

The role of optimism and self-compassion in teachers' social well-being

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ABSTRACT

Social well-being is an important aspect of health that has not been given due attention so far. Especially in the teachers' group, who play an important role in nurturing the country's future leaders, and the need to pay attention to this issue is felt. Accordingly, the aim of the present study is to determine the role of optimism and self-compassion in teachers' social well-being. The method of conducting the research was descriptive correlational research. The statistical population of this study consisted of all teachers (male and female) in the primary school of Nimroz city, of whom 148 people were selected using a random stratified sampling method according to the Cochran formula. The research tools used were three questionnaires: optimism (Scheyer and Carver, 1985), self-compassion (Neff et al., 2012), and social well-being (Keyes, 2011). Linear and stepwise regression, Pearson correlation coefficient, were used to analyze the research hypotheses. The results showed that optimism and self-compassion were able to significantly predict the social well-being of teachers in Nimroz city. Among the components of optimism, the component of intrinsic optimism and among the components of self-compassion, the component of self-kindness played the most important role in the social well-being of teachers. Also, a significant relationship was observed between optimism and self-compassion and its components with the social well-being of teachers.

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Introduction

Teachers, as individuals who play a crucial role in shaping the future builders of any country, form an essential part of every society. Schools and educational institutions without teachers are akin to lifeless bodies (Ghosh et al., 2024). Teachers hold a vital and indispensable role in the success, progress, and well-being of students' lives. Numerous studies focus on enhancing students' school-life experiences. However, research indicates that improving teachers' well-being is a prerequisite for enhancing students' welfare. Teachers' well-being plays a significant role in their professional growth, students' academic success, mental health, and fostering a positive school climate (Mo, 2024). The World Health Organization defines teachers' well-being as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (Zhang et al., 2024). Teaching, due to the challenges of working with students in crowded classrooms, stress from interactions with parents, colleagues, and superiors, among other factors, can be a significant source of stress for educators. This, in turn, can affect their levels of well-being (Sadat et al., 2019). Research evidence shows that teacher well-being is a critical element in teacher effectiveness, retention, and the well-being of the learners they teach. Thus, increasing well-being among teachers benefits both the individuals themselves and the success of their institutions (Giorgi et al., 2017). Consequently, there is growing interest in identifying protective factors and interventions that promote well-being in the professional context. Well-being can be analyzed through the lens of the depths and complexities of individuals, which is the essence of positive psychology (Wang et al., 2021). Seligman and Peterson (2003) explored human strengths and how individuals can cultivate attributes such as courage, empathy, fairness, self-regulation, optimism, and hope under various life circumstances. Well-being in life and work is a distinct factor often referred to as optimism, reflecting individuals' generalized positive expectations for their future (Song, 2022). Optimism reflects an attitude rooted in the belief or hope that the outcome of a specific effort—or, more broadly, life outcomes—will be positive, desirable, and favorable. It encompasses the expectation that future circumstances will unfold in the best possible way. As a trait, optimism enhances resilience against stress (Wilson & Vandervelde, 2024). Luzinska and Guitierrez-Donahue (2009) concluded in their study that there is a positive relationship between well-being and optimism (Safarinia & Azizi, 2019). Kazemi et al. (2018) found that self-compassion training significantly impacts teachers' academic optimism. Gasper et al. (2019) investigated the distinction between optimism and self-compassion, noting that while both reflect positive attitudes toward future favorable events, their evaluations differ. Self-compassion, as defined and conceptualized by Neff (2023), involves supporting oneself during moments of distress, whether caused by personal failures or external adversities. Neff delineates six core components: self-kindness versus self-judgment, common humanity versus isolation, and mindfulness versus over-identification. Research consistently highlights the positive relationship between self-compassion and mental health across various populations and contexts. Self-compassion contributes to individuals' social and emotional competence and well-being (Neff et al., 2018; as cited by Awwad-Tabari & Lukovich, 2023). It is a vital resource for coping with stress and adversity and is linked to reduced burnout and increased job satisfaction among teachers. Mindfulness and self-compassion are recommended as effective strategies for reducing stress in teachers (Ho, 2023). Koo (2024) found that fostering self-compassion in teachers appears essential for their well-being.

Despite three decades of research and theoretical development on optimism, self-compassion, and social well-being internationally—demonstrating their positive effects in academic and professional domains—these areas have not received adequate attention in Iran. This research seeks to simultaneously study these three concepts and examine the impact of optimism and self-compassion on teachers' social well-being. Addressing this gap is a primary necessity of the study.

