

Illusion of control? or Posttraumatic growth? Influencing Factors between Risk Controllability and Satisfaction on Subjective Life

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Abstract

This study aims to find the factors that an individual has to try to get in order to seek happiness by identifying how optimism, resilience, and self-leadership have an influence between the risk that an individual recognizes and the satisfaction with subjective life. To this end, a total of 296 valid responses were collected and analyzed.

The results from this study suggest that training for enhancing optimism and self-leadership for pursuit of happiness, one of the important human goals is necessary and it is also necessary not to fall into the illusion of control against risk by avoiding optimistic bias.

Keywords: *Controllability perception of risk, Optimism, Resilience, Self-leadership, Subjective well-being*

1. Introduction

Despite the uncertainties including traffic accident, sudden onset, family disorganization, and other recent various personal risks happening in our society, people tend to believe that they are less likely to experience negative events than others. In fact, people often become unhappier due to illusion of control regarding how to cope with risk. For example, in case of losing families due to unexpected earthquake, tsunami, etc., the other family members who still survive fall into the bottomless pit of unhappiness. They often ruin their lives because they fall into the illusion of control despite the impossibility to control by themselves. Given these are frequently reported, understanding how to cope with risk is very important because it is closely related to personal happiness.

This study aimed to identify how two important factors for positive psychology capital, optimism and resilience have an effect on individual's risk recognition and satisfaction with subjective life. On the other hand, this study has an interest in the role of self-leadership proposed by [1]. Therefore, this study aimed to identify an individual's coping style against risk and ways to overcome risk and seek happiness by classifying the risk that he/she might face in this world into controllable risk and uncontrollable risk and identifying how optimism, resilience, and self-leadership might be influential in the process that an individual's risk recognition has an influence on satisfaction with subjective life.

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The findings from this study are expected to provide various clues to creating a much better society by not only re-illuminating people's coping style against risk but also proposing ways to pursue happiness.

2. Related researches

Risk controllability can be defined as actual or perceived ability to determine the result of a certain event [2]. Sense of control also means that one's behavior accompanies the desired results [3]. Therefore, risk can be classified into controllable risk and uncontrollable risk depending on controllability. Uncontrollable risk generally refers to a risk that has a small potential for change by an individual's effort, for example sudden accident or death, failure in business, or unemployment. On the other hand, controllable risk is a risk that has a big potential for change, for example family conflict, interpersonal conflict, etc. Risk controllability at the individual level can be predicted with attributional theory of an individual's risk tolerance related to how people accept risk and perceived control. This study has interest in [4]'s attributional theory regarding the recognition of risk controllability because an individual perceives risk or undergoes attributional process. If seen from [4][5]'s theory, first, an individual can recognize risk controllability as controllable risk and uncontrollable risk depending on locus of causality, which indicates that the causes that can account for a risk event are inside or outside of an individual.

Optimism is derived from positive psychology proposed by several psychologists in American Psychological Association (APA) centering on Seligman after discovering that the psychology that they had analyzed for about 50 years since the 2nd World War was relatively negligent in a healthy individual's self-development like self-realization [6]. Optimism was proposed by [7] and is a belief that one believes strongly that the future will be fine despite many difficulties and frustrations. Therefore, optimism refers to attitude of mind that one is not frustrated when one challenged but failed, figures out the cause of failure, and has the willingness to rechallenge [7][8][9]. [10] defined optimism as personality trait that is maintained stably and consistently despite the changes in time and circumstances with a feeling of expectancy that a lot of good things will happen in the future, but bad things will not happen too much.

Resilience is defined by internal and external researchers as an individual's whole internal capacity that copes flexibly with the environment that causes stress [11][12], psychological immunity against stress or adversity [13], psychological ability to make the most of internal and external resources [14], or ability to change adversity to mature experience [15]. Also, resilience implies negative perspectives as well as positive ones as it means an ability to not only return to the original state from failure, hardship, and conflict but also return back to the original state from positive events or positive processes or responsibilities given to oneself [16][17][18][19]. In other words, resilience is one of the important psychological resources that can overcome the risk situations such as stress that an individual faces and adversity and simultaneously has a positive effect on preventing upcoming risks.

