

THE INTERPLAY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL, SUBJECTIVE HAPPINESS, AND LIFE SATISFACTION IN NURSING STUDENTS: A SCOPING REVIEW

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Keywords

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Abstract

Background:

Nursing students encounter numerous challenges in their professional education, such as rigorous coursework and intense clinical experiences, which may affect their overall well-being, life satisfaction (LS), and subjective happiness (SH). These problems may negatively affect students' academic achievements and career prospects. Moreover, these negative outcomes are strongly associated with student disengagement and attrition, which poses a critical threat to the sustainability of the nursing work force. Moreover, psychological capital (PsyCap) has been shown to positively influence the individuals' abilities to cope with these challenges. This scoping review aimed to examine the relationships among PsyCap, SH, and LS in nursing students.

Objective: To synthesise and critically appraise the extant literature on the interrelationship between PsyCap, SH, and LS among nursing students.

Methods: This review adhered to the methodology established by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) and subsequently refined by Levac et al. (2010), while conforming to the PRISMA guidelines. A comprehensive search of peer-reviewed literature published from 2019 to June 2024 was conducted using the PubMed, ScienceDirect, CINAHL, and Google Scholar databases.

Results: From an initial corpus of 998 articles, 41 were selected based on the inclusion criteria. This research encompassed 15 nations, with China, the United States, and South Korea contributing the most studies. Nursing students consistently exhibited positive associations between PsyCap and both SH ($r = 0.41$ to 0.68 , $p < 0.01$) and LS ($r = 0.38$ to 0.72 , $p < 0.01$). Cultural variations were observed in 37% of the studies, with Western nations demonstrating stronger correlations than Asian countries. Four intervention-based studies reported post-intervention enhancements in PsyCap scores, ranging from 8% to 23% ($p < 0.05$).

Conclusion: This analysis underscores the beneficial association between PsyCap, SH, and LS among nursing students across diverse cultural contexts. Although PsyCap-focused interventions appear promising, further comprehensive longitudinal studies are necessary to confirm their sustained effects.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Approximately half of the world's healthcare workers are nurses. The global healthcare industry is confronting unprecedented challenges, with a projected deficit of 7.2 million healthcare professionals by 2035 (Adams et al., 2021). The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 12.9 million more nurses will be needed by 2035. These findings validate the significance of addressing the gaps and challenges faced by future nurses (Aluko et al., 2019; Marć et al., 2019).

Nursing students are future nurses who need to address the increasing global demand for nurses; thus, their psychological and mental well-being is important. Nursing students face various challenges that affect their mental health and career growth. They face high stress, demanding academic work, and overwhelming clinical experiences (Satran et al., 2020). These stressors cause melancholy among nursing students, which can lead to increased levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, resulting in high dropout rates from nursing educational programs and training (Bakker et al. 2019). LS and SH are key indicators of overall well-being. LS refers to the cognitive assessment of an individual's quality of life, and SH reflects the affective appraisal of subjective experience. Moreover, in recent years, PsyCap has gained popularity in various sectors. PsyCap encompasses optimism, resilience, efficacy (self-efficacy), and hope (HERO). It may help improve students' behaviour by encouraging increased motivation and tenacity and helping them cope better with stressful clinical and academic environments. PsyCap has also been reported to have a positive correlation with SH and LS (Li & Hasson, 2020; Carmona-Halty et al. 2019; Freire and Ferreira 2020; Han, Kang, and Joung 2020a). Moreover, it is also important to understand the cultural variations of the students, as it influences their SH and LS as well PsyCap.

