

The Relationship Between Optimism and Well-Being of Airlines' Employees after Being Lay Off during The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic: The Mediating Effect of Resilience

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between optimism and well-being of airline employees after being laid off due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the mediating effect of resilience on this relationship. Data were collected via a questionnaire which was returned by 419 airline employees who had been laid off in these circumstances. The respondents were selected through a non-probabilistic convenience sampling. Multiple linear regression was used to analyze and test the hypotheses. The results revealed that, although the relationship between optimism and well-being are strongly linked, it was partially mediated by resilience. This result is noteworthy for the airline employees when they are setting their attitudes and plans after being laid off. Not only optimism but also resilience is needed in these situations to maintain their feelings of well-being in their lives during such a crisis.

Keywords: Resilience, Optimism, Well-being, COVID-19

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บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษาในครั้งนี้ มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างการมองโลกในแง่ดีและความผาสุกของพนักงานสายการบินหลังการถูกเลิกจ้างจากผลกระทบของสถานการณ์วิกฤตโควิด 19 และเพื่อศึกษาความยืดหยุ่นในฐานะตัวแปรคั่นกลางที่มีบทบาทต่อความสัมพันธ์ดังกล่าว โดยใช้แบบสอบถามในการเก็บข้อมูลจากกลุ่มตัวอย่าง คือ พนักงานสายการบินที่ถูกเลิกจ้างจากผลกระทบของสถานการณ์วิกฤตโควิด 19 จำนวน 419 คน เป็นการสุ่มตัวอย่างโดยไม่ใช้ความน่าจะเป็นและใช้การวิเคราะห์การถดถอยแบบพหุคูณ

ผลการศึกษาพบว่า ถึงแม้ว่าการมองโลกในแง่ดีมีความสัมพันธ์กับความผาสุกของพนักงานสายการบินหลังการถูกเลิกจ้างจากผลกระทบของสถานการณ์วิกฤตโควิด 19 เชิงบวกอย่างมีนัยสำคัญ ความยืดหยุ่นมีบทบาทสำคัญในการเป็นตัวแปรคั่นกลางที่มีอิทธิพลบางส่วนต่อความสัมพันธ์ดังกล่าว ซึ่งผลที่ได้จากการศึกษาในครั้งนี้จะเป็นข้อมูลเชิงประจักษ์ที่สำคัญสำหรับพนักงานสายการบินในการปรับทัศนคติและการวางแผนการดำเนินชีวิตหลังการถูกเลิกจ้าง ทั้งนี้ นอกจากการมองโลกในแง่ดีแล้ว พนักงานสายการบินที่ถูกเลิกจ้างจะต้องมีความยืดหยุ่นในการปรับตัวกับสถานการณ์วิกฤตที่เกิดขึ้น อันจะส่งผลให้พนักงานสายการบินสามารถดำเนินชีวิตต่อไปได้อย่างผาสุกภายหลังการถูกเลิกจ้าง

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Introduction

The coronavirus impacted almost every aspect of life, social relationships, religious observance, and particularly employment and business activities, worldwide. The origin of the virus remains unknown, or, at least, is subject to controversial debate and universal treatment and vaccination is still far from available. A ‘New Normality’ has developed over the 18 months since the epidemic began. Many countries introduced strict domestic and international travels bans and restrictions, and adopted social distancing, quarantining, requirements to wear masks, and business and personal lockdowns and closures, to break the chain of transmission of the COVID-19 illness (Reguera-García. et al., 2020). One industry impacted very seriously was the aviation and air travel industry. There was a dramatic drop in demand for airline services (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2020) resulting in an almost complete closedown of airline travel, with airlines forced to reduce expenditures and rely on cash reserves and loans to survive until air travel demand recovers (International Air Transport Association [IATA], 2020), a situation that has not yet occurred at the time of writing, May 2021.

As in many industries, payroll is a major fixed expense for the airline industry, and this required many employees, particularly flight crews and cabin staff, to be laid off. The new analysis showing that some 25 million jobs in aviation and related sectors across the world are at risk of disappearing with plummeting demand for air travel amid the COVID-19 crisis; 11.2 million jobs in Asia-Pacific, 5.6 million jobs in Europe, 2.9 million jobs in Latin America, 2.0 million jobs in North America, 2.0 million jobs in Africa and 0.9 million jobs in the Middle East (IATA, 2020). This disruption to, or termination of, their earnings, negatively affecting their immediate, short-term, and possibly long-term economic situation, would have caused significant anxiety and worry for those affected.