The present research aims to investigate the role of optimism and self-compassion in teachers' social well-being. Exploring the factors influencing social well-being and determining their significance can guide strategic decision-making and enhance the educational system's efficiency and effectiveness. Consequently, this study's findings are expected to benefit policymakers, educational administrators, school leaders,

teachers, and future researchers. Based on the discussions above, the central question of this research is: Can optimism and self-compassion predict teachers' social well-being?

Method

This study was conducted using a descriptive-correlational method.

Sample and Sampling Method

Given that the primary aim of the present study was to determine the role of optimism and self-compassion in predicting teachers' social well-being, this research is applied in purpose and descriptive with a correlational approach in method. The statistical population included all elementary school teachers (male and female) in Nimrouz County during the 2021-2022 academic year, totaling 250 individuals.

Tools Used

Life Orientation Test by Scheier and Carver (1985)

Designed by Scheier and Carver (1985), this questionnaire consists of 10 items and assesses two subscales: inherent optimism (items 1-7) and inherent pessimism (items 8-10). It uses a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Items 7, 9, and 10 are reverse-scored. Scores range from 0 to 24, with higher scores indicating greater optimism. Scheier and Carver (1985) reported a Cronbach's alpha reliability of 0.75. In Marshall and Lang's (1990) study, the reliability was 0.78. Hassanshahi (2002) reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.74 and a test-retest reliability of 0.65.

Self-Compassion Scale by Neff et al. (2012)

This 10-item questionnaire evaluates self-compassion across five dimensions: self-kindness, self-judgment, common humanity, mindfulness, and over-identification. It employs a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always). In Shahbazi et al.'s (2015) study, the Cronbach's alpha for the overall scale was 0.91. In [Khosravi et al.'s \(2013\)](#) study, the alpha was reported at 0.76. [Dasht Bozorgi and Homayi \(2018\)](#) found a Cronbach's alpha of 0.81 for this questionnaire.

Social Well-Being Scale by Keyes (2011)

This standardized questionnaire consists of 15 items across five subscales: social integration, social acceptance, social actualization, social coherence, and social contribution. Responses are scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Keyes (2011) reported internal consistency reliability for the overall score at 0.78, with subscale reliabilities ranging from 0.41 to 0.73. In [Hemati-Rad et al.'s \(2018\)](#) study, the Cronbach's alpha was 0.74. [Safarinia and Azizi \(2019\)](#) reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.81.

Procedure

This study was conducted using a descriptive-correlational method. The statistical population included all teachers (male and female) at the primary school level in Nimroz city, from which 148 individuals were selected using stratified random sampling based on Cochran's formula. In the initial stage, after obtaining necessary permissions and coordinating with education officials, three questionnaires of optimism (Scheier & Carver, 1985), self-compassion (Neff et al., 2012), and social well-being (Keyes, 2011) were distributed among the participating teachers. After completion of the questionnaires by participants and data collection,

the obtained information was analyzed using linear and stepwise regression tests and Pearson correlation coefficient.

Results

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variables	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Inherent Optimism	148	14.61	4.88	7	28
Inherent Pessimism	148	5.63	2.91	0	9
Optimism	148	20.25	4.35	10	31
Self-Kindness	148	4.25	1.63	2	8
Self-Judgment	148	4.17	1.76	2	8
Common Humanity	148	4.23	1.91	2	8
Mindfulness	148	5.18	1.67	2	10
Over-Identification	148	5.00	1.67	2	10
Self-Compassion	148	22.85	6.26	13	40
Social Participation	148	6.64	2.18	3	12
Social Acceptance	148	6.82	2.19	3	12
Social Flourishing	148	7.93	2.29	3	15
Social Coherence	148	7.11	2.71	3	14
Social Bonding	148	6.53	2.19	3	12
Social Well-Being	148	35.05	8.22	20	57

Table 2: Summary Results of Linear Regression Model of Optimism and Self-Compassion with Social Well-Being

Variables	R	Adjusted R ²	F	β	t	sig
Optimism	0.368	0.130	22.93	0.368	4.78	0.001
Self-Compassion	0.359	0.123	21.54	0.359	4.64	0.001

The data in Table 2, regarding the simultaneous regression results for optimism and social well-being of teachers, indicates that optimism, with an adjusted R² value of 0.130 (13%), significantly predicts the social well-being of teachers. This prediction is meaningful at a 99% confidence level, as evidenced by the values

$F=22.93$, $\beta=0.368$, $t=4.78$, and $P<0.01$. Thus, it can be concluded that optimism significantly predicts the social well-being of teachers in Nimrooz County.

