

# Positive Psychology and Occupational Health

*The Role of Life Satisfaction and Personal Growth*

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# Content of presentation



- Theoretical foundation
  - Hedonic vs eudaimonic
  - Life satisfaction and personal growth
- Research inquiry
- Method
- Results
- Implications
- Applicability



## Aim of the study

- To investigate the role of life satisfaction and personal growth on occupational health.

These two variables represents two different research backgrounds, and we speculate whether they affect occupational health differently.



# Occupational Health

- Theoretically founded in positive psychology
- Based on the idea that
  - Positive affect more than absence of negative affect
  - Engagement and interest more than just the absence of burnout
  - Well-being is more than absence of illness  
(Ryan & Deci, 2001; Seligman, 2002)

# Well-being reserach: Two perspectives



- Hedonic approach focus on happiness (Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999)
  - Well being defined by pleasure attainment and pain avoidance
  - Subjective well-being consist of three dimensions (Ryan & Deci, 2001):
    - Life satisfaction
    - Presence of positive mood
    - Absence of negative mood

# Well-being reserach: Two perspectives



- Eudaimonic approach focus on meaning (Ryan & Deci, 2001)
  - Well being defined by degree to which a person is fully functioning
  - To live in accordance with ones "daimon" – or true self (Waterman, 1993; Ryff and Singer, 2000)
  - Happiness / the good life is more than pleasure
- Different research focus – knowledge both divergent and complementary



## Life satisfaction (hedonic)

- Typically measured by asking respondents to evaluate their lives in terms of good or bad on a general basis (Kahneman, 1999)
- Explains part of complexity in occupational health and sick-leave

# Personal growth (eudaimonic)



- Theoretically founded in Ancient Greek philosophy e.g., Aristotle
  - Rationale: Feeling good is necessary but not sufficient for a happy life
- Today reflected in process-oriented models, such as the Self-Determination Theory (SDT)
- Psychometrically defined through five concepts; curiosity, flow, competence, complexity and learning
- Personal growth adds to the understanding of occupational health and sick-leave

