

## BELIEF HEALING: AN APPROACH TO POSITIVE COGNITIVE-BEHAVIORAL PSYCHOLOGY

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**Abstract:** A study was conducted, using belief healing as an approach, to enhance a state of mental well-being referred to as “happiness”. An intervention was carried out over a period of 21-days on a sample of 30 individuals. The intervention included techniques of self-reflection, positive self-affirmations, journal writing and individual counseling. The analysis of the study was done in two parts; quantitative analysis, for evaluating the efficacy of the approach, a pre-post analysis was done on the sample using three scales: Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS), Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ) and Scale for Positive and Negative Experiences (SPANE); and a qualitative analysis, for the purpose of understanding the process, an in-depth analysis of five cases with maximum discrepancy in pre-post scores was carried out. This paper advocates the basic mechanisms underlying belief healing. It concludes by giving a few limitations of this approach.

**Keywords:** Belief healing, happiness, intervention.

**Introduction:** *“The greatest discovery of my generation is that human being can alter his life by altering his attitudes of mind.”*

-William James

Beliefs can be referred to as a psychological state in which an individual holds a conjecture or premise to be true. It can be seen as a as the simplest form of mental representation or can be called as the building blocks of conscious thought. For this paper we define beliefs to be typically conceptualized as estimates of the likelihood that the knowledge one has acquired about a referent is correct or, alternatively, that an event or state of affairs has or will occur (Eagly & Chaiken, 1998; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

Belief healing can be understood as a conscious effort by an individual to identify his/her dysfunctional/irrational beliefs about the reality, through training, release them and replace them with positive and rational ones using positive self-affirmations. The basic mechanisms used in this approach have utilized the principles of Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy (REBT), and a few scientifically proven self-help techniques like: the Sedona Method and positive self-affirmations.

The principles of REBT are used in helping the individual identify the dysfunctional/irrational beliefs. It is based on the concept that emotions and behaviors result from cognitive processes; and that it is possible for human beings to modify such processes to achieve different ways of feeling and behaving. REBT proposes a ‘biopsychosocial’ explanation of causation, i.e. that a combination of biological, psychological, and social factors are involved in the way humans feel and behave (Ellis, 1962). The most basic premise of REBT, is that almost all human emotions and behaviors are the result of what people think, assume or believe (about themselves, other people, and the world in general). It is what people believe about situations they face –

not the situations themselves – that determines how they feel and behave. To say that a belief is irrational means:

1. It blocks a person from achieving their goals, creates extreme emotions that persist and which distress and immobilize, and lead to behaviors that harm oneself, others, and one’s life in general.
2. It distorts reality (it is a misinterpretation of what is happening and is not supported by the available evidence);
3. It contains illogical ways of evaluating oneself, others, and the world.

The Sedona Method (Dwoskin, 1992) is a unique, simple, powerful, easy-to-learn and duplicate technique that shows how to uncover ones natural ability to let go of any painful or unwanted feeling in the moment. The Sedona Method consists of a series of questions an individual asks him/herself that lead their awareness to what they are feeling in the moment and gently guide them into the experience of letting go or releasing that feeling. It is important to note that what we think is what we feel, according to REBT, so releasing either the thought or the feeling will lead to a better state of mind.

Every thought one thinks, every word one says is an affirmation. All of our self-talk or inner dialogue is a stream of affirmations (Hay, 1990). We continually affirm subconsciously with our words and thoughts and this flow of affirmations create our life experience in every moment. Our beliefs are just learned thought patterns that have developed with experience since our childhood, many of them work well for us, but others might be working against us, they are dysfunctional and may sabotage us from achieving what we want. Every affirmation we think or say is a reflection of our inner beliefs. It is important to realize that many of these beliefs may not actually be true for us in the present moment or may be based on invalid or inappropriate impression

we constructed as children, which if examined in the present can be proved as inappropriate. Our subconscious uses the behavior patterns that we have learned to automatically react to many everyday situations. They make reacting and responding quick and easy. Problems arise, if at an early stage some of the foundation beliefs on which many of the others are built were formed from a skewed perspective. The strategy could be appropriate for a perceived difficult circumstance, however often such beliefs are totally inappropriate for succeeding in the real world as adults. One can use "positive affirmations" which are usually short positive statements targeted at a specific subconscious set of beliefs, to challenge and undermine negative beliefs and to replace them with positive self-nurturing beliefs. It is a kind of "brainwashing" only the individual gets to choose which negative beliefs to wash away.