Resilience plays a significant role in the reaction of any employees who need to adapt themselves to this crisis to survive and move on. Greater levels of resilience are associated with a reduction in fatigue (20% less), greater participation and exercise, greater social and financial support, a healthier diet, and better psychological health (Ploughman et al., 2020). Ideally, measures of resilience should address the personality aspect of resilience as well as the availability of resources and the ability and willingness

to use those resources (Resnick, 2017). Optimism is a key personality trait that affects resilience (Gómez-Moliner et al., 2018; Tusaie-Mumford, 2001; Yu & Zhang, 2007). Understanding resilience and evaluating resilience is important to allow impacted employees with low resilience to be identified and to develop appropriate interventions to be implemented to help them overcome this specific challenge and maintain the level of well-being in their life. Researches in resilience have found that resilience has a positive impact on optimism and well-being (Haglund et al., 2007; Troy & Mauss, 2011).

This study examined the mediating effect of resilience towards the relationship between optimism and well-being of employees after being laid off during the pandemic. The study began by reviewing the literature appropriate to the topic. Hypotheses are embedded in this study to examine the effect of the optimism on resilience and well-being. This research also observes the effect of resilience on well-being. Furthermore, the paper focuses on investigating the mediating effect of resilience on the relationship between optimism and well-being. Finally, this research is designed to promote the importance of resilience associated with employees after being laid off during the pandemic by examining it as both predictor (to well-being) and mediator. A conceptual model was then developed.

Literature Review

This section will review the related literature in two areas: (a) The relationship between optimism and well-being (b) The mediating role of resilience

The relationship between optimism and well-being

Scheier and Carver (1992) defined optimism is the creation of one's own goals, values, and expectations in order to reduce negative emotions that can affect personal physical and mental health and maintain a life-balance in the individual. Optimism is composed of two important elements: "learned optimism" (Peterson & Seligman, 1984) and "dispositional optimism" (Scheier & Carver, 1985). Learned optimism is as a personal trait and optimistic individuals use an adaptive attributional style in order to explain adverse situations. In turn, dispositional optimism refers to a general belief that good things will happen rather than bad things in the future. When any changes happen, the optimist can create positive feelings and enthusiasm sufficient to handle the

problems and to be able to adjust themselves consciously in such situations (Scheier & Carver, 2002). Hence, optimism is one of the important factors that leads the person to have good expectations and positive perceptions of their future even though they are in the middle of a crisis or are surrounded by obstacles. Consequently, the optimist can always turn a negative situation into the bright side (Goleman, 1995).

Optimism during the crisis will occur when people expect that good things will happen to them in the future. People confidently predict that they can survive the difficult times and find good things awaiting them in the future (Scheier & Carver, 1985). Literature has highlighted the benefits that optimism have on physical and psychosocial well-being, for example; reducing depressive symptoms and stress impact, enhancing self-esteem, and forming and maintaining relationships (Ferguson & Goodwin, 2010; Hatchett & Park, 2004; Krypel & Henderson-King, 2010; Puskar et al., 2010). That is the reason why people can live their life with hope; an essential element in maintaining their feelings of well-being. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many employees working in airline industry were laid off. These employees must face a huge change in their life unexpectedly, so they need to adapt themselves in coping with this sudden change.

According to Schuessler and Fisher (1985) there are three elements of well-being: (a) life satisfaction - a long-term vision and evaluation of one's own life based on the personally chosen criteria and standards, (b) happiness - an emotional state is characterized by positive feelings and emotions of joy, contentment, delight and bliss (Zarbova & Karabeliova, 2018) and (c) quality of life - which consists of self-realization, personal growth, self-fulfillment, and self-esteem. Well-being was described in Diener et al. (1985) as quality of life, based on the availability and frequency of positive and negative emotions and the overall satisfaction in a human's life. The person's evaluation of his or her own life wherein happiness, as the balance between positive and negative effects, reflects a person's immediate experience of pleasant or unpleasant moments (Ng & Fisher, 2013). There appears to be a positive relationship between optimism and well-being as indicated by Scheier and Carver, 1985.