Self-leadership is a concept that constructive thinking strategy is added to behavior-centered strategy and natural renewal strategy drawn from intrinsic motivation theory and self-control theory as well as self-regulation theory and social cognitive theory [20]. Therefore, self-leadership is characterized by not only behavior strategy to manage and control behavior on the premise that we interact under the environment that we meet in

life through feedback and execution of self-observation, self-goal setting, self-compensation, and self-correction but also selection of pleasure to be obtained while performing one's favorite (natural reward strategies), visualization of successful outcome to establish or maintain one's constructive and habitual thinking pattern, continuous attempts to have a dialogue with oneself, and consistent evaluation of beliefs and various assumptions.

Subjective life satisfaction is called as subjective happiness, quality of life, subjective wellbeing, or subjective welfare and thus differs slightly in defining the concept depending on scholar. Satisfaction with life is a subjective evaluation of the overall life that an individual had lived and also a concept that represents a successful adaptation in the process that an individual has lived so far [21]. Therefore, satisfaction with life that an individual pursues from the subjective perspective is an important factor that might lead to one's happiness.

3. Research model & hypotheses

This study divided risk into uncontrollable risk that might happen regardless of one's will and controllable risk that might be improved sufficiently by one's own effort and then identified how an individual's recognition of risk has an influence on subjective satisfaction with life by way of optimism, resilience, and self-leadership. From the positive psychology perspective emerged in the 1990s, [22] and [23] demonstrated that trauma may cause disease or morbid symptoms to some, but bring about better functions and adaptations than before trauma to another and this expects that through Posttraumatic Growth (PRG), difference in risk recognition might enhance an individual's optimism, resilience, and self-leadership. Therefore, this study is expected to reduce an individuals' optimism, resilience, and self-leadership temporarily in case he/she falls into controllable risk, and in case of uncontrollable risk, posttraumatic growth is expected. Thus, the following hypotheses and structured research models can be established.

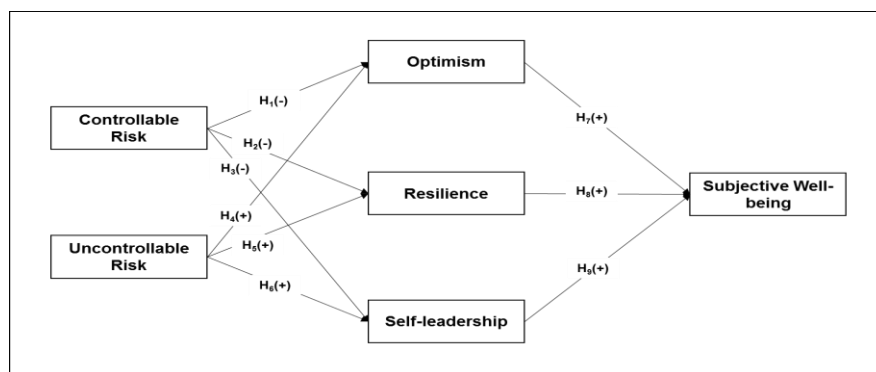


Figure 1. Research model and hypotheses

4. Data collection and research methods

To perform this study, samples were extracted from ordinary people living in Seoul and capital area with convenient sampling and 296 copies, among a total of 300 copies of questionnaire, were used for analysis.

