



ROLE OF OPTIMISM AND PESSIMISM AND IT'S EFFECTS ON SOCIETY



What Is Optimism?

Optimism is a mental attitude characterized by hope and confidence in success and a positive future. Optimists are those who expect good things to happen, whereas pessimists instead predict unfavorable outcomes. Optimistic attitudes are linked to several benefits, including better-copcingills, lower stress levels, better physical health, and higher persistence when pursuing goals.

Optimists tend to view hardships as learning experiences or temporary setbacks. Even the most miserable day holds the promise for them that "tomorrow will probably be better."

If you always see the brighter side of things, you may feel that you experience more positive events in your life than others, find yourself less stressed, and even enjoy greater health benefits.

Optimist Explanatory Style

Optimists explain positive events as having happened because of their actions or characteristics (internal). They also see them as evidence that more positive things will happen in the future (stable) and inher areas of their lives (global).

Conversely, they see negative events as not being their fault (external). They also see them as being flukes (isolated) that have nothing to do with other areas of their lives or future events (local).

For example, if an optimist gets a promotion, they will likely believe it's because they are good at their job and will receive more benefits and promotions in the future. If they are passed over for the promotion, it's likely because they were having a bad month cause of extenuating circumstances, but will do better in the future.

How to Practice Optimism?

Understandably, if you're an optimist, this bodes well for your future. Negative events are more likely to roll off of your back while positive events affirm your belief in yourself, your ability to make good things happen now and in the future, and the good life.

Research suggests that genetics determine about 25% of your optimism levels and environmental variables out of your control—such as your socioeconomic status—also play an important role. But this doesn't mean that you can't actively improve your attitude.

While you might tend to have either an optimistic or pessimistic explanatory style, there are things that you can do to help cultivate a more optimistic attitude. These include:

- **Become more mindful:** Mindfulness is a focus on being engaged, attentive, and present in the here and now. It can be a useful technique to help you focus on what matters in the present and avoid worrying about future events and things that are outside of your control. If you are living fully in the moment, you are much less likely to ruminate over negative past experiences or worry about upcoming events. This allows you to feel more appreciative of what you have now and less consumed with regrets and anxieties.
- **Practice gratitude:** Gratitude can be defined as an appreciation for what is important in life. One study found that participants who were assigned to write in a gratitude journal showed increased optimism and resilience. If you are trying to develop a more optimistic attitude, set aside a few minutes each day to jot down some of the things for which you are grateful.

- **Write down your positive emotions:** Research has shown that something as simple as writing down positive thoughts can help improve your optimism. One study found that expressive writing focused on positive emotions was linked to decreased mental distress and improved mental wellbeing.

It is also possible to develop learned optimism. Pessimists can essentially learn to be optimists by thinking about their reactions to adversity in a new way and consciously challenging negative self-talk.

Impact of Optimism

There has been a great deal of research on optimists and pessimists. Research has shown that an optimistic worldview carries certain advantages.

- **Better Health**

Studies regularly show that optimists are more likely to maintain better physical health than pessimists, including a 50% lower risk of cardiovascular disease and greater survival rates when fighting cancer. Some studies have also linked a pessimistic explanatory style with higher rates of infectious disease, poor health, and earlier mortality.

- **Greater Achievement**

Psychologist Martin Seligman, the founding father of positive psychology, analyzed sports teams and found that the more optimistic teams created more positive synergy and performed better than the pessimistic ones. Another study showed that pessimistic swimmers who were led to believe they'd done worse than they had were prone to future poor performance. Optimistic swimmers didn't have this vulnerability. □ **Persistence**

Optimists don't give up as easily as pessimists, and they are more likely to achieve success because of it. People with optimistic attitudes are more likely to continue working toward their goals, even in the face of obstacles, challenges, and setbacks. Such persistence ultimately means that they are more likely to accomplish their goals.

- **Emotional Health**

Research suggests that cognitive therapy (which involves reframing a person's thought processes) can be as effective or more effective than antidepressant medications in the treatment of clinical depression. Such improvements also tend to be long-lasting, suggesting that they are more

than a temporary fix. People who have this training in optimism appear to become better able to effectively handle future setbacks.

- **Increased Longevity**

In a retrospective study of 34 healthy Hall of Fame baseball players who played between 1900 and 1950, optimists lived significantly longer. Other studies have shown that optimistic breast cancer patients had a better quality of life than pessimistic and hopeless patients.

- **Less Stress**

Optimists also tend to experience less stress than pessimists or realists. Because they believe in themselves and their abilities, they expect good things to happen. They see negative events as minor setbacks to be easily overcome and view positive events as evidence of further good things to come. Believing in themselves, they also take more risks and create more positive events in their lives.

Benefits and Drawbacks of Optimismked at a certain way, one of the biggest risks of being a pessimist is not being an optimist. Significant scientific research has found that optimists tend to be healthier, happier, more successful (financially, socially, and in many other ways), and enjoy stronger and more satisfying relationships.

But living on the bright side isn't always sunny. Drawbacks of optimism include a greater propensity for taking unwarranted risks in terms of personal health and safety, such as not buckling a seatbelt or not getting a vaccine, or in finances, such as investing in a risky business venture. When considering the possible drawbacks, the benefits of optimism are huge. Optimism is correlated with great relationship satisfaction in dating couples.

Greater optimism also is related to an increased likelihood of seeking out social support in times of stress and hardship and lower levels of interpersonal conflicts.

Higher levels of optimism in married couples are also correlated with better health. Studies have shown that one partner's level of optimism plays a role in promoting the health of both partners.

Optimism is associated with warmer, more outgoing personality types, and pessimism is associated with more hostile and submissive interpersonal styles.

Research has linked optimism to increased longevity.

