

THE INTERSECT OF DARKNESS: A QUANTITATIVE EXPLORATION OF MACHIAVELLIANISM, EXTRINSIC GOALS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING IN YOUNG ADULTS

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigated the effect of Machiavellianism and extrinsic goals on subjective well-being of young adults. It was hypothesized that Machiavellianism and extrinsic goals are likely to negatively predict well-being in young adults. Furthermore, demographic variables are likely to predict well-being in young adults. The sample comprised 150 young adults with an age range of 20-30 years. Convenient sampling was used. Demographic information sheet, Two-Dimensional Machiavellianism Scale (TDMS), Aspirations Index, and Subjective Well-being (BBC-SWB) scale were used as assessment measures. Pearson Product Moment correlation was used to find out the relationship between study variables. Moreover, hierarchical regression analysis was used to find out the predictors of well-being. The results revealed that Machiavellianism negatively predicted subjective well-being in young adults. Findings revealed that extrinsic goals were not a predictor of well-being. Further, no demographic variable predicted well-being in young adults. The findings of the study are beneficial for awareness regarding the harms of Machiavellian traits.

Keywords: Machiavellianism, extrinsic goals, well-being.

INTRODUCTION

In the past years, researchers took a keen interest in the topic of well-being to explore the bases of happiness and many characteristics of human thriving. A person's well-being is a complex combination of physical, mental, emotional, and social health elements. Well-being is divided into two perspectives, hedonic and eudemonic. Hedonic well-being involves seeking pleasure and avoiding painful experiences to lead a peaceful life. The concept of eudemonia belongs to actualizing the self, self-realization, and purposeful life. Well-being has different forms, it can be subjective well-being;

overall well-being of a person, or psychological well-being (Rehman et al., 2020).

Subjective well-being is the term used to describe how people view their own state of general well-being, which includes things like general health and quality of life. It refers to the individualized experience of prioritizing happy affect above negative affect and is a prevalent strategy for well-being in daily life. An individual's assessment of their level of happiness, life satisfaction, and emotional equilibrium is reflected in this subjective judgment. In order to cultivate subjective well-being, it is important to prioritize pleasant emotions and

minimize negative ones. This helps people feel more fulfilled and happy in all areas of their lives (Ackerman et al., 2018; Vargas & Oyanedel; 2023). According to the bottom-up theory of well-being, happiness is fundamentally the accumulation of many little pleasures, as some philosophers have put it. Rather than concentrating only on significant happy occasions, people assess their general well-being by adding up all of their life's experiences, both good and bad. This viewpoint is in opposition to a more atomistic or reductionistic school of philosophy, especially one which is connected to Lockean philosophy. In former context, the focus is on viewing well-being as a result of a collection of distinct, personal experiences and joys rather than as something that is only dictated by major or defining life events. It emphasizes how crucial it is to take into account all of one's experiences both good and bad when determining how one feels about oneself in general (Kozma & Stones, 1978).

Machiavellianism is characterized as “a social conduct that comprises manipulating others for personal advantage, usually at the risk of the other's self-interest” (Wilson, Near, & Miller, 1996). Machiavellianism is a personality trait characterized by a cynical outlook, a readiness to act unethically, and a set of manipulative strategies that can be utilized to achieve power and wealth for oneself (Christie & Geis, 1970). Machiavellianism has historically been connected with the “darker side” of human nature (Paulhus & Williams, 2002).

The term ‘Machiavellian’ has its roots in the name of Niccolo Machiavelli, in 1513. Niccolo Machiavelli was born in the fifteenth century in Florens, Italy. Machiavelli was a philosopher, politician, and writer. Machiavelli wrote many works in his final years, including *The Prince*, which became an international bestseller, *The Prince*. Machiavelli propound that others should be regarded as vicious, lazy, and untrustful and that a ruler should use cruelty, exploitation, and deceit to maintain power (Walter, Anderson, & Martin, 2005).—Niccolo Machiavelli, was the notorious Renaissance diplomat and philosopher whose most well-known publication “*The Prince*” (*Il Principe*). His views are contained in this well-known work. Which holds that strong rulers must be cruel to their subjects and opponents, and that greatness and survival can be attained through any means, even if they are considered immoral and vicious. “Machiavellianism” became a well-known term in the late sixteenth century to describe the

technique of deception in order to achieve success. It wasn't a psychological word until the 1970s, when Richard Christie and Florence L. Geis, in 1970 two social psychologists, devised “the Machiavellianism Scale” (Harris & Tesser, 1976).