Additionally, the regression results for self-compassion and social well-being demonstrate that self-compassion, with an adjusted R^2 value of 0.123 (12.3%), significantly predicts the social well-being of teachers. This prediction is also meaningful at a 99% confidence level, with values $F=21.54$, $\beta=0.359$, $t=4.64$, and $P<0.01$. Hence, it can be concluded that self-compassion significantly predicts the social well-being of teachers in Nimrooz County.

Table 3: Summary of Regression Model for Components of Optimism and Teachers' Social Well-Being

Step	Variable	R	Adjusted R ²	F	β	t	sig
1	Intrinsic Optimism	0.593	0.348	76.36	0.593	8.90	0.001
2	Intrinsic Optimism	0.622	0.379	45.77	0.495	6.72	0.001
	Intrinsic Pessimism				-0.211	-2.87	0.005

The results in Table 3 indicate that among the components of optimism, intrinsic optimism plays the most significant role in predicting social well-being. As shown, in the first step, intrinsic optimism (predictor variable) entered the regression equation, accounting for 34.8% (adjusted $R^2=0.348$) of the variance in teachers' social well-being (criterion variable) with $\beta=0.593$, $t=8.90$, and $P<0.01$.

In the second step, intrinsic pessimism ($\beta=-0.211$, $t=-2.87$, $P<0.01$) was also included in the regression equation. Together with intrinsic optimism ($\beta=0.495$, $t=6.72$, $P<0.01$), these variables accounted for 37.9% ($R^2=0.379$) of the variance in social well-being among teachers.

This analysis demonstrates that intrinsic optimism is the most influential predictor of social well-being, while intrinsic pessimism has a negative but statistically significant impact.

Table 4: Summary of Regression Model for Components of Self-Compassion and Teachers' Social Well-Being

Step	Variable	R	Adjusted R ²	F	β	t	sig
1	Self-Kindness	0.528	0.274	56.49	0.528	7.51	0.001
2	Self-Kindness	0.630	0.389	47.42	0.423	6.27	0.001
	Shared Human Experience				0.359	5.32	0.001
3	Self-Kindness	0.646	0.405	34.31	0.392	5.76	0.001
	Shared Human Experience				0.273	3.55	0.001
	Self-Judgment				0.172	2.21	0.02

The results in Table 4 indicate that among the components of self-compassion, self-kindness plays the most significant role in predicting social well-being. As shown, in the first step, self-kindness entered the regression equation, accounting for 27.4% ($R^2=0.274$) of the variance in teachers' social well-being with $\beta=0.528$, $t=7.51$, and $P<0.01$. In the second step, shared human

experience ($\beta=0.359$, $t=5.32$, $P<0.01$) was added to the regression equation. Together with self-kindness ($\beta=0.423$, $t=6.27$, $P<0.01$), these variables explained 38.9% ($R^2=0.389$) of the variance in social well-being.

In the third step, self-judgment ($\beta=0.172$, $t=2.21$, $P<0.05$) was included in the regression equation. Alongside self-kindness ($\beta=0.392$, $t=5.76$, $P<0.01$) and shared human experience ($\beta=0.273$, $t=3.55$, $P<0.01$), these components collectively explained 40.5% ($R^2=0.405$) of the variance in teachers' social well-being.

Table 5. Correlation Matrix of Optimism and Its Components with Social Well-Being

Variables	Intrinsic Optimism	Intrinsic Pessimism	Optimism
Social Well-being	0.593	-0.443	0.367

N = 148, $p < 0.01$

The findings in Table 5 indicate that the correlation coefficient between intrinsic optimism and social well-being is $r=0.593$, between intrinsic pessimism and social well-being is $r=-0.443$, and the overall correlation coefficient between optimism and social well-being is $r=0.367$. These relationships are significant at the 99% confidence level ($p<0.01$).

Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between optimism and its components with the social well-being of primary school teachers in Nimrouz County.

Table 6. Correlation Matrix of Self-Compassion and Its Components with Social Well-being

Variables	Self-Kindness	Self-Judgment	Shared Humanity	Mindfulness	Over-Identification	Self-Compassion
Social Well-being	0.528	0.450	0.306	0.420	0.483	0.605

N = 148, $p < 0.01$

The findings in Table 6 indicate that the correlation coefficient between self-kindness and social well-being is ($r=0.528$), self-judgment and social well-being is ($r=0.450$), shared humanity and social well-being is ($r=0.306$), mindfulness and social well-being is ($r=0.420$), over-identification and social well-being is ($r=0.483$), and the overall correlation coefficient between self-compassion and social well-being is ($r=0.605$). These relationships are significant at the 99% confidence level ($p<0.01$).

