

Perceived effect of regular organised group singing on happiness, positive and negative affect and self-efficacy

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Abstract

Singing as a group activity has been prevalent across cultures worldwide since time immemorial. Prior research in the beneficiary effects of singing provides evidences of improvement of health and psychological wellbeing, by encouraging positivity (Kreutz, Bongard, Rohrman, Grebe, Bastian, & Hodapp, 2003). This study tries to explore and analyse the effect of regular organised group singing in church, college and private choirs and college music societies on the happiness, positive and negative affect and self-efficacy of individuals who are part of such groups, as perceived by them. In order to discover whether individuals experienced an increase in happiness, positive affect and self-efficacy and a decrease in negative affect and the various underlying themes, three participants with varying years of experience as members of choir groups (3 years, 25 years and 40 years respectively) were interviewed. Self-report questionnaire data on happiness, positive and negative affect and self-efficacy was also collected from participants (n=104). The questionnaires used for data collection are as follows: Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999), Positive and Negative Affect Scale (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) and Generalised Self-Efficacy scale (Schwarzer, R., & Jerusalem, M., 1995). Thematic analysis of the interviews taken show that the individuals experienced a range of benefits from being part of such groups which includes increase in self-confidence, conflict resolution, organisational and managerial skills, and wider avenues for social interaction among others. Analysis of the data collected via standardized questionnaires also supports these claims to a considerable extent. Further research in this domain may validate the claim made by this study that engagement in such activities on a regular basis proves to be highly beneficial to individuals in their life.

Key words: *Happiness, Positive Affect, Negative Affect, Self-Efficacy*

In the present times, studies are indicating that social support is associated with decreased likelihood of a lifetime suicide attempt (Kleiman & Liu, 2013) and studies also show that leisure activities like group singing have long term impacts on memory, task performance, helping behaviour, socialization, self-concept, and health. (Hull, 1990). Hence, it

becomes imperative to research upon the relevance and positive impacts of group activities like singing, sports etc on the overall wellbeing and development of individuals.

Singing as a group activity has been prevalent across cultures worldwide since time immemorial. Prior research on the beneficiary

effects of singing provides evidences of improvement of health and psychological wellbeing, by encouraging positivity (Kreutz, Bongard, Rohrmann, Grebe, Bastian, & Hodapp, 2003).

A research by Clift & Hancox (2000) on the perceived benefits of group singing amongst members of university college choral societies found out that individuals involved in such activities had benefitted personally in their social (87%), emotional (75%), physical (58%) and spiritual (49%) aspects of life. It is important to note here that such activities are done on a voluntary basis and do not hold any monetary value for the individuals engaged in such activities.

Findings from a research conducted by Sloboda, Susan & Antonia (2001) also indicate that regular experience of music resulted in participants becoming more positive, more alert, and more focussed in the present, particularly where personal choice over the music was involved.

Further, a comparative study made of the positive moods generated by four common leisure activities: sport/exercise, music, church, and watching TV soaps by Hills & Argyle (1998) also indicate that each of these activities were a significant source of positive moods. Therefore, one can clearly make an attempt to study the overall impact of leisure based group activities on the happiness, positive and negative emotions experienced by individuals regularly engaged in such activities.

Happiness herein can be described as the overall subjective happiness perceived by an individual pertaining to whether he or she considers himself or herself to be a happy or an unhappy person (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). **Positive emotions** would mean the

extent to which an individual feels enthusiastic, active and alert henceforth resulting in a state of high energy, full concentration, and pleasurable engagement (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). **Negative emotions** can be described as “general dimension of subjective distress and unpleasurable engagement that subsumes a variety of aversive mood states, including anger, contempt, disgust, guilt, fear, and nervousness” (Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988).

A research interest in analyzing such impacts from the realm of individuals involved in group singing arrived from a study conducted by Betty, Bailey & Davidson (2003) on a choir of homeless men which brought out the result that positive life transformations experienced since joining the choir were primarily because of their involvement in group singing which appeared to have promoted therapeutic effects arising from emotional, social and mental involvement. Their study is based on Ruud's (1997) music therapeutic theory which states the relevance of culturally aligned musical activities in enhancing the quality of one's life. A study on the effect of singing on comprehension and reading achievement showed positive improvement in middle school students struggling in reading (Biggs, Homan, Dedrick, Minick, & Rasinski, 2008). The treatment group in this study improved on their self-efficacy upon improvement in performance due to singing.