# Research question



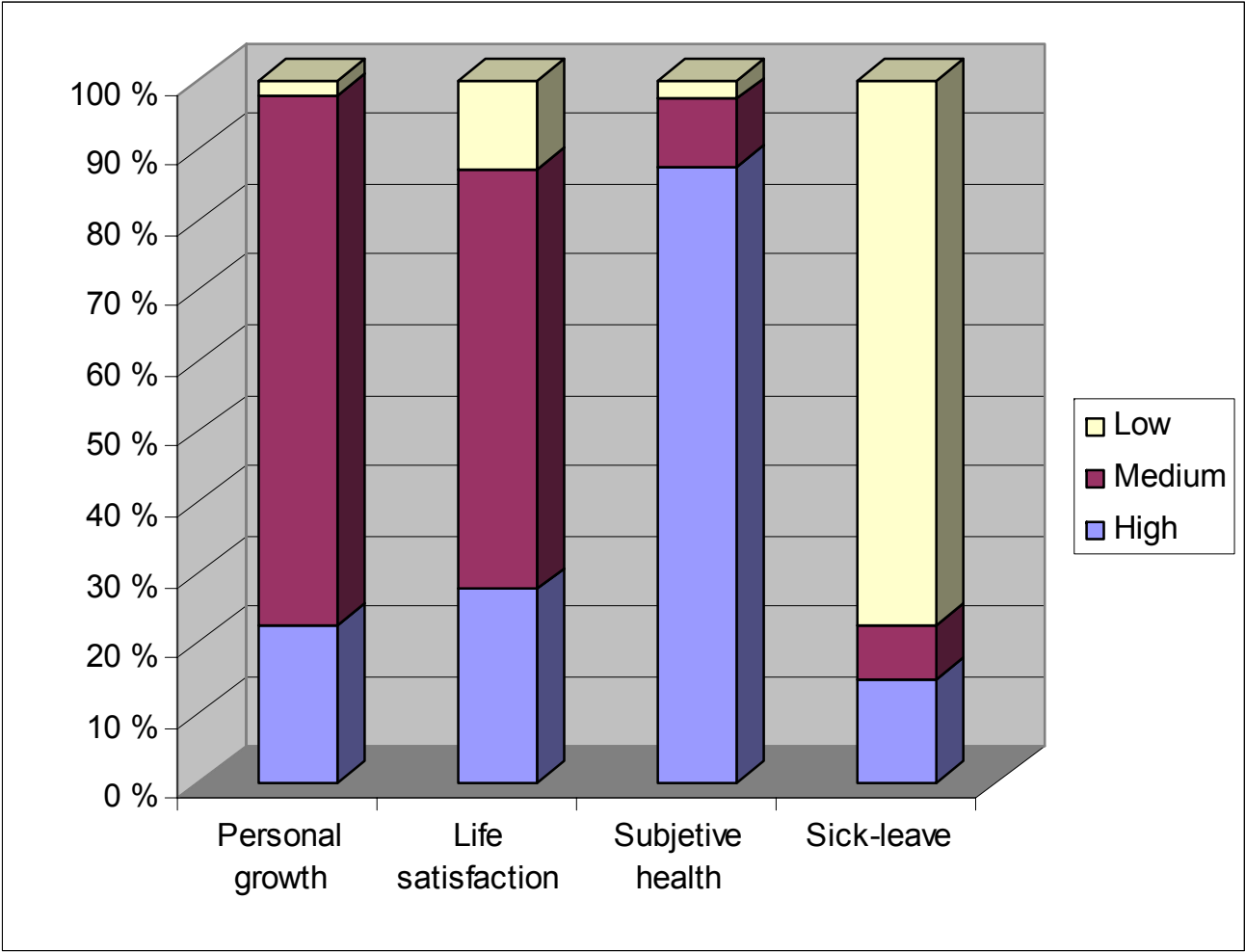
- Life satisfaction (hedonic) and personal growth (eudaimonic) affect subjective health and sick-leave in organizations differently



## Method

- Data collected among members of Occupational Health Services in Norway (N = 465) by means of a questionnaire spring 2006
- Sample cross-sectional within health services, mean age 48 (SD = 10), 65% female and 25% male
- Analyses included Pearson's correlation and structural equation modelling

# Results



# Results



- Zero-order correlations
  - Life satisfaction positively correlated with subjective health ( $r = .37, p < .01$ )
  - Life satisfaction negatively correlated with number of days absent from work ( $r = -.14, p < .01$ )
  - Personal growth was positively correlated with subjective health ( $r = .10, p < .05$ )
  - Personal growth also positively correlated with sick leave ( $r = .09, p < .05$ )

# Correlations



Table 1.