To prove the efficacy of belief healing as an approach a study was conducted, in two parts, which was aimed at enhancing the level of happiness. Happiness is a term interchangeably used with subjective well-being by many researchers. It has found to be associated with numerous tangible benefits, such as enhanced physical health, reduced psychopathology, superior coping skills, and even longer life (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). The science of happiness has received considerable amount of attention in the last decade. The findings have attracted enormous attention because, of course, almost everyone would like to be happier. From this research, we have begun to understand the following:

- Happiness can be measured objectively and over time.
- There is a strong correlation between happiness and the experience of meaning.
- There are many misconceptions about what makes us happy. We can do things—voluntary and intentional activities—to increase our levels of happiness and meaning.

Research studies show that our enduring level of happiness (H) is determined by our happiness set point (S), life circumstances (C) (influenced by aspects of temperament and character such as depression and sleep quality) and intentional or voluntary activities (V). Martin Seligman (2002) proposed an equation for happiness:  $H = S + C + V$ . Further, Sonja Lyubomirsky (2005), a prominent researcher in the field of happiness and author of *The How of Happiness*, attached percentages to these components. She suggested that our—set point, or happiness level determined by birth or genetics, accounts for 50 percent of happiness; circumstances such as marital status, earnings, and looks determine 10 percent; and the remainder of our happiness comes from intentional activities or things we can do to change our happiness level.

The intervention was conducted for a period of 21-days as it is believed that the wiring of the brain with thoughts looks and performs like trees, with branches and fruit. In science, they are called "The magic trees of the mind" because the nerve cells in the brain look like tree branches. Researchers at NASA determined that it only takes 21-42 days to create new habit patterns. It takes 21 days to cause a physical change to replace toxic memories with good memories in the brain. With every new or old thought, we remember and hold our conscious mind. This is known as neuroplasticity. If one doesn't change the toxic thought in that time, it goes back into memory even stronger than it came out.

#### **Method:**

**Participants:** Using the statistical technique of purposive sampling, 30 participants ; 15 males and 15 females of the age range 20-25 years residing in New Delhi, India with majority of them pursuing under graduation or post-graduation and a few having just started working was taken. All belonged to the middle socio-economic strata. Tools included, Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS), The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ) and the Scale of positive and negative experiences (SPANE).

**Procedure:** All the participants were guided to undergo an intervention program with the underlying assumption of enhancing the level of happiness by replacing the irrational beliefs with positive affirmations for a period of 21 days. After the time lapse, a post intervention analysis using the same tools was conducted.

The participants were explained the following steps for identifying and releasing irrational beliefs. The intervention was tailor-made according to each participants situational requirements and individual counseling was given at every step.

- Focus on an issue that you would like to feel better about, and then allow yourself feel whatever you are feeling in this moment.
- Ask yourself one of the three questions; could I let this feeling go? , could I allow this feeling to be here? , could I welcome this feeling?
- No matter what question you started with, ask yourself this simple question; would I? , In other words, 'Am I willing to let go?'
- Ask yourself this simpler question: when?
- Repeat the preceding four steps as often as needed until you feel free of that particular feeling.

**After this process the participants were required to read a few positive affirmations at least once every day. The affirmations were related to self-worth, self-love, self-esteem and self-acceptance.**

**A few of the affirmations were:** I am willing to let go of my critical and negative thoughts about myself and my life, I am powerful, Every day in every way I am getting happier and happier, etc.

The analysis of the study was carried in two phases, quantitative involving all 30 participants and qualitative involving only 5 cases with maximum disparity. It primarily required the participants to

actively engage in introspection and find out beliefs they possessed that were limiting their thinking patterns.

## Results and Discussion: Quantitative Analysis

**Table 1:** Summary Table

S. No.	Test	t-value	p-value
1	Subjective Happiness Scale	4.856072	3.8**
2	Oxford Happiness Questionnaire	3.689809	0.000922*
3	Scale for Positive and Negative Experiences (Positive, Negative and Affect Balance)	2.129319 (P) -4.858016 (N) 4.816638 (B)	0.041843* 3.8** 4.2**

Note: \*p significant at 0.05 levels

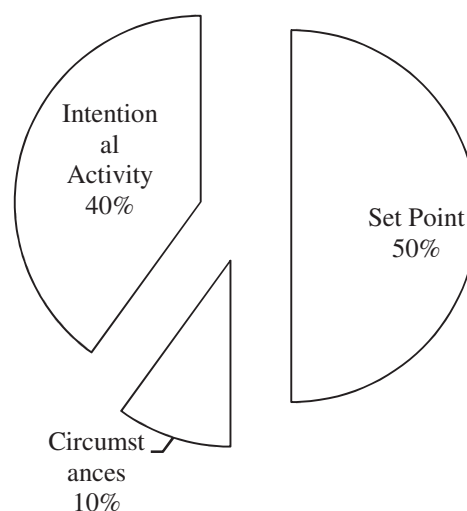
\*\*p Significant at 0.01 levels

Quantitative analysis employed student t – test for the two dependent means to find out the effectiveness of intervention offered. The results suggested a significant difference in the scores of the participants before and after the intervention. The results suggest that there is a significant difference in the scores of the participants before and after the intervention. Scores on all the three tests used to measure the level of happiness show a significant difference. The difference is found to be significant on 0.01 levels for Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS), Scale for Positive and Negative Experiences (SPANE) Negative Affect (SPANE - N) and Affect Balance (SPANE- B) as value of  $p \leq 0.01$  and 0.05 levels for Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ) and Scale for Positive and Negative Experiences (SPANE) Positive Affect (SPANE- P) as value of  $p \leq 0.05$ .

