges while maintaining psychological well-being. Positive psychology views resilience not as an innate trait but as a dynamic capacity that can be strengthened through supportive relationships, positive school environments, emotional regulation, and opportunities for mastery and growth.

Furthermore, concepts such as optimism, hope, and self-efficacy highlight children's beliefs about their abilities, future possibilities, and capacity to overcome difficulties. Researches show that optimism is closely associated both mental and physical health. Engagement and the experience of flow emphasize the importance of active involvement in meaningful activities that promote learning, creativity, and personal growth. Gratitude, mindfulness, and positive relationships further strengthen emotional awareness, social connectedness, and psychological balance. Gratitude helps the individual become aware of the positive things that have happened to them in the past, which makes the individual feel happy in the present and optimistic about the future (Power, 2016). Mindfulness is conceptualized as a path to well-being in the positive psychology approach (Kashdan & Ciarrochi, 2013). Mindfulness involves accepting ambiguity of daily life, inhibiting our tendency to maintaining our automatic behaviours and letting go of the urge to judge oneself and others. All these core concepts demonstrate that positive psychology extends beyond the absence of mental illness by promoting the development of strengths, positive emotions, and adaptive competencies that enable children to flourish academically, socially, emotionally, and psychologically.

"Building upon the theoretical foundations of positive psychology, several empirical studies have explored its relevance in promoting children's emotional, social, and psychological development. The following section reviews existing literature on positive psychology-based approaches and their implications for child well-being." Research on positive emotions has demonstrated their significant role in enhancing children's cognitive flexibility, social competence, and psychological resilience. Barbara Fredrickson, through the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, proposed that emotions such as joy, gratitude, and hope expand children's thought-action repertoires and contribute to the development of enduring personal and social resources. Empirical studies have further indicated that positive emotional experiences are associated with improved coping abilities, stronger interpersonal relationships, greater academic engagement, and

enhanced psychological well-being among children. Peterson and Seligman (2004) introduced the classification of character strengths and virtues, emphasizing that individuals possess unique strengths that can be identified and developed. Research among children and adolescents suggests that strengths such as perseverance, kindness, curiosity, and self-regulation are associated with greater life satisfaction, positive behaviour, and improved psychological adjustment (Park & Peterson, 2006).

Resilience research further supports the relevance of positive psychology in childhood development. Masten (2001) described resilience as a dynamic process through which children adapt successfully despite adversity. Studies have shown that protective factors, including supportive relationships, optimism, self-efficacy, and positive learning environments, contribute significantly to children's ability to cope with challenges and maintain psychological well-being (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). Although existing literature provides substantial evidence regarding the contribution of positive psychology to children's emotional, social, and psychological development, several areas require further investigation. Future research should focus on culturally relevant interventions, longitudinal outcomes, and the effective integration of positive psychology practices across diverse educational and social contexts. Overall, previous studies demonstrate that positive psychology provides a valuable framework for understanding and promoting children's flourishing by strengthening positive emotions, character strengths, resilience, and overall psychological well-being. These findings provide a foundation for exploring the practical applications of positive psychology in fostering holistic child development.

II. PERMA MODEL AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

One of the most influential contributions to contemporary positive psychology is the PERMA model of well-being, proposed by Martin E. P. Seligman (2011). The model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding human flourishing by laying emphasis on multidimensional construct rather than merely the absence of psychological distress. According to Seligman, flourishing is achieved through the integration of five essential dimensions: Positive Emotion (P), Engagement (E), Positive Relationships (R), Meaning (M), and Accomplishment (A). Unlike traditional approaches that primarily focus on reducing mental illness, the PERMA model highlights the cultivation of positive psychological resources that enable individuals to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives. In the context of child development, the PERMA framework

offers valuable insights into fostering emotional well-being, resilience, academic success, and healthy social functioning.

Positive Emotion (P) refers to the experience of pleasant emotions such as joy, gratitude, hope, curiosity, love, and contentment. Positive emotions are fundamental to children's emotional development as they broaden cognitive processes, enhance creativity, encourage exploration, and strengthen resilience. Children who frequently experience positive emotions are more likely to develop adaptive coping strategies, maintain supportive peer relationships, and demonstrate greater motivation toward learning. Furthermore, positive emotional experiences enable children to manage stress effectively and recover from setbacks which lead them to improved psychological wellbeing.

