The Multidimensional Model: An Integrated Approach to Psychological Well-being

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Abstract

Psychological well-being has been defined in various ways. Theoretical explanations of psychological well-being provided by psychologists do not integrate the important aspects of psychological well-being. Carol Ryff's multidimensional model can be recognized as a powerful framework for psychological well-being which includes the important aspects of one's life. Ryff has explained six important dimensions of psychological well-being: self-acceptance, purpose in life, personal growth, positive relationships with others, autonomy, and environmental mastery by integrating all theoretical perspectives. Studies have utilized Ryff's multidimensional model to assess individuals' psychological well-being and have revealed significant gender, age, ethnic and cultural differences in relations to different dimensions of psychological well-being.

Psychological well-being is mostly described as the absence of mental illnesses. Researchers in areas of developmental psychology, clinical psychology, and mental health have provided theoretical explanations of psychological well-being; however, they have not integrated the important characteristics of psychological well-being in their definitions. Clinical psychology describes well-being based on self-actualization (Abraham Maslow's theory), fully functioning person (Carl Roger's theory), maturity (Allport's theory), and individualization (Jung's theory). Developmental psychology mainly focuses on Erikson's psychosocial development, Buhler's concept of life tendencies which lead life-satisfaction, Neugarten's view about changes of individuals' personality in adulthood and old age. Conceptions of positive criteria of mental health (Jahoda) and positive functioning in later life (Birren) are emphasized in the field of mental health (Ryff, 1995).

Psychological well-being is characterized by many aspects of an individual's life. The aforementioned theoretical perspectives explain different aspects of psychological well-being based on the major focus of their fields. The same aspect of psychological well-being is

viewed differently and as a consequence, these concepts seem overlapping. However, these explanations do not provide an integral definition for psychological well-being that can be assessable. Hence, a model that integrates and measures the important characteristics of one's psychological well-being will provide a better understanding of the person.

Multidimensional Model of Psychological Well-being

The Ryff's (1995) definition of psychological well-being that integrates all theoretical perspectives provides clarity and structure for psychological well-being. Ryff has explained six dimensions of psychological well-being: self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth, by integrating all theoretical conceptualizations. Many studies have utilized Ryff's criterion in order to assess individuals' psychological well-being because of its clarity and structure (Helson & Srivastava, 2001).
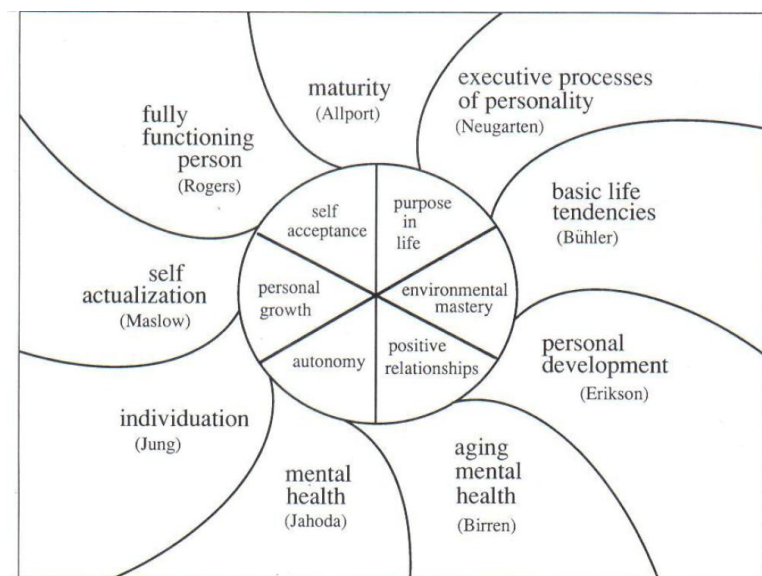

Figure 1. Core Dimensions of psychological well-being in midlife and their theoretical origins, (Ryff, 1995).

