

The Effect of Grit on Work Performance and Psychological Wellbeing: Analytical Study of Grit Literature

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ABSTRACT

The analytical study of grit literature has been conducted to identify the contribution of grit research in various social-cultural settings and their limitations for future research direction. A total number of 17 studies have been recognised to understand the concept of grit in the context of job performance, and individuals' mental and psychological wellbeing. We have also identified the correlation of grit with other socio-psychological factors in order to have a better understanding on its concept. The reviewed studies were conducted through quantitative designs by using self-rated survey. In general, it was found that higher level of grit has significantly increased the work performance of personnel such as medical doctors, sportsmen, and military cadets. Consistent findings were also found for the effect of grit on psychological wellbeing of individuals. Mental health issues were found to have reduced significantly with a higher level of grittiness. Nonetheless, most of the findings from this review was unable to derive grit as a standalone concept. The variable of grit is more robust when it was correlated with another socio-psychological factors. Overall, though grit was found to have positive implications for a specific setting and population, it alarmed the issue of generalisation. As grit is an emerging concept in the literature, more concrete findings and evidences are required for a comprehensive and conclusive understanding on its implications.

Keywords: grit; psychological wellbeing; work performance; perseverance; long term goal

INTRODUCTION

The primary objective of this review was to identify the existing contribution in grit studies, the implications of grit variable in various socio-cultural settings, its limitations and suggestions for future research directions. A total of 17 studies were identified for this review which were drawn from two main research databases (i.e. Mendeley and SCOPUS) with exclusion criteria of academic settings and qualitative studies. Investigations that explored grit through quantitative research approach were included in the present review article.

This article reviews the empirical investigations on the construct of grit in various socio-cultural settings and its implications, and the ways it contributes or correlate with other psychosocial factors. Since most of the grit literature have given extensive focus on studies conducted in academic setting, no studies from this particular setting are included in this review. Instead, the present review focuses on the effect of grit on the work performance of other populations such as medical doctors, military officers, and sportsmen. In addition, we have also reviewed the impact of grit on individual's psychological wellbeing such as depression, suicidal ideation, substance abuse, successful wellbeing, and basic needs satisfaction. Important issues concerning grit and its implications are also identified. Suggestions on the directions of future research are highlighted to fill in the gaps and

limitations from previous studies, hence steering towards a more comprehensive understanding on concept.

Grit and Its Definition

Literally, from Merriam-Webster dictionary (2019), grit means the firmness of spirit or mind of a person with an unyielding courage in the face of hardship or danger. Conceptually, grit has been closely related to the theoretical framework of mindset theory by Dweck (2006) which suggested the key of success for men through growth mindset instead of fixed mindset. From this theory of mindsets, Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews and Kelly (2007) started with the term grit with a definition of being successful and achieving as the after effect of having perseverance, passion, and motivation in pursuing long term goals. They highlighted that grit is considered a type of personality trait which leads individuals to work tremendously in dealing with challenges, keeping consistent on effort in anything although they were in adversity, hence differentiating grit from resilience. Credé, Tynan and Harms (2017) also define grit as a trait which consists of a combination of characters such as self-control, perseverance and passion.

THE PRESENT REVIEW

In the extant literature, grit has been studied for its implications on medical doctors (i.e. surgeons, general practitioners, otolaryngologist); sportsmen and athletes (i.e. soccer players, basketball players); and cadet and military personnel. Nonetheless, these studies have been looking into the implications of grit with different variables which will be discussed further. Narrowing to the studies on medical doctors in the United Kingdom and the United States (Halliday, Walker, Vig, Hines & Brecknell, 2016; Walker, Hines & Brecknell, 2016; and Salles, Cohen & Mueller, 2014), these investigations have found that having higher grit is very likely to be associated with lower level of burnouts in the medical field. There were also highlights in which being in different medical departments (i.e. surgeons, general practitioners, otolaryngologist, medical doctor in training) and having different level of experience in the field, have also contributed to the grittiness of the medical personnel. These findings were related to the different level of exhaustion that they had (Halliday, Walker, Vig, Hines & Brecknell, 2016); career satisfaction (Walker, Hines & Brecknell, 2016); and overall psychological wellbeing (Salles, Cohen & Mueller, 2014).