Since, optimism affects personal growth, sense of purpose in work, relations with others, pride in accomplishments, and general level of happiness in work (Chiok Foong Loke, 2001), it seems to be a major contributor to employee well-being (Harter,

Schmidt, & Keyes, 2003; Gavin, & Mason, 2004). The relationships between optimism and well-being have been observed in case studies as well as longitudinal studies (Wrosch & Scheier, 2003). Carver et al., (2010) mentioned that higher levels of optimism have been related prospectively to better subjective well-being in times of adversity or difficulty. Therefore, considering the airline employees who were laid off, if they are optimistic, then they will manage to get through the crisis with positive emotion and continue to maintain a good level of well-being in life. If, however, affected employees embedded themselves in negative feelings, unable to see any positives in the crisis, they will have a difficult time recovering from the crisis. Based on the existing literature review, hypotheses are developed as follows.

Hypothesis 1: Optimism is positively associated with well-being.

The mediating role of resilience

Wagnild and Young (1993) mentioned that there are five elements of resilience: (a) equanimity – being calm under pressure (b) perseverance – trying to solve problems (c) self-reliance – being confident in one's own ability to manage the situations (d) meaningfulness – thinking about the value and meaning of life (e) existential aloneness – being able to live by oneself. These elements are associated with each other and contribute to one's own resilience which enables and supports the person's ability to pass through the crisis and maintain well-being in life. Resilience is a characteristic of persons in adapting themselves towards stress and maintaining wellness, and physical and mental health during such difficult times in life (Haglund et.al., 2007; Malik, 2013). Resilience occurs when negative feelings are eliminated efficiently and appropriately by the person who manages to control oneself. This person chooses to pay attention to the situation and evaluates the situation. These abilities will protect the person from the negative effects of stress (Troy & Mauss, 2011).

Even though optimism has a major role to play in adaptation to stressful conditions when confronting a challenge, optimists who show more resilience have been identified that can temper the effects of life stressors which lead to well-being in life (Synder & Lopez, 2002). Optimism accompanies resilience in stressful situations (Carver et al., 2010). Ryff and Singer (2003) argued that resilient individuals are generally able to maintain their physical and psychological health and have the capacity to

recover more quickly from stressful events. Fredrickson (2001) states there are evidences suggesting that resilience is effective in improving psychological well-being. Therefore, when employees in airline industry were laid off during the COVID-19 pandemic, they would have certainly encountered problems and stress. For this reason, if the employees lacked resilience, they would have difficulty in adjusting and recovering themselves when facing the crisis that affecting their way of life and well-being. On the other hand, if the employees are optimistic and resilient, they will be able to adapt themselves to the crisis, counter the situation with positive emotions which will lead them to a greater sense of well-being in life. In this study, resilience is inserted to primarily examine the mediating effect and confirm the literatures. Therefore, hypotheses are set.

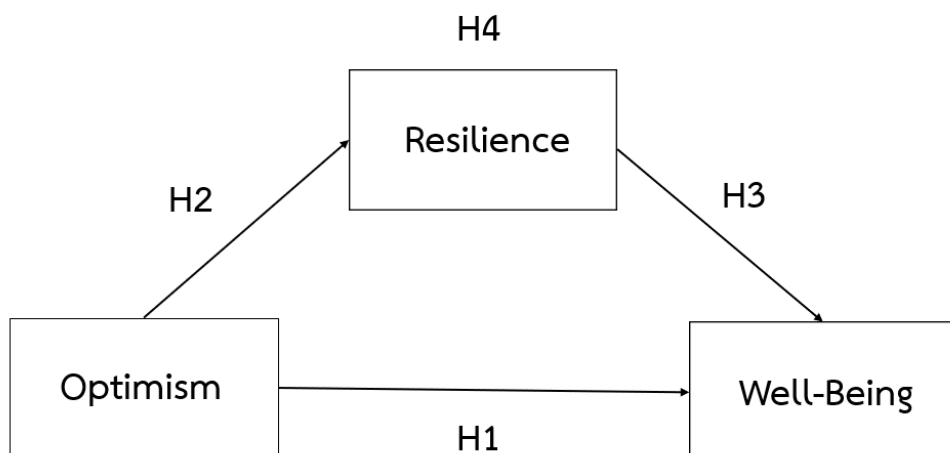
Hypothesis 2: Optimism is positively associated with resilience.