Self-efficacy can be defined as the belief in one's competence to cope with a broad range of stressful or challenging demands (Luszczynska, Scholz, & Schwarzer, 2005). By regular organised group singing, the implication is towards an organised group of singers who come together on a regular basis to practise

their music and perform at various events and competitions.

Thus, the present study was conducted in order to provide a cohesive research on the effect of voluntary leisure activities like group singing on a person's happiness, experience of positive and negative emotions and the enhancement of self-efficacy through regular engagements in such activities.

METHOD

Sample

Three participants with varying years of experience as members of choir groups (3 years, 25 years, 40 years respectively) were recruited for the study along with a sample of 104 choir group members – 47 males and 57 females from age 12 onwards – recruited randomly through purposive sampling method. Subject 1 who was interviewed is a school student aged 15 with 3 years of experience as a choir member. Subject 2 was a school teacher aged 31 with 25 years of experience as a choir member and presently is also the choir master of his choir. Subject 3 was a 49 year old service manager working at a multinational company with 40 years of experience as a choir member and was formerly the choir master of his choir as well. The research was concentrated on regular members of various singing groups like church, college and private choirs and college music societies.

Hypotheses

Based on the literature review, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: There will be a positive association between regular organised group singing and happiness.

H2: There will be a positive association between regular organised group singing and positive affect.

H3: There will be a positive association between regular organised group singing and self efficacy.

H4: There will be a negative association between regular organised group singing and negative affect.

The hypotheses were to be tested based on the data gathered from the subjects via the following standardised questionnaires.

Measures

Subjective Happiness Scale by Lyubomirsky & Lepper (1999) is a 4 item scale on a 7 point Likert scale with points ranging from describing oneself as a happy or unhappy person, with higher rating corresponding to greater happiness, except item 4 which has reverse scoring. This scale is designed to measure the global subjective happiness of the respondent in general. Two items (1 and 2) give the respondents' absolute ratings and ratings relative to peers. The other two items (3 and 4) briefly describe happy and unhappy individuals and ask the respondents to rate the extent to which the description applies to them.

The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule by Watson, Clark & Tellegan (1988) is a 20 item scale intending to measure the respondent's positive and negative feelings and emotions over a period of time. The response ratings are given on a 5 point (1-5) Likert-type scale with point 1 corresponding to emotions experienced 'Very slightly or not at all' and point 5 corresponding to emotions experienced 'Extremely'. The respondents have to rate certain positive and negative words pertaining

to the extent to which they experience that particular emotion over a period of time. 10 items in the scale assess the extent of positive emotions and the rest 10 items assess the extent of negative emotions. In order to assess the extent of positive emotions and feelings, respondents were asked to rate items which were as follows – ‘Interested’ (item 1), ‘Excited’ (item 3), Strong (item 5) etc. Similarly, in order to assess negative emotions and feelings, items like ‘Distressed’ (item 2), ‘Upset’ (item 4), ‘Guilty’ (item 6) etc were used.

The Generalised Self –Efficacy Scale by Schwarzer & Jerusalem (1995) is a self-report measure with 10 items on a Likert type scale with ratings ranging from point 1 to 4 corresponding to participants responding to statements as ‘not at all true’ (point 1) for them on one end of the rating scale and as ‘exactly true’ (point 4) for them on the other end. The scale aims to measure the self-efficacy of the respondent using statements such as – “I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough” (item 1).