Studies the role of grit has also been conducted on athletes and sportsmen in the United States and Australia (Martin, Byrd, Watts & Dent, 2015; Larkin, O'Connor & Williams, 2015). O'Connor and Williams (2015), found that having higher level of grit has helped the soccer players to engage into more training hours and they performed better on cognitive skills test especially when they want to achieve their performance goals. Martin, Byrd, Watts and Dent (2015) have found the same effect of grit amongst wheelchair basketball players. However, their findings suggested that hardiness also contributed to the satisfaction of play that was felt by the players. They mentioned a different perspective of the implications of grit amongst their sample which is, sports engagement is significantly related to being gritty while life satisfaction is strongly related to having high level of hardiness.

Grit and its impact on work performance has also been identified amongst United States cadets and military personnel. Maddi, Matthews, Kelly, Villarreal, Gundersen and Savino (2017) has focused their research on identifying the similarities and differences between hardiness and grit on the performance and retention amongst cadets in West Point camp. Their findings suggested that grit and hardiness are significantly correlated. However, they found

that grit have effects on the performance of the cadets only on the physical and military exercise components but no effect on the overall performance and the academic component. Moreover, they suggested that hardiness was more influential towards the performance of the cadets as its concept of 'existential courage of involving oneself in the ongoing stresses and learning from them' is more impactful for them. These findings are consistent with Martin, Byrd, Watts and Dent (2015). A different approach of investigation was conducted by Pennings, Law, Green, and Anestis (2015) as they focused more on the degree that grit moderates the association between hopelessness and both suicidal ideation and resolved plans and the preparations for suicide amongst the military personnel. This longitudinal study suggested grit to be the protective factor against thoughts and desires towards suicide as they found that higher level of grit lowered the strength of relationship between hopelessness and suicidality. This has indirectly suggested to the grit literature on suicidality amongst the military personnel that being gritty inhibits the thoughts and plans for suicide.

Grit and Psychological Wellbeing

Grit was also studied in various populations in order to see its impact on the psychological wellbeing on an individual. A number of investigations were identified in this review that looked into the perspective of psychological wellbeing such as depression amongst Filipino high school students (Datu, King, Valdez & Eala, 2018); Americans with substance abuse disorder (Griffin, McDermott, McHugh, Fitzmaurice & Weiss, 2016), suicidal ideations amongst college and university students in the United States (Kleiman, Adams, Kashdan & Riskind, 2013; Blalock, Young & Kleinman, 2015); successful aging amongst Korean elderly (Kim & Lee, 2015); subjective wellbeing and basic needs satisfaction amongst Korean population; and Chinese adolescents (Jin & Kim, 2017; Li, Lin, Zhao, Chen & Wang, 2018), and substance use and other risk behaviours amongst Latino adolescents (Guerrero, Dudovitz, Chung, Dosanjh & Wong, 2016). Even though the identified studies have been conducted either towards the Western population or the collectivist population, they have found that almost consistent findings on the implications of grit. Overall, these investigations have found that having higher level of grit helped individuals to have a better psychological wellbeing. Nonetheless, none of these investigations were able to examine grit as a standalone construct that has a direct positive implication on individual's psychological wellbeing suggesting that other psychosocial factors may have contributed to the measurement outcomes of each investigation.

Research by Datu, King, Valdez and Eala (2018) and Kleiman, Adams, Kashdan and Riskind (2013) have used the factor of meaning of life as a mediator variable to mediate the effect of grit. These have suggested that grit only elevated the psychological wellbeing of an individual by having a higher sense of meaning of life. Besides that, Griffin, McDermott, McHugh, Fitzmaurice and Weiss (2016) found that patients with substance abuse disorder were able to overcome the relapses by being gritter only when they were older or employed. This suggested that the patients' grittiness level was only significant when they were either senior at age or they have a stable financial resource by having a job opportunity. Kim and Lee (2015) have also found that only a partial concept of grit was applicable for their geriatric population. They have suggested that only the concept of perseverance was significant improving the life of the elderly and the concept of interest was not significant.

Guerrero, Dudovitz, Chung, Dosanjh and Wong (2016) examined the association between grit and health behaviours amongst at-risk Latino youths and have found that the parenting style of the youths' parents was the strongest factor that associated with grit which indirectly reduce their involvement with alcohol and risky behaviours. This finding suggested

that grit alone did not have significant impact on the youths' health behaviours. Blalock, Young and Kleinman (2015) have also found consistent findings with the mentioned investigations. A significant relationship between negative life events and suicidal ideation was found only by using grit as a mediator variable, suggesting the role of grit to be impactful by having another psychosocial factor at hand. Their grittiness was not affected by having experience negative life events which then reduced their suicidal ideation. The finding was unable to explain the role of grit as a unique construct on its own. Another investigation by Jin and Kim (2017) has also found that grit reduced the level of depression with satisfaction in basic needs and role of anatomy contributing the mediating effects of the relationship. They have suggested that grit alone cannot explain subjective wellbeing of an individual.

