

## Effectiveness of positive psychotherapy on subjective well-being in Women with Veteran Spouses

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### Abstract

**Aim:** This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of positive psychotherapy on subjective well-being in women with veteran spouses.

**Method:** The method of this study was quasi-experimental with a pretest-posttest design with a control group. The statistical population of the research included all women with veteran spouses in Noorabad Mamasani city (Fars Province) in 2023. Using convenience sampling, 30 women with veteran spouses participated in this study and were randomly assigned to the control group (n=15) and experimental group (n=15). The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) were used to collect data. The experimental group received 10 sessions of positive psychotherapy training (PPT), and the control group received no interventions. Data were analyzed using multivariate analysis of covariance.

**Findings:** The findings showed that positive psychotherapy training (PPT) had an effect on subjective well-being ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Conclusion:** It can be concluded that positive psychotherapy training (PPT) can be considered a method to improve subjective well-being in women with veteran spouses. The findings of this study have potentially important implications for professionals and counselors to pay special attention to interventions based on positive psychotherapy for women with veteran spouse.

**Keywords:** Subjective Well-being, Psychotherapy, Women with Veteran Spouses.

## Introduction

The Iran-Iraq war from 1980 to 1988 has left many consequences for veterans and their families that persist long after the war has ended. Combat exposure is associated with an increased risk for veterans' families, in addition to the physical and mental disorders among veterans (Na, Schnurr, & Pietrzak, 2023). War has a profound effect on the mental health and well-being of soldiers, veterans, and victims; military violence has led to malfunctioning communication and disruption of family dynamics and mental health (Murthy & Lakshminarayana, 2006). The psychological problems caused by war usually affect the victims and their families for a long time after the war; that is, the psychological consequences can sometimes last up to 20 years after the war (Taghvaeinia & Mohammad Ebrahim Jahromi, 2020). An injured husband causes the wife to face many problems and reduces her mental health (Ahrenfeldt, 2018). Therefore, war, as a cause of severe stress, has far-reaching consequences for the mental health, well-being, and quality of life of disabled veterans and their families that persist for a long time after the end of the war (Robert et al., 2019). Studies of the general population show a definite increase in the incidence and prevalence of mental disorders. Women are more affected than men (Schabert et al., 2024). Therefore, subjective well-being is one of the most important challenges for women with veteran spouses.

As one emerging topic of positive psychology, subjective well-being reflects a person's subjective evaluation of their life as a whole (Diener & Ryan, 2009). It relates to what constitutes the good life (Diener, Oishi, & Tay, 2018). The subjective element of subjective well-being is essential because people react differently to the same circumstances and evaluate their good life based on their unique expectations, values, and previous experiences (Diener, 1984). Although its evaluation is subjective, subjective well-being is thought to reflect something about the actual conditions of people's lives, including both external conditions such as income and social relationships, as well as internal conditions such as personal goals, outlook on life, and other psychological resources (Diener, 1984). Subjective well-being is a personal perception and experience of positive and negative emotional responses and global and domain-specific cognitive evaluations of satisfaction with life. It has been defined as "a person's cognitive and affective evaluations of his or her life" (Diener, Lucas, & Oishi, 2002). Survey studies have reported that the mental health and well-being of women with veteran spouses and their families are not optimal, and mental disorders in this population show a high rate (Mojahed et al., 2011; Schabert et al., 2024). Moreover, the challenge of modern humans is to get rid of absurdity and futility and to find a solution to deal with the crisis of meaning and achieve higher subjective well-being (Loon et al., 2019). Given the family's pivotal role in providing physical and emotional resources to support members' health during crises, such as periods of illness (Corallo et al., 2017), many solutions used to address individual crises are also applied to family therapy. Timely interventions during crises can lead to better family adaptation and alignment (Mackova et al., 2019).

Since the survivors and victims of wars worldwide receive special facilities to deal with their life challenges and increase their well-being, interventions that can increase subjective well-being in this population are of great importance. Positive psychotherapy (PPT) has been favored recently (Seligman et al., 2005). Based on the theory of positive

psychology, Seligman, Rashid, & Parks (2006) developed PPT. Happiness is the primary goal of positive psychology, which has three significant manageable components: positive emotions, engagement, and meaning (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). PPT increases the levels of subjective well-being and ameliorates depression. Studies have reported that adverse experiences in the families of veterans may lead to a decrease in mental health (Mojahed et al., 2011; Schabert et al., 2024). Therefore, interventions that can increase subjective well-being in this population are of great importance.