Procedure

The present research was an exploratory research conducted by interviewing three participants with varying years of experience as choir members (3 years, 25 years and 40 years respectively). Semi structured interviews were conducted to assess the participants’ perceived sense of benefit through regular organised group singing in terms of their happiness, experience of positive and negative emotions and self-efficacy. Simultaneously, 104 participants (47 males and 57 females) above the age of 12 years who are regular members of choir groups were selected using purposive sampling method. Their level of happiness was

assessed by using *Subjective Happiness Scale* by Lyubomirsky & Lepper (1999). It includes 4 items which measures the subjective happiness of the respondent. A higher mean score value achieved on the scale as against the norm mean score indicates greater level of happiness. The positive and negative emotions and feelings experienced by the participants were also assessed using the *Positive and Negative Affect Schedule* by Watson, Clark, & Tellegan (1988). It is a 20 item measure with a 5 point rating scale measuring the extent of positive and negative emotions experienced by the respondent over a period of time. Under the positive affect score, a respondent can achieve scores ranging from 10 to 50 with higher scores representing higher levels of positive affect. Similarly, the negative affect scores of the respondent can range from 10 to 50 with lower scores representing lower levels of negative emotions. The respondents were also assessed on their level of self-efficacy using the *Generalised Self-Efficacy Scale* by Schwarzer & Jerusalem (1995). This scale has 10 items with participants responding on a 4 point rating scale (1-4). A higher score on the scale indicates a higher level of self-efficacy. After collecting data, the information was analysed to find out whether the hypothesis was rejected or accepted.

RESULT

The mean score of participants on the subjective happiness scale was 4.66 with 52.88% of the sample scoring above the mean value (Tables 1 and 2). The normative sample mean for the scale is 4.8 which indicates that the sample scored below the norm (Table 1). It was also seen that 42.31% of the sample did score above the normative sample mean (Table 2). The mean of the positive affect score on the

Positive and Negative Affect Schedule came out to be 36.32 with a standard deviation of 6.73. The normative sample mean score for positive affect is 33.33 (SD=7.2) which implies that the present sample scored above the norm with a lower value of SD hence indicating higher levels of positive affect experienced by the elements in the sample (Table 3). On the negative affect score, the sample had a mean of 22.26 with a standard deviation of 7.90. The normative sample mean score for negative affect is 17.14 (SD=6.2) which implies that our sample scored above the norm with a higher value of SD henceforth also indicating higher levels of negative affect experienced by the elements in the sample (Table 3). The mean sample score on the Generalised Self Efficacy Scale (GSE) was found to be 29.95 out of a possible maximum score of 40 with 57.69% of the sample scoring above the mean value (Table 4). The results indicate that the present sample scored a significantly above average score on the GSE Scale.

Thematic analysis of the interviews conducted on *three* participants brought out the following results:

Subject 1

The first subject has three years of experience as a church choir member. Upon extensive interviewing, the researcher could arrive at a range of benefits that the subject perceived in terms of her experience as a regular member of the church choir. The subject was asked to elaborate on the development that she had as an individual in these three years related to her experience within the church choir. The participant clearly stated that she felt an increase in her self-confidence in terms of stage performances and a subsequent reduction in

stage freight. She has, through her experience as a choir member achieved a wide range of opportunities (recording projects, entry into a professional choir at a young age, participate in various music competitions etc) as part of her choir and otherwise. Such opportunities also enabled her to meet new people with similar interests thereby increasing her social support base. The subject cherishes her time in the choir practises and performances as she experiences a sense of belonging and connection with her peers within the choir. Her time within the choir has enabled her to be happier (“Singing with my choir group makes me happy at all times”), forget her worries, relieve her mind off pressure and negative events, feel excited and enjoy her time as a whole. The technical knowledge and skills that she has gained through her experience as a choir member has also found practical applications in other realms of her life wherein she can now perform better and more confidently in front of an audience (even in solo events). This confidence has also helped her make new friends, a skill that the subject lacked prior to her entry into the church choir. The subject felt pride in narrating instances wherein her experience within the choir was considered an area of expertise which she could apply in her school life as well. The subject reports to have developed a striving to perform better year after year and has begun to enjoy the activity of group singing more than before. The subject perceives herself to be a better singer now, improving constantly as the time goes by. She also experiences negative emotions of frustration and guilt when her choir performs inadequately or when her peers don't take practises too seriously. But such minor glitches act as reinforcements for her to improve on her skills and help her peers in whichever way

possible. Overall, the subject values her presence and experience within the church choir which, according to her, has made her a more confident individual.