Optimism is also associated with greater life satisfaction, coping skills, social support, and resilience.

What Is Pessimism?

Pessimism is defined by the American Psychological Association as "the attitude that things will go wrong and that people's wishes or aims are unlikely to be fulfilled." A person with a pessimistic personality tends toward a more negative—or some might say, realistic—view of life. Optimists, on the other hand, see things more positively.

Pessimists usually expect negative outcomes and are suspicious when things seem to be going well. Optimists expect good things to happen and look for the silver lining when life doesn't go their way.

Pessimism is not a trait most people aspire to. It's often associated with negativity, a "half-full" attitude, depression, and other mood disorders. However, a healthy dose of negative thinking isn't necessarily all bad. While we're all often told to smile, think of the bright side, and make lemonade from lemons, that's not always practical, advisable, or healthy. Sometimes a little pessimism might be a good thing.

Benefits of Pessimism

While the factors that contribute to pessimism are mostly negative, pessimism does have an upside. There are all benefits to a healthy dose of pessimism. Specifically, pessimists are often better prepared for tough times and may avoid risks that more optimistic thinkers might ignore.

Research has shown that pessimists tend to foresee obstacles more readily since they expect things to go wrong. This means that they are more likely to plan for difficulties. A 2013 study published in the *Journal of Research in Personality* found that negative thinkers are also more likely to build safety nets, are more prepared (practically and emotionally) when things go wrong, and don't find their world views in crisis when bad things do happen.

A 2013 study in *Psychology and Aging* found a correlation between underestimating future life satisfaction with positive health outcomes and longevity in older adults. In other words, the study found that thinking your life would not go well was linked with some health benefits.

Risks of Pessimism

There are many clear drawbacks of too much pessimism. Some of the major pitfalls of being overly pessimistic:

Dwelling on negative thoughts is bad for well-being. Studies suggest that women may have higher rates of depression because they have higher rates of rumination, brooding, and reflection. Rumination and brooding are both components of pessimistic thinking.

Overly negative thinking contributes to depression and anxiety. Key symptoms of anxiety disorders are excessive worry, rumination, and worst-case scenario thinking. Likewise, low mood, negative thoughts, low self-esteem, and worry are not only characteristics of pessimistic thinkers, but also factors in depression.

Pessimism contributes to negative health effects. A negative outlook is associated with several other health risks, such as heart disease, as well as overall mortality.

Pessimists tend to have greater stress and fewer coping skills. One study showed that in older people, pessimism is also correlated with higher stress levels, more focus on the less positive parts of their life, and a greater tendency to look back on life with more negativity in general, reducing life satisfaction.

Optimists experience healthier stress levels and a higher perception of life satisfaction. Conversely, pessimistic people tend to experience more isolation, greater conflict and stress, poorer health, and reduced well-being.

A 2015 study found that "higher optimism was associated with better physiological adjustment to a stressful situation, while higher pessimism was associated with worse psychological adjustment to stress."

Another worrisome component of pessimism is that it may make stressful situations feel worse than they are. On the other hand, more optimistic thinking can help significantly when coping with challenging events.

Pessimist Explanatory Style

Pessimists think the opposite of what that negative events are caused by their own mistakes or traits (internal). They believe that one mistake means more will come (stable), and mistakes in other areas of life are inevitable (global) because

they are the cause. They see positive events as flukes (local) that are caused by things outside their control (external) and probably won't happen again (unstable).

A pessimist would see a promotion as a lucky event that probably won't happen again, and may even worry that they'll now be under more scrutiny. Being passed over for a promotion would probably be explained as not being skilled enough. They would, therefore, expect to be passed over again.

Impact of Thinking Styles

One key difference between how an optimist and a pessimist thinks has to do with their explanatory style, which is essentially the way people interpret what happens in their lives. An optimist will take positive events and magnify them while minimizing the negative in a situation; a pessimist will do the opposite and downplay the positive while heightening the focus on the negative.

The tendency to minimize the negative—one of the traits of optimists that encourages optimists to dream big and emboldens them to keep on trying even after they face setbacks—can also produce a false sense of security that may cause optimists to fail to conceive of possible difficulties and plan for them. It may also lead them to feel surprised when things don't go their way.

However, these very traits—minimizing the negative and maximizing the positive—can help an optimist through tough times that could send a pessimist to a darker, more helpless place.

An optimist may seek new solutions instead of dwelling on problems; they'll often have hope for the future and the coping skills to get through hard times, setting them up to turn a negative situation into a positive one.

Numerous studies have pointed to the conclusion that it's more important for good health to be less pessimistic than it is to be more optimistic. In other words, you don't need to be overly cheery to reap the benefits of not being overly negative. The key seems to come from limiting the negative health impact of overly pessimistic thoughts, while purely positive thinking doesn't have as big an effect.

Conclusion:

The Optimism-Pessimism Spectrum

Psychologists view pessimism and optimism as a spectrum with each of our viewpoints and personalities situated somewhere along that line. At either end of

the spectrum, the pure pessimist may be miserable and the pure optimist may be detached from reality.

Most people lie somewhere in the middle of the pessimism-optimism spectrum. Everyone has their ups and downs when thinking is more negative or positive. Life circumstances and the effects of time and experience can also impact our relative pessimism or optimism. People are also often more optimistic about one area of life and less optimistic about another. However, people's moods and thinking usually lean toward one end or the other of that spectrum resulting in personalities that are more or less pessimistic or optimistic.

There are many reasons why certain people end up with a more or less negative personality, including:

- Genetics
- Family dynamics
- Past experiences
- Social and environmental factors.

Those with more pessimistic outlooks tend to have lower social support, lower resilience, lower ability to cope with stress, and a greater propensity for depression and anxiety disorders.