The psychological qualities of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy combine up the dark triad. Because of their malicious traits, they are referred to be “dark.” The Dark Triad, which is a constellation of personality characteristics that encompasses narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism, has gotten the most empirical attention in the last decade. Narcissism is characterized by a sense of dominance, privilege, and grandiosity (Raskin & Hall, 1979). Psychopathy is characterized by thrill-seeking behaviors combined with a lack of empathy and anxiety (Hare, 1985). Machiavellianism is the Dark Triad's third component. Machiavellianism depicts a very selfish mindset in which a person is prepared to go to any length to attain his or her objectives, such as deception, manipulation, and exploitation. The Dark Triad traits have been discovered to related to a wide range of behaviors and interpersonal tendencies. Machiavellianism has stronger correlation with decline of moral values (Arvan, 2013; Haidt, et al. 2009).

Life goals are aims that individuals consciously form continuously in their lives in order to have a will to live. Goals are classified into either extrinsic (e.g., financial success) or intrinsic (e.g., community feeling). Materialistic ambitions such as fame, image, and fortune are examples of extrinsic life goals. These objectives are largely dependent on the unintentional reactions of others and are often pursued as a means to an end (Fulford et al., 2020).

Two main procedures form individuals’ aspirations and goal systems. First, Individuals respond to the repetitive stimuli they encounter as a result of their habits. Second, individuals make comparisons with other people to compare themselves known as social comparison theory (Schipper & Ziegler, 2019). According to self-determination theory, life goals might be intrinsic or extrinsic. According to self-determination theorists, psychological well-being is dependent on meeting three needs: liberty, or a sense of choice and volition in behavior management, maturity, or a sense of accomplishment in one's actions, and relatedness, or a sense of being loved and maintaining close relationships with others (Deci & Ryan, 2000). There are three main psychological

demands, according to the self-determination theory (SDT): liberty, capability, and social connection. A need is defined as the resources or conditions required for an individual to grow and thrive. To look at it another way, the idea that people have needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness means that these needs must be met in order for them to achieve optimum growth and health (Deci & Ryan, 1995).

Extrinsic goals are linked with gaining rewards or approval and are associated with lower well-being if they are not fulfilled. People with higher goals spend their time gaining money by exploiting others instead of working on their well-being which ultimately results in lower well-being.

In sum, Machiavellianism is dark personality traits that involve exploiting and using people for one's own good. People with Machiavellian traits can do anything to reach their goals and if they can't achieve their goals it will result in lower well-being. Extrinsic life ambitions are materialistic expectations that are connected to lower happiness (Roderer et al., 2022). A study conducted on a sample of employees in Pakistan indicated that dark triad had a significant association with mental well-being, specifically, Machiavellianism was negatively related to the well-being of the employees experiencing cyberbullying (Baheer et al., 2023). Similarly, another research study conducted in India by Rehman et al. (2018) studied the association between Machiavellianism and well-being. The study found negative relationships between Machiavellianism and well-being. Machiavellianism has a negative link with life satisfaction and psychological well-being.

Tang et al. (2008) studied the love of money, Machiavellianism, risk tolerance, and unethical behavior in business and psychology students. Cluster analysis was used to analyze data. The results indicated that love of wealth has a direct and significant relationship with Machiavellianism.

Muris et al. (2017) investigated the relationships between love of money, Machiavellianism, and unethical behavior. The data was collected from 360 MBA students. Results showed that individuals being very fond of money were 5,87 times more likely to represent upper-level Machiavellian personality than individuals being very little fond of money.

Gómez-Leal et al. (2022) revealed in their study The Dark Triad and Subjective Well-being that there is a negative relationship between the traits of psychopathy and Machiavellianism and subjective

well-being. It was found that participants who scored higher on Machiavellianism engaged in more maladaptive strategies with a subsequent reduction in affective well-being, which, in turn, explained the reduction in cognitive well-being.

Dittmar and Isham (2022) conducted a study on Materialistic value orientation and well-being. It was revealed that materialistic values have been linked to poorer well-being across different facets of well-being (personal, social, and environmental) and that these negative associations have been recorded across the lifespan.

Furthermore, Pilch and Górnik-Durose (2016b) examined the relationships between the Dark Triad traits (narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy) and materialism. Sample size was 378 which was taken from the general population. In this study, the triarchic psychopathy model (which includes meanness, boldness, and disinhibition) was applied. Dark triad predicts 21–36 percent of materialism and its features. Narcissism and Machiavellianism were the most powerful positive predictors. Christopher et al. (2009) studied the relationship between materialism and well-being. By convenient sampling 237 participants were recruited. High materialism and low income were found to be associated with lower well-being.