Thus, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between self-compassion and its components with the social well-being of primary school teachers in Nimrouz County.

Discussion

This study aimed to determine the role of optimism and self-compassion in predicting the social well-being of male and female primary school teachers in Nimrouz County.

The results of the first question showed that the variable of optimism could predict 13% of the social well-being of teachers. Therefore, optimism significantly predicted the social well-being of teachers in Nimrouz County. This finding aligns with the results of [Salari Selajgeh \(2019\)](#), [Namani & Bagherian \(2018\)](#), [Khodadadi \(2017\)](#), [Foroughmand \(2016\)](#), [Hansen et al. \(2016\)](#), and [Jiang et al. \(2016\)](#).

[Salari Selajgeh's \(2019\)](#) study demonstrated that optimism positively correlates with social well-being and is a predictor of social well-being. [Foroughmand \(2016\)](#) showed that there is a significant positive effect of optimism on social well-being. Similarly, [Stellar et al.'s \(2017\)](#) study revealed that optimism and pessimism are predictors of social well-being. Carver and Scheier (1992) proposed that optimism involves a tendency

to adopt the most hopeful outlook and entails a positive evaluation and prediction of outcomes and consequences in life. This positive perspective fosters satisfaction and well-being across various dimensions, ultimately enhancing social well-being.

Optimistic individuals tend to interpret events and phenomena around them positively, consider challenges as temporary and solvable, and compartmentalize difficulties to prevent their spillover into other aspects of life. Consequently, they do not feel defeated by unfavorable life events and do not perceive them as threats. Social well-being, in turn, requires the fulfillment of needs, a sense of purpose, and the belief that individuals can achieve significant personal goals and actively participate in society. Those with high levels of social well-being can generally establish and maintain relationships with others.

Thus, it can be explained that optimism influences social well-being, and individuals with higher levels of optimism are likely to experience enhanced social well-being.

The data from Table 2 indicated that self-compassion accounted for 12.3% of the variance in teachers' social well-being. This finding suggests that self-compassion significantly predicts the social well-being of teachers in Nimrouz County. These results are consistent with the findings of [Namani and Bagherian \(2018\)](#), [Hosseini and Goli \(2018\)](#), [Jokar and Jafari Sadr \(2017\)](#), [Shafiei and Jazayeri \(2016\)](#), [Beshkoufeh and Karami \(2015\)](#), and [Ashish \(2017\)](#).

[Hosseini and Goli \(2018\)](#) found that self-compassion is a predictor of social well-being. [Jokar and Jafari Sadr \(2017\)](#) reported that self-compassion significantly influences social well-being. [Shafiei and Jazayeri \(2016\)](#) concluded that self-compassion correlates with social well-being and can foster it. Social well-being is closely tied to individuals' socialization and plays a crucial role in adopting societal norms. Those with high levels of social well-being can establish and maintain relationships (Bahadori & Habibi, 2016).

[Desia et al. \(2015\)](#) emphasized that self-compassion satisfies basic needs such as autonomy, competence, and connection, which are essential for social well-being. Higher levels of self-compassion are associated with social well-being and provide stress protection. Thus, self-compassion can be viewed as a protective and nurturing factor for social well-being.

Findings from the Second Question

Among the components of optimism, intrinsic optimism played the most significant role in social well-being. In the first step, intrinsic optimism accounted for 34.8% of the variance in teachers' social well-being. In the second step, intrinsic optimism combined with intrinsic pessimism accounted for 37.9% of the variance in social well-being. These findings are consistent with the results of [Salari Selajgeh \(2019\)](#), [Namani and Bagherian \(2018\)](#), [Khodadadi \(2017\)](#), [Foroughmand \(2016\)](#), [Stellar et al. \(2017\)](#), [Hanssen et al. \(2016\)](#), and [Jiang et al. \(2016\)](#).

[Khodadadi \(2017\)](#) found that optimism significantly impacts the social well-being of mothers with children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. [Jiang et al. \(2016\)](#) demonstrated a significant relationship between optimism, social well-being, and mental health, suggesting that higher social well-being enhances optimism and mental health. Diener et al. (2013) argued that individuals with high well-being experience positive emotions and evaluate life events favorably, while those with low well-being perceive events negatively and experience more anxiety, depression, and anger ([Safariniya & Azizi, 2018](#)).