Subject 2

The subject has 25 years of experience as a choir member and now leads his choir as a choir master since the last one year. As a choir member, the subject reported to have experienced a great deal of happiness and satisfaction owing to his time within his choir. For him, choir practise is a joyous experience which helps him connect more with music, with his peers and with his audience. It acts as a getaway for him from personal and family issues, helps him rewind and stay away from tension. His experience within the choir has enabled him to expand on his knowledge base in music and explore more genres. This technical base is the prime reason which made him take up the challenge of leading his choir presently. Through group singing within the choir, the subject reported to have understood the importance of being in harmony with others, to take others along, help them in their pitfalls and develop a sense of collective responsibility within the choir and in all areas of life. This sense of harmony is also something that the subject tries to impart to his students as a school teacher. The subject believes that the choir provides an avenue to learn social interaction skills at a very young age as opposed to people who explore this dimension much later in life. He fondly remembers the time spent bonding with the members of his choir over food and music during choir practises. The subject reported to have gained expertise in conflict resolution measures in his time as a choir member owing to the power struggle and politics within his choir. This also

developed emotions of frustration and fear within the subject that the core value of his love for music may be shattered. Nonetheless, the subject reiterated the fact that he would continue to be a part of choirs as long as he lives. This is because the subject highly values the knowledge and life-lessons learnt through group singing experience which includes a development of coherent aim and purpose in life, a sense of collective responsibility, a desire to better himself, and to help others improve in the process.

Subject 3

The subject is a former choir master with 40 years of experience within the choir. The subject reported to have experienced 'mental happiness' and a sense of confidence to do various activities ("I can do things") by virtue of his experience as a choir member. The subject feels that his presence in the choir enables him to feel younger, gain more opportunities and knowledge, and develop a capacity to achieve things one wishes for in life. The subject prefers group singing to solo singing owing to the fact that the music thus produced has a greater sense of harmony. The time spent in the choir enabled him to develop a sense of discipline, reduce his stage fright and have deeper social connections with his peers and competitors. Personally, the subject perceives that his being a part of the choir has expanded his social support system and enabled him to come up with novel ideas and implement them successfully. The subject feels disappointment over lack of punctuality and seriousness towards practise in the younger generations within the choir owing to his desire to prepare well in order to perform one's best as a choir. He therefore, tries to help out the younger generations and feels extreme pride

given the fact that he receives high regard from his choir and others owing to his years of experience as a chorister. The subject strives to make group singing an enjoyable activity and implement constructive suggestions from peers outside the choir into better improving the choir performance. The subject personally believes that the choir environment develops a positive attitude towards life and others, equips one with the mental strength and capacity to face all kinds of challenges in life, provide an avenue for productive time utilisation and hence, reducing the time and effort engaged in negative thoughts and actions.

DISCUSSION

The present study aims to explore and analyse the effect of regular organised group singing in church, college and private choirs and college music societies on the happiness, positive and negative affect and self-efficacy of individuals who are part of such groups, as perceived by them. This research also aims at exploring the various areas of benefit that such individuals experience as being a part of such groups on a regular basis.

Based on the review of literature, it was hypothesised that individuals who are regular members of singing groups will experience a high degree of happiness, positive emotions and self-efficacy and a low degree of negative emotions. Herein, by happiness we mean the overall subjective happiness pertaining to whether an individual is a happy or an unhappy person (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999).

According to the first hypothesis (H1), there will be positive association between regular organised group singing and happiness. The scores obtained from the Subjective Happiness Scale by Lyubomirsky & Lepper (1999) to

assess subjective happiness of the elements in the sample (Table 1) showed that the sample scored below the normative sample mean of 4.8 (Sample Mean = 4.66). It was also seen that 42.31% of the sample scored above the normative sample mean of 4.8. (Table 2). Hence, based on the data analysis, the first hypothesis (H1), was rejected.

According to Watson, Clark & Tellegan (1988), positive affect (PA) reflects the “extent to which a person feels enthusiastic, active, and alert”. High PA is a state of high energy, full concentration, and pleasurable engagement, whereas low PA is characterized by sadness and lethargy. Whereas, negative affect (NA) is a “general dimension of subjective distress and unpleasurable engagement that subsumes a variety of aversive mood states, including anger, contempt, disgust, guilt, fear, and nervousness”, with low NA being a state of calmness and serenity.