Several studies have examined the effectiveness of positive psychotherapy interventions on subjective well-being in women with veteran spouses. Ali-Akbari et al. (2020) showed that positive psychotherapy interventions can improve the well-being of women with veteran spouses. The results of the study by Koydemir, Sökmez, and Schütz (2021) showed the effect of positive psychotherapy on subjective well-being. Philip (2011) showed that positive psychology decreases the consequences of war. Schabert et al. (2024) examined psychological well-being in Europe after the outbreak of war in Ukraine and concluded that well-being levels varied across countries during the war. Data show a significant decline in well-being on the day of the Russian invasion. Recovery over the following weeks was associated with an individual's personality. In general, well-being was lower on days when the war was more salient on social media. The results demonstrate the need to consider psychological interventions. Busseri (2022) showed that well-being improves by increasing positive affect and life satisfaction and decreasing negative affect. Heintzelman, Kushlev, and Diener (2023) showed that positive psychology intervention improves subjective well-being.

Various interventional approaches have been employed to address the psychological and marital issues faced by women with veteran spouses. A review of the research literature reveals that most studies on women with veteran spouses were primarily focused on problem reporting. Hence, it is vital to provide professional mental health services. Therefore, interventions that can increase subjective well-being in this society are of great importance. A review of the research literature shows that the effect of positive psychotherapy interventions on the indicators considered in this research is minimal, and such a study has not been carried out in the community of veterans. Therefore, the fundamental issue of the present research is whether positive psychotherapy affects the subjective well-being of women with veteran spouses. The current research aims to show that positive psychotherapy intervention will reduce negative affect, increase positive affect, and increase satisfaction with life in women with veteran spouses. They can overcome their failures with the help of positive psychotherapy, and ultimately, this intervention improves their subjective well-being.

## Methods

**Research Design:** This research has a semi-experimental design, with a pre-test and post-test with a control group.

**Participants:** The statistical population of the research includes all Women with Veteran Spouses in Noorabad Mamasani city (Fars Province). Using convenience sampling, 30

women with veteran spouses participated in this study and were randomly assigned to the control group (n=15) and experimental group (n=15). Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) and Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) were used to collect data. After random selection of control and experimental groups, the experimental group received 10 sessions of positive psychotherapy training (PPT). The inclusion criteria were as follows: (a) being female or veteran spouses, (b) no use of psychiatric drugs and narcotics, history of hospitalization or mental disorder (assessed through clinical interview), and (c) having a scoreless in the SWB. The exclusion criteria were as follows: (a) practicing PPT before participating in this study and (b) being absent from the sessions. After doing the treatment, post-tests were given to both groups. In order to analyze the data, the multivariate analysis of covariance was used. PPT training included a ten-week, two-hour group therapy sessions developed by Rashid (Rashid, 2013; Table 1). Positive psychology formed the basis of the concepts and theoretical grounds for PI (Lee Duckworth, Steen, & Seligman, 2005). A certified coach was employed to conduct the PPT training independent of the study team.

**Table 1.** Positive psychotherapy Training (PPT) program overview.

<b>Session1</b>	Acquaintance and referrals	Understanding the members of the group with each other, describing the program of positive psychotherapy, and the rules of the meeting
<b>Session2</b>	Familiarity with the positive psychotherapy framework, the role of the therapist, and responsibilities	Talking about the lack of positive resources, such as positive emotions, commitment, positive communication, meaning of character strengths ,and their role in depression, discussion of the positive psychotherapy framework, the therapist's role and limitations, responsibilities, and the responsibilities of the authorities
<b>Session3</b>	Boosting strengths, feelings, and positive emotions	Talking about the 24 character strengths to build and strengthen commitment and fluidity, discussing how to use the strengths, and the role of emotions and positive emotions in a person's well-being
<b>Session4</b>	Introducing forgive	Introducing forgiveness as a powerful tool that can turn feelings of anger and hatred into a neutral emotion, and even for some to feel positive and emotional
<b>Session5</b>	Introducing gratitude and appreciation	Emphasis on good memories and appreciation as a form of sustainability of gratitude, discussion of the role of good memories, and focus on appreciation
<b>Session6</b>	Talking about contentment and exuberance	Talking about contentment and satisfaction instead of excess in the field of pleasure and encouragement of contentment through engagement and commitment