Moreover, Aghababaei (2019) discovered the Relationship between the Dark Triad traits, Subjective and Psychological Well-being in Iranian Students. 228 Iranian university students were recruited for the study. Narcissism is linked to both psychological and subjective well-being. Psychopathy and Machiavellianism were connected to lower levels of happiness. The current study found that narcissism was positively connected to autonomy and well-being, while Machiavellianism was negatively related.

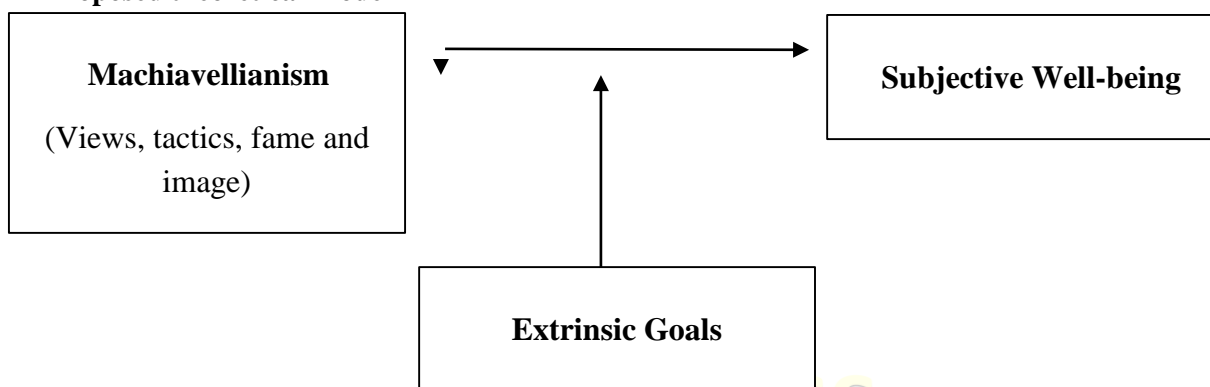
Personality traits and their effect on subjective well-being is one of the most discussed topics in psychology. Recently there has been increasing interest in psychology toward harmful personality traits. The current study examines the degree to which Machiavellianism affects happiness and subjective well-being. Sometimes, giving priority to financial goals can be detrimental to happiness. Striving for material goods can hurt social relationships, thus lowering the level of well-being. From a life satisfaction point of view, it could be wise to discourage materialistic values and encourage other values in life (Puente-Díaz &

Cavazos-Arroyo, 2019). It seems obvious that those who have manipulateness and deceitful behavior will value material goods over intrinsic goals and ultimately have lower well-being if facing a lack of fulfillment of their goals. Yet, research on this subject has been inconclusive and seems to reach different conclusions depending on how materialistic values and subjective well-being are measured (Schalembier et al., 2020). That's why, this research will aim to see whether Machiavellianism and extrinsic goals predict well-being. Furthermore, a sample of unmarried young

adults was taken to assess their subjective well-being. Married adults were excluded as their well-being criteria were different.

The study included the hypotheses. (H1) Machiavellianism would negatively predicts well-being in young adults. (H2) Extrinsic goals would negatively predict well-being in young adults. (H3) Machiavellianism views, tactics, fame and image would predict subjective wellbeing (H4) Extrinsic goals would moderate the relationship between Machiavellianism and well-being in young adults.

Proposed theoretical Model



Method

Research Design

Quantitative approach was executed using correlation research with cross sectional design through survey was executed to assess the relationship among Machiavellianism, Extrinsic goals and Subjective well-being.

Sample and Sampling Strategy

Data was collected from 150 young adults through an online module. Male and female-educated young adults with an age range of 20-30 were recruited using nonprobability convenient sampling. Participants with any physical disability and married young adults were excluded as they might be more focused on intrinsic life goals as compared to extrinsic goals.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics of demographic variables (N= 150)

| Characteristics | <i>f</i> | <i>%</i> |
|-----------------------|----------|----------|
| Gender | | |
| Men | 63 | 42 |
| Women | 87 | 58 |
| Monthly Family income | | |
| Less than 50,000 | 86 | 57.3 |
| Above than 50,000 | 64 | 42.7 |
| Family system | | |
| Nuclear | 102 | 68 |
| Joint | 48 | 32 |
| Place of residence | | |
| Urban | 112 | 74.7 |
| Rural | 38 | 25.3 |

| Characteristics | <i>f</i> | % |
|-------------------|----------|------|
| Employment status | | |
| Employed | 31 | 20.7 |
| Unemployed | 119 | 79.3 |

Note. *f*=frequency; %=percentage

Assessment Tools

Personal information sheet

A demographic information sheet was used to gather knowledge about the exclusive information such as age, gender, education, family income, family system, place of residence, employment status, and marital status.

