



Life orientation, positive thinking, and intellectual extremism among female Physical Education teachers in post-conflict Iraqi

Orientación vital, pensamiento positivo y extremismo intelectual en profesoras de Educación Física en el posconflicto iraquí

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Abstract

Objective. This study was conducted to identify the levels of life orientation, positive thinking, and intellectual extremism of female physical education teachers in post-conflict liberated areas of Iraq and to explain the relationships between variables.

Methods: A descriptive-correlational method was used. The sample was 436 female physical education teachers in Nineveh, Salah al-Din, and Kirkuk governorates. Instruments-Data were gathered through the Life Orientation Scale, Positive Thinking Scale, and Intellectual Extremism Scale, the validity and reliability of which had been established.

Results: The results showed that the sample scored a high orientation toward life ($M=34.67$) and positive thoughts ($M=50.75$), and a low degree of intellectual extremism ($M=70.89$). The correlation between life orientation and intellectual extremism was -0.67 ($r = 0.67$, $P < 0.01$), indicating a strong, statistically significant negative correlation between the two variables, while positive thinking and intellectual extremism did not indicate a statistically significant correlation ($r = -0.11$).

Conclusion: The study results indicate that the teachers showed a high level of psychological resilience in hostile environmental conditions. Life orientation is protective against extremism when it has cognitive and existential predictive power diffuse orienting, and positive thinking is not a risk factor for the youth in countering extremism although positive thinking is an important characteristic of mental health.

Abstract: Background: Teachers in post-conflict settings are psychologically resilient. Incorporating a sense of purpose in life orientation is, therefore, a promising psychosocial mechanism for reducing vulnerability to extremist ideologies and movements.

Keywords

Life orientation, positive thinking, intellectual extremism, liberated areas.

Resumen

Objetivo: Este estudio tuvo como objetivo identificar los niveles de orientación vital, pensamiento positivo y extremismo intelectual en profesoras de educación física en áreas liberadas de Irak tras el conflicto, así como investigar la relación entre estas variables.

Metodología: Se empleó un método descriptivo-correlacional. La muestra consistió en 436 profesoras de educación física de las provincias de Nínive, Saladino y Kirkuk. Los datos se recopilaban utilizando las escalas de Orientación Vital, Pensamiento Positivo y Extremismo Intelectual, cuya validez y fiabilidad fueron confirmadas.

Resultados: Los hallazgos revelaron que la muestra exhibía un alto grado de orientación vital ($M=34.67$) y pensamiento positivo ($M=50.75$), junto con un bajo grado de extremismo intelectual ($M=70.89$). Se encontró una correlación negativa, fuerte y estadísticamente significativa entre la orientación vital y el extremismo intelectual ($r=-0.67$), mientras que la relación entre el pensamiento positivo y el extremismo intelectual no fue estadísticamente significativa.

Discusión: Los resultados indican la alta resiliencia psicológica de las profesoras a pesar de las condiciones adversas. La orientación vital actúa como un factor protector cognitivo y existencial contra las ideologías extremistas, mientras que el pensamiento positivo, aunque importante, puede no estar directamente asociado con la lucha contra el extremismo.

Conclusiones: Las profesoras en entornos posconflicto poseen una notable resiliencia psicológica. Fomentar una orientación vital con propósito es una estrategia psicosocial eficaz que puede contribuir a reducir la susceptibilidad a las ideas extremistas.

Palabras clave

Orientación vital, pensamiento positivo, extremismo intelectual, zonas liberadas.

Introduction

The word "war" leaves a painful mark on the human psyche. It is well known today that wars destroy countries, leaving societies scarred by social, economic, and political problems that weigh heavily on the psychological state of their populations. Direct or indirect exposure to the effects of war generates psychological trauma of varying levels, depending on the degree of exposure, age, and social, cultural, or financial status. Women, in particular, have borne a significant burden, whether by losing a loved one, having their homes destroyed, being displaced with their families, or suffering direct physical or psychological harm. These effects are not easily or quickly erased, often lingering for a long time, or even permanently if the necessary societal support and assistance are not provided.