According to Ryff's criterion, self acceptance explains positive attitude toward the self, acceptance of one's good and bad qualities, and one's past life. Positive relations with others includes trusting, satisfying relationships with others that gives affection, intimacy, and empathy for both parties. Autonomy explains self-determination, independence, and the ability to resist social pressure as well as to regulate behavior. Environmental mastery is the feeling of capability and comprehensive knowledge of controlling and managing the

environment. Purpose in life explains that individuals have life goals based on their past and present, and the tendency to achieve future goals. Personal growth is the sense of continued development of one's life that expands their growth and provides new experiences to improve their lives further (Ryff, 1995).

Individualism and Collectivism

People in individualistic and collectivist cultures may have different perspectives of psychological well-being. The conceptualization of individualism and collectivism is mainly based upon the way individuals define self: whether they define it by their personal choices and achievements or in relation to their attachment with collective groups (Smith & Bond, 1994). Individuals in these two cultures have different self-perceptions as they experience diverse socialization processes that direct them to define themselves based on the above qualities. These differences may also influence them to develop different views of well-being.

Individualistic cultures place a greater emphasis on the independent self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Redford, 1999). The self is viewed as a unit which consists of internal attributes such as motives, abilities, personality traits, etc. Consequently, they tend to highlight qualities like self-determination, initiation, recognition, and achievement (Smith & Bond, 1994). These cultures promote them to perceive themselves as a separate entity and to become unique as well as self-expressed persons. Further, they are encouraged to recognize their inner selves and to achieve personal goals for their development (Matsumoto & Juang, 2004).

In collectivist cultures, individuals tend to highlight the interdependent self. They give more importance to their social groups to which they belong. Their goal is to protect the relationship between them and the other important persons in their lives (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Hence, they place a greater emphasis on the connectedness with other members linked to them. In these cultures, individuals learn to establish as well as to maintain the connectedness with others through the socialization process. Therefore, they tend to maintain closer relationships with others with whom they share their lives such as family members, relatives, and friends. Also, they attempt to fulfill their obligations and responsibilities for them (Matsumoto & Juang, 2004).

Studies have indicated the effects of individualistic and collectivist cultures on individuals' self-perceptions and their relations with others (e.g., Dhawan, Roseman, Naidu,

Komilla, & Rettek, 1995; Bochner, 1994; Shweder & Bourne, 1984; Bond & Tak-Sing 1983). For example, a study with Malaysian, Australian, and British participants on self-descriptions in relation to their cultures has revealed that Malaysians tend to report more collectivistic self statements and fewer individualistic statements suggesting the importance of their social relationships in self-descriptions (Bochner, 1994). Another study with Americans and North Indians has also provided similar results in their self-description task (Dhawan, Roseman, Naidu, Komilla, & Rettek, 1995).

A study with individuals from USA, Hawaii, Greece, Hong Kong, and China has suggested the effects of social groups on self-perception of individuals in collectivist cultures. Among all, Chinese have mentioned a higher number of social attributes which refer to their memberships in different social groups (Triandis, McCusker, & Hui, 1990). Cousins' (1989) study with Japanese and Americans has revealed that Americans tend to maintain their independent self, even though they may act differently in a given situation. In contrast, Japanese describe themselves more positively, especially when they are given the atmosphere of their interdependent social settings like home, work, friends. These findings suggest the self-oriented and others-oriented nature of individuals in these two cultures. These cultural differences may influence the way they perceive other aspects of their lives such as psychological well-being and life satisfaction.

Psychological Well-being and Cultural Differences

People in individualistic and collectivist cultures tend to value different dimensions of psychological well-being. For example, people in individualistic cultures highlight the self-oriented aspect of well-being. Therefore, they focus on dimensions such as self acceptance, personal growth, autonomy etc. In contrast, individuals in collectivist cultures emphasize the others-oriented aspect of well-being. They focus more on dimensions like positive relations with others than other aspects of psychological well-being (Ryff, 1995).

In collectivist cultures, individuals are expected to help the members in their social groups. They are socialized to be empathetic, understand other members, complete their duties and responsibilities, and to engage in behaviors that are beneficial for their social groups (Matsumoto & Juang, 2004). The goal of these activities is to promote the interdependence within their social groups. Consequently, they develop more social

relationships. This may be one of the main reasons for their tendency to place greater emphasis on others when defining psychological well-being.

