

HOPE AS A MEDIATOR BETWEEN PERSONALITY TRAITS AND LIFE SATISFACTION

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Abstract: The paper focuses on the question whether hope mediates the effect of personality traits on life satisfaction. It is based on the assumption that the cognitive ability to perceive the possibility of reaching one's own personal goals is an important outcome of personality traits as well as a strong predictor of life satisfaction. The research sample consisted of 451 secondary school and university students in Slovakia with mean age 20.02 years. Hope Scale (Snyder, 1995), Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985), and NEO Five Factor Inventory (Costa, McCrae, 1992, Slovak version Ruisel, Halama, 2007) were used to measure the defined characteristics. The results showed that hope acts as a partial mediator between neuroticism, conscientiousness and life satisfaction, and a full mediator between extraversion and life satisfaction.

Key words: hope, life satisfaction, big five personality traits

INTRODUCTION

The ability to see one's own personal goals as reachable and accessible is frequently mentioned as a very important factor in general well-being. Several concepts were developed to describe this phenomenon, e.g. self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982), optimism (Scheier, Carver, 1985), etc. Most of them have appeared in the area of the social cognitive approach, which implies that this ability is primarily of a cognitive nature. One of the theories dealing with the question of how people think about the accessibility of their personal goals is Hope theory (Snyder, 1995, 2000). Snyder defined hope as a sum of perceived capabilities to produce routes to desired goals along with the perceived

motivation to use these routes (Snyder, 2000). As this definition implies, his theory defines two basic components of hope-related thinking: pathways and agency. Pathways thinking is a perceived ability to produce plausible routes to goals. It is related to mental representations of possible ways for goals to be reached. Agency thinking reflects a person's perception that he or she can move towards the goals and persevere in the goal journey. According to Snyder, overall hope results from the integration of both pathway and agency, because the components enhance each other in the goal pursuit process.

Since the Hope theory was established, many studies have confirmed that hope, as understood in this approach, is positively related to well-being and optimal psychological functioning. It was found to be positively related to general well-being, life satisfaction, self-esteem and meaning

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in life (e.g., Magaletta, Oliver, 1999; Halama, Dědová, 2005; Mascaro, Rosen, 2005). Usually, this effect is discussed in the context of cognitive dynamics. Positive beliefs and assumptions about goals produce more positive feelings related to self as well as to life in general (Snyder, 2000).

Although Snyder defined hope as a primarily learned characteristics based on a reinforcing environment, research showed that hope is positively correlated with basic personality traits, e.g. as defined in big five factor theory. Halama and Dědová (2005) found that hope correlated negatively with neuroticism and positively with extraversion and conscientiousness. What is more, Mascaro and Rosen (2005) also found positive correlation for hope and agreeableness. This leads to consideration of the role of temperament and other personality traits in the process of cognition related to positive functioning (Salovey et al., 2001).

The present study links these three areas of human functioning: personality traits, hope and life satisfaction. It tries to answer a question, namely, whether hope mediates the relationship between personality traits and life satisfaction. This relationship was confirmed in many studies reporting neuroticism, extraversion and conscientiousness as most frequent predictors of well-being (e.g., Schimmack et al., 2004; Hayes, Joseph, 2002; Hřebíčková et al., 2010); less research, however, has focused on the processes behind this relationship. It is hypothesized in this study that a tendency to experience positive feelings towards goals (coming from extraversion and conscientiousness) can enhance hope and subsequently life satisfaction, and also that negative feelings (such as anxiety and depressive mood as expressed in neuroticism) can decrease hope and, subsequently, life satisfaction.

METHOD

Sample

The research sample consisted of 451 secondary school and university students from different Slovak regions (216 males and 235 females, age ranged from 16 to 35 years with mean 20.02 and standard deviation 3.04). They filled out the set of questionnaires voluntarily during the lessons.

Measures

Hope Scale (HS, Snyder, 1995) was used to measure the level of hope in life. It has 12 items (4 items are distracters) and it defines hope in terms of Snyder's (1995, 2000) understanding of hope mentioned above, consisting of two dimensions - pathway and agency.

NEO Five Factor Inventory (NEO FFI, Costa, McCrae, 1992, Slovak version Ruisel, Halama, 2007) was used to measure personality traits. The questionnaire measures five personality factors as defined in big five theory: neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness. It has 60 items (12 for every dimension) and it is one of the most used questionnaires in current personality research.

Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) was used to measure life satisfaction. It was created by Diener et al. (1985). It is a short, 5-item scale measuring general sense of life satisfaction and it is one of the most used scales to assess the general aspect of well-being.

RESULTS

In the analysis, Baron and Kenny's (1986) four criteria for evaluating medi-

ation effect were used to assess whether hope mediated the relationship between personality traits and life satisfaction. Their criteria imply that if mediation occurs, 1) personality trait should be significantly associated with life satisfaction; 2) personality trait should be significantly associated with hope; 3) hope should significantly affect life satisfaction after controlling for personality; 4) and after controlling for hope, personality effect on life satisfaction should be significantly reduced or even zero. In the first step, Pearson correlations were computed between all measured variables. They are presented in Table 1. As we see, four personality traits have significant relationship with life satisfaction. However, only three of them (neuroticism, extraversion, conscientiousness) have a significant relationship with hope, which is a condition for considering the hypothesis that hope operates as a mediator between personality traits and life satisfaction.

In the next step, multiple regression analysis was used to evaluate mediation effect of hope. Figure 1 presents three

mediation analyses with regression coefficients representing effect of personality traits (neuroticism, extraversion, conscientiousness) on hope, effect of hope on life satisfaction after controlling for personality trait, as well as effect of personality traits on life satisfaction after controlling for hope. In all three cases, effect of personality traits on life satisfaction was reduced after controlling for mediation effect of hope. Effect of neuroticism on life satisfaction (Figure 1a) decreased from -0.316 (direct effect without mediation) to -0.219 (effect after controlling for mediation), suggesting that approximately 31% of this effect is mediated by hope. In the case of extraversion (Figure 1b), the effect was reduced from 0.179 to a non-significant value close to zero, showing that there is full mediation. Finally, the mediation effect of hope between conscientiousness and satisfaction (Figure 1c) was shown to explain 48% (decrease from 0.316 to 0.165) of the direct effect. Sobel test was performed to estimated significance of the mediation effect and it confirmed that the all three mediations were significant.

Table 1. Pearson correlations between personality traits, hope and life satisfaction

	N	E	O	A	C	HS
N	-					
E	-0.223**	-				
O	0.017	0.079	-			
A	-0.148**	0.194**	0.016	-		
C	-0.200**	0.112*	-0.015	0.153**	-	
HS	-0.292**	0.377**	0.083	-0.06	0.367**	-
SWLS	-0.316**	0.179**	-0.008	0.167**	0.285**	0.381**

* $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$

N - neuroticism, E - extraversion, O - openness to experience, A - agreeableness, C - Conscientiousness, HS - Hope Scale, SWLS - Satisfaction With Life Scale

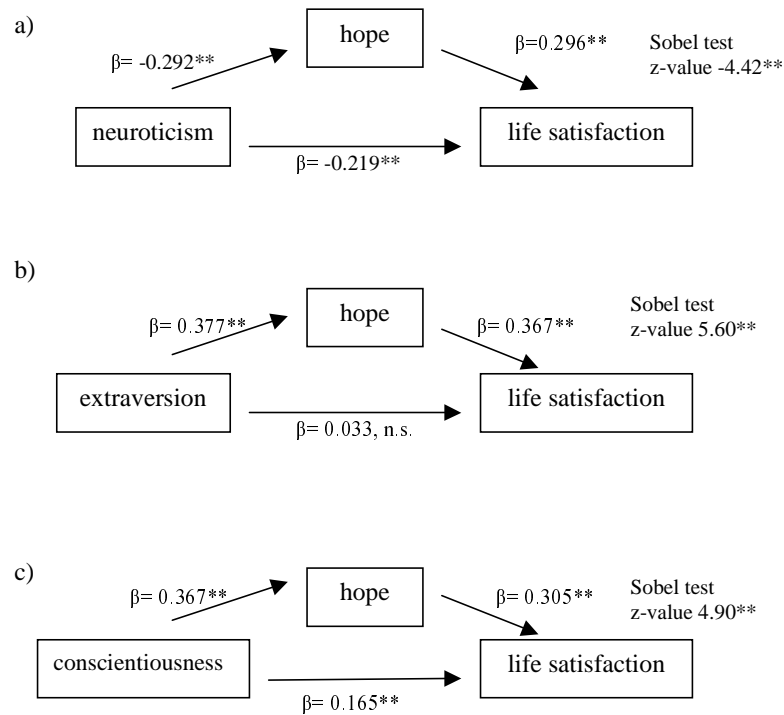


Figure 1. Models of hope as a mediator between personality traits and life satisfaction (** $p \leq 0.01$)

DISCUSSION

The correlation analysis confirmed that hope showed a relationship of middle level with two personality traits: extraversion and conscientiousness. These results are consistent with previous research findings (Halama, Dědová, 2007; Mascaro, Rosen, 2005). Conscientiousness is a trait related to having goals and the ability to manage one's own goals through self-discipline and organizing (Ruisel, Halama, 2007).