Two-Dimensional Machiavellianism

The 12-item two-Dimensional Machiavellianism Scale by Monaghan, measures the views and tactics dimension. Scale turned out to have reliability of cronbach alpha .80 to .89, Views ranging from .74 to .84, and Tactics ranging from .81 to .88. There were six reverse coded items. Items 1-6 are averaged to create the Views subscale, while items 7-12 are averaged to create the Tactics subscale with 7-point Likert scale ranging from ‘disagree strongly’ to ‘agree strongly’. The scale consists of items i.e. I think that most people will take advantage of others in the right situation etc.

Aspirations Index

The Aspirations index scale created by Kasser and Ryan in 2001 assesses people’s aspirations or life goals. It is a 7-point Likert scale ranging from ‘not at all’ to ‘very’. Cronbach alphas was 0.91. There is not any reverse-coded item. Some of the items of the scale are; to be financially successful, be famous, to be rich, etc. Every subscale has questions about goals i.e. How important is this goal to you? and How likely is it that you will attain this goal in your future? (Utvær et al., 2014)

Subjective Well-being Scale

The BBC Subjective Well-being scale was developed in 2013 to measure people’s subjective experiences of well-being. It has previously been shown to be a reliable and

valid measure of subjective well-being in the general population with good psychometric properties. Internal consistency for the total 24-item scale is .94. It was developed using responses on a 5-point Likert scale. These were; ‘not at all’ to ‘extremely’ One item is reverse coded. It is 24 items scale i.e., do you feel depressed or anxious, are you happy with your personal and family life, are you happy that you have enough money to meet your needs?

Procedure

The title of the study and the researcher’s identity were reported in the permission letter. Data were collected from the participants through convenient sampling. The data was collected through an online google forms module. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were identified by the researcher and consent was taken from the participants. The researcher ensured the confidentiality of all the obtained information. The goal of the research was delineated to them. The respondents were given the questionnaires after brief instructions. Some ethical considerations were taken in view such as, permission was taken from the concerned authors of the scales. Consent was taken from the participants for data collection. Confidentiality of participants was maintained. Participants were informed that they had the right to withdraw at any time.

Results

The study was designed to explore the relationship between Machiavellianism, extrinsic goals, and well-being in young adults. The data analytic strategy starts with reliability analysis using Cronbach’s alphas for scales. Further, Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to assess the relationships between demographic and study variables.

Table 2

Descriptive analyses of assessment measures

| Variable | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | Range | Chronbeck α |
|--------------------------|----------|-----------|----------|--------------------|
| Machiavellianism Views | 19.73 | 5.23 | 7 – 35 | .55 |
| Machiavellianism Tactics | 20.06 | 7.76 | 6 – 42 | .84 |
| Wealth | 59.96 | 18.18 | 25 – 91 | .92 |
| Fame | 44.57 | 18.45 | 15 – 90 | .92 |
| Image | 47.15 | 17.05 | 15 – 90 | .89 |
| Subjective Well-being | 88.81 | 17.95 | 25 – 117 | .93 |

The above table showed the means and standard deviations and maximum and minimum ranges of assessment measures Alpha reliability of study variables. Results indicated an acceptable range of reliability for Machiavellianism tactics, wealth, fame, image extrinsic goals, and subjective well-being. The value of Machiavellianism views was low.

As reliability provided an initial baseline, Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was carried out to assess the relationship between study variables.

Table 3

Correlational analysis between the study variables (N = 150)

| Variables | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|--------------------------|----------|-----------|---|-----|-------|-------|--------|
| 1. Mechanistic Tactics | 20.06 | 7.76 | - | .02 | .01 | .08 | -.61** |
| 2. Wealth | 59.96 | 18.18 | | - | .51** | .51** | -.22** |
| 3. Fame | 44.57 | 18.45 | | | - | .68** | .04 |
| 4. Image | 47.15 | 17.05 | | | | - | -.05 |
| 5. Subjective well-being | 88.81 | 17.95 | | | | | - |

Pearson Product Moment correlation was run to find the relationship between Machiavellianism, extrinsic goals, and well-being in young adults. Results indicated that Machiavellianism Tactics and wealth were negatively related to the subjective well-being of adults. Fame and Image were non-significant related to subjective well-being.