Optimism is associated with psychological benefits such as reduced anxiety, greater social and mental well-being, life satisfaction, positive affect, resilience, and fewer symptoms of depression and hopelessness. Conversely, intrinsic pessimism involves negative expectations about outcomes. Pessimists attribute successes to external, temporary, and specific factors, while attributing failures to internal, permanent, and pervasive factors.

Therefore, it can be concluded that increasing intrinsic optimism enhances social well-being, while increasing intrinsic pessimism reduces it.

Findings from the Third Hypothesis

The results of the third hypothesis revealed that among the components of self-compassion, self-kindness had the most significant role in predicting the social well-being of teachers. In the first step, self-kindness predicted 27.7% of the variance in social well-being. In the second step, shared humanity, combined with self-kindness, predicted 38.9% of the changes in social well-being. In the third step, self-judgment, along with self-kindness and shared humanity, collectively predicted 40.5% of the changes in social well-being.

These findings are consistent with the results of [Namani and Bagherian \(2018\)](#), [Hosseini and Goli \(2018\)](#), [Jokar and Jafari Sadr \(2017\)](#), [Shafiei and Jazayeri \(2016\)](#), [Beshkoufeh and Karami \(2015\)](#), and [Ashish \(2017\)](#). For example, [Beshkoufeh and Karami \(2015\)](#) found that self-compassion components and social well-being predict happiness. [Ashish \(2017\)](#) demonstrated that self-compassion significantly impacts social well-being.

This study highlights the critical role of self-kindness as the most influential component in improving teachers' social well-being. Thus, it is imperative for educational authorities to focus on this aspect. Schools can foster social well-being by normalizing the idea that personal failures and challenges are a natural part of life, facilitating connections among teachers and between teachers and students' families, and providing suitable environments for interaction.

Findings from the Fourth Question

The correlation coefficient for intrinsic optimism with social well-being was $r=0.593$, for intrinsic pessimism with social well-being was $r=-0.443$, and for overall optimism with social well-being was $r=0.367$. These findings demonstrate a significant relationship between optimism and its components with the social well-being of primary school teachers in Nimrouz County.

This result aligns with studies by [Salari Selajgeh \(2019\)](#), [Namani and Bagherian \(2018\)](#), [Khodadadi \(2017\)](#), [Foroughmand \(2016\)](#), [Stellar et al. \(2017\)](#), [Hanssen et al. \(2016\)](#), and [Jiang et al. \(2016\)](#). For instance, [Namani and Bagherian \(2018\)](#) concluded that optimism, self-compassion, and a sense of security positively and significantly correlate with social well-being. Similarly, [Foroughmand \(2016\)](#) found a significant positive relationship between optimism and social well-being, and [Hanssen et al. \(2016\)](#) reported a meaningful connection between optimism and social well-being.

Optimism is a positive belief among teachers that they can overcome challenges and respond to failures with persistence while emphasizing teaching and learning, trusting the involvement of parents and students, and relying on their capacity to achieve progress. Therefore, it can be concluded that as optimism increases, teachers' social well-being also improves.

The results from the fifth question revealed the following correlation coefficients between the components of self-compassion and social well-being: the kindness towards oneself component ($r=0.528$), self-judgment component ($r=0.450$), common humanity component ($r=0.306$), mindfulness component ($r=0.420$), over-identification component ($r=0.483$), and the overall self-compassion variable ($r=0.605$). Therefore, a significant relationship was observed between self-compassion and its components with the social well-being of elementary school teachers in Nimrouz County.

These findings align with the results of studies by [Namani and Bagherian \(2019\)](#), [Hosseini and Goli \(2019\)](#), [Jokar and Jafari Sadr \(2018\)](#), [Shafiei and Jazayeri \(2017\)](#), [Beshkoufeh and Karami \(2016\)](#), and [Ashish \(2017\)](#). [Shafiei and Jazayeri \(2017\)](#) concluded that self-compassion is significantly related to social well-being. [Beshkoufeh and Karami \(2016\)](#) also showed a meaningful relationship between self-compassion, social well-being, and happiness among students.

Self-compassion is defined as adopting a positive attitude towards oneself, particularly when things are going wrong. It is considered both a trait and an effective protective factor in fostering psychological and social well-being ([Dasht Bozorgi & Homaei, 2018](#)). Given that social well-being plays a crucial role in individual, familial, and social functioning, comprehensive and appropriate planning to enhance the social well-being of teachers is clearly essential ([Sharbatian & Khaneqahi, 2017](#)).

Thus, it can be concluded that increasing self-compassion leads to an improvement in the social well-being of teachers.

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