Nayi Soch, Nayi Shuruaat: Building Learned Optimism in New Parents

Mubasshira Aibani (C035), Pranjal Suthar (C039), Shreel Patel (C048), Tanya Iyer (C053),

Krina Maru (C073)

JDSOLA, NMIMS, Department of Psychology

T.Y., B. Sc. Applied Psychology

Happiness and Positive Psychology

March 31, 2026

Contents

1. Introduction to the variable 3
2. Theoretical background 4
3. Justification for selecting the variable 6
4. Target Population & Setting 7
5. Objectives 9
6. Hypothetical application scenario 11
7. Session structure 13
8. Conclusion 16
9. REFERENCES 18

Introduction to variable

Learned Optimism is an important construct of positive psychology and is described as "the capacity to develop a more adaptive and positive explanatory style in response to adversity in a conscious way." Learned Optimism is based on Seligman's (1990/2006) theory that optimism is not a personality trait but a cognitive skill that can actually be developed.

At the heart of learned optimism is the construct of explanatory style. Explanatory style is a pattern of interpreting negative events along three dimensions: personal (internal/external), permanence (stable/temporary), and pervasiveness (global/specific). A pessimistic explanatory style is one in which the individual provides internal, stable, and global explanations for the situation. This creates feelings of hopelessness and despair. Learned optimism is a process of changing these negative explanations into external, temporary, and situational explanations.

One of the major techniques that is often employed in the context of learned optimism is the ABCDE model, which consists of adversity, beliefs, consequences, disputing, and energizing. The ABCDE model is a structured approach that allows the individual to challenge his/her unhealthy thinking styles in a more positive manner.

In the context of new parenthood, individuals may experience significant psychological and emotional challenges. These challenges may include, for instance, lack of sleep, role and responsibility challenges. These challenges may, in turn, lead to negative thoughts about themselves, self-doubt, and inadequacies. The learned optimism framework is relevant for new parenthood because it has the potential to help parents cognitively redefine challenges.

Learned optimism has the potential to help new parents escape negative thoughts and feelings associated with challenges in new parenthood by cognitively defining challenges in a positive manner. It is not only important to note that learned optimism has the potential to

help new parents escape negative thoughts and feelings, but also to cope with challenges in new parenthood.

Theoretical background

The workshop is based on the principles of positive psychology. The workshop is designed to impart the concept of learned optimism to new parents in India. New parents experience emotional, social, and role changes. Learned optimism is considered to be one of the important coping mechanisms for new parents. It helps in the maintenance of homeostasis, emotional ups and downs, and social interactions. The theoretical base for the workshop is based on the concepts of Learned Optimism, Broaden and Build Theory, and PERMA.

Learned Optimism by Martin Seligman

The theory of Learned Optimism, which was created by Seligman, states that learned optimism has nothing to do with personality. It has to do with the way we think. It is the cognitive style that we have developed. The Learned Optimism theory revolves around the idea of the construct of the way we think. The self-statements of new mothers have pessimistic elements, which include negative statements like being a bad mother, permanent (the situation will never change), and pervasive (everything is wrong). The Learned Optimism theory gives us a framework like the ABCDE model, which helps us to become more aware of negative thinking and challenge it. The Learned Optimism theory can be related to the Indian context to resolve problems like internalized problems like *log kya kahenge.*

Broaden-and-Build by Barbara Fredrickson

Another theory which can be added is the Broaden and Build Theory of Positive Emotions, which was proposed by Barbara Fredrickson. This theory is based on the functional aspect of emotions and positive emotions, which include joy, gratitude, and love. Positive emotions are capable of broadening the thought-action repertoires of individuals, and they are capable of building personal and social resources as well. The new parents are in a state of high stress, but positive emotions can help these new parents counterbalance the negative emotions they are facing in their lives. Positive emotions can help new parents in a collectivistic culture like India by providing them with social networks, which are very essential for them.