Hypothesis 3: Resilience is positively associated with well-being.

Hypothesis 4: Resilience positively mediates the relationship between optimism and well-being.

A conceptual model is presented in Figure 1

Figure 1 Conceptual Model



Research Methodology

Participants

Data were collected via a 38-item self-administered questionnaire completed by airline employees in five airline organizations in Thailand who were being laid off during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through non-probabilistic convenience sampling by using the Taro Yamane formula with infinite population and 95% confidence level, the recommendation is that 400 cases be included in the sample (Yamane, 1973). In this study, 500 questionnaires were distributed by the gatekeepers in each organization via two channels; google forms through various applications and paper forms, 419 questionnaires were returned. Participants were strictly anonymous and voluntary. Each statement on the questionnaire was rated according to a 5-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree). Details of participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Details of Participants (Sample size, n=419)

Categories	n	Percentage
Gender		
Male	113	27
Female	306	73
Age (years)		
< 30	6	1.4
30 – 40	148	35.3
41 – 50	124	29.6
> 50	141	33.7
Education		
Lower than Bachelor's degree	1	0.2
Bachelor's degree	300	71.6
Master's degree	118	28.2
Work experience with the latest airlines (years)		
< 5	23	5.5
5 – 15	178	42.5
16 – 25	73	17.4
> 25	145	34.6
Department		
Administration	68	16.2
Operation	351	83.8

Measurement

An index of item-objective congruence (IOC) was developed by three professors who specialize in human resource and organizational development. The reliability of the results was 0.95 which met the requirements of Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951).

Optimism was measured with a 10-item questionnaire developed from Life Orientation Test (LOT-R) by Scheier and Carver (1994). Sample statements are *It's easy for me to relax, I'm always optimistic about my future, I often expect things to go my way, I don't get upset too easily, Overall, I expect more good things to happen to me than bad.*

Well-being was measured with a 14-item questionnaire developed from the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) by Janmohamed and Stewart-Brown (2008). Sample statements are *I usually manage one way or another, I usually take things in stride, I can usually find something to laugh about, My belief in myself gets me through hard times, When I'm in a difficult situation, I can usually find my way out of it.*

Resilience was measured with a 14-item questionnaire developed from the 14-item Resilience Scale™ (RS-14™) by Wagnlid and Young (2009). Sample statements are *I've been feeling optimistic about the future, I've been feeling useful, I've been dealing with problems well, I've been thinking clearly, I've been feeling cheerful.*

Findings

Factor analysis was performed as illustrated in Table 2. As recommended by Hair et al. (2010), factor loadings equal to or greater than 0.50 are considered significant which show the internal item validity. Therefore, the factor loadings of all items are above 0.50.

Correlation was conducted to confirm the relationship and direction among variables. This approach indicates the accuracy of the components that were used for the research. The results showed a significant relationship among optimism, well-being, and resilience.

Table 2 Factor Loadings

Item	Optimism	Well-being	Resilience
In uncertain times, I usually expect the best.	0.50		
It's easy for me to relax.	0.63		
If something can go right for me, It will.	0.72		
I'm always optimistic about my future.	0.59		
I enjoy my friends a lot.	0.57		
It's important for me to keep busy.	0.80		
I often expect things to go my way.	0.55		
I don't get upset too easily.	0.70		
I always count on good things happening to me.	0.80		
Overall, I expect more good things to happen to me than bad.	0.76		
I've been feeling optimistic about the future.		0.53	
I've been feeling useful.		0.58	
I've been feeling relaxed.		0.61	
I've been feeling interested in other people.		0.67	
I've had energy to spare.		0.74	
I've been dealing with problems well.		0.66	
I've been thinking clearly.		0.57	
I've been feeling good about myself.		0.51	
I've been feeling close to other people.		0.75	
I've been feeling confident.		0.77	
I've been able to make up my own mind about things.		0.62	
I've been feeling loved.		0.66	
I've been interested in new things.		0.73	
I've been feeling cheerful.		0.74	
I usually manage one way or another.			0.75
I feel proud that I have accomplished things in life.			0.68
I usually take things in stride.			0.76
I am friends with myself.			0.65
I feel that I can handle many things at a time.			0.62
I am determined.			0.66
I can get through difficult times because I've experienced difficulty before.			0.84
I have self-discipline.			0.55
I keep interested in things.			0.59
I can usually find something to laugh about.			0.56
My belief in myself gets me through hard times.			0.60
In an emergency, I'm someone people can generally rely on.			0.53
My life has meaning.			0.62
When I'm in a difficult situation, I can usually find my way out of it.			0.58