Engagement (E) represents the state of deep psychological involvement in activities that completely utilize an individual's abilities and interests. This concept is closely associated with the notion of flow, introduced by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, in which individuals become wholly absorbed in challenging yet enjoyable activities. During childhood, engagement is reflected in active participation in learning, creative play, sports, arts, and problem-solving tasks. Such experiences promote concentration, intrinsic motivation, persistence, and cognitive development. Educational environments that encourage active participation and strengths-based learning are more likely to foster children's engagement and lifelong love for learning.

Positive Relationships (R) constitute another essential component of the PERMA model. Children develop and flourish within supportive relationships with parents, teachers, peers, and members of the wider community. Warm, secure, and trusting relationships provide emotional security, promote empathy and cooperation, and enhance children's sense of belonging. Positive interpersonal relationships also work as defensive factors against stress and adversity by strengthening resilience and psychological adaptation. Consequently, family support and positive school climates play a crucial role in improving children's overall well-being.

Meaning (M) refers to the perception that one's life consists of value, purpose, and significance beyond personal interest. For children, meaning develops through participation in family life, school activities, cultural traditions, community service, and relationships that foster responsibility and contribution to others. Experiences that encourage children to identify personal values, pursue meaningful goals, and recognize their role within their communities contribute to moral development, self-esteem, and psychological well-being. Developing a sense

of meaning also helps children manage hope, optimism and perseverance during challenging situations.

Accomplishment (A) emphasizes the importance of pursuing goals, developing competence, and experiencing a sense of achievement. Accomplishment extends beyond academic success to include mastery in sports, arts, leadership, creativity, social responsibility, and personal growth. Children who experience success through constant efforts develop confidence, self-efficacy, perseverance, and a growth-oriented mindset. Recognition of effort, rather than outcomes alone, further strengthens intrinsic motivation and encourages continuous learning and development.

The PERMA model has important implications for educational practice and child development. Schools and families can promote flourishing by creating learning environments that foster positive emotions, encourage active engagement, build supportive relationships, nurture a sense of purpose, and celebrate meaningful accomplishments. Integrating PERMA-based interventions into educational programs have been associated with improvements in emotional well-being, academic engagement, resilience, classroom behaviour, and life satisfaction. Therefore, the PERMA model provides a holistic and evidence-based framework for promoting children's comprehensive development and preparing them to thrive in an increasingly complex and demanding society.

III. APPLICATIONS OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Recognizing childhood as a critical period for the formation of emotional, cognitive, and social competencies, positive psychology provides a framework for understanding and enhancing the factors that contribute to optimal development. Its applications extend across educational, familial, and community contexts, with the aim of fostering well-being, resilience, positive relationships, and adaptive functioning among children.

A significant application of positive psychology is in the domain of positive education, which integrates academic learning with the cultivation of psychological well-being and character development. By incorporating principles such as character strengths, growth-oriented thinking, gratitude, and meaningful engagement, positive education promotes both academic achievement and psychosocial development. This approach encourages children to recognize their individual strengths, develop intrinsic motivation, and engage actively in learning experiences, thereby creating a balance between achievement and well-being.

Positive psychology also contributes substantially to the development of social-emotional competencies in children. Interventions based on emotional awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and interpersonal skills enable children to understand and manage their emotions while developing healthy social relationships. These competencies are associated with improved peer interactions, greater classroom adjustment, and enhanced psychological functioning, highlighting the importance of emotional development alongside cognitive growth.

Another important application involves strengthening resilience and adaptive coping mechanisms. Positive psychology interventions emphasize the development of protective factors, including optimism, hope, self-efficacy, and problem-solving abilities, which enable children to respond effectively to adversity and developmental challenges. Rather than viewing resilience as a fixed personal characteristic, contemporary positive psychology conceptualizes it as a dynamic process shaped by supportive relationships, environmental resources, and opportunities for competence-building.

The integration of positive psychology within families and educational institutions further emphasizes the role of nurturing environments in children's development. Supportive parenting practices, positive teacher-student relationships, and inclusive learning environments provide essential contexts for the expression and development of children's strengths. Consequently, positive psychology offers a comprehensive developmental framework that moves beyond the remediation of difficulties toward the active promotion of children's flourishing, psychological well-being, and lifelong adaptive functioning.