The PERMA Model by Martin Seligman

The PERMA Model of well-being is another comprehensive model that can be used in the measurement and maintenance of well-being. The PERMA Model of well-being consists of positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. This is important in organizing long-term learned optimism practices. For example, positive emotions can be enhanced through increasing gratitude, engagement can be enhanced through increasing mindful parenting, relationships can be enhanced through increasing peer and partner support, meaning can be enhanced through increasing purpose in parenting, and accomplishment can be enhanced through increasing small wins in parenting activities. The PERMA Model of well-being ensures that learned optimism is not in isolation but in the context of an individual's psychological well-being.

These three theories, when integrated, will result in a multidimensional construct of learned optimism. The three theories are cognitive in nature when they are based on the theory of Learned Optimism, emotional in nature when they are based on the Broaden-and-Build theory, and holistic in nature when they are based on the PERMA theory.

The three theories have the potential to achieve the purpose of the workshop since they have the potential to help a participant change their thoughts, be emotionally strong, overcome cultural challenges, and build a habit of wellbeing in their daily life as a parent.

Justification for selecting variable

Learned optimism as a coping mechanism

Individuals who have an optimistic approach towards life, find it manageable to cope with challenges in life. “Optimists expect good outcomes, even when things are hard” (Segerstrom et al., 2017). They deal with stress by reframing the situation. Instead of thinking about something as permanent or impossible, they think of it as temporary and doable. Such an outlook aids them in moving on from challenges faster and adopting a solution oriented approach to the problem.

For new parents, this is especially important, as they deal with daily stressors like feeding the baby, soothing the baby, childcare responsibilities, and this pressure can feel overwhelming initially. During such times, optimism helps to cope more effectively and adopt a solution driven approach to problems.

Helps in maintaining a balanced outlook

Research supports that optimism provides a very realistic way of thinking. It doesn’t ignore challenges but helps individuals avoid thinking about the extreme scenarios. It prevents people from spiraling into a negative loop of self blame, guilt and doubting one’s own capabilities. Hanssen et al. (2015) found that dispositional optimism, a generalized tendency to expect positive outcomes, was significantly associated with lower depression and anxiety, with this relationship operating primarily through flexible goal adjustment: the ability to redefine personal standards and expectations in response to situational demands.

This is a very crucial aspect for new parents, as minor failures in the initial stages of parenting can lead one to doubt themself as a parent. Thoughts like “I am failing”, or “I’m not doing enough” can surface during such times, and it is important to think of such circumstances as “I am learning” or “This is a phase which shall pass by”.

Promotes Better Interpersonal Functioning

Learned optimism can enhance interpersonal functioning as it inculcates in one qualities like patience and empathy, which aids in one’s social environment. Empathetic individuals thrive better in society as they are liked by everyone socially. Optimism is associated with social growth and people view their future from a positive lens (Sergerstrom, 2007). It reduces irritability in conversations, a more understanding and open approach while listening to others. It also aids in constructive communications, where it is easier for one to take feedback more positively and work on it rather than taking it to heart.

This comes into play in co parenting scenarios. Many times, due to the overwhelming demands of child care, couples may blame each other for any mishaps. Hostile feelings may develop for each other in order to provide the child with the best care, and they may forget that they are a team. Hence, optimism here allows for better communication, reduced misunderstandings and supportive partnership throughout the process.

Target population & setting

The workshop is aimed at building learned optimism in new parents in an Indian cultural setting. Since, parenting is such a stage where adjustment demands are high, as there are a lot of new changes in the couple’s lives and additions to responsibilities. Therefore, this phase is marked by major lifestyle changes, shifts in relationship dynamics and emotional and physical strain.

The target audience includes:

First time parents

They face a lot of uncertainty as a result of a lack of experience. They constantly keep enquiring if they are doing things the "right" way or not. Especially, in Indian settings, usually the parents of the couple accompany and help the young couple, and many times it is a joint family system. Due to this, a lot of opinions come into play, creating a confusion for the couple as to which opinion to consider. The grandparents of the newborn may sometimes force the new parents to adhere to what they say, which most of the time creates a dilemma for the new parents. Since childcare comes with a lot of responsibilities, the new parents are highly prone to go into a negative thinking pattern. Hence, the workshop shall help in bringing clarity and a sense of community through sharing experiences with other new parents.