Table 3 displays the mean, standard deviation, average variance extracted (AVE), composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha value of constructs from data collection ($n = 419$). Average variance extracted (AVE) higher than .50 are defined that each item by itself is a good measure for the latent construct. Composite reliability (CR) higher than .70 are indicated that the scale items tend to result in higher reliability levels. Cronbach's alpha higher than .80 are considered excellent meaning that the items in the questionnaire are highly correlated (Cronbach, 1951). According to Hair et al. (2010), these results showed that all values passed the threshold which explained the item reliability and validity. Optimism was positively correlated to resilience ($r = .58, p < .01$) and well-being ($r = .56, p < .01$). The resilience variable was positively correlated to well-being ($r = .75, p < .01$).

Table 3 Mean, Standard Deviation, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Composite Reliability (CR) Cronbach's Alpha Value of Constructs and Correlations among Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	AVE	CR	Cronbach's alpha	1	2	3
1. Optimism	3.67	1.01	.59	.81	.80	-		
2. Resilience	3.99	1.01	.53	.85	.89	.58**	-	
3. Well-being	3.97	1.04	.52	.84	.90	.56**	.75**	-

Note. $n = 419$; ** $p < .01$

Verification of Research Hypotheses

According to Baron and Kenny (1986), four steps are used to test mediating effects of resilience on the relationship between optimism and well-being of airlines' employees after being lay off during the impact of COVID-19 pandemic. Firstly, optimism as independent variable positively associates with well-being, dependent variable. Secondly, optimism positively associates with resilience as proposed mediator. Thirdly, resilience positively associates with well-being. Finally, a comparison of the p -values when both independent variables and the mediating variable are added to the regression equation.

To verify the research hypotheses, table 4 displays the results of hypotheses testing. Step one, optimism exerted a significant and positive association with well-being ($\beta = .56, p < .01$) and optimism explained 32% the variance of well-being. Hypothesis 1 of this research was supported. Step two, optimism demonstrated a significant and

positive association with resilience ($\beta = .58, p < .01$) and 34% the variance of resilience was explained by optimism. Hypothesis 2 was supported. Step three, demonstrated a significant and positive association of resilience with well-being ($\beta = .75, p < .01$), and 57% the variance of well-being was explained by resilience. Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Table 4 Analyzing the Mediating Effects of Resilience

Independent Variable	Resilience	Well-being	
	Standard β	Standard β	Standard β
Optimism	.58**	.56**	-
Resilience	-	-	.75**
Adj. R^2	.34	.32	.57
SEE	7.31	6.59	5.22
F value (sig. level)	215.15**	193.75**	554.24**

Note. N = 419; ** $p < .01$

Table 5 shows the results for the positive associations which also support hypothesis 1-3 as the t-values are 13.92, 14.67, and 23.54 and p-values are .00. The t-values are above 1.96 for all relationships. Thus, the hypotheses are accepted. Step 4, to test hypothesis 4, the indirect effect of optimism on well-being via the mediator, resilience, is significant as the t-value is 12.51 and p-value is .00. The results reveal a significant relationship that explains the mediating effect of resilience. Since the relationship between optimism and well-being is significant, this demonstrates that resilience is a partial mediator to this relationship. Hypothesis 4 of this research was supported. Table 5 shows the p-values are significant meaning resilience is mediator to this relationship (Sobel, 1982).