According to the second hypothesis (H2), there will be a positive association between regular organised group singing and positive affect. Based on the scores obtained from the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule by Watson, Clark & Tellegan (1988), it was seen that the sample scored above the normative sample mean and SD of 33.33 (SD=7.2) (Sample Mean = 36.32, SD = 6.73). This indicates that the elements in the sample experienced higher levels of positive emotions hence retaining the second hypothesis (Table 3). Similarly, the sample also scored above the normative sample mean and SD of 17.14 (SD = 6.2) on negative affect score with a sample mean of 22.26 and SD of 7.90 (Table 3). Henceforth, our fourth hypothesis (H4) which states that there will be a negative association between regular organised group singing and

negative affect was rejected, indicating higher levels of negative emotions experienced by the elements in the sample.

General self-efficacy is the belief in one's competence to cope with a broad range of stressful

or challenging demands (Luszczynska, Scholz & Schwarzer, 2005). The third hypothesis (H3) stated that there will be a positive association between regular organised group singing and self efficacy. The mean sample score on the Generalised Self Efficacy Scale was found to be 29.95 out of a possible maximum score of 40 with 57.69% of the sample scoring above the mean value (Table 4). The results indicate that the present sample scored a significantly above average score on the GSE Scale henceforth retaining the hypothesis (H3) which means that elements in the sample experience higher levels of self-efficacy

Hence, it is proved that individuals engaged in regular group singing experience higher levels of positive emotions and self-efficacy. They also experience higher levels of negative emotions therefore, refuting the hypothesis in this aspect. Although, results from the interviews indicate how group singing acts as an effective mechanism to regulate and protect oneself from the detrimental impacts of such negative emotions. The results from the Subjective Happiness Scale also do not indicate higher levels of happiness in the sample as previously hypothesised. Although, the results from the interviews do indicate how group singing and the various opportunities attached with being part of such groups act as a constant source of happiness for such individuals.

The interviews bring forth a number of benefits pertaining to being a regular member of singing

groups. These would include an increase in self-confidence, decrease in stage fright, wider opportunities for self-growth and development, increased avenues for social interactions and subsequent development of a coherent social support system, enhancement of conflict resolution, organisational skills and managerial skills. Such an experience was also seen to be highly beneficial to develop a sense of collective responsibility, increase the scope for prosocial behaviour, develop a sense of purpose in life and a striving towards perfection and to develop a positive attitude towards life and others. The experience of group singing was seen to enhance one's positive emotions and act as an efficient get away for all the negative emotions experienced in life. The results also show such individuals to be high on the values of leadership, initiative taking and implementation skills.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that there is a considerable impact of regular organised group singing on an individual wherein he or she experiences a higher degree of positive emotions and self-efficacy. The individuals were also seen to be experiencing a higher degree of negative emotions wherein group singing acts as an effective get away to manage such emotions. No significant impact was seen on the level of happiness experienced by the individuals from the quantitative data analysis; nonetheless it was noted in the interviews that significant experiences of happiness were related to events associated with the individual being a part of such singing groups. The study revealed a number of benefits arising from regular group singing – increase in self-confidence, conflict resolution, organisational and managerial skills

and wider avenues for social interaction among others. Although generalising the results on the entire population of regular group singers is a farfetched task, given the fact that the research

sample only constituted a miniscule part of the population, we may safely say that such activities do have an impact on the overall development of an individual.

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APPENDIX**Table 1:** Mean scores of norm and sample on Subjective Happiness Scale

	Mean
Norm	4.8
Sample	4.66

Table 2: Percentage of sample above norm mean scores and sample mean scores

Mean scores	Percentage
Above norm mean= 4.8	42.31
Above sample mean= 4.66	52.88

Table 3: Norm and Sample scores on the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule

Affect	Mean	Standard Deviation	Norm	Sample
	Norm	Sample		
Positive	33.33	36.32	7.2	6.73
Negative	17.14	22.26	6.2	7.90

Table 4: Sample scores on the Generalised Self Efficacy Scale

	Mean	Percentage of sample above sample mean
Sample	29.95	57.69