The cultural differences may also influence individuals' perceptions about psychological well-being. For example, in United States, individuals' psychological well-being is related to their personal accomplishments and control (Lachmen & Weaver, 1998). In Japan, individuals' psychological well-being is associated with maintaining and managing sympathy (Kitayama & Markus, 2000). This suggests that individualistic cultures highlight personal characteristics when describing psychological well-being while collectivist cultures focus on qualities that indicate their interdependent nature.

A cross-cultural study with midlife adults in U.S. and South Korea has suggested cultural differences of psychological well-being (Ryff, 1995). Accordingly, Americans attribute positive characteristics to themselves when defining psychological well-being and they score higher on personal growth and autonomy than Koreans. In contrast, Koreans report more positive relations with others than Americans, suggesting their collectivist cultural influences in defining psychological well-being. Korean adults think about their well-being, personal satisfaction, and their maturity by engaging their families. For example, success of children greatly influences the perception of well-being in middle-aged Koreans. Their definition of a mature person includes interdependent characteristics such as modesty, respectfulness, honesty, faithfulness, conscientiousness, and responsibility. A study conducted by Ryff and colleagues (1993), has indicated similar outcomes in relation to psychological well-being. Similar to Koreans, middle-aged adults in the U. S. also think of their well-being through their family, especially through their marital relationships. According to them, a mature person is one who is caring and related to other members. However, as members of an individualistic culture, they consider their personal achievements as important contributors to their self-satisfaction more than their children's achievements. They believe that a healthy and satisfied person would be one who is more self-confident, continually improving, and appreciating life (as cited in Keyes & Ryff, 1999).

Psychological Well-being and Ethnic Differences

Studies have found significant ethnic differences in psychological well-being. For example, there are ethnic and gender differences in relation to hedonic well-being and eudaimonic well-being (Ryff, Keyes, & Hughes, 2003). Hedonic well-being mainly focuses

on individuals' happiness and life satisfaction while eudaimonic well-being considers six dimensions of psychological well-being. Significant ethnic differences in Whites, African Americans, and Mexican Americans were found in relation to the six dimensions of psychological well-being (Ryff, Keyes, & Hughes, 2003). Minority groups, particularly African Americans have rated high on self-acceptance even with the low level of education compared to Whites. Also, ethnic minority groups have rated higher on environmental mastery and personal growth than the majority group. African Americans have stated higher levels of autonomy than

Whites. In general, minority status seems to be a significant positive predictor of individuals' well-being.

These findings provide evidence for ethnic differences in psychological well-being in individualistic cultures. There may be different outcomes in ethnic groups in collectivist cultures in relation to their psychological well-being. Culture-specific variables such as beliefs, values, norms and social practices may affect the perception of psychological well-being in different ethnic groups in collectivist cultural settings.

Psychological Well-being and Gender Differences

There are significant gender differences in psychological well-being (Ryff, 1995; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Ryff, 1991; Ryff, 1989). For example, women tend to rate higher on positive relationships with others and personal growth than men (Ryff, 1995). Women in young adulthood, midlife, and old age seem to have more positive interpersonal relations with others than men (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Ryff, 1991; Ryff, 1989). A study with White Americans and African Americans has revealed that men rate higher on self-acceptance and environmental mastery than women (Ryff, Keyes, & Hughes, 2004). Particularly, older men score higher on self-acceptance than older women. Young adult men rate higher on purpose of life than young adult women. In both White American and African American groups, young and midlife men rate higher on autonomy than women.

A study with individuals in the United States (individualistic culture) and South Korea (collectivist culture) has suggested that both Korean and American women report more positive relations with others than men in both cultures. Additionally, both groups indicate more personal growth than men in their respective cultures (Keyes & Ryff, 1999). It seems

that women tend to   indicate similar outcomes in relation to certain dimensions of psychological well-being regardless of cultural differences.