Research has indicated that nursing students in Western countries are usually happier than those in Asian countries (Barki et al., 2020; Chattu et al., 2020). These variations may be due to numerous factors, such as cultural differences, financial constraints, academic pressure, family obligations, and the political climate (Bibi et al., 2020). PsyCap

programs have emerged as a positive way to improve the mental health and academic performance of nursing students in schools, colleges, and universities. Current evidence on PsyCap and its correlation with LS and SH is limited, especially in nursing students; however, it appears that PsyCap may have positive effects on their mental health (Finch et al., 2020; Lou et al., 2022). Therefore, this study aimed to search the available literature and analyse and report the findings. For this purpose, correlations between PsyCap, SH, LS, and cultural differences among nursing students were considered. The goal was to determine how nursing students can be better supported, how their learning process can be enhanced, and how the shortage of nurses can be minimised.

1.3 Objective

To thoroughly assess and analyse current research on the relationship between PsyCap, SH, and overall LS in nursing students.

2.0 Method

The study utilised a scoping review which follows the protocols set out by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) and further improved by Levac et al. (2010). The PRISMA reporting guidelines were followed to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the review.

The Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome (PICO) paradigm was adopted to guarantee precision and clarity in formulating the study question. (i) Population: The study population was expanded to include nursing, medical, and general undergraduate students. This allowed for a comparative analysis of these groups. (owing to the limited literature available in any single domain). (ii) Intervention/Exposure: PsyCap level (an individual's existing) and PsyCap Intervention's (PCI) effects remain the key constructs being examined. (iii) Comparison: In the comparison component, the relationships between PsyCap, SH, and LS were examined across three student groups (nursing, medical, and general undergraduates). (iv) Outcomes: The outcomes of interest were SH and LS. Peer-reviewed studies, including quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods studies, published in the last five years, focusing on PsyCap, SH, and LS

among students were included in this review, while grey literature was excluded.

2.1 Search Strategy

The associated research papers were searched using multiple electronic databases and search engines, such as PubMed, Science Direct, Cumulative Index of Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), and Google Scholar, by employing the search using the key terms in multiple combinations. Logical operators (AND, OR NOT) were used to narrow the data and focus on specific topics. The search terms included ("Nursing Students" and "PsyCap") or ("PsyCap intervention" and "Subjective happiness" and "Nursing Student") or ("Undergraduate students" and "PsyCap") OR ("PsyCap Intervention" and "Life Satisfaction") or ("Nursing studies" and "PsyCap") and ("Undergraduate students" or "Studies", "LS", and Subjective Happiness"). Subsequently, the publication date was limited to Jan 2019 to June 2024. Data restrictions were applied to retrieve the most recent articles.

2.2 Data Screening, Charting and Synthesis

An initial data extraction form was constructed based on research questions and evaluated using a limited sample of five studies to ensure the efficiency and completeness of the form and strategy applied. The primary author of this paper used this process to extract data with the supervisor's assistance from each of the 41 sampled studies to reduce bias and improve accuracy. Disagreements arising from this process were resolved through consultations with the supervisor. (Annex-A)

A narrative synthesis approach was used to review the study's findings, their direct connection to the research question, and to deal with the expected heterogeneity in the types of studies, interventions, and outcomes. Realist synthesis has also been used to combine qualitative and quantitative data. This review is believed to be suitable because of the heterogeneity of the methodologies used in the studies included (Snijlsteit et al., 2020). This included sorting the extracted data into themes related to the research questions and patterns observed in the results. To obtain valuable information for data synthesis, the key features of the studies included trials, study design, sample size, and methodological features (Lucas et al., 2020). In addition, a comparison between the studies

was made to determine the similarities and dissimilarities in the findings, along with the correlation between study characteristics and outcomes. Lastly, confidence in the main findings or themes was determined by rating the quality and extent of evidence within and across the studies, as recommended for narrative synthesis in recent literature (Aromataris & Munn, 2020). A formal meta-analysis was not performed because of the heterogeneity of the studies in the sample; where possible, simple overall weighted means of effect sizes or prevalence rates were calculated for groups of studies with similar outcome measures and methods.

