CHAPTER – VII

SUMMARY

7.1 SUMMARY

Over the years, the question of how people can improve their happiness is the focus of both – public interest as well as scientific interest. Nowadays, many self-help books and magazine sidebars boast secrets to happiness but are not grounded in any scientific evidence or theory. Fortunately, research in the field of positive psychology has emerged to answer and guide scientists towards questions of human thriving; especially the personal experiences of happiness. Recently, many promising approaches have been formulated to increase happiness, which is generally known as Positive Psychology Interventions (PPI), i.e. treatments, methods, or simple intentional activities that aim to cultivate positive feelings, cognitions and behaviours which can precipitate meaningful increase in happiness. Tracking the progression of research on character strengths over the past few years has paved way from exploratory studies towards action-oriented researches. Psychologists have had success in using interventions to enhance single character strength (McCullough, Pargament & Thoresen, 2000b; Emmons & McCullough, 2003) and recently Breen, Kashdan, Lenser & Fincham, (2010) have examined theoretically linked character strengths gratitude and forgiveness together with positive psychological processes. Although, now gratitude and forgiveness are being considered in unison in several training programs in West, but a similar kind of work in this area is not much dwelled upon in our Eastern culture.

Since the purpose of the present research was to examine whether the program designed for the study i.e. Strength Building Program (SBP) which comprised of ‘gratitude’ and ‘forgiveness’ activities contributes towards enhancing the existing level of the above said strengths. It further aimed to explore if enhancement of these strengths together could spill over its effect and enhance participant’s happiness level as well. Hence, the present study is an initiative to provide a scientific foundation for
a variety of techniques (exercises on ‘gratitude’ and ‘forgiveness’) that can be implemented to improve and attain greater happiness.

Based on the focus of the study the following objectives were formulated for the current research:

- The first objective was to examine the distribution of gratitude, forgiveness and happiness among Indian youth.

- The second objective was to design Strength Building Program of gratitude and forgiveness by compiling adequate exercises proposed by positive psychologists (Miller, 1995; Krech, 2002; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Baskin & Enright, 2004; Tangney, Boone & Dearing, 2005 Worthington, 2006; Lyubomirsky, 2009) that intended to enhance the above said strengths and would check its effect on happiness (outcome variable).

- The third objective was to test the efficacy of Strength Building Program of gratitude and forgiveness using pre post quasi-experimental design, for which the study aimed to have an experimental group and a control group. Participants low on both character strengths i.e. gratitude and forgiveness were incorporated in the final sample. The experimental group consisted of students (participants) who received Strength Building Program. The control group consisted of students didn’t received Strength Building Program. The pre and post Strength Building Program scores on gratitude, forgiveness and happiness were compared for experimental and control groups.

Based on the focus of the study, theoretical conceptualizations, review of literature, and empirical evidences available following hypotheses have been formulated for the current research:

H1: Gratitude and forgiveness among youth receiving Strength Building Program in experimental group would significantly increase from pre to post-training period as compared to the control group.
H2: Happiness among youth in experimental group would significantly increase from pre to post-training period as compared to the control group.

H3: Increase in gratitude and forgiveness would be maintained in post-training sequential evaluation i.e. from time-1 to time-2.

H4: Increase in happiness would be maintained for both post-training sequential evaluation i.e. from time-1 to time-2.

Design for the present study

The present study aimed at designing Strength Building Program (SBP) to educate youth about the concept and relevance of character strengths i.e. Gratitude and Forgiveness in our daily lives and to enhance their existing levels through eight activities on gratitude and forgiveness which in turn was expected to consequently raise their level of happiness. Pre post quasi time-series experimental design was used with baselines scores on independent variables i.e. gratitude and forgiveness and outcome variable i.e. happiness were considered as pre-test scores and the post-test scores on the same were recorded at two times i.e. immediately at the end of SBP and a month after the program.