Dual income couples

For such couples, it becomes difficult to juggle both responsibilities together. Interventions and strategies are required to help them navigate through multiple roles and understand prioritisation. Especially for young mothers planning to join the workforce back, it becomes difficult to shift environments, and to concentrate on their work as they sometimes get preoccupied with the thoughts of their child. The workshop aims to address these issues by suggesting a few activities that can help them deal with their work life conflict better and manage multiple roles efficiently.

Parents of young infants

Young infants require constant care and vigilance, which emotionally and physically drains the parents, leading to exhaustion. They are likely to feel overwhelmed and are at an increased risk of burnout and fatigue. This gives parents less time for themselves, to indulge in self care, spend time with each other and relax. The workshop hence aims to help these parents by adopting a positive outlook towards parenting.

Objectives

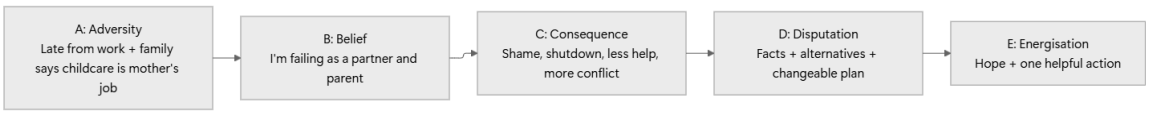
By the end of the workshop session, participants would be able to accomplish these objectives:

Identify pessimistic and optimistic explanatory styles in parenting self-talk

It's often seen that mothers whose infants won't stop crying, begin to assume that they are not good mothers, especially when that is reinforced by harsh remarks or taunts from in-laws or elders. Indian new parents frequently internalise the difficulties they face during caregiving as personal failures. The first step toward stopping this is recognising this pattern, bringing awareness that the self-talk is pessimistic, operates on auto-pilot almost without conscious control and may lead to negative consequences if not managed properly (Seligman, 1990). Pessimistic self-talk can deepen helplessness.

Apply ABCDE cognitive reframing technique to a pre-existing and culturally specific parenting stressor

Indian family dynamics are so nuanced and complex that generic coping advice may not be beneficial long-term. A father who is scolded by in-laws that he does nothing for the baby would require a structured method to dispute the belief that he is an inadequate parent. He also has an equally important role as the mother in the baby's developmental years. The ABCDE model provides the exact pathway i.e., identifying the adverse situation, noticing the automatic belief, seeing its consequences, refuting it with evidence and alternatives that goes against the belief, and arriving at energisation, meaning feeling more hopeful and in control of the adversity (Reivich & Shatte, 2002).



Distinguish between post-partum period cultural practices and traditions that are supportive and those imposed with pressure

An Indian post-partum tradition called jaappa (40-day confinement period for new mothers) is practised. It carries helpful benefits like rest, nutrition, bonding time with the child. However, it can also eventually become a source of control, isolation, and constant judgement when the new mother's autonomy and independence is overridden (Rodrigues et al., 2003). She is told to not leave the house, not to eat certain foods, and must obey elder's instructions without questioning them, quietly. It can become stressful for the mother and potentially ruin her motherhood experience. Research says that parents who can separate helpful support from culturally imposed pressures are better capable to care without losing their sense of selves, and their relationship (Scheir & Carver, 1985).

Develop optimistic self-statements that counter societal judgements in everyday parenting decisions

Among Indian parents, social comparison and fear of societal judgement becomes one of the most powerful stressors, from breastfeeding choices to career decisions after birth all the way to how quickly the baby reaches milestones. It's not an easy period to handle for them. One good example of this is a mother returning to work 3 months postpartum. She may think that everyone is judging her and probably commenting on how she could leave her baby alone in the care of someone else. Is money and work more important to her than her baby? Such questions trouble her mind. Crafting specific, realistic counter statements like providing for my child financially is also an act of care and love. This helps in building optimistic attribution (explaining positive events as internal, stable and global like due to them, lasting, and widespread and negative events as external, unstable and specific like due to luck or others, temporary and limited). This is associated with psychological well-being and resilience and weakens the tendency of self-doubting (Seligman, 1990).