As Iraq has been, and continues to be, a hotbed of military events, much of its infrastructure has been destroyed, particularly educational institutions. Despite the hardships, educators have made tremendous efforts to continue teaching in an environment shadowed by war. The situation was especially challenging when one side of the conflict was a terrorist organization that prevented women from performing their jobs under the pretext of false religious beliefs, even going so far as to prohibit sports under misleading and oppressive fatwas.

Female physical education teachers endured violations of their rights and those of their families and children. This required them to possess a high level of psychological resilience to avoid harm and to cope with the increased duties and exposure to extremist ideologies. They needed to find a way to adopt positive thinking to foster hope and a positive life orientation. Michael (2009) defines life orientation as "the capacity of an individual to envision good things in their work or job that will occur as a result of known and specific behaviors" (Michael, 2009, DOI: 10.25777/94m7-8f86). Kappagoda (2014), citing Tiger, defines it as "the actions and behaviors that enable members of society to overcome the difficulties and hardships they face in their lives" (Kappagoda, 2014). Ali (2012) confirms in his study that "married employees in the study sample showed a positive life orientation" (Ali, 2012).

To achieve this orientation, it is necessary to think positively. Positive thinking is defined as "the use or focus of an individual's positive mental outcomes on what is constructive and good, in order to replace destructive, negative thoughts with positive thoughts and feelings" (Dhiab & Al-Kubaisi, 2020). The study by Al-Jamal and Saud (2021) highlighted that "during hardships, it is necessary to make use of home quarantine time by strengthening social communication among colleagues at work" (Al-Jamal & Saud, 2021).

Intellectual extremism is an unhealthy behavior that leads its followers down a path of falsehood and away from the truth, entering them into situations that harm them, their surroundings, and their communities by altering their social and behavioral values. Intellectual extremism is "a deliberate ideology adopted by an individual, group, or a specific organization toward people with the aim of imposing a belief or culture on the minds of others to dissolve their personalities and achieve extremist goals" (Hussein, 2019). The study by Al-Sharifi (2019) shows that intellectual extremism is a phenomenon present in all societies, but to varying degrees. In Iraqi society, extremist terrorist groups emerged, attempting to impose their ideology by exploiting ideological and religious differences to sow discord, weaken, and divide society, using a policy of intimidation and unjustified killing (Al-Sharifi, 2019).

This study is significant because it reveals the levels of key psychological variables—life orientation, positive thinking, and intellectual extremism—in an important segment of Iraqi society: female physical education teachers who lived through oppressive conditions under the control of terrorist organizations that temporarily took over some Iraqi provinces, including the city of Salah al-Din.

The research problem is to answer the following questions:

1. What is the degree of life orientation among the study sample?
2. What is the degree of positive thinking among the study sample?
3. What is the degree of intellectual extremism among the study sample?
4. Is there a relationship between life orientation and positive thinking with intellectual extremism among female physical education teachers in the liberated areas (the city of Salah al-Din)?

Research Objectives

- To identify the degree of life orientation, positive thinking, and intellectual extremism among female physical education teachers in the liberated areas of Salah al-Din, Ninawa, and Kirkuk provinces.
- To find the relationship between the degree of life orientation and positive thinking with the degree of intellectual extremism.

Definition of Terms:

1. Life Orientation: "An individual's view of the bright aspects of life with hope, peace, happiness, and self-satisfaction with the surrounding environment" (Al-Bashrawi & Al-Azzawi, 2018).
2. Positive Thinking: "Utilizing the subconscious mind's ability to be convinced in a positive way" (Al-Dulaimi et al., 2013).
3. Intellectual Extremism: Defined by Owais (2003) as "fanaticism in opinion and exceeding the limits of moderation in it, and the resulting violent and sometimes inhumane human behaviors" (Owais, 2003).
4. Liberated Cities: Iraqi cities that were occupied by extremist terrorist organizations and were liberated through military operations.

Method

Study Design

The researchers used a descriptive-correlational method, as it is appropriate for the nature of the research (Fayyad et al. 2025; Hammood et al. 2024; Khalaf, Abduljabbar, and Ali 2025; Omar et al. 2025).

Participants

The study's target population consisted of 534 female physical education teachers employed in schools within the directorates of education in the provinces of Salah al-Din, Ninawa, and Kirkuk. A purposive sample of 436 teachers was selected to participate in the main study, which represents a response rate of 81.64%.