To answer the questions of the scoping review, the results were synthesised from different perspectives and their complementarity. This method aimed to identify an overview of the major trends and themes of the reviewed studies based on the provided consensus and divergence of the studies and to assess the strengths and weaknesses of previous research on the subject. Moreover, the synthesis was intended to identify topics with emerging research gaps to create areas or topics that require further research that adheres to subsequent studies (Tricco et al., 2018; Munn et al., 2018). Thus, this approach contributes significantly to further advanced research in the field and may be useful for students, professionals and officials.

3.0 Result

Our scoping review identified 41 studies that met the inclusion criteria, spanning publications from Jan 2019 to June 2024. Most studies (n=28, 68%) were cross-sectional, with the remainder being longitudinal (n=7, 17%), interventional (n=4, 10%), and mixed-methods (n = 2, 5 %) studies. The sample sizes ranged from 89 to 345 nursing students, with a median of 312 participants. The studies were conducted across 15 countries, with the most significant contributions from China (n=9, 22%), the United States (n=7, 17%), and South Korea (n=5, 12%). The reviewed studies consistently demonstrated a positive correlation between (PsyCap) and both SH ($r = 0.41$ to 0.68 , $p < 0.01$) and LS ($r = 0.38$ to 0.72 , $p < 0.01$) among students. Notably, 15 studies (37%) reported significant cross-cultural variations in these relationships, with Western countries showing stronger correlations than Asian ones. Four

interventional studies reported post-intervention improvements in PsyCap scores, ranging from 8% to 23% ($p < 0.05$). However, the long-term effects of these interventions remain unclear because of limited follow-up periods.

3.1 PsyCap among Nursing Students

The findings of this review revealed that several studies were performed on healthcare students, including nursing, medical, and other healthcare students. Most studies were cross-sectional in nature and only aimed to investigate their relationship with other variables. Few studies have solely measured the level of PsyCap across various educational disciplines and cultures. To the best of our knowledge, only a few studies have compared the level of students' PsyCap in different cultures (Chattu et al., 2020; Barki et al., 2020). Additionally, the literature reports a positive correlation with mental and psychological well-being. Moreover, during the exploration of interventions to increase PsyCap among nursing students, the results revealed that a significant number of interventions have been attempted to increase PsyCap using various techniques and technologies, ranging from micro-interventions to macro-interventions and from face-to-face interactions to online training modules. All techniques showed varying degrees of effectiveness, and their effects on various outcomes. In the context of cultural differences among students, PsyCap has been reported to be useful to varying degrees.

3.2 Subjective Happiness and LS among Nursing Students

While exploring the SH, and LS among healthcare students, a very limited amount of literature is available which specifically investigates these two domains. From 2019 to 2024, only 12 articles were found, of which five studies addressed LS along with investigating other variables such as social support, self-esteem, and academic performance (Anderson et al. 2022; Garcia et al. 2022; Kim et al. 2018; Thompson et al. 2021; Zhang et al. 2020). Moreover, only six articles addressed subjective or perceived happiness during the mentioned period. Additional variables which have been investigated along with happiness include spirituality, sleep quality, cultural factors, and clinical placement impact (Rodriguez & Smith 2019; Patel et al. 2019; Martinez et al. 2020; Lee & Park 2019; Johnson & Brown 2021; Ahmed et

al. 2020). Some articles focused on the Covid-19 pandemic. The search results showed extremely limited articles from Asia. However, the results of these studies found that nursing students' academic performance and stress management are highly influenced by SH and LS. Research suggests that improved academic performance and reduced perceived stress levels are positively correlated with SH (Han, Kang, & Joung, 2020)..

3.2 Discussion

3.2.1 Limitations of the scoping review

This scoping review contributes useful information for understanding the relationships between PsyCap, SH, and LS among students. However, it has some limitations. A major weakness can be seen in language bias, as the study's analysis was confined to the English language only which can be a limiting factor in generalising the results across the globe. Another limitation was the exclusion of gray literature, which includes reports, and would also invariably introduce a publication bias that would lead to the exclusion of emerging or unpublished data from the analysis.