Establish a judgement free peer support connection with another parent who has lived the experience

This will enable the participants to sustain optimism beyond the workshop session. It is usually seen that Indian parents lack safe spaces to voice their struggles without stigma, or being dismissed as everyone manages it, so you can also do that. This minimisation of distress due to cultural differences can prevent them from seeking help and increase isolation. If not stopped, it can go beyond generations. Research explains that social support is one of the best ways to reduce postpartum distress to a significant level among Indian parents (Patel et al., 2002). Thus, structured peer pairing within the workshop itself with someone who understands their situation better after having gone through what they are going through now, can create a sustained low effort accountability relationship that extends the workshop's impact into daily life.

These objectives are grounded in Seligman's learned optimism framework and Scheier and Carver's dispositional optimism model, both concepts of learned optimism.

Hypothetical application scenario

A workshop on the principles of learned optimism can be conducted in a community-based group in Mumbai for parents of 0-3-year-old children having adjustment problems, role strain, family demands, work-life balance, etc. The major aim of conducting a workshop on learned optimism is to make parents more psychologically hardy by enabling them to develop the skill of learned optimism. It is applicable and beneficial for parents as a workshop can be conducted in a culturally sensitive manner by a trained workshop facilitator. The workshop will enable parents to share their negative and positive experiences as a parent in a free manner. This will enable parents to overcome their feelings of isolation and low

self-esteem. Parents will learn that one of the major factors determining how they feel in a given situation is the meaning of the situation.

Parents will have negative self-statements like “I’m not doing enough” or “I always fail as a parent.” Parents will become aware of these negative self-statements and will learn how to dispute these negative self-statements by a process of self-reflection and self-discovery (also included in the 30 day action plan)The major activity of conducting a workshop on learned optimism is enabling parents to learn the ABCDE method of transforming negative thoughts into positive thoughts. The parents are encouraged to become aware of the beliefs they hold about the adversity. The parents are encouraged to dispute the beliefs they hold about the adversity. The parents are encouraged to get involved in the activities related to reframing the adversity, such as the crying baby in a positive and constructive way.

The other important aspect of this model is the application of the learned optimism. The parents are involved in activities related to goal-setting. The parents can be encouraged to set some small and easily achievable goals, such as designing a simple feeding routine for the baby. This is important as it helps the parents realize that small successes can add up to huge successes.The parents get involved in the activity related to positive self-talk. The parents are encouraged to use the positive affirmations such as “I can handle this” and “I am doing my best” in order to help them overcome the negative self-talk. The parents get involved in the micro-optimism aspect of the model through the activity related to daily reflection. The parents are encouraged to think about what small positive things they can accomplish, such as comforting the crying baby or successfully feeding the baby once.

Another important aspect of the optimism program is the parents’ personalized 30-day action plan. This is important because the parents are able to turn cognitive learning into

behavior change. The parents are able to set various goals depending on the situation. The parents can set various goals such as sharing the responsibility with the child, taking breaks, and journaling every day. This is important because the parents are able to enhance their level of commitment to the learned optimism techniques. This is supported by the research evidence on the effectiveness of learned optimism in this regard. The parents' optimistic explanatory style is helpful in reducing stress and anxiety and enhancing positive emotions (Kalfon-Hakhmigari et al., 2024; Yan & Xu, 2023). Moreover, learned optimism is helpful in the improvement of coping skills, social support systems, and relationships with the family (Qi et al., 2022).