A separate group of 15 teachers, who were not part of the main sample, was selected to participate in a preliminary pilot study to ensure the reliability and validity of the research tools.

During the data collection process, 83 individuals from the initial population were excluded from the study. The reasons for their exclusion were systematically documented, and they included teachers who were on leave and those who did not respond to the measures. The distribution of the population, sample, and excluded participants is detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Details of the Study Population, Sample, and Percentage Representation.

City	Population	Sample	Pilot Sample	Excluded
Ninawa	245	201	5	39
Salah al-Din	197	161	5	31
Kirkuk	92	74	5	13
Total	534	436	15	83
Percentage	100%	81.64%	2.8%	15.54%

Procedure

Measures

To achieve the research objectives, the researchers used the following measures:

1. Life Orientation Scale (Al-Najjar, 2016).
2. Positive Thinking Scale (Ghazi et al., 2014).
3. Intellectual Extremism Scale (Al-Madadaha, 2015).

The Scales Explained: Scientific Roots

It is probably one of the cornerstones of any academic research, the scientific basis of scales determines if results could be relied upon and valid for conclusion. This investigation is only about two key properties: validity and reliability.

Validity

Validity: the degree to which a test measures what it purports to measure. Scales employed in this study were validated through the following procedure:

- **Face Validity:** To assess this type of validity, the items of the scales were presented to a group of experts and specialists in psychology and education (Appendix 1). The objective was to ensure that the items were evident, understandable, and content validated to measure the agreed-upon variables (life orientation, positive thinking, and intellectual extremism). Experts rated items appropriate and related to the research aim; this established the soundness of the tools.
- **Construct Validity:** A more sophisticated form of validity, reflects to what extent a scale has a relationship with the theoretical construct it is trying to operationalise. To ensure that this was a real finding, not an artifact of the methods, the researchers performed correlational analyses between the three main scales. An example of this is the analysis of the relationship between the concepts of "positive thinking" and "life orientation" to demonstrate that the tools are measuring constructs that are related to one another, as presumed by the literature in scientific publications.

Reliability

Reliability means, how consistent a scale would give you the results. That means if we apply the scale several times in the states/research conditions, it should give near-similar results over and above the sounds of measurement. To test the reliability of the scales, several statistical tests were used by the researchers, namely:

- **Internal Homogeneity:** For measuring this kind of reliability, Cronbach's Alpha is the widely used coefficient. This coefficient is a reliability measure of the homogeneity of the items within the internal of a scale. The closer this value is to 1.0, the greater the internal consistency of the scale. The researchers reported this coefficient for all the scales, indicating adequate internal consistency.

If every such detail on the validity and reliability of the scales used to collect the data are included at this stage in Methodology, it enhances the credibility of research immeasurably and the academic standards against which a researcher works.

Data analysis

Data Analysis: The data in this study were all analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)(Abdullateef Abduljabbar et al. 2025; Mohammed et al. 2025; Mohammed Hammood, Hussein Rashid, and Adham Ali 2025). The following statistical procedures were implemented in actualizing the research objectives:

Descriptive Statistics: Means (M) and standard deviations (SD) were used to describe the central tendency and dispersion of study variables (life orientation, positive thinking, and intellectual extremism). This enabled us to classify the general score of every variable in the context of the study sample.

Correlational Analysis: For examining the correlation among study variables, we calculated Pearson's r. It measures and analyzes the type, strength, and direction of the relationship between life orientation and intellectual extremism, also between positive thinking and intellectual extremism. The significance of these relationships was evaluated using the p-value, which we used to accept or reject the research hypotheses.

Statistical tools were used to convert raw data into meaningful and reliable results, which were the basis of the conclusions and recommendations.

Results

Results for the life orientation variable

Analysis of Table 3: The data presented in this table indicates a high level of life orientation among the study sample. The observed mean score of 34.67 is notably higher than the hypothesized mean of 30, suggesting that the participants generally possess a strong positive outlook on life, characterized by a sense of purpose and hope for the future. The standard deviation of 4.07 reflects a moderate level of variation in scores, indicating that while most teachers had a positive orientation, there was still a range of individual experiences.

