

A Correlational Study on Humour Styles and Their Relationship with Flourishing among Young Adult Women

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Abstract

The present study examined the relationship between humour styles and flourishing among young adult women. A quantitative research design was adopted, with a sample of 250 participants selected through convenience sampling. Data were collected using the Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ) and the Flourishing Scale, and analyzed using Pearson's correlation. The findings indicated a moderate to high level of flourishing among participants and a significant positive relationship between overall humour and flourishing. Affiliative humour showed a strong positive correlation, while self-enhancing humour demonstrated a moderate positive relationship. Aggressive humour showed a weak negative correlation, whereas self-defeating humour did not show a significant relationship with flourishing. The study concludes that adaptive humour styles contribute positively to psychological well-being, while maladaptive humour styles may have limited or negative effects. Promoting positive humour styles may enhance overall well-being among young adult women.

Keywords: Humour styles, flourishing, psychological well-being, affiliative humour, self-enhancing humour, aggressive humour, self-defeating humour

1. Introduction

Psychological well-being is no longer viewed merely as the absence of mental illness but as the presence of positive psychological resources that enable individuals to function effectively and maintain balance in everyday life [26], [6]. With the emergence of positive psychology, greater emphasis has been placed on strengths such as resilience, optimism, and humor, which contribute to overall well-being and optimal functioning [25], [26].

Humor is a universal and integral aspect of human experience that plays a significant role in emotional expression, social interaction, and coping with stress [16]. Beyond its association with laughter, humor

involves complex cognitive and emotional processes that allow individuals to reinterpret situations in a less threatening or more manageable way. This process of cognitive reappraisal can reduce emotional tension, enhance positive affect, and promote psychological adjustment [17], [13].

However, humor is not uniformly beneficial. Individuals differ in how they use humor, the contexts in which it is expressed, and the intentions behind it. These differences influence whether humor contributes to psychological well-being or leads to negative outcomes. The Humor Styles Model identifies four distinct humor styles: affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating [18]. Affiliative and self-enhancing humor are considered adaptive, as they facilitate social bonding, emotional regulation, and resilience. In contrast, aggressive and self-defeating humor are regarded as maladaptive, as they may contribute to interpersonal conflict, lower self-esteem, and psychological distress.

Flourishing is a central concept within positive psychology and represents a state of optimal psychological functioning that extends beyond the absence of distress [6]. It encompasses aspects such as positive relationships, a sense of purpose, competence, and self-acceptance. Individuals who experience higher levels of flourishing tend to report greater life satisfaction, better emotional health, and stronger social connections [12]. Thus, flourishing reflects a holistic view of well-being that integrates both emotional and functional aspects of human life.

Young adulthood is a critical developmental stage characterized by significant psychological, social, and emotional transitions. During this period, individuals navigate identity formation, increased independence, and evolving interpersonal relationships. Young adult women, in particular, may encounter unique challenges related to societal expectations, emotional responsibilities, and role adjustments, which can influence their coping strategies and psychological well-being.

Given the importance of humor as a coping mechanism and its varying psychological effects, it becomes essential to examine how different humor styles relate to flourishing. Adaptive humor styles may enhance well-being by promoting resilience and positive social interactions, whereas maladaptive humor styles may hinder emotional growth and interpersonal functioning. Therefore, the present study aims to examine the relationship between humor styles and flourishing among young adult women..

Need for the study

The need for the present study arises from the limited research examining the relationship between humour styles and flourishing among young adult women. With the growing emphasis on strengths-based approaches in mental health, it becomes important to explore positive psychological factors that contribute to well-being. Humour, as an everyday psychological resource, plays a significant role in emotional regulation and social functioning, yet its specific influence on flourishing remains underexplored. Additionally, humour has often been stereotypically associated more with men, leading to an underrepresentation of women in humour-related research. Addressing this gap is important for a more balanced understanding of humour across genders. Understanding this relationship can help identify how different humour styles impact well-being. Furthermore, the study holds practical relevance for counselling and positive psychology interventions aimed at enhancing psychological functioning and promoting overall well-being.

2. Review of Literature

Čekrlija et al. (2024) examined the relationship between humour styles, optimism, and quality of life among adults using a quantitative design. The findings identified distinct humour profiles, with adaptive

humour styles associated with higher optimism and better quality of life, while maladaptive styles were linked to poorer outcomes.

