Reviewer's report

Title: Positive affect as a moderator of the effects of stress on psychological functioning and perceived health

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Reviewer: Dara Friedman-Wheeler

Reviewer's report:

'Positive affect as a moderator of the effects of stress on psychological functioning and perceived health' is an interesting piece that seeks to answer an important question about the relationship between positive affect and health. The article (and the study on which it reports) has many notable strengths, including its sample and sample size, and the relative simplicity of the design (using a cross-sectional design but with reference to time periods that imply temporal precedence). However, there are several methodological flaws that make it unable to answer its primary questions as they are stated, in a meaningful way.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The measure of positive affect did not, I feel, measure positive affect as it is typically defined in the literature. While the construct it represents is an interesting one, I don’t feel that it’s appropriate to couch the results in the positive affect literature, given the nature of this measure, which the authors even note measures something that is perhaps broader than/overlapping with positive affect. I realize that positive affect is operationalized in a variety of ways in the literature, but again, I’m not certain that PA is the best characterization of what was measured here.

2. The authors frame the paper as testing a moderational model, and indeed, it seems to. However, the “conclusions” section of the abstract suggests that it is in fact stress that moderates the relationship between positive affect and health outcomes, as opposed to positive affect moderating the relationships between stress and health outcomes. Other statements of the results seem to correspond better to the hypotheses.

3. The health measure that was used as an outcome is only 2 items long and measures perceived health, vs. actual health. Indeed, one of the two items asks specifically about quality of life. It is conceivable that this construct could be affected by positive affect in ways that are very different from the relationships between positive affect and actual health outcomes. At a minimum, given the centrality of this construct and the fact that the measure consists of only 2 items, more information is needed to establish the reliability and validity of this measure.

Minor Essential Revisions

4. The manuscript, while generally well-written, contains many minor errors (e.g., Running head: “Positive Affective as a Moderator” should read “Positive Affect as
a Moderator”. It is recommended that the paper be proofread by a native English speaker with strong editing skills.

5. The second sentence of the second paragraph does not seem to follow logically: “One possible mechanism for the effect of positive affect is through improved self-regulation and improved coping ability, in that positive emotion might function as a buffer against the detrimental effects of stress.” Maybe “through which positive emotion might function…”?

Discretionary Revisions

6. In the discussion, the authors suggest that “The study also gives support for including strategies to increased [sic] positive affect during stressful conditions.” This advice may be over-stepping the limitations of the data (which are cross-sectional, as the authors note), and is also vague. I would recommend using more tentative language and at the same time referring readers to resources for ideas on how to do this – perhaps Moskowitz, Hult, et al. (2011)?

7. Later in the discussion, the authors refer to the people who were invited to participate in the study but opted not to do so as “non-responders.” Isn’t this term generally used to refer to people who do not improve with treatment? It is suggested that the authors use the language of “selection bias,” instead.

In conclusion, I feel that this study makes a valuable contribution to the knowledge-base, but that it needs to be reframed to report more accurately on the constructs included and their implications.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.