Table 3. Mean and Standard Deviation for the Life Orientation Variable.

Sample Size	Mean	Standard Deviation	Hypothesized Mean
436	34.67	4.07	30

Results for the positive thinking variable

Analysis of Table 4: The findings show that the female teachers in the sample exhibit a "very high" level of positive thinking. The mean score of 50.75 demonstrates that the majority of participants consistently engage in constructive thought processes. The standard deviation of 5.69 suggests that the scores are clustered closely around the mean, reinforcing the conclusion that a high level of positive thinking is a shared characteristic across the sample.

Table 4. Mean and Standard Deviation for the Positive Thinking Variable.

Sample Size	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level based on the Scale
436	50.75	5.69	Very high

Results for the intellectual extremism variable

After applying the scale to the sample and analyzing the data, the following results were obtained:

Table 5. Mean and Standard Deviation for the Intellectual Extremism Variable.

Sample Size	Mean	Standard Deviation	Hypothesized Mean
436	70.89	11.24	81

Analysis of Table 5: The results from this table indicate a low level of intellectual extremism among the study participants. The observed mean score of 70.89 is significantly lower than the hypothesized mean of 81. This finding suggests that the teachers, as a group, strongly reject extremist ideologies and hold moderate, balanced views. The standard deviation of 11.24 is higher than the other variables, indicating a wider spread of scores, but the overall mean still points to a clear and significant finding.

Results of the relationship between life orientation and positive thinking with intellectual extremism

After statistically analyzing the data, the following results were reached, as shown in Table 6:

Table 6. Values of Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlation Coefficient between Life Orientation and Positive Thinking with Intellectual Extremism.

Statistical Variables	Sample	Mean (\bar{x})	SD (σ)	Calculated (r) Value	Significance
Life Orientation	436	34.67	4.07	*0.67	Significant
Intellectual Extremism	-	70.89	11.24	-	-
Positive Thinking	-	50.75	5.69	0.433	Not Significant
Intellectual Extremism	-	70.89	11.24	-	-

Analysis of Table 6: This table covers the central results in terms of the associations between various study variables. In correlating the relationship between Life Orientation and Intellectual Extremism,

Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) was 0.67 and $p < .05$. This is a significant negative correlation signalling that the higher the life orientation score for the participant, the lower their score in terms of intellectual extremism.

Conversely, the correlation coefficient between Positive Thinking and Intellectual Extremism is 0.433, which is not statistically significant. This suggests that there is no meaningful linear relationship between a participant's level of positive thinking and their level of intellectual extremism. This is a crucial finding that challenges a potential assumption that both positive thinking and life orientation would be equally correlated with reduced extremism.

Discussion

After administering the scales, collecting the data, and performing statistical analysis, the study arrived at the following findings:

The data presented in Table 3 indicates that the research sample possesses a high degree of life orientation. The sample's mean score was 34.67, which is higher than the hypothesized mean of 30. This result suggests that despite the tragedies endured due to the control of extremist terrorist groups over their lives, livelihoods, and work, the participants retain a strong sense of purpose. It reflects a resolve to begin rebuilding what was damaged, especially given their critical mission as educators who must serve as role models for others. This aligns with the findings of Khodair and Al-Saraih (2020), who, referencing the work of Scheier and Carver, noted "a positive correlation between a positive life orientation, psychological hardiness, and mental health, and a negative correlation with hopelessness". This is further supported by Al-Harbi et al. (2020), who state that "the school, as a social institution, is the community's tool for achieving education in its pedagogical, instructional, and social dimensions by instilling the various values and norms prevalent in society in the souls of learners for a proper social upbringing". With these findings, the first objective of the research has been achieved.

Regarding the positive thinking variable, the sample of physical education teachers achieved a mean score of 50.75 with a standard deviation of 5.69 on the positive thinking scale. When compared to the scale's interpretation levels, this score is considered "very high," as detailed in Table 4. The researchers attribute this result to the participants' ability to develop a mindset that maintains a healthy psychological balance when perceiving life's problems, focusing on the positive aspects of situations and avoiding negativity to find optimal solutions. Melhem (2014) notes that "positive thinking is a strategy that a person acquires through learning, and it results mainly from the individual's modification of negative thoughts about oneself and others, leading them to achieve successes in their life that reflect positively on the individual and society". Here, the second objective of the research was fulfilled.