Sampling procedure and the tools

A total of 400 students from various colleges of Chandigarh were targeted for the study. The inclusion criterion for the sample of the study was as follows:

- Age would range from 18-22 years
- Sample encompassed females (unmarried) only
- Females from intact families of urban middle class were included
- Students enrolled in bachelor courses only were comprised in the present study (Government and private colleges)

They were administered Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS; Peterson and Seligman, 2003) and their scores were noted down. Out of these 400 students, 160 were found to be low on strength of gratitude and 164 students were
found to be low on forgiveness (with score equal to 18 or less as per VIA-IS scoring). Finally, 160 students (commonly found to be low on both the character strengths of gratitude and forgiveness) formed as the participants for administration of Strength Building Program. Further, out of 160 students, 100 students were randomly selected for the formation of experimental or the training group and were also divided into groups of 10 each. Each experimental group was trained on strengths of gratitude and forgiveness for four days (two days to each strength) and follow up was done after a gap of 30 days from administration of Strength Building Program. Also, N= 100 formed the control or no-training group and were also divided into groups of 10 each. Each control group narrated about their lives, shared their earlier memories or just described their living room. Participants shared their experiences and gave weekly feedback through e-mail to the researcher.

The tools used for pre-post measurement of the scores on character strengths and happiness were Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (Peterson and Seligman, 2003) and Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky and Lepper, 1999) respectively.

*Description of framing SBP (Strength Building Program)*

Since the focus of the study was to educate and train youth on strengths of gratitude and forgiveness, the researcher made extensive visits to different colleges of Chandigarh, interacted with the teachers and gauged their seminar room and laboratory condition. The rationale behind specifically selecting the youth for the present study was that, with the advent of modernization and advancement, today’s youth has fallen short of such strengths of character. Their morals, ethics and values are fading to the extent that it is the need of the hour to culminate and develop gratitude and forgiveness among them. Imparting these character strengths would be a potentially important route to view themselves as confident, efficacious and optimistic thereby contributing to increased happiness.

Exercises by noted authors like (Miller, 1995; Krech, 2002; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Bskin & Enright, 2004; Tangney, Boone & Dearing, 2005; Worthington, 2006; Lyubomirsky, 2009) were thoroughly examined and adapted in
form of explanation and relevant examples in order to suit the Indian culture and mindset. This initial draft of the program was sent to Seligman & Peterson and Lyubomirsky for their expert comments and suggestions. The final draft after the changes was resent for a review after which it was ready to be administered.

Statistical analyses

Descriptive statistics was applied to the data to obtain means, standard deviations and percentages. To test the efficacy of Strength Building Program, ANCOVA was used on the independent variables of gratitude, forgiveness and on outcome variable of happiness at baseline, immediately after the program (time-1) and a month subsequent to the program (time-2). The size of effect on the variables was also calculated using Cohen’s d effect size method.

7.2 CONCLUSIONS

Distribution of Gratitude and Forgiveness; Happiness

The results showed the following distribution for gratitude and forgiveness among the total sample i.e. (N=400). 40% of youth were low, while 38% and 22% were falling in moderate and high category of the strength of gratitude. Similarly, percentage and distribution for low, moderate and high on the strength of forgiveness was 41%, 34% and 25% respectively. Further, percentage of youth population on the outcome variable of happiness was 47%, 30% and 23% for low, moderate and high category respectively.

Thus, an overview of results imply that majority of youth who formed the final sample were moderate to low on both the strengths of gratitude and forgiveness. This also reiterated the fact that there was a requirement for such a program that can enhance not just the strengths but also lead to greater happiness.

Also, the findings reveal (r = 0.84, p<.001) statistically significant relationship between gratitude and forgiveness i.e. they are complementary to each other and they both affect each other and when these two strengths are ‘packaged’ together and
practiced with wider variety of activities, subsequently paves way towards improvement in youth’s well being and happiness.