Table 4

Regression analysis between study variables (N = 150)

| Variables | <i>B</i> | <i>SE</i> | <i>T</i> | <i>p</i> | 95% <i>C.I</i> |
|--------------------------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------------|
| (Constant) | 109.62 | 6.37 | 17.22 | .00 | [97.0 – 122.2] |
| Machiavellianism Tactics | -.60 | .23 | -2.59 | .01 | [-1.1 - -.14] |
| Wealth | -.38 | .10 | -4.01 | .00 | [-.6 - -.19] |
| Fame | .30 | .11 | 2.77 | .01 | [.1 - .5] |
| Image | -.06 | .12 | -.50 | .62 | [-.3 - .2] |

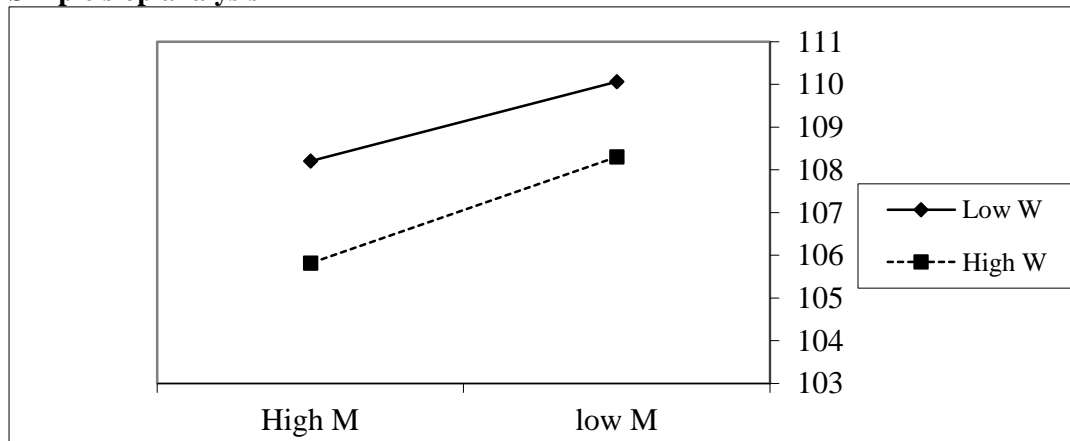
Overall model was significant $F = 5.22, p < .001$. Assumptions were fulfilled (tolerance $> .2$), Results indicated that overall Machiavellianism Tactics was the strongest negative predictor of well-being followed by wealth. Moderation analysis was established using results as a baseline.

Table 5
 Moderation by centration (N = 150)

| Predictor | B | 95% C.I | | SE | B | R ² | ΔR ² |
|--------------------------|--------|---------|--------|------|---------|----------------|-----------------|
| | | LL | UL | | | | |
| Step I | | | | | | .08** | .08 |
| (Constant) | 99.82 | 89.49 | 110.14 | 5.22 | | | |
| Wealth | -.32 | -.51 | -.13 | .09 | -.32** | | |
| Fame | .24 | .02 | .45 | .11 | .24* | | |
| Image | -.05 | -.28 | .18 | .12 | -.05 | | |
| Step II | | | | | | .45*** | .36 |
| (Constant) | 126.18 | 116.57 | 135.80 | 4.86 | | | |
| Wealth | -.32 | -.47 | -.18 | .07 | -.33*** | | |
| Fame | .18 | .01 | .35 | .08 | .19* | | |
| Image | .05 | -.14 | .23 | .09 | .04 | | |
| Machiavellianism Tactics | -1.41 | -1.69 | -1.13 | .14 | -.61*** | | |
| Step III | | | | | | .54*** | .09 |
| (Constant) | 111.54 | 100.96 | 122.12 | 5.35 | | | |
| Wealth | -.12 | -.29 | .04 | .08 | -.13 | | |
| Fame | .16 | -.02 | .34 | .09 | .17 | | |
| Image | .07 | -.10 | .24 | .09 | .07 | | |
| Machiavellianism Tactics | -1.27 | -1.54 | -1.01 | .14 | -.55*** | | |
| CMT X CW | -.04 | -.06 | -.02 | .01 | -.37*** | | |
| CMT X CF | .00 | -.02 | .02 | .01 | .01 | | |

Multiple regression was run to assess the moderating role of extrinsic goal between Machiavellianism and well-being in young adults. Durban watson = 1.76 indicating independence of observation. Results also indicated that in step 1, the model was significant (F = 4.54, df = 3,146, p <.05) explained 8% variance. Model 2 was significant (F = 29.83, df = 4,145, p <.00) explained 45% variance, results indicated that wealth and Machiavellianism. Tactics were negative predictors of subjective well-being. Model 3 was significant (F = 27.52, df = 5,144, p <.00) explained 54% variance, results indicated that the relationship between Machiavellianism Tactics and well-being was moderated by the wealth.