As shown in Table 5, the results indicate a low level of intellectual extremism among the research sample. The sample's mean score was 70.89, which is significantly lower than the hypothesized mean of 81. The researchers attribute this finding to the fact that the extremist ideologies of terrorist groups failed to take root within a diverse Iraqi society rich in cultural, human, and social values. This was particularly true among the educated segment of the population, which led to the formation of an intellectual current opposing extremism. The community of Salah al-Din, despite its diverse population, had not previously suffered from ideological, social, religious, or ethnic problems, making these extremist ideas foreign and unable to find fertile ground for growth. The strength of the social environment and a legacy of moral, religious, and tribal values acted as a bulwark against this type of extremism. This was reinforced by institutions promoting moderation, chief among them the educational system, where schools and teachers play a vital role in establishing principles of tolerance and peaceful coexistence. This is consistent with the study by Al-Harbi et al. (2020), which recommended "encouraging students to connect sports with the teachings of the Islamic religion". Thus, the third objective of the research was achieved.

Regarding the relationship between life orientation and intellectual extremism, the Pearson correlation coefficient was $r = 0.67$, indicating a significant inverse relationship. The researchers attribute this to the fact that the female physical education teachers possess intellectual maturity, an open-minded view of the future, and a proactive approach to planning their lives, particularly their careers. This is supported by Al-Majdalawi (2012), who states that "individuals' outlook on life is realistic, and they are able

to achieve their goals, which motivates them to approach life with vigor, perseverance, and desire, keeping in mind the possibilities of success in their lives".

Conversely, the Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = 0.433$ indicates that there is no statistically significant relationship between positive thinking and intellectual extremism. This result may suggest that the sample thinks positively by accepting positive ideas and rejecting negative ones due to the responsibility they feel towards their families, their work, their community, and especially themselves. This personal focus stands in opposition to the nature of intellectual extremism. As they are all subject to similar post-conflict conditions, a sense of mutual, self-driven encouragement may help them maintain positive thinking independently of broader ideological struggles. As noted by Al-Khalidi and Zeidan (2014) in their study, "widowed women are affected by the same circumstances and are subject to a single culture, and this brings their viewpoints closer together".

Limitations of the Study

Despite the importance of the findings, several limitations in this study must be acknowledged. First, the study relied on self-report instruments (questionnaires), which may expose the data to social desirability bias. Second, the sample is limited to female physical education teachers, which restricts the generalizability of the results to other groups, such as male teachers or teachers of other specializations, due to the lack of a comparison group. Third, the study's cross-sectional design is a key limitation; it demonstrates a correlation between variables but does not allow for the establishment of causality. It is impossible to definitively conclude that life orientation leads to lower intellectual extremism, or vice versa.

Future Research Directions

This study opens avenues for several future research paths to address its limitations and deepen understanding. It's suggested to conduct longitudinal studies to follow a sample of teachers over an extended period to better understand the causal relationship between life orientation and intellectual extremism. It's also recommended to conduct comparative studies that include male teachers, teachers from other disciplines, or those from regions unaffected by the conflict to verify if the current findings are specific to this sample. Finally, future studies could employ mixed-methods research, combining quantitative tools with in-depth qualitative interviews to gain a richer understanding of the phenomenon.

Conclusions

Based on the analysis of the results and the subsequent discussion, the following key conclusions can be drawn:

1. The female physical education teachers in the liberated areas of Iraq demonstrate high levels of both life orientation and positive thinking, while simultaneously exhibiting a low level of intellectual extremism. This highlights their profound psychological resilience in a challenging post-conflict environment.
2. A significant inverse relationship exists between life orientation and intellectual extremism. This finding indicates that as individuals adopt a more positive and purposeful outlook on life, their susceptibility to extremist ideologies decreases.
3. No significant relationship was found between positive thinking and intellectual extremism. This suggests that while positive thinking is a prevalent and beneficial trait within this group, it does not directly correlate with a lower level of intellectual extremism, distinguishing it from the broader construct of life orientation.

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