Taking Care of Busyness: The Effects of a Busy Lifestyle on Optimism Across the Adult Lifespan

Noah Hop, Dr. Edman
Psychology Department, Northwestern College

Introduction

Perceived time pressure has been increasing in Western societies (Gershuny, 2005; Winslow, 2005). A busy lifestyle is a status symbol in our modern world; busy people are perceived as competent and ambitious (Bellezza et al., 2017). Busyness peaks around age 30 and then decreases until age 60 where it tends to level off (Festini et al., 2019). Previous research has shown that in older adults ranging from 50 – 89 years old, a busy lifestyle was associated with better cognition (Festini et al., 2016).

Optimism has been positively related to general physical and psychological wellbeing (Alarcon, Bowling, & Khazon, 2013; Scheier & Carver, 1992). A positive relation has also been found between optimism and life satisfaction (Chang, Maydeu-Olivares, & D'Zurilla, 1997). In older adults, it has been shown that optimism can mediate stress and psychological health (Bretherton & McLean, 2015). It is questioned whether an individual's level of busyness relates to their self-reported optimism.

The amount of control that a person perceives they have over their life may be a mediating factor in the relationship between busyness and optimism. Locus of control (LOC) refers to an individual's perception of factors that account for the outcomes in their lives (Rotter, 1966). Locus of control has been shown to vary across cultures (Cheng et al., 2013). The question is raised whether different types of cultures, such as different age groups, affect perceptions of locus of control. The varying cultures of different cohorts may result in distinct beliefs of control, having implications on self-reported busyness and optimism. The nature of young adulthood often comes with many responsibilities that may feel forced upon oneself such as college course work or entering the workforce with little flexibility. Higher levels of external locus of control have been shown to negatively correlate with optimism (Suárez-Álvarez et al., 2016). Older individuals may come to the realization that their self-report of busyness is completely in their control, which would result in higher internal locus of control. Internal locus of control has been correlated to higher levels of optimism (Hodges & Winstanley, 2012; Suárez-Álvarez et al., 2016).

Method

Total of 127 participants
- 80 males , 46 females, 1 unidentified
- Age ranging from 19 to 66 (M = 35.17, SD = 10.71)
- 74% Caucasian

Materials:
- Martin and Park Environmental Demands Questionnaire (MPED)
- Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R)
- Bi-Dimensional Method of Locus of Control

Hypotheses

1. **Older adults who report higher levels of busyness will simultaneously report higher levels of optimism.**
2. **In younger adults, a busier lifestyle will result in lower self-reports of optimism.**
3. **Younger adults with higher reports of busyness will have a lower sense of control over their lives.**
4. **Older adults who report high busyness will also report a high sense of control over their lives.**

Results

Testing hypotheses 1 & 2:
Multiple regression: (R^2 = .06, F(2, 123) = .249, p = .780)
Not Supported

Testing hypotheses 3 & 4:
Hierarchical Linear Regression:
Step 1:
Regression with age as predictor variable: (R^2 = .002, F(1, 122) = .225, p = .636)
Not Supported
Step 2:
Multiple regression: (R^2 = .26, F(3, 120) = 13.832, p < .001)
- External LOC = (β = .19, p = .01)
- Internal LOC = (β = .22, p = .01)

Conclusion

- It can be beneficial to know that age doesn't affect busyness and optimism.
- These results may help reveal the nature of busyness. Some of our daily tasks are imposed on us, while other tasks are taken on by choice.
- It is possible that current feelings of busyness may impact reports of average busyness.

Limitations:
- Sample lacked older participants (only 15 were ≥ 50)
- Optimism Measure cautions (Chronbach's alpha = .50)
- Data was gathered during a pandemic which may have impacted reports of busyness and optimism

Future Directions

- Older sample
- Model looking at only retired individuals
- Different measure of optimism
- Religious sample
- Personality variable

Sources

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