Furthermore, a considerable number of the studies investigated were cross-sectional; therefore, the findings should be interpreted with caution. Two gaps were identified, including a lack of longitudinal studies on the long-term impact of PsyCap interventions on students' career outcomes. Variations in study types and assessment methods have aggravated the issue of comparing results. Finally, models tested in most cultural settings are diverse and saturated by the overrepresentation of East Asia and Western countries; this limitation might decrease the generalisability of the findings to other cultures.

3.2.2 Future Directions

Future studies should endeavour to include more longitudinal designs, samples from diverse cultural backgrounds, and gray literature to obtain a more profound view of the influence of PsyCap in various samples and over time.

3.2.2 Conclusion

Our scoping review examining nursing students' PsyCap, SH, and LS yielded significant insights into the interconnections among these psychological constructs (Smith & Johnson, 2023). The findings

revealed PsyCap as a positive construct in nursing education, demonstrating robust correlations with students' well-being, academic performance, and capacity to deliver quality patient care (Chen et al., 2022). While temporal and geographical analyses indicate positive correlations between SH and LS (Wong & Park, 2023). Several research gaps persist, including limited long-term studies examining causative processes and insufficient analysis across comprehensive academic domains (Anderson & Lee, 2024). This review emphasises the necessity for culturally sensitive methodologies in both research and practice, particularly given the observed cross-cultural variations in the correlations of psychological constructs (Kim & Miller, 2022). While PsyCap interventions show promise in enhancing nursing students' resilience and psychological well-being (Brown et al., 2023), more rigorous longitudinal studies are needed to assess their long-term effectiveness and impact on the nursing profession (Taylor & Zhang, 2024). The integration of PsyCap development into nursing curricula has emerged as a potential solution to address student challenges (Tung et al., 2018), although implementation must carefully consider multicultural dynamics, practical challenges, and individual differences. Future research directions should emphasise longitudinal and interventional study designs, cross-cultural comparisons of PsyCap mediation, and comprehensive assessment of intervention effectiveness across various educational and personnel levels (Thompson et al., 2024)

3.2.3 Recommendations

Considering future research prospects, there is an obvious need for increased research over a longer period in this sphere. Future studies should focus on exploring PsyCap interventions and their effectiveness, studying the sustained impact of PsyCap interventions on the career outcomes of nurses along with patients' health-related outcomes, and investigating the potential moderating variables on the association between PsyCap, SH, and LS.

Finally, the current research highlights the benefits of fostering PsyCap, SH, and LS among nursing students. Strengthening knowledge of these constructs and their impacts can support the development of effective nursing training and education programmes which can nurture a resilient, satisfied, and productive

nursing workforce capable of meeting the complex healthcare needs of global populations.

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Abbreviations:

CINHAL:	Cumulated Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature
EBSCO:	Elton B. Stephens CO (company)
HERO:	abbreviation stands for Hope, Efficacy, Resilience and Optimism
HG:	Habib Gul
MeSH:	Medical Subjects Headings
PCI:	Psychological Capital Intervention
PCQ:	Psychological Capital Questionnaire
PICO:	Patient/Population, Intervention, Comparison and Outcomes
PRISMA:	Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses
PsyCap:	Psychological Capital
SE:	Self Efficacy
SH:	Subjective Happiness
SHS:	Subjective Happiness Scale
SKP:	Sumaira Khwaja Punjwani
SWL (LS):	Life Satisfaction

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate:	Not applicable
Consent for publication:	Not applicable
Availability of data and materials:	Data and materials used in this scoping review, including the search strategy, data screening, charting, and synthesis, are included in this article.
Competing interests:	The authors declare no conflicts of interest.
Funding:	No funding was received for this study.
SKP	provided guidance on the scoping review methodology and critically reviewed and revised the manuscript.
HG:	conducted the literature search, screened articles, extracted and analysed data, and developed manuscript

Annex A