The integrative model of happiness can be used to explain the above found results. It accommodates the role of both personality/genetic and circumstantial/demographic factors in happiness. However, it also goes beyond these cross-sectional or concurrent factors, to incorporate dynamic, time-sensitive factors. Most important, the model incorporates the role of motivational and attitudinal factors, consistent with the assumption that happiness can be actively pursued. The model focuses on namely, the *set point*, *life circumstances*, and *intentional activity* (figure 1). Existing evidence suggests that genetics account for approximately 50% of the population variation (Braungart et al., 1992; Lykken & Tellegen, 1996; Tellegen et al., 1988), and circumstances account for approximately 10% (Argyle, 1987; Diener et al., 1999). This leaves as much

as 40% of the variance for intentional activity, supporting our proposal that volitional efforts offers a promising possible route to longitudinal increases in happiness. In other words, changing one's intentional activities may provide a happiness-boosting potential that is at least as large, and likely much larger, than changing one's circumstances (cited by, Lyubomirsky, Sheldon and Schkade, 2005).

### What Determines Happiness?



**Figure 1:** Three primary factors influencing the happiness level (cited by, Lyubomirsky, Sheldon and Schkade, 2005).

**Qualitative Analysis:** Then for the qualitative research all the 30 participants were asked to maintain a journal, writing down about their experiences for the 21 days. Based on the individual scores in the pre-post analysis, 5 participants who showed the highest discrepancy and also based on the journal review, 5 participants were selected for the in-depth analysis. They were asked questions related to their experience and asking them to describe in detail. The questions were related to the 3 objectives of the research; (1) To find the effectiveness of belief-healing on happiness, (2) To find if Sedona Method helps release strongly held dysfunctional beliefs using narratives, and (3) To find the effect of positive self-affirmations on the levels of happiness using narratives.

The analysis of the content revealed Sedona Method does help release dysfunctional beliefs but it requires persistent, determined and conscious efforts from the individual. It is not easy but the results are positive, liberating and rewarding. Positive self-affirmations help individuals stay positive, hopeful and see life from a different perspective. Some participants mentioned it made them feel confident and self-assured.

**A Case Illustration:** The participant seemed to follow the instructions diligently. To her, the intervention process seemed relevant and meaningful. Letting go of the irrational thoughts via positive affirmations proved highly beneficial. Nonetheless, the process of identification and change appeared challenging. In her purview, the overall experience was 'amazing'. Her outlook of viewing things reformed for good.

From the 21 days journal maintained marked changes were inferred. The Sedona method proved partly effective. She could let go of those beliefs with repeated efforts. She felt better after letting go and could feel the difference in her reality too. Further, could realize that her way of thinking and her beliefs had colored her perception of the world. The use of

positive affirmations helped her see the positive side of her life and shifted her focus. She felt better about herself. She saw an immediate occurrence of all the things she said to herself in her reality. There were things that existed in her reality already but she had just forgotten about them because she was so engrossed in finding faults with herself and her life.

It can be said that the intervention was effective as the participant showed an increase on the scores of all three tests her pre- intervention scores on Subjective Happiness Scale, Oxford Happiness Questionnaire and Scale of Positive and Negative Experiences was 3.75, 3.83 and 18 (positive affect), 15 (negative affect) and 3 (affect balance) respectively; and post- intervention 4.25, 3.76 and 21 (P), 17 (N) and 4 (B).

**Conclusion:** The quantitative analysis revealed a significant difference (positive) between the pre and post scores. Through the qualitative analysis the process of belief healing was confirmed.

Thus, it can be said that belief healing as an approach is effective in increasing happiness to large extent.

The study has the following limitations:

- Due to paucity of resources, such as time, money and labor, the research could not be conducted on a larger sample, thus reducing the extent to which it can be generalized on the population.
- The experiences shared by the participants through journals and in-depth interview can't describe the extent and the intensity of emotions because a few things can only be experienced and can't be defined in words.
- Some participants, who are unable to introspect, require a lot of focus and individual attention which couldn't be possible, due to paucity of resources.
- The methods used in research are just a few out of the many other available. So, this technique is not the only way of increasing the level of happiness.

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