<b>Session7</b>	Introducing the concept of hope and optimism	Remembering good and bad memories and discussing their impact on psychological well-being, discussing cognitive revaluation strategies to rewrite and reinterpret bitter memories, emphasizing the benefits of focusing on positive and constructive memories
<b>Session8</b>	Introducing positive relationships, social communication, and active-constructive feedback	Introducing active-constructive feedback and education on how to react actively and constructively when receiving pleasant news from others
<b>Session9</b>	Talking about gradual and continuous enjoyment:	The gradual and continuous enjoyment discussion as a complete pleasure and deliberative effort awareness to prolong its longest course, would teach how to deal with the introducing enjoyment, the fruitful life discussion as a combination of positive emotions, commitment, positive communication, meaning, success, and progress, and also is discussing about the benefits as well as therapeutic experiences along with those ways for preserving the changes that were created during the positive psychotherapy
<b>Session10</b>	Overview and Conclusion	Integrating the content and processes of the previous sessions, explaining the group therapy experience and its impact, receiving feedback from the group members about their feelings and opinions about the group psychotherapy, preparing members to leave the group, using the positive achievements of positive psychotherapy in the future, reviewing and summarizing the contents, conducting a final poll, and closing.

## Measurements

### Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS)

The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) was designed by Watson et al. (1988). In this study, the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) was used to measure the affective dimension of subjective well-being. PANAS is a self-report questionnaire that consists of two 10-item scales to measure both positive and negative affect. Each item is rated on a 5-point scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely). Watson et al. (1988) computed Cronbach's alpha coefficient for all factors as follows: positive affect (0.88) and negative affect (0.87). This study used the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for positive affect (0.85) and negative affect (0.83) to estimate reliability.

### Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) was designed and validated by Diener et al. (1985) and evaluates the cognitive dimension of subjective well-being. SWLS is a short 5-item instrument designed to measure global cognitive judgments of satisfaction with one's life. The scale usually requires only about one minute of a respondent's time, where respondents answer on a Likert scale. Items are rated on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), and higher scores indicate higher satisfaction with life (Diener et al., 1985). A study (Diener et al., 1985) determined the SWLS reliability using a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.91. This study's reliability was estimated using a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.85 for SWLS.

## Results

The mean age of the participants in the experimental group was 44.81, and in the control group, it was 45.19. The following presents the mean and standard deviation of the subjective well-being subscales in the two experimental and control groups during the test stages.

**Table 2.** Mean and standard deviation of dependent variables.

Dependent Variables	Group	Pre-test		Post-test	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Positive affect	Experimental	32.93	4.06	42.27	5.38
	Control	33.73	6.06	33.47	5.98
Negative affect	Experimental	20.22	5.52	15.53	3.74
	Control	19.33	4.75	19.13	4.61
Satisfaction life	Experimental	14.17	4.93	19.86	6.04
	Control	13.70	4.16	13.96	4.24

The results in Table 2 indicate that the average scores of positive and negative affect, and satisfaction with life have changed significantly in the experimental group. However, only a slight change was observed in the control group. Covariance analysis was used to determine the effectiveness of positive psychotherapy on subjective well-being, but before that, the assumptions related to it were examined. The results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for the normality of the data distribution showed that the significance level of all variables was higher than 0.05, so the data distribution was normal. Levene's test was used to check the assumption of homogeneity of variances, and the results showed that the significance level of all variables was higher than 0.05, so the assumption of homogeneity of variances was established. The results of the multivariate covariance analysis are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Results of MANCOVA on mean scores of dependent variables.

Test	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squard
Wilks' Lambda	2.15	13.32	4	21	0.0001	0.69

The results of the multivariate analysis of covariance (Table 3) indicate that Positive Psychotherapy Training (PPT) was effective in at least one of the dependent variables at a level of 0.01. To investigate this effect, a univariate analysis of covariance was used, and the results are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Results of ANCOVA on mean scores of dependent variables.

Dependent Variable	Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Positive affect	Group	60.34	1	68.44	21.12	0.0001	0.51
	Error	1661.20	28	59.329			
Negative affect	Group	57.99	1	57.99	17.25	0.001	0.45
	Error	185.33	28	66.19			
Satisfaction life	Group	32.85	1	32.85	15.72	0.001	0.48
	Error	1908.53	28	68.62			

The results of the covariance analysis in the above table showed that Positive Psychotherapy Training (PPT) affected subjective well-being, and there was a significant difference between all variables in the two experimental and control groups.