As can be noted from the above discussion, learned optimism is a skillful capacity which plays an important role in the promotion of resilience among parents. Some of the benefits which the parents receive from the workshop include the reduction of stress and emotional overload. The parents also gain confidence in the role of parents and at the end they learn how to deal with the adversities in a healthier way

Session structure (brief outline)

The workshop "Nayi Soch, Nayi Shuruaat" will be conducted in a community health centre or anganwadi centre with the aim to cultivate learned optimism in Indian new parents. It will last for around 2.5 hours and occur in-person, group setting. A trained psychology practitioner will conduct this workshop with 15-20 new parents. Both mothers and fathers are encouraged to attend. It will also include a peer-parent mentor assigned to each parent. This will be someone who has navigated the postpartum period and can share lived experience. Materials include 'Meri Ek Soch' index cards, printed ABCDE worksheets, 'Mera Plan' action-plan sheets, flip chart, colored post-it notes, markers, pens and a take-home kit for each participant.

Sabse Mushkil Aur Sabse Pyaara (Session 1 ~ 20 minutes)

The workshop session would open by creating a safe judgement free space for the participants. Each one of them would be told to share two small moments, one hardest moment and one sweetest moment, from their recent week as a new parent. This would normalise the fact that early parenthood is filled with both struggle and joy, at the same time, and both are valid. The facilitator would then establish three ground rules i.e., confidentiality, no unsolicited advice and no judgement. Such a framing statement would clarify that the workshop is not about teaching parenting, but more about examining and changing the way parents talk to themselves when things get tough.

Yeh Meri Galti Hai Kya? (Session 2 ~ 25 minutes)

The facilitator would introduce pessimistic and optimistic explanatory styles by narrating two culturally grounded scenarios. One of a mother facing breastfeeding criticism from her mother-in-law and another of a father caught between work demands and family expectations. Using these stories, the three dimensions of explanatory style (internal vs external, stable vs variable, global vs specific) can be explained in simple terms. Moreover, how to reframe those scenarios in an optimistic way would also be demonstrated to them. Participants would then be told to write down one pessimistic thought they must have had about themselves as a parent on a ‘Meri Ek Soch’ card provided to them. It’s not shared with anyone. This card would then be used in the next session.

Badlo Soch, Badlo Kahani (Session 3 ~ 35 minutes)

This session would teach them the ABCDE cognitive reframing technique, discussed above as a practical, step by step tool that they can apply in their lives to resolve their respective parenting stressor. The facilitator would first portray the method using some relatable Indian scenario about a couple fighting after the arrival of their baby. Then the participants would be instructed to pair up and apply that ABCDE model to the real

pessimistic thought they had written on their ‘Meri Ek Soch Card’ in the previous session. The pairs would help them challenge and dispute the negative belief. This is followed by a brief group debrief where volunteers share the optimistic reframes with them.

Hamari Kahani, Hamari Chunauti (Session 4 ~ 30 minutes)

In this session, participants would work in small groups to collectively explore the culturally specific pressures and stressors they face as new parents in India. These stressors could be organised on flip-chart under six basic categories: joint family dynamics, the confinement period or jaappa, career guilt, gender role rigidity, fear of social judgement or log kya kahenge, and financial anxiety. Each group then selects what’s the most overwhelming stressor for them, apply the ABCDE model to it as a team, and present one line optimistic reframe to the group as a whole. The facilitator would then help them connect that reframe to research evidence on adaptive coping and social support so as to refute the automatic belief with evidence and alternatives (D in ABCDE)

Mera Plan (Session 5 ~ 20 minutes)

Here, each participant fills out a structured ‘Mera Plan’ worksheet. It has three components - three optimistic self-statements that are specific to their own life, two realistic commitments / actions for the next 30 days that fit within their actual household constraints, and the name of one accountability person that they will share their plan with. Participants can also exchange their contact details with their ABCDE practice partner for a weekly check-in over the following month, so as to sustain the learning from the workshop.

Main Kar Sakti / Sakta Hoon (Session 6 ~ 10 minutes)

Finally, the workshop closes on a hopeful, strengths-based note. Each participant completes the sentence “I can do…” with one thing they now feel more capable of. The facilitator emphasizes 3 key messages at the end of the session - optimism is a learnable skill, small changes in self-talk can create significant emotional shifts over time, and asking for

help is not a sign of weakness, but a sign of maturity and wisdom. Everyone receives a take-home kit that contains their completed action plan, a bilingual ABCDE summary card, and a list of accessible mental health helplines they can consult to in case of any concerns. The workshop ends with the collection of an anonymous feedback form for workshop evaluation.