Rahman and Hossain (2024) investigated humour styles and psychological well-being among university students using a correlational design. Results showed that affiliative and self-enhancing humour positively predicted well-being, whereas aggressive and self-defeating humour were associated with distress, with notable gender differences.

Irani et al. (2023) explored the role of hope, humour, and self-stigma in predicting flourishing and self-acceptance among adults who stutter. The findings indicated that humour and hope positively influenced outcomes, while self-stigma had a negative effect.

Kumar et al. (2023) examined humour styles, resilience, and well-being among Indian college students. The study found that adaptive humour styles were positively associated with resilience and well-being, whereas maladaptive humour was linked to poorer outcomes.

Rastogi (2023) investigated emotional intelligence, humour styles, and flourishing among young adults. Results showed that adaptive humour styles were positively related to flourishing, with emotional intelligence acting as a mediating factor.

De Cruz-Dixon (2023) studied humour styles in relation to well-being and distress among undergraduate students. Findings revealed that adaptive humour was linked to better well-being, while maladaptive humour predicted higher psychological distress, with resilience and hope as mediators.

Heintz and Webster (2023) explored humour styles and wisdom among adults. The study found that adaptive humour was positively associated with emotional regulation, maturity, and psychological stability.

Wang et al. (2022) conducted a cross-cultural study on humour styles and well-being. Results indicated that adaptive humour was consistently linked to positive outcomes across cultures, while maladaptive humour related to stress and negative affect.

Shaikh and Vyas (2022) reviewed existing literature on humour styles and self-esteem. The findings consistently showed that adaptive humour was associated with higher self-esteem, whereas self-defeating humour had negative associations.

Kennison (2022) examined humour styles, resilience, and happiness among young adults. Results indicated that adaptive humour predicted higher happiness through resilience, while maladaptive humour showed negative associations.

Murphy (2021) investigated humour, gratitude, and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study found that adaptive humour, particularly self-enhancing humour, was positively associated with flourishing.

Abdullah et al. (2021) explored humour styles, resilience, and well-being among university students. Findings indicated that adaptive humour was positively related to resilience and well-being, while maladaptive humour showed negative associations.

Jiang (2020) conducted a meta-analysis on humour styles and subjective well-being. The results confirmed that adaptive humour is positively related to happiness and life satisfaction, whereas maladaptive humour is linked to lower well-being.

Martin et al. (2019) examined humour styles and resilience during stressful life events. The study found that adaptive humour was associated with greater resilience, while maladaptive humour was linked to higher stress.

Cann and Collette (2014) investigated humour styles, affect stability, and well-being among students. Findings showed that self-enhancing humour was associated with positive affect, while self-defeating humour related to negative affect.

Ruch and Heintz (2014) explored whether humour styles predict well-being beyond personality traits. Results indicated that although adaptive humour was positively related to well-being, its effect reduced after controlling for personality.

Kazarian and Martin (2004) examined personality traits, humour styles, and well-being. The study found that extraversion and openness were linked to adaptive humour, while neuroticism was associated with maladaptive humour.

Martin et al. (2003) developed and validated the Humor Styles Questionnaire, identifying four humour styles: affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating. This study provided the foundational framework for humour research.

3. Methodology

3.1 Statement Of The problem

The present study aims to examine the relationship between humor styles and flourishing among young adult women.

3.2 Aim

To study the relationship between humor styles and flourishing among young adult women.

3.3 Objectives

- To examine the relationship between humor styles and flourishing among young adult women.
- To assess humor styles and levels of flourishing.
- To analyze the relationship between positive and negative humor styles and flourishing.

3.4 Hypothesis

H1: There will be a significant relationship between overall humour styles and flourishing among young adult women.

H2: Affiliative humour will be positively correlated with flourishing among young adult women.

H3: Self-enhancing humour will be positively correlated with flourishing among young adult women.

H4: Aggressive humour will be negatively correlated with flourishing among young adult women.

H5: Self-defeating humour will be significantly related to flourishing among young adult women.

3.5 Research Design

The present study adopts a quantitative, non-experimental, correlational research design. This design is suitable for examining the relationship between humor styles and flourishing without manipulating any variables. Data are collected at a single point in time to understand the association between the study variables.