The experience of being successful can produce positive thinking in relation to future goals. Also, extraversion refers to positive emotions related to vitality and life energy. These feelings could be a source of agency thinking, which is considered to be a component of hope. Similarly, neuroticism, which was found to have a negative relationship with hope, refers to the tendency to experience negative feelings that could contribute to negative thinking about future goals and one's own ability to achieve them. On the other

hand, the relationship between agreeableness and hope (Mascaro, Rosen, 2005) was not confirmed in the present sample. Correlations between life satisfaction with personality also showed a pattern similar to previous research (Hayes, Joseph, 2002; Hřebíčková et al., 2010), i.e. positive correlation with extraversion, conscientiousness as well as agreeableness, and negative correlation with neuroticism.

Testing mediation confirmed that hope acts as a mediator. In the case of extraversion, full mediation was found, which means that all the effect of extraversion on life satisfaction is mediated by hope. Previous research by Schimmack et al. (2004) revealed that life satisfaction is predicted by the facet of extraversion known as Positive emotions. The results of this study suggest that the effect of positive emotions has no direct influence on life satisfaction, but increases hope, and subsequently, hope increases life satisfaction. Although not researched in this study, it could be assumed that agency thinking especially could play an important role in this mediation, as Snyder (2000) considers it as the willpower of hope. On the other hand, neuroticism can have opposite (negative) effect on agency thinking. The analysis confirmed that neuroticism decreases hope, and in this way a person experiences less life satisfaction. As was said before, higher negative emotions can block a perceived ability to achieve personal goals, which has a negative impact on life satisfaction.

Concerning conscientiousness, the results also confirmed that hope mediated its effect on life satisfaction. The mediation could in this case be connected with pathway thinking. Prenda and Lachman (2001) found that conscientiousness predicts planning for the future and subsequently higher planning for the future increases life satisfaction. They have also found that an im-

portant role in this mediation is played by the sense of control. Therefore, it could be assumed that the trait of conscientiousness leads to higher perception of perceived routes to goals and better ability to plan the achievement of personal goals. This leads to higher perception of a sense of control over life and in this way to higher life satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

Results of the present study indicate that although most basic personality traits are understood in the sense of emotions (e.g., positive vs. negative), cognitive processes can play an important role in the route by which these traits affect other important variables and everyday behavior. In this study it was shown that hope-related thinking could be understood as a mediator between personality traits (extraversion, conscientiousness, neuroticism) and life satisfaction. The present study refers to goal-related cognitions; however, other types of cognitions could also be considered in further research.

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NÁDEJ AKO MEDIÁTOR MEDZI OSOBNOSTNÝMI ČRTAMI A ŽIVOTNOU SPOKOJNOSŤOU

P. H a l a m a

Súhrn: Príspevok sa zameriava na otázku, či nádej pôsobí ako mediátor vplyvu osobnostných črt na životnú spokojnosť. Je založený na predpoklade, že kognitívna schopnosť percipovať možnosť dosiahnutia svojich cieľov je významným dôsledkom osobnostných črt ako aj silným prediktorom životnej spokojnosti. Výskumný súbor pozostával zo 451 študentov stredných a vysokých škôl na Slovensku s priemerným vekom 20.02. Škála nádeje (Snyder, 1995), Škála spokojnosti so životom (Diener et al., 1985), a NEO päťfaktorový inventár (Costa, McCrae, 1992, Slovenská verzia Ruisel, Halama, 2007) boli použité na meranie definovaných charakteristík. Výsledky ukázali, že nádej pôsobí ako čiastočný mediátor vzťahu medzi neurotizmom, svedomitou a životnou spokojnosťou a ako úplný mediátor vzťahu medzi extraverziou a životnou spokojnosťou.

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