Character profiles and life satisfaction

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Abstract

Background: There is a surge of interest in subjective well-being (SWB), which concerns how individuals feel about their happiness. Life satisfaction tends to be influenced by individual psychological traits and external social factors. The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between individual character and SWB.
Methods: Data from 3522 university students were analyzed in this study. Character profiles were evaluated using the Temperament and Character Inventory-Revised Short version (TCI-RS). Life satisfaction was assessed using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). All statistical tests regarding the correlations between each character profile and life satisfaction were conducted using ANOVAs, t-tests, multiple linear regression models and correlation analyses.
Results: The creative (SCT) profile was associated with the highest levels of life satisfaction, whereas the depressive (sct) profile was associated with the lowest levels of life satisfaction. Additionally, high self-directedness, self-transcendence and cooperation were associated with high life satisfaction. The results of gender-adjusted multiple regression analysis showed that the effects of self-directedness were the strongest in the assessment of one's quality of life, followed by self-transcendence and cooperativeness, in that order. All of the three-character profiles were significantly correlated with one's quality of life, and the character profiles of TCI-RS explained 27.6% of life satisfaction in total. Among the three-character profiles, the self-directedness profile was most associated with life satisfaction.
Limitations: Our study was cross-sectional, and self-reported data from students at a single university were analyzed.
Conclusions: The results of this study showed that, among the character profiles, the effects of self-directedness were the strongest for predicting life satisfaction.
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1. Introduction

Well-being is a multidimensional concept that includes various aspects of mental, physical, emotional, social and spiritual health. It supports social relationships and the ability to deal with stressful events [1,2]. The effect of well-being on people's lives is very clear and important. Current positive psychological well-being has a positive effect on the survival of both healthy and diseased people [3]. Other health risk factors, such as social factors, health behavior, hostility and coping strategies, have been proposed as mediators [4]. In addition, subjective well-being and subjective health are more strongly associated with each other than subjective health and objective health. In many studies, subjective health was found to be a better predictor of survival than objective health measures [5]. Subjective well-being can be explained as a cognitive process in which people compare their perceptions of their current situations with their aspirations. This observation led to defining well-being as life satisfaction. Life satisfaction refers to a person's internal subjective assessment of his or her overall quality of life [1]. There are two broad aspects of subjective well-being, an affective and a cognitive component. The affective component is divided into positive and negative valences.

The cognitive component of subjective well-being is referred to as life satisfaction [6].

Connections between personality and psychopathology have frequently been reported in research studies [7]. The same is true of the relationships between personality and well-being. Personality is a critical factor to determine the level of well-being [8] and is regarded as one of the various components important to subjective well-being (SWB) [9]. Personality traits such as extraversion and neuroticism tend to determine an individual's response to emotional stimuli. Extraversion and neuroticism have been found to be related to the frequency and intensity of positive and negative emotions, respectively. In other words, positive emotions reflect the tendency to respond to positive affect, whereas negative emotions reflect the tendency to respond to negative affect [10]. Thus, personality is a component and a decisive factor of emotion and well-being.

Because life satisfaction varies depending on socio-environmental factors and psychological traits instead of the individual's perpetual tendency or traits, various factors of life satisfaction need to be considered [11]. Nevertheless, previous studies have suggested that the effects of socio-environmental factors are insignificant compared with psychological traits, because life satisfaction is a conscious cognitive judgment of one's life in which the criteria upon which the judgment is based are up to the person [12]. The same results have been obtained in a previous study in patients with schizophrenia [13]. Therefore, various factors of life satisfaction need to be considered to better understand life satisfaction, but there is a paucity of literature to elucidate life satisfaction's relationship to intrinsic personality traits, which are different from the ostensibly visible socio-environmental factors. Therefore, the lack of research in this area is quite significant and requires further study.

SWB-related studies in diverse forms have been carried out in many countries. In a study conducted using TCI-measured personality and SWB, personality was closely correlated with SWB [14]. Another study used a personal approach with TCI profiles to investigate how individual personality profiles influence physical, emotional, and social aspects of well-being [15]. The three-character profiles of the TCI have been shown to influence well-being differentially and make distinct contributions to well-being through interactions with the other character profiles [15]. Three different dimensions of character reflect each self-concept leading a person to identify the self as an autonomous individual, an integral part of humanity and an integral part of the universe as a whole [16]. In other words, personality was found to be predictive of life satisfaction [17]. However, most conventional studies have been performed in the United States on smaller scales.

Previous studies have indicated that the use of cognitively driven factors in life satisfaction is more adequate than emotionally driven factors as single-rating measures by which to evaluate happiness or well-being [18]. It has been suggested that temperament is closely related to physical and emotional health, whereas character is strongly associated with "wellness" [19–21].

Therefore, in this study, we aimed to investigate the relationships between personality and life satisfaction in a large population using the TCI, an internationally recognized personality test that assesses different traits of human personality, and the SWLS, a scale that assesses the cognitive factors of SWB.

2. Methods

2.1. Study participants

We carried out two surveys as part of a program to promote local education capacity and mental health in 2001 and 2003, and recruited students enrolled at Kongju National University for this study. After providing a complete description of the study, including a statement that the questionnaire results would be used for the purpose of the study while remaining confidential, informed consent was provided by all participants. A total of 3522 subjects who completed the SWLS and the TCI were evaluated in this study. First-year students accounted for 3467 (98.4%) of the subjects. The mean age was 20.09 years. Males and females comprised 47.6% and 52.4% of the sample, respectively. Approval for this study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of Kangbuk Samsung Medical Center.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Temperament and character

The TCI is a self-report questionnaire developed by Dr. C. Robert Cloninger. It is based on a psychobiological model that attempts to explain human personality. The questionnaire allows the calculation of main scores corresponding to 4 temperament dimensions and 3 character dimensions: novelty seeking (NS), harm avoidance (HA), reward dependence (RD), persistence (P), self-directedness (SD), cooperative (C) and self-transcendence (ST). In this study, we used a modified version, the Temperament and Character Inventory-Revised Short version (TCI-RS). The TCI-RS is a 140-item questionnaire, with a 5-point rating for each statement [22].

2.2.2. Life satisfaction

In this study, we used the SWLS, an internationally recognized self-report test devised by Pavot and Diener [23]. It has five questions that examine an individual's life satisfaction (including a non-affective side of subjective well-being) on a seven point Likert scale: 1) In most ways my life is close to my ideal; 2) The conditions of my life are excellent; 3) I am satisfied with my life; 4) So far I have gotten the important things I want in life; and 5) If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing [24]. High SWLS scores represent a high degree of life satisfaction. The distribution of scores ranges from a minimum of 5 to a maximum of 35. Cronbach's alpha for this study was 0.863.