Role centrality plays a significant role in the psychological well-being of women. Research has suggested that greater centrality of four major roles: primary caregiver, mother, wife, and employee, increases the level of their life satisfaction (Martire, Stephens, & Townsend, 2000). Centrality of all these roles is beneficial for women's psychological well-being as it gives them a purpose, meaning, and guidance to their lives. These gains significantly impact on them by enhancing their psychological well-being and minimizing psychological distress resulted from these roles.

Individuals' identity salience is also associated with their psychological well-being. Identities that are easier-to-exit or more voluntary, like friend, have a significant impact on psychological well-being by reducing symptoms. On the contrary, identities that are difficult-to-exit, like parent, have a positive impact on psychological well-being only when individuals experience low level of stress of a particular role. Both women and men have similar outcomes in relation to the salience of identities and psychological well-being (Thoits, 1992).

Psychological Well-being and Age Differences

With respect to age differences in psychological well-being, research has suggested that environmental mastery and autonomy increase with age (Ryff, 1989). Older adults and middle-aged adults indicate more environmental mastery than young adults. Middle-aged adults report more purpose of life and personal growth than older adults and more autonomy than young adults. With respect to self acceptance and positive relations with others, all three age groups: young adults, mid adults, and older adults, are nearly similar.

Significant differences among age groups: young adulthood, middle age, and older age, were found for environmental mastery, autonomy, and personal growth (Ryff, 1991). Environmental mastery, autonomy, and self acceptance tend to increase with age while personal growth tends to decline with age. Middle-aged adults indicate more personal growth than older adults, and more environmental mastery and autonomy than young adults. A similar level of positive relations with others can be observed in each group.

A study with midlife adults has also provided evidence for age difference in psychological well-being (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Environmental mastery seems to increase with age while purpose of life and personal growth tend to decline with age. Young adults

and middle-aged adults state more personal growth and purpose of life than older adults. When comparing young and middle-aged adults, young adults indicate more personal growth and purpose of life than middle-aged adults. In contrast, older adults report more environmental mastery and autonomy than young and middle-aged adults. Significantly, older adults tend to have more positive relationships with others than younger adults.

These findings suggest that some dimensions of psychological well-being are highlighted more in particular stages of human development. The ability to manage one's environment and self-determination are significant dimensions of the psychological well-being in midlife adults when compared with those in young adulthood. Dimensions such as personal growth and purpose of life are consistent through young adulthood to middle age. However, these dimensions tend to decline in old age. Some studies have stated that there are no significant developmental changes in self-acceptance and positive relations with others in these three age groups. When considering these findings, it seems that middle age is the time that individuals experience gains in many aspects of psychological well-being (Keyes & Ryff, 1999).

A study by Ryff, Keyes, and Hughes (2004) with national and subsamples of White Americans, African Americans, and Mexican Americans, has revealed significant age differences in psychological well-being. There are significant differences for personal growth in the national group. Young adults have higher ratings than mid-life adults. Mid-life adults report higher ratings than older adults except African American female older adults. It seems that personal growth decreases with age. Additionally, older adults report more positive relations with others than mid-life adults and rated higher on environmental mastery than middle-aged and young adults. Young and mid-life adults rate higher on purpose of life than older adults. Young adults rate lower on autonomy than mid-life and older adults. In subsamples, older adults have higher ratings for self-acceptance than mid-life and young adults, and lower ratings for purpose of life than young adults. When comparing young and mid-life adults, middle-aged adults score higher on purpose of life than young adults.

It seems that dimensions such as environmental mastery, self- acceptance, and positive relationships with others tend to increase with age while purpose of life and personal growth tend to decrease with age. There may be many reasons for these differences. Individuals' life goals, life experiences, and behaviors may change from one developmental stage to another. Consequently, they may focus on different aspects of psychological well-being at certain ages in their life-span.

In Summary, Carol Ryff's multidimensional model can be identified as the first systematic approach which gives the importance for different aspects of well-being. Her theoretical model considers significant dimensions of one's life that are important in organizing their lives and overall satisfaction. Her model has been scientifically verified and recognized as a powerful framework for psychological well-being.

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