The application of psychological ideas, research, and intervention strategies to comprehend the good, adaptable, imaginative, and emotionally satisfying elements of human behaviour is known as positive psychology (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Positive psychologists, like other natural or social scientists, seek to understand psychological structure, phenomena, and functions. There has been significant progress in the theory of positive psychology, as evidenced by PERMA (the five elements of well-being; Seligman, 2011)

With the advancement of positive psychology studies, positive psychology intervention has attracted researchers' attention. Positive psychological intervention (PPI) is defined as "building its intervention on positive psychology theory and

employing its coherent theoretical model to achieve the objective of promoting happiness" (Carr et al., 2020).

In considering the role of positive psychology in global issues, some researchers suggest that positive psychology may benefit from the integration of spirituality to better support people's well-being (Bellehumeur et al., 2022).

According to Seligman, psychology has three distinct tasks. These tasks include:

- Treating mental illnesses and pathologies
- Assisting everyone in living more purposeful and productive lives, and
- Identifying and strengthen the areas in which individuals are talented.

With the birth of positive psychology, happiness and well-being began to be examined with scientific methods (Lu & Shih, 1997; Diener, 2009). Well-being is examined in two dimensions, hedonic and eudemonic. In the hedonic approach, well-being is defined in terms of escaping from pain and achieving pleasure, while the eudomaneic approach examines wellbeing in terms of self-actualization and explains well-being through the functionality of the individual (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Beyond just feeling good, eugenic well-being also refers to a sense of meaning and purpose (Newman & Graham, 2018). A question by Neal Mayerson question to Seligman, have paved the way for studies of character strengths, "Do you have any hope that positive psychology can help people realize their potential?" Seligman began working as the institute's scientific director, and Christopher Peterson as project director. Many academics have supported the character strength studies led by Seligman and Peterson. In this context, academicians working in the field of positive psychology came together in the conference organized in cooperation with the Gallup Organization and carried out studies. Chris Peterson and his team of 55 researchers conducted content analysis of nearly 200 major religious and philosophical texts from around the world and sought to identify the values that these religions or philosophies sought to promote. In the light of this study, six basic virtues and twenty-four-character strengths associated with these virtues have been identified (Peterson and Seligman, 2004). For example, the character forces named curiosity and creativity are categorized within the virtue of wisdom and love and social intelligence are categorized within the virtue of humanity (Niemic et al., 2020).

Studies have shown that hope is an important predictor of mental health and wellbeing (Hope is a concept that is addressed in different fields of social sciences such as philosophy, anthropology, behavioural sciences, as well as in

theology and religious studies (Slezackova & Kraff, 2016). The sense of hope that arises from the ability to imagine, that is, to think beyond what is in the here and now, is fuelled by faith in a greater power or God. Human beings face the reality of death in the life cycle. The idea that there is a life beyond death evokes in people a sense of hope for those who await them at the end of life. Seligman stated that people who are satisfied with their past lives, optimistic about the future, and happy in the present will have a high level of well-being.

The life path is not always straight. Life is full of uncertainties, bumps and bends are encountered from time to time. We see that some people are able to cope with these difficulties and even come out stronger from these difficulties and improve themselves after negative experiences. Going through negative life events can help a person learn how to deal with life's challenges, overcome them, learn from negative experiences and experience positive transformation. This situation is examined in the literature with the concept of psychological resilience (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013; Hunter-Hernández et al., 2015). Resilience refers to the process of adapting to challenging life events such as troubles and traumas (Luthar et al., 2014). Researchers working on resilience have examined risk factors and protective factors that may mitigate the harmful consequences of adverse life situations. Spirituality and religion have been regarded as crucial protective resources that can help or strengthen an individual's resistance to adversity (Smith et al., 2012). Studies reveal that there is a positive relationship between spirituality and resilience (Shelton et al., 2020).

IV. CONCLUSION

1. Conclusion and Future Perspectives

Positive psychology has significantly enriched our understanding of children's well-being by promoting children's wellbeing, strengths, positive emotions, resilience, and overall development. The evidence reviewed in this paper suggests that nurturing these positive psychological resources through supportive family environments, educational practices, and community engagement can enhance children's emotional, social, and academic development. Promoting well-being during childhood not only contributes to present adjustment but also lays the foundation for lifelong mental health and responsible citizenship.

Future research should focus on developing culturally sensitive and evidence-based interventions, examining their long-term effectiveness through longitudinal studies, and exploring the integration of positive psychology into school curricula and educational policy. Such efforts will further strengthen the

application of positive psychology in promoting the holistic development and well-being of children in an increasingly dynamic and challenging world.

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