**Effect of SBP (Strength Building Program) on Gratitude and Forgiveness; Happiness**

An overview of the results of the present study portrays, that gratitude was significant on both time-1 and time-2 sequential evaluation (F = 11.984, p < .001) and (F = 12.178, p < .001). The effect size of Strength Building Program (SBP) for gratitude during both time-1 and time-2 sequential evaluation was 0.68 and 0.90 respectively. The findings also revealed that forgiveness was found to be significant on both time-1 and time-2 of sequential evaluation (F = 10.782, p < .001) and (F = 28.362, p < .001). The effect size of Strength Building Program (SBP) forgiveness during both time-1 and time-2 of sequential evaluation was 0.76 and 0.94 respectively. Hypotheses of the present study outlined as ‘Gratitude and forgiveness among youth receiving Strength Building Program in experimental group would significantly increase from pre to post-training period as compared to the control group’ and ‘Increase in gratitude and forgiveness would be maintained in post-training sequential evaluation i.e. from time-1 to time-2’ has been supported.

Further, the results revealed that the outcome variable happiness was significant on both time-1 and time-2 of sequential evaluation (F = 8.739, p < .001) and (F = 8.455, p < .001). The effect size of the program for happiness during both time-1 and time-2 of sequential evaluation was 0.58 and 0.67 respectively. Hypotheses of the present study outlined as ‘Happiness among youth in experimental group would significantly increase from pre to post-training period as compared to the control group’ and ‘Increase in happiness would be maintained for both post-training sequential evaluation i.e. from time-1 to time-2’ has been confirmed. Thus, final picture of the results revealed that participants of the experimental group were exposed to the program and showed an enhancement in both the character strengths i.e. gratitude and forgiveness and consequently also augmented their happiness during both time-1 and time-2 sequential evaluations as compared to participants of the control group who were just not part of the training program.
The enhancements in the above said study variables may be taken as the indices of the efficacy of the program. An intriguing fact of the present research revealed that although the exercises incorporated in Strength Building Program like “Writing a letter expressing thanks”, “Counting blessings versus burdens’, Performing Naikan’, “Writing an apology: asking for forgiveness” etc has been tailored in West and have proved to be successful on Western sample but indeed has confirmed its worth and effectiveness on our Eastern sample as well. The exercises proved to fit well and delivered beneficial outcomes for Indian youth – highlighting the fact that people around the globe want to be happy and can be happy. The underlying gain could be accounted to the most important ingredient of the program i.e. practice of ‘intentional activities’. These activities had the potential due to its intentional character, dynamic and varying nature provided new experiences, created positive change and had the capacity to advance to the participant’s happiness level.

Further, the reasons for enhancement were also confirmed theoretically. Gratitude and forgiveness are considered as two sides of a social coin i.e. a person filled with gratitude cannot help but forgive and if a person is capable of forgiving others, then, he/she is much more able to be grateful. Strengths of gratitude and forgiveness have been categorized under the virtue ‘transcendence’ and ‘temperance’ respectively by Peterson & Seligman, (2003). However, recently psychologists have reached a consensus that these strengths could be conceptualized together under the same cluster or factor. Hence, the findings of the present study are in line with the conceptualizations proposed by Macdonald, Bore & Munro, 2008 who have identified four factors on analysis of twenty four character strengths and clubbed gratitude and forgiveness under the factor of ‘Niceness’ and more recently Brdar & Kashdan (2010) adds gratitude and forgiveness to ‘Interpersonal’ factor thereby reflecting the importance of the shared impact of gratitude and forgiveness on relationship processes and well-being (happiness being its component).

The findings clearly implied that though gratitude and forgiveness possess distinct attributions yet share a common and fundamental component of empathy and philanthropic behaviour (Karremans, Van Lange & Holland, 2005). Beyond the “head” strengths (love of learning, open mindedness, perspective) that are intellectual
and self-oriented, the present findings showed that strengths of (gratitude and forgiveness), are the strengths of the “heart”, i.e. ‘emotional’ and ‘interpersonal’ in nature, that plays an important role and are the key factors in determining youth’s happiness level.