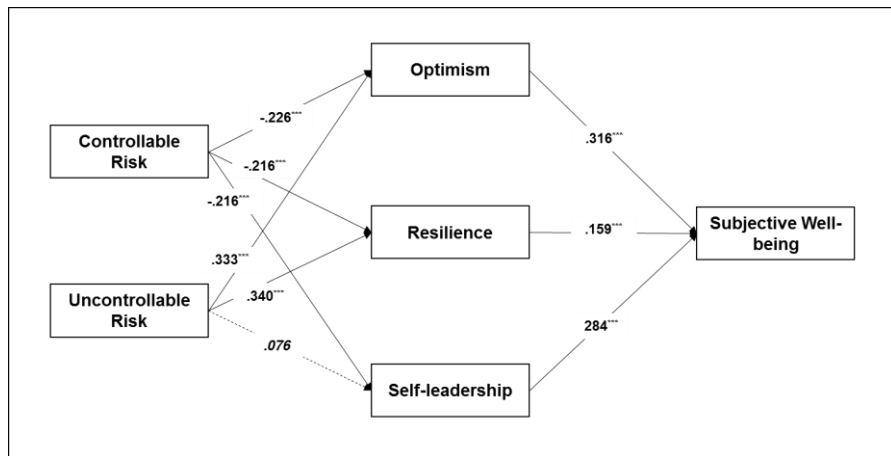
Risk recognition was measured on Likert 5-point scale based on [24]: five items regarding uncontrollable risk including ‘sudden difficulty of family economic circumstances’ and ‘ostracized from friends (or supervisor and colleagues)’ and five items regarding controllable risk including ‘severe fight with parents’ and ‘few conversations with families.’ In [24], Cronbach’s α for uncontrollable risk was identified as 0.65 and that for controllable risk 0.75. Satisfaction with subjective life was measured with Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) developed by [25] and five items including ‘I am satisfied with my life’ were measured with Likert 5-point scale. As sub-factor of positive psychological capital proposed by [9], optimism was measured with six items including ‘I expect the best results in uncertain situations and resilience was measured with six items including ‘I can get through the difficulties’ on Likert 5-point scale. Self-leadership was measured with seventeen items based on [26]’s study on Likert 5-point scale. To remove the difference in scale for each variable, it was converted to Z-score for analysis.

5. Results

The demographic characteristics of respondents were drawn as follows: First, there were 155 females (52.4%) and 141 males (47.6%) and in age, the number of those in their 50ties was 81(27.4%), that of those in their 30ties 79(26.7%), and that of those in their 40ties 57(19.3%). In occupation, the number of office workers was 129 and 161 were found to be a university graduate.

As a result of verifying the internal consistency of items, Cronbach’s α for controllable risk was 0.793, that for uncontrollable risk 0.787, that for satisfaction with subjective life 0.832, that for optimism 0.868, that for resilience 0.870, and that for self-leadership 0.899, which suggested that reliability was ensured. On the other hand, as a result of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to identify the validity of each variable, construct reliability was 0.847-0.964 and average variance extracted (AVE) 0.593-0.747, which suggested that validity was ensured.

As a result of verifying hypotheses through structural equation path analysis, it was found as shown in [Figure 2].



Note) * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Figure 2. Results of path analysis

6. Conclusions

As a result, the following conclusions could be obtained. First, controllable risk was found to reduce optimism, resilience, and self-leadership at the individual level. This result can be interpreted as being influenced by temporary despair over failure to control despite the possibility to control because finally sense of control is perceived competence to determine the result of a certain event [2]. Second, uncontrollable risk was found to have a positive effect on optimism and resilience although it did not have an influence on self-leadership, which suggested that it acted as posttraumatic growth factor as expected in the first research model. This result means that finally the inability to control an event by an individual's effort does not let the individual fall into the illusion of control, but rather convert to posttraumatic growth. Third, optimism, resilience, and self-leadership was found to have a positive influence on satisfaction with subjective life. Therefore, it is necessary to enhance optimism, resilience, and self-leadership in order to facilitate posttraumatic growth and pursue an individual's happiness. This means that an individual's pursuit for happiness is possible through efforts to enhance optimism and resilience based on the fact that the previous researchers argued that optimism and resilience are temperamental trait, whereas the recent positive psychology researchers suggested that training makes a difference. Also, it is expected that better quality of life is possible by improving self-leadership through behavior focused strategies that are based on social cognitive theory or natural reward strategies and constructive thought pattern strategies that are based on intrinsic motivation theory.

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