3.6 Sample

The sample for the present study consists of 250 young adult women.

3.7 Sampling Technique

Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling method in which participants are selected based on their easy accessibility, availability, and willingness to participate in the study.

In the present study, the sample was selected using the convenience sampling method, based on the availability and willingness of participants to take part in the study.

3.8 Inclusion Criteria

- Young adult women aged 18–25 years
- Ability to read and understand the questionnaire language
- Willingness to participate and provide informed consent

3.9 Exclusion Criteria

- Male participants
- Participants unwilling to provide informed consent
- Participants who do not complete the survey or provide inconsistent responses.
- Participants who are not within the specified age range of young adult women
- Participants who have difficulty understanding the questionnaire language

3.10 Variables

Independent Variable: Humor styles (affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating)

Dependent Variable: Flourishing.

3.11 Tools Used

Humour styles questionnaire

The HSQ, developed by Martin et al. (2003), consists of 32 items measuring four humor styles: affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating. Responses are rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The scale demonstrates good reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from .77 to .81, and adequate test-retest stability. It also shows strong construct, convergent, and discriminant validity

Flourishing Scale

The Flourishing Scale, developed by Diener et al. (2010), includes 10 items assessing overall psychological well-being. Each item is rated on a 7-point Likert scale. The scale has high reliability (Cronbach's alpha .85–.90) and strong construct validity, with positive associations with well-being and negative associations with distress.

3.12 Conceptual Definition

Humor Styles

Humor styles refer to the characteristic ways in which individuals use humor in their everyday lives. In the present study, humor styles are assessed using the Humor Styles Questionnaire developed by Martin et al. (2003), which measures affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating humor styles.

Flourishing

Flourishing refers to a state of optimal psychological functioning encompassing positive relationships, purpose, engagement, competence, and self-acceptance. In the present study, flourishing is measured using the Flourishing Scale developed by Diener et al. (2010).

3.13 Operational Definition

Humor Styles

In the present study, humor styles are operationally defined as the manner and frequency with which young adult women use humor in their daily interactions and emotional situations. Humor styles are measured based on participants' responses to items assessing social, emotional, and self-directed use of humor.

Flourishing

In the present study, flourishing is operationally defined as the level of positive psychological functioning demonstrated by young adult women, as reflected in their responses related to purpose in life, positive relationships, engagement, competence, and self-acceptance.

3.14 Procedure

After obtaining informed consent, participants are briefed about the purpose of the study. The questionnaires are administered individually, and participants are instructed to respond honestly to all items. Confidentiality and anonymity of responses are ensured throughout the data collection process.

4. Results and Discussion

The present chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of data collected to examine the relationship between humour styles and flourishing among young adult women.

Humour styles, as conceptualized by Rod A. Martin, consist of four distinct dimensions, namely affiliative humour, self-enhancing humour, aggressive humour, and self-defeating humour. These dimensions represent both adaptive and maladaptive ways in which individuals use humour in their daily lives.

Affiliative humour refers to the use of humour to enhance social interactions and relationships, whereas self-enhancing humour involves maintaining a humorous outlook in the face of stress. In contrast, aggressive humour includes sarcasm and teasing at the expense of others, and self-defeating humour involves putting oneself down for the amusement of others.

Flourishing, on the other hand, represents a state of optimal psychological functioning, including aspects such as positive emotions, purpose in life, and meaningful relationships.

The data were analysed using descriptive statistics and Pearson’s product moment correlation to understand the relationship between humour styles and flourishing.

4.1 Demographics Analysis

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (N = 250)

Variables	Category	Percentage %
Socio economic status	Middle	66.0
	Upper	17.0
	Lower	17.0
Educational level	Graduate	87.2
	School level	12.8
Locality	Urban	76.0
	Semi-urban	12.4
	Rural	11.6
Marital status	Unmarried	72.7
	Married	23.8
Employment status	Employed	49.2
	Student	31.4
	Unemployed	19.4

Table 1 shows the demographic distribution of the participants. A majority of the respondents belonged to the middle socio-economic group, indicating a relatively stable economic background. Most participants were graduates, suggesting that the sample was largely well-educated.

In terms of locality, a higher proportion of participants were from urban areas, followed by semi-urban and rural areas. This indicates that the sample had greater urban representation.

