

# The Role of Positive Emotion and Contributions of Positive Psychology in Depression Treatment: Systematic Review

Veruska Santos<sup>1,\*</sup>, Flavia Paes<sup>1</sup>, Valeska Pereira<sup>1</sup>, Oscar Arias-Carrión<sup>2</sup>, Adriana Cardoso Silva<sup>1</sup>, Mauro Giovanni Carta<sup>6</sup>, Antonio Egidio Nardi<sup>1</sup> and Sergio Machado<sup>1,3,4,5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Laboratory of Panic and Respiration, Institute of Psychiatry of Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (IPUB/UFRJ), Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil; National Institute for Translational Medicine (INCT-TM), Brazil

<sup>2</sup>Hospital General Dr. Manuel Gea Gonzalez, Secretaria de Salud Mexico DF, Mexico

<sup>3</sup>Quiropraxia Program of Faculty of Health Sciences, Central University (UCEN), Santiago, Chile

<sup>4</sup>Institute of Philosophy, Federal University of Uberlandia (IFILO/UFU), Minas Gerais, Brazil

<sup>5</sup>Physical Activity Neuroscience Laboratory (LABNAF), Physical Activity Sciences Postgraduate Program of Salgado de Oliveira University (PPGCAF/UNIVERSO), Niterói, Brazil

<sup>6</sup>Department of Public Health and Clinical and Molecular Medicine, University of Cagliari, Italy

**Abstract:** The present study aims to conduct a systematic review of the literature by checking the impact of positive emotion in the treatment of depression and on the use of strategies of positive psychology which involves positive emotion to treat and reduce symptoms of depression. For this purpose, we conducted searches in databases ISI Web of Knowledge, PsycINFO and PubMed and found a total of 3400 studies. After inclusion application and exclusion criteria, 28 articles remained, presented and discussed in this study. The studies have important relations between humor and positive emotion as well as a significant improvement in signs and symptoms of depression using different strategies of positive psychology. Another relevant aspect is the preventative character of the proposed interventions by positive psychology by the fact that increase well-being and produce elements such as resilience and coping resources that reduce the recurrent relapses in the treatment of depression. The strategies of positive psychology, such as increasing positive emotions, develop personal strengths: seeking direction, meaning and engagement for the day-to-day life of the patients, appear as potentially tools for the prophylaxis and treatment of depression, helping to reduce signs and symptoms as well as for prevention of relapses.

**Keywords:** Depression, emotion, positive psychology, resilience.

## INTRODUCTION

Positive psychology is a psychological approach targeted to emphasize people skills and to promote their cognitive functioning, physical and emotional health. Martin Seligman, American psychologist, established in January 1998 the conceptual basis of positive psychology at the time he assumed the presidency of the American Psychological Association (APA). Seligman [1] stressed the fact that psychology needed to study also the human qualities and not only the weaknesses and illnesses. The focus of clinical psychology intervention was mental illness, understanding and how to reduce the signs and symptoms associated to psychiatric disorders. According to Wood and Tarrier [2] prior to the event of positive psychology the negative aspects of life were taken into consideration and the positive aspects were disregarded. These authors don't suggest the study of positive functioning as a separate field of clinical psychology, but

rather than clinical psychology itself changes to become a more integrative discipline.

Seligman, Steen, Parks & Peterson [3] point out that positive psychology emphasizes the study of positive emotion, the personal strengths and skills of the human being, as well as the positive institutions, which are institutions that allow the experience and expression of positive emotions such as the family and the community to enhance mental health and promote wellness. According to Sin & Lyubomirsky [4], extending the positive emotion in daily life of patients is one of the main goals of positive psychology. Positive emotions as joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe and love play a central role in the treatment and can function as a kind of protection against stress and depression. [5-8] pointed the importance of positive emotions on psychological well-being. [9-12] have shown that positive automatic thoughts and optimistic style of thinking also offers protection against depression and are indicators of happiness and well-being.

[6, 13-15] pointed an important aspect studied by positive psychology: resilience and how to make people more resilient in when facing adversity. Resilience refers to the

\*Address correspondence to this author at the Laboratory of Panic and Respiration, Institute of Psychiatry – Federal University of Rio de Janeiro – Brazil; Tel: +5521-2521-6147; Fax: +5521-2521-6147; E-mail: veruskaasantos@gmail.com