Table 5 Mediating Effect of Resilience

	B	Std. Error	t-value	p-value
Optimism to Well-being	.87	.06	13.92	.00
Optimism to Resilience	1.01	.07	14.67	.00
Resilience to Well-being	.67	.03	23.54	.00
Optimism to Resilience to Well-being	.68	.05	12.51	.00

Discussion and Recommendation

Scheier and Carver, 1985 indicated that there appears to be a positive relationship between optimism and well-being. The result of this study confirms that optimism is positively associated with well-being which is consistent with existing works by Ferguson and Goodwin (2010), Ho et al. (2010), and Ju et al. (2013). Airline employees who are optimistic towards themselves and situations after being laid off due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic can enhance their personal well-being efficiently. As optimism refers to a general belief that good things will happen in the future (Souri & Hasanirad, 2011), optimistic airline employees will have a positive attitude, investigate the bright side of the crisis, and aim for a better life in the future. They will find a way to live their life and get through the difficult time. This result is also consistent with the studies of Masten and Wright (2010), Pargament and Cummings (2010), Schumann (2002), and Werner and Smith (2001). Hence, it is important to strengthen the individual's optimism since it helps to demonstrate satisfaction in life (Gómez-Molinero et al., 2018). Moreover, whenever employees are optimistic, they also develop their positive sense of resilience in life effectively (Souri & Hasanirad, 2011; Tusaie-Mumford, 2001; Yu & Zhang 2007) which corresponds with result of the current study. Therefore, considers optimism as an important aspect that positively associated with resilience (Gómez-Molinero et al., 2018; Tusaie-Mumford, 2001; Yu & Zhang, 2007;).

The result of this study identified a positive association between resilience and well-being which is consistent with the results of Besharat et al. (2007) and Souri and Hasanirad (2011). Then, the influence of resilience as a mediator on the relationship between optimism and well-being was measured. The result reveals that resilience positively predicted well-being and also plays a major role on the relationship between optimism and well-being. This result is consistent with existing works by Gómez-Molinero et al. (2018), Malik (2013), Noble and McGrath (2012), and Souri and Hasanirad (2011). Therefore, resilience has a key role to play in adaptation to stressful conditions. People who present greater levels of resilience will have a greater capacity for adapting to adverse situations (Reguera-García et al., 2020). As resilience shows to play a partial mediator role on the relationship between the optimism and well-being, this study fills

an important research gap by examining whether resilience serves as a mediator in the relationship between two variables which consistent with the study of Jangsiriwattana (2021), Reguera-García et al. (2020), and Sourì and Hasanirad (2011). Thus, during a challenge, optimistic airline employees who think positively toward the situation and show more resilience would be able to adapt themselves to the stressful conditions and appear to have a more positive sense of well-being than those employees who demonstrated less resilience. In summary, those airline employees should not only be positive but also adaptive as such characteristic play a significant role in well-being of airlines' employees.

Finally, this research provides evidence that airline employees who were laid off due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, but resilience, have a strong positive sense of personal well-being. The finding that resilience, as a partial mediator, highly influence the relationship between optimism and well-being, is important. As discussed earlier, in a difficult crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, resilience is needed to maintain their current and future well-being in life. Regardless of how bad the situations are, if employees are flexible and adaptive, they may survive the crises with a good level of life satisfaction. Thus, it is those employees who create a positive feeling and enthusiasm towards handling the problems and can adjust themselves in any situation, who will reach a good level of well-being in their life.

Limitation and Future Research

This research, like all researches, has some limitations. The limitation is that this study only examined the results obtained from airline employees. In the obvious absence of any specific differences between airline employees and employees from other industries, this limits the perception of resilience to only a small fraction the total number of employees who were laid off due to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic, regardless of industry. Therefore, other industries should be studied to evaluate a wider range of results and to be able to compare similarities and differences.

Implication of The Study

This study involved a survey of airlines' employees who were laid off due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The conceptual framework was developed based on the reviews relating to optimism, well-being, and resilience. The results confirm that optimism has a significant association with well-being of these employees. However, resilience as a partial mediator has a high influence on the relationship between optimism and well-being. This study has shown that, after being laid off during the pandemic, employees with optimism, together with resilience, maintained a higher positive sense of well-being. The results obtained from this study encourage airline employees to understand the importance of resilience. The results can be used as a guideline for individuals, and HR departments concerned about the impact of such a crisis on their employees, when setting expectancy and plans for the better improvement of the employees' well-being following the crises.

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