The marital status distribution shows that most participants were unmarried, which is typical for young adult populations. With respect to employment status, more than half of the participants were employed, while others were either students or unemployed. Overall, the sample reflects a diverse yet predominantly urban and educated group of young adult women.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables

	Mean	Standard deviations
Flourishing	41.51	11.03
Humour total	126.49	21.31
Affiliative	37.03	9.92
Self enhancing	33.14	8.39
Aggressive	25.23	8.42
Self defeating	31.11	10.77

The table presents the mean and standard deviation of humour styles and flourishing among the participants. The mean represents the average score, while the standard deviation indicates the variability of responses.

The mean score for flourishing (M = 41.51, SD = 11.03) shows the average level of flourishing in the sample. The total humour score (M = 126.49, SD = 21.31) reflects the overall use of humour among participants.

Among the humour styles, affiliative humour (M = 37.03, SD = 9.92) has the highest mean, followed by self-enhancing humour (M = 33.14, SD = 8.39). Self-defeating humour (M = 31.11, SD = 10.77) shows a moderate mean, while aggressive humour (M = 25.23, SD = 8.42) has the lowest mean score.

4.2 Correlational Analysis

Table 3
Correlational analysis showing the relationship between total humour score and flourishing

		Flourishing	Humour stle
Flourishing	Pearson correlation	1	.460
	Sig.2 tailed		.000
	N	250	250
Humour total	Pearson correlation	.460	1
	Sig.2 tailed	.000	
	N	250	250

“Correlation is significant at 0.01 level 2 tailed”

The table presents the relationship between total humour and flourishing among the participants using Pearson’s correlation analysis.

The results show a moderate positive correlation between total humour and flourishing ($r = 0.460, p < 0.01$). This indicates that as humour increases, flourishing also tends to increase. The correlation is statistically significant, suggesting that the relationship is meaningful.

Overall, the findings indicate that higher levels of humour are associated with higher levels of flourishing among the participants. Therefore, the hypothesis stating that there is a significant relationship between humour and flourishing is accepted.

4.3 Correlation Table for Subscales

Table 4
Shows the correlation between Affiliative humor style and Flourishing

		Flourishing	H1AF
Flourishing	Pearson correlation	1	.697
	Sig.(2-tailed)		.000
	N	250	250
H1AF	Pearson correlation	.697	1
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.000	
	N	250	250

“Correlation is significant at 0.01 level 2 tailed”

The above table presents the relationship between affiliative humour and flourishing among the participants using Pearson’s correlation analysis.

The results indicate a strong positive correlation between affiliative humour and flourishing ($r = 0.697, p < 0.01$). This suggests that individuals who frequently use humour to enhance social relationships and create a positive interpersonal environment tend to experience higher levels of psychological well-being. The correlation is statistically significant, indicating that the relationship is reliable and not due to chance. This finding highlights the importance of affiliative humour in promoting positive emotions, strengthening social bonds, and enhancing overall life satisfaction.

Overall, the results suggest that affiliative humour plays a significant role in increasing flourishing among young adult women.

Table 5
Shows the correlation between self enhancing Humour style and Flourishing

		Flourishing	H2SE
Flourishing	Pearson correlation	1	.481
	Sig.(2-tailed)		.000
	N	250	250
H2SE	Pearson correlation	.481	1
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.000	
	N	250	250

“Correlation is significant at 0.01 level 2 tailed”

The table presents the relationship between self-enhancing humour and flourishing among the participants using Pearson’s correlation analysis.

The results show a moderate positive correlation between self-enhancing humour and flourishing ($r = 0.481, p < 0.01$). This indicates that as self-enhancing humour increases, flourishing also increases. The correlation is statistically significant, suggesting that the relationship is meaningful. Overall, the findings indicate that higher levels of self-enhancing humour are associated with higher levels of flourishing among the participants. Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted.

Table 6
Shows the correlation between aggressive humour style and flourishing

		Flourishing	H3AG
Flourishing	Pearson correlation	1	-.198
	Sig (2-tailed)		.002
	N	250	250
H3AG	Pearson correlation	-.198	1
	Sig (2-tailed)	.002	
	N	250	250

“Correlation is significant at 0.01 level 2 tailed”

The table presents the relationship between aggressive humour and flourishing among the participants using Pearson’s correlation analysis.