Fortunately the emerging reasons, theories and perspectives to believe that the pursuit of happiness is indeed a practical and attainable goal comply with the findings of the present study as the program stimulated positive thoughts (cognitive), lead to an increase in positive emotions (affective), which in turn triggered positive behaviours (connative) among youth. Therefore, increase in positive emotions triggered by eight positive activities on ‘gratitude’ and ‘forgiveness’ mediated the relationship between the activity and the subsequent improvements in resources such as well-being and happiness.

Another most intriguing aspect of the our findings was that it defies the research evidence which states that Westerners gain more in positive activity (namely expressing gratitude and optimism) than Easterners (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2011). It can be said as the sample of the present study was Indian youth and they not just advanced their knowledge on prospects and practices on character strengths, indeed achieved and maintained through the positive activities on these strengths and attained a greater level of happiness as well.

7.3 IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

In light of the findings of the present research the following implications have been outlined for reviewing and revamping the activities for positive youth development. The student life is a stage of exciting personality growth and character development. It is simply a tough period as it involves transition to even a more complex world that is marked by a number of life changes. The numerous studies and research in the field of positive psychology shows that happiness can be achieved by encouraging and nurturing these strengths in our daily life.

It is evident from the findings of the present study that Strength Building Program (SBP) effectively suited and benefited to an Indian sample, especially youth.
The present day times are beset with a variety of significant problems among youth – such as – greed, envy, selfishness, anxiety, depression, violence and crime. Also, it is evident from the findings that majority of students were low to moderate on strengths of gratitude and forgiveness. Thus, findings suggest need for a greater focus on character strengths to be integrated into counselling settings, psycho-educational and developmental programs as it can prove to be a progressive step to foster a shift in values and behaviour that is the need of the hour towards a sustainable future – which will ultimately impact youth’s happiness. Although Western schools are already committed to ‘character education’ for eg: Britain’s national educational strategy includes the social and emotional aspects to learning (SEAL Program, 2010) and similarly in USA, many states have standards and policies related to social and emotional learning eg: (CASEL, 2009) (Greenberg & Harris, 2012). Therefore, such programs or plans if applied can have significant implications for educators, parents, mental health professionals and policy makers who concern themselves with promoting positive youth development.

At a more practical level, our results suggests that parents should also be provided with similar sorts of such programs with activities and exercises adapted to their understanding, needs and demands. Parents are considered to be important socializing agents and it is seen that their children look upto them and follow their ways of behaving. So, our findings recommend that it would be worthy to provide parental programs in combination with programs for children and youth in schools and colleges respectively for firm construction of ethics and morality.

All the facts discussed so far target all youth. The findings of the study further imply that similar kinds of programs with strengths-based strategies should be employed for specific populations – i.e. youth at-risks such as indulgence in delinquency, involvement in crimes and gang activities. Therefore, the present study’s rationale would act as an antidote and can be applied with various populations with some adaptations and hence could be a better way to approach individuals across various contexts.
7.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- Considering about 25% participant’s who didn’t gain from the program, can be face-to-face interviewed / administer open-ended questionnaire so as future researches can elicit insightful replies from participants’ and gain understanding by probing in as to what they might anticipate from the program.

- Further research can be conducted on other exercises that are proposed and researched in West (one’s that has not being tried out in the present study) that may help youth gain in strengths which in turn promote happiness. Also, if future research could include other relevant character strengths like kindness, hope, humor besides gratitude and forgiveness, then the influence of the program would be better.

- It is suggested to future studies to include different outcome variables such as well-being, life satisfaction, close relationships, coping skills, prosocial behaviour in dealing with these strengths.

- Further investigation may be needed to focus on gender differences and across different cultures as this would enable to modify the program according to the needs and cultural background.

- The results of the training program would show more lasting impact if administered over longitudinal training period of time.