Figure Number 1
 Simple slop analysis



Adults with higher desire of wealth as an extrinsic goal have better psychological wellbeing if they have low Machiavellianism traits.

Discussion

Goal achievement is becoming more and more important in today's society, and materialistic impulses are also becoming more prevalent. The growing aspiration for social standing and financial achievement is having a significant effect on people's wellbeing. This shift in culture highlights the possible drawbacks of placing more value on material prosperity and social standing than on overall wellbeing. The pursuit of material goals can be detrimental to people's general happiness and sense of fulfillment in life.

The findings, which showed that Machiavellian tactics emerged as the most powerful negative predictor of psychological well-being, confirmed the premise that there is a negative correlation between Machiavellianism and well-being. This implies that those who use Machiavellian strategies have low psychological wellbeing. These results support previous research, particularly that of Baheer et al. (2023), which emphasizes the detrimental effects of Machiavellian strategies on general well-being. The manipulative nature of these strategies is blamed for this unfavorable forecast because it creates stress, disagreement, moral quandaries, and obstructs the development of genuine relationships—all of which impair wellbeing.

The results showed that wealth was the negative predictor of psychological well-being, supporting the premise that there is a negative relationship between wealth and well-being. This implies that people who have a strong desire to be wealthy are less

psychologically well-off. These results are consistent with previous research, especially that of Ingrid et al. (2009), which shows the substantial harm that the chase of riches causes to one's general state of well-being. It's interesting to note that this runs counter to the widely held belief that wealth improves well-being since it allows for easier access to resources and better financial security.

It was also hypothesized that the relationship between the Machiavellianism traits and wellbeing was moderated by extrinsic goal. The hypothesis was partially accepted. Results indicated that adults with higher desire of wealth as an extrinsic goal have better wellbeing if they have low Machiavellianism traits and vice versa. The relationship between the Machiavellianism, wealth and wellbeing was explored separately (Womick et al., 2019). The findings were consistent with the literature review.

Individuals with a strong desire for wealth and low Machiavellian traits tend to experience better well-being. The genuine pursuit of success, combined with an ethical approach, contributes to a positive sense of accomplishment. Conversely, a high desire for wealth with high Machiavellian traits may lead to short-term gains but compromise long-term well-being due to manipulative and potentially unethical behaviors.

It was also hypothesized that fame and image would predict subjective wellbeing. Results were not in line with literature (Dittmar, & Isham, 2022). Results from regression analysis (table 5) indicated that fame and image were non-significant predictor of subjective well-being. The lack of significance of fame and image as predictors of subjective well-being suggests that these factors may not consistently contribute to people's happiness.

Conclusion

It is concluded that main study variable Machiavellianism is strongly related to lower levels of well-being. It is observed that having unethical characteristics and using wrong and manipulative Strategies to achieve one's goal does not bring happiness. Extrinsic goals are not related to well-being which can be cultural effect. Also, demographic variables did not predict well-being in young adults.

Limitations and Suggestions

There is a dearth of research on Machiavellianism in Pakistan at the moment, and little is known about this personality trait in relation to married people. Including married individuals in the study may yield important insights into the ways in which the dynamics of married relationships reflect Machiavellian tendencies. Furthermore, investigating the function of extrinsic objectives as a mediator in married people, organization or relationship may improve the clarity of the associations among the variables being examined. Study instruments in the local language are essential to guaranteeing the validity and cultural applicability of the research findings.

Implications of the Study

Personality factors and personal values have an impact on the relationship between pursuing riches and overall well-being. Happiness can be enhanced by pursuing financial success in line with one's

personal ideals. Understanding the factors of wellbeing has consequences for counseling and education, highlighting the role that values play in making decisions. Questions concerning how to strike a balance between overall well-being and economic success are raised by societal values. By addressing these factors, we can have a more comprehensive understanding of social ideals and personal fulfillment.

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