The results show a weak negative correlation between aggressive humour and flourishing ($r = -0.198, p < 0.01$). This indicates that as aggressive humour increases, flourishing tends to decrease. The correlation is statistically significant, suggesting that the relationship is meaningful.

Overall, the findings indicate that higher levels of aggressive humour are associated with lower levels of flourishing among the participants. Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted.

Table 7
Shows the correlation between self defeating humour style and flourishing

		Flourishing	H4SE
Flourishing	Pearson correlation	1	.050
	Sig.(2-tailed)		.435
	N	250	250
H4SE	Pearson correlation	.050	1
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.435	
	N	250	250

“Correlation is significant at 0.01 level 2 tailed”

The table presents the relationship between self-defeating humour and flourishing among the participants using Pearson’s correlation analysis.

The results show a very weak positive correlation between self-defeating humour and flourishing ($r = 0.050, p > 0.05$). This indicates that there is no significant relationship between the two variables. The correlation is not statistically significant.

Overall, the findings indicate that self-defeating humour is not significantly related to flourishing among the participants. Therefore, the hypothesis is rejected.

5. Discussion

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between humour styles and flourishing among young adult women. The findings indicate that humour is not a uniform construct, and its impact on psychological well-being varies depending on the style of humour used.

The results revealed a significant positive relationship between overall humour and flourishing, suggesting that individuals who engage in humour more frequently tend to experience higher levels of well-being. This indicates that humour may help individuals maintain a more balanced and positive perspective in everyday life.

Among the different humour styles, affiliative humour showed the strongest positive association with flourishing. This suggests that individuals who use humour to enhance social interactions and build relationships tend to experience greater well-being. Given the importance of interpersonal relationships during young adulthood, especially among women, this finding highlights the role of positive social engagement in promoting psychological functioning.

Self-enhancing humour also demonstrated a positive relationship with flourishing, although the association was moderate. This form of humour reflects an individual's ability to maintain a positive outlook during stressful situations. Such an approach may help individuals regulate their emotions and cope more effectively with challenges, thereby supporting overall well-being.

In contrast, aggressive humour showed a weak negative relationship with flourishing. This suggests that humour involving sarcasm or ridicule may slightly reduce well-being, possibly by affecting the quality of social interactions. Although the relationship was not strong, it indicates that humour directed negatively toward others may not contribute positively to psychological functioning.

Interestingly, self-defeating humour did not show a significant relationship with flourishing. This may be due to its complex nature, as it can sometimes be used in a socially acceptable way while also reflecting underlying self-criticism. As a result, its impact on well-being may vary across individuals and contexts. Overall, the findings highlight that the benefits of humour depend largely on how it is used. Adaptive humour styles, such as affiliative and self-enhancing humour, are associated with higher levels of flourishing, whereas maladaptive styles show weaker or negative associations. These results emphasize the importance of considering the type of humour rather than humour as a general construct.

6. Conclusion

The present study examined the relationship between humour styles and flourishing among young adult women. The findings indicate that humour plays a meaningful role in psychological well-being, but its impact varies depending on the style of humour used.

Adaptive humour styles, particularly affiliative and self-enhancing humour, were found to be positively associated with flourishing, suggesting that they promote positive emotions, resilience, and social connectedness. In contrast, aggressive humour showed a negative association, while self-defeating humour did not demonstrate a significant relationship.

These findings highlight that not all forms of humour are beneficial, and the effectiveness of humour depends on how it is used. Encouraging the use of adaptive humour styles may contribute to improved well-being and overall quality of life among young adult women.

7. Limitations

The study was limited to young adult women, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. The sa-

mple was predominantly urban and educated, which may not represent diverse populations. The cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causal relationships. Additionally, the use of self-report measures may have introduced response bias.

8. Implications

The findings have practical relevance in counselling and clinical settings, where promoting adaptive humour styles may enhance psychological well-being. Awareness programs can also be developed to educate individuals about the impact of humour on mental health. The study further contributes to positive psychology by highlighting humour as an important factor in well-being.

9. Suggestions For Future Research

Future research can include more diverse populations across different age groups to improve generalizability. Longitudinal studies may help establish causal relationships between humour and flourishing. Further research can also explore the influence of cultural, social, and personality factors, as well as evaluate interventions aimed at promoting adaptive humour styles.

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