## Discussion

The present study aimed to determine the effectiveness of positive psychotherapy on subjective well-being in women with veteran spouses. The results showed that PPT effectively improves subjective well-being in women with veteran spouses. The findings of the current study corroborated the results of previous studies conducted by local and foreign researchers (Ali-Akbari et al., 2020; Schabert et al., 2024; Philip, 2011; Koydemir et al., 2021; Heintzelman et al., 2023). In explaining the findings of the research, it can be stated that this intervention helps women with veteran spouses to discover meaning and purpose in their lives, enabling them to establish positive social relationships, promote social integration, and receive social support. In addition, they can solve problems, find suitable solutions, and attain psychological satisfaction. Furthermore, PPT aids women with veteran spouses in encountering the challenges of life, establishing positive relationships with others, and accomplishing their goals (Schabert et al., 2024). In PPT, due to increased positive emotions, thoughts, behaviors, and satisfaction, psychological needs boost the feeling of subjective well-being and people's mood (Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013). This is because engaging in some positive activities, such as remembering good and bad memories and rewriting and reinterpreting bitter memories, creates positive emotions in a person. These positive emotions increase individual resources, such as improving subjective well-being and happiness. Several studies have also supported the finding that positive emotions can act as a mechanism for relieving symptoms of depression and promoting subjective well-being (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002). According to some studies, some of the components of PPT, such as recognition of character strengths, are significantly involved in an individual's improved sense of well-being (Proyer et al., 2013; see also, e.g., Buschor et al., 2013; Peterson et al., 2007). Positive psychotherapy training (PPT) can help women with veteran spouses

to regain greater efficiency, not to focus on grief and despair, reduce depressive symptoms, and increase levels of satisfaction. Therefore, it can be assumed that PPT contributes to an increase in the experience of positive emotions by spouses participating in it, and thus contributes to the reduction of depressive symptoms (possibly also negative symptoms). This intervention helps to increase the meaning of life through creating a sense of worth, increasing self-confidence, fulfilling commitments, optimal social efficiency, being receptive to new experiences, planning and doing chores regularly, feeling good, and having short-term and long-term goals (Nuttin, 2014). The emphasis on life satisfaction-related behaviors, such as overcoming life challenges, can be explained by experiencing positive emotions, self-worth, and choosing the desired activities. Satisfied individuals are more likely to be optimistic, hopeful, positive, and interested than dissatisfied individuals.

In contrast, individuals with low life satisfaction consider themselves, their past and future, others, and their life events and situations unfavorable. They experience more negative emotions, such as anxiety and depression (Tsibidaki, 2021). Therefore, there was a significant difference between the groups at the 10th week. On the other hand, subjective well-being scores of the PPT group were significantly improved from baseline to the tenth week, and it is also noteworthy that the above-mentioned variables' scores in the PPT group had greater improvements compared with the control group.

Additionally, as with any scientific research, this study faced inherent challenges and limitations that could influence the results and interpretation of data. One important limitation pertains to the study's sample population. Since the research was conducted solely with women with veteran spouses in Noorabad Mamasani, the results may not be fully generalizable to veteran spouses from other regions or under different conditions. Therefore, caution is warranted when generalizing the findings. Furthermore, the measurement tools used, such as questionnaires, may have limited accuracy due to potential response biases or self-censorship by respondents. Thus, employing complementary data collection methods, such as in-depth interviews or field observations in non-experimental settings, could enhance the accuracy and validity of the findings.

Psychologists can use this intervention to increase the sense of meaning in life and, consequently, the quality of life and mental health. Moreover, this intervention can provide a psychological package for the centers related to the families of veterans so that psychologists and counselors can benefit from it. It should be noted that future studies should be conducted using qualitative or mixed methods to obtain more accurate and in-depth information. The effectiveness of this intervention should also be compared with other interventions to determine its relative efficacy.

## Conclusion

Based on this study's findings, Positive Psychotherapy Training (PPT) is an effective intervention for increasing the subjective well-being of women with veteran spouses. Considering the problems this group of spouses can create for others, this method alone or in combination with other intervention methods can be effective.

## Disclosure Statements

The author declares no conflict of interest for this study.

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