Conclusion

The training seminar "Nayi Soch, Nayi Shuruaat: Building Learned Optimism for New Parents" is designed to help the individual develop cognitive as well as emotional tools that will help him/her overcome the challenges associated with the role of a new parent. This intervention is based on the construct of learned optimism, which is based on the idea that an individual can be made more effective in his/her thinking.

The techniques used in this intervention, such as ABCDE, positive self-statements, and goal-setting, will help the individual become more aware of his/her pessimistic style, which will then challenge him/her, helping him/her become more effective in coping with the role as well as the emotions associated with the role of a parent. This culturally sensitive intervention will ensure that the techniques used are relevant to the socio-cultural context of the Indian community.

Though there are a number of advantages associated with this workshop, there are a number of challenges which are likely to be encountered while implementing this workshop. These include the lack of time to effectively engage with participants on all the activities, the lack of willingness among individuals to open up and share their experiences because of social stigma, and the lack of time to change cognitive behaviors, which are deeply ingrained in people's minds.

In the real world, the application of the techniques learned in the workshop is evident in the challenges parents face daily, such as the care and raising of distressed babies, work

and life balance, and social challenges. Eventually, this will lead to the development of coping mechanisms and relationships.

In conclusion, the application of the learned optimism techniques is important for new parents since it will give them the ability to effectively handle challenges optimistically and flexibly. This is possible by changing the way an individual handles challenges, which is essential for the well-being of the individual and the creation of a conducive environment for the family.

REFERENCES

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. W. H. Freeman.

Hanssen, M. M., Vancleef, L. M. G., Vlaeyen, J. W. S., Hayes, A. F., Schouten, E. G. W., & Peters, M. L. (2015). Optimism, motivational coping and well-being: Evidence supporting the importance of flexible goal adjustment. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 16(6), 1525-1537.

Kalfon-Hakhmigari, M., Even-Zohar, A., & Lavidor, M. (2024). Optimism, social support, and postpartum stress symptoms among new mothers. *Journal of Affective Disorders, 344*, 123–130.

Patel, V., Rodrigues, M., & DeSouza, N. (2002). Gender, poverty, and postnatal depression: A study of mothers in Goa, India. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, *159*(1), 43–47.

Reivich, K., & Shatté, A. (2002). *The resilience factor: 7 essential skills for overcoming life's inevitable obstacles*. Broadway Books.

Rodrigues, M., Patel, V., Jaswal, S., & de Souza, N. (2003). Listening to mothers: Qualitative studies on motherhood and depression from Goa, India. *Social Science & Medicine*, *57*(10), 1797–1806.

Scheier, M. F., & Carver, C. S. (1985). Optimism, coping, and health: Assessment and implications of generalized outcome expectancies. *Health Psychology*, *4*(3), 219–247.

Segerstrom, S. C. (2007). Optimism and resources: Effects on each other and on health over 10 years. *Journal of research in personality*, 41(4), 772-786.

Segerstrom, S. C., Carver, C. S., & Scheier, M. F. (2017). Optimism. In *The happy mind: Cognitive contributions to well-being* (pp. 195-212). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Seligman, M. E. P. (2006). *Learned optimism: How to change your mind and your life*. Vintage Books. (Original work published 1990)

Seligman, M. E. P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist*, *55*(1), 5–14.

Qi, M., Zhou, S., Guo, Z., & Zhang, W. (2022). Parental optimism and youth well-being: The mediating role of family functioning. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 19(15), 9453.

Yan, L., & Xu, Y. (2023). The relationship between social support and postpartum anxiety: The mediating role of self-esteem and optimism. *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth, 23*, 412.

Contribution Report

Member	**Contribution**
Mubasshira Aibani	Hypothetical Application Scenario
Pranjal Suthar (C039)	Objectives, Structure of the Session
Tanya Iyer (C053)	Justification for selecting variable, Target population & setting
Shreel Patel	Introduction to the variable, Conclusion
Krina Maru	Theoretical Background