The literature that focused on the role of grit towards psychological wellbeing of an individual have demonstrated that other psychosocial factors have contributed for grit to be impactful and significant on its relationship with an individual's wellbeing. These findings have led for this article to further review on other factors that may elevate and explain concisely on the concept of grit which will be discussed in detail afterwards.

Grit and Its Correlation with Other Factors

As explained in the previous part of this review, literature that focused on the correlation between grit and other psychosocial factors were included in this review article. Von Culin, Tsukayama and Duckworth (2014) have studied the extent of pursuing engagement, meaning, and pleasure in life differentially in explaining the variance of grit. They have found that grittier individuals were more likely to search for happiness through engagement and meaning in their life which contributed to the facets of grit; interest and perseverance. Likewise, Li, Lin, Zhao, Chen, and Wang (2018) have explored the mediating role of mindfulness in the association between grit and subjective wellbeing among Chinese adolescents. Their findings have suggested that although grit did have a positive association with the wellbeing of the adolescents, a greater effect was found when mindfulness mediated the relationship.

In addition, Vainio and Daukantaite (2016) have studied the relationship between grit, individual's perspective towards happiness and meaning in life (i.e. harmony, satisfaction), authenticity, and sense of coherence amongst Swedish university students. They have found that grit was correlated with the psychosocial factors measured. The findings suggested that though grit was significantly correlated with happiness and meaning in life, authenticity, and sense of coherence, its concept did not guarantee for higher level of subjective wellbeing.

Direction for Future Research

Based on the review of previous research, three main directions for future research could be identified in order to further explain the concept of grit conclusively.

First, all of the investigations have used cross-sectional methodological design for their research. The researchers have agreed on the limitation of using this research method as it has restricted the analysis for any causal relationship or confounding factors that may have indirectly contributed to the main relationship between grit and the variables outcomes. Hence, a longitudinal study was suggested for future research in order to understand better on the implication of grit. Longitudinal study is believed to be soundful in providing a comprehensive and thorough understanding on the impact of grit, especially with grit's nature of the possibility of amplifying and declining over time. Observing the impact of grit on an individual in a longitudinal study will help to see the pattern of the impact of the variable comprehensively.

Secondly, the literature has identified that only self-report measures were used during data collection. This has opened rooms for self-report biases and social desirability. It has been suggested that by including interviews with the respondents or a mixed method designs of qualitative and quantitative approach during the data collection would enable the researchers to have a better understanding of the implication and role of grit. Kelle (2006) has highlighted that using both quantitative and qualitative designs can help overcome the limitations of both designs. Qualitative method of interviewing helps in identifying and explaining incomprehensible variables and findings from quantitative data. On the other hand, quantitative method in a mixed mode approach helps researchers to explore more variations of qualitative findings into other domains of the research variables.

Lastly, most of the literature have focused on only certain group of populations such as medical doctors (i.e. surgeons, general practitioners, otolaryngologist), sportsmen and athletes (i.e. soccer players, basketball players), students, and cadet or military personnel. This has raised the issue of generalisation on the concept of grit. A rising number of literatures was found to be investigating further on the effect of grit amongst the collectivist population but generalisation was unable to be achieved as each population group would have different perspective on the concept of grit. Hence, the implication that were discovered would not be similar. Grit study can be conducted in the future by focusing on high-risk professions such as fire fighters, police officers, pilots, construction workers, and nurses. As grit is still a growing study in the psychological field, the concept is still lacking in its generalisation. An understanding on the cultures and background history of specific target populations is needed in order to reach the generalisation of grit concept which can be achieved through the combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods.

CONCLUSION

In general, previous studies have shown that grit did contribute towards facilitating the psychological wellbeing of individuals and have mostly predicted the work performance of workers especially those with higher work demands and pressure. However, these findings on the implications of grit have demonstrated that positive effects and correlations were only stronger and significant when there were other psychosocial factors that were included as either mediator or as confounding factor. As grit is an emerging concept in the literature of positive psychology, more studies are needed to understand its role and implications on a broader perspective and socio-cultural settings.

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The Effect of Grit on Work Performance and Psychological Wellbeing: Analytical Study of Grit Literature

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