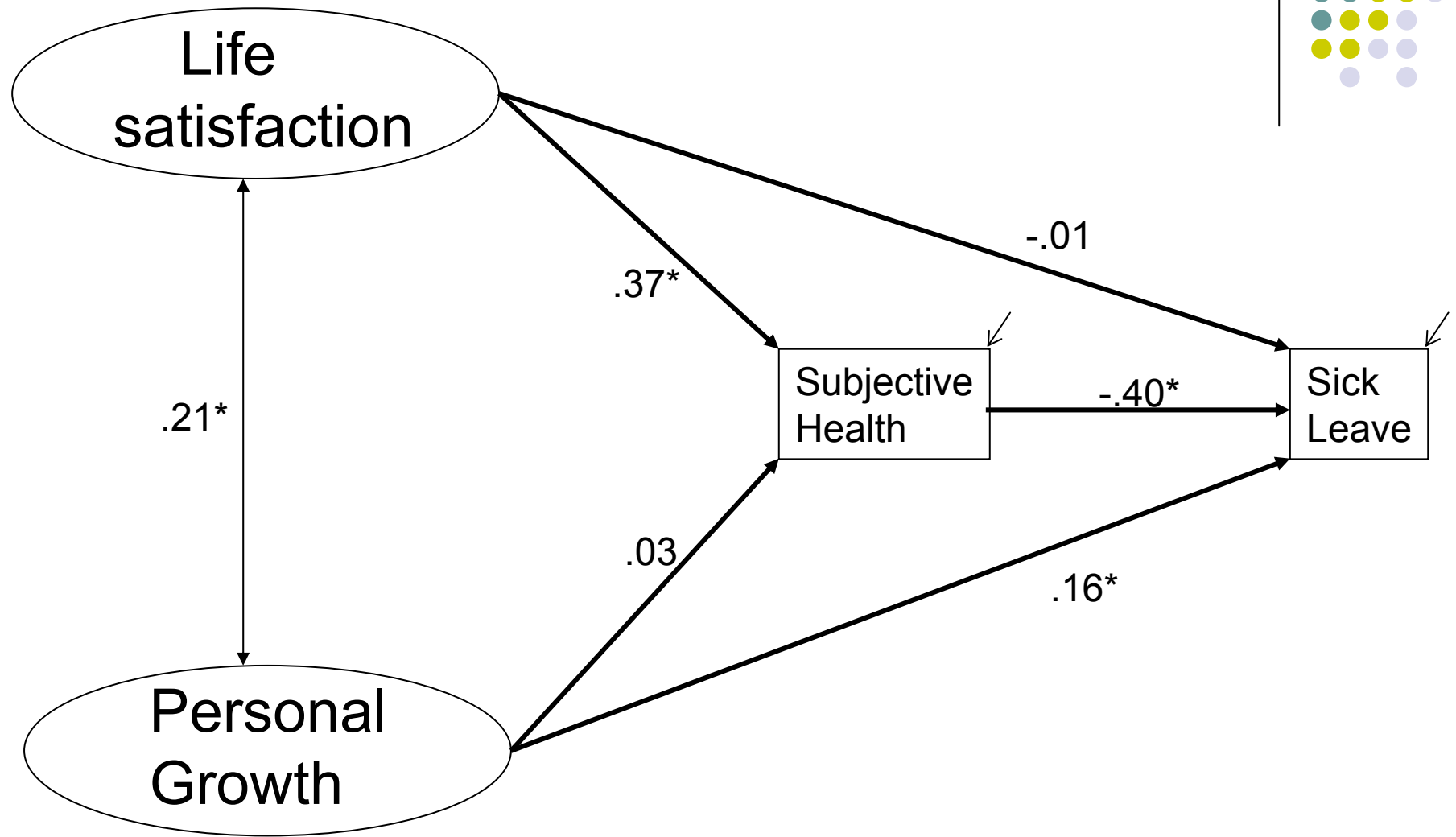
	Personal growth	Life satisfaction	Subjective health	Mean	SD
Personal growth				3,7	0,38
Life satisfaction	.19**			5,1	1,1
Subjective health	.10*	.37**		4,2	0,76
Sick leave	.10*	-.14**	-.38**	1,9	1,25

Note. N = 465. \* $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$



# Results

- Path model with Life satisfaction and personal growth as latent variables
  - Life satisfaction predicted subjective health ( $r = .37, p < .05$ ), but no direct link to sick leave
  - Personal growth predicted days of sick leave, but not subjective health ( $r = .16, p < .05$ )
  - Subjective health was only a moderately strong predictor of sick leave ( $r = .40, p < .05$ )



\* =  $p < .001$

$X^2 (79, N = 446) = 79.0, p = .004, CFI = .99, RMSEA = .04$

# Conclusions



- Life satisfaction and personal growth represents diverse aspects of well-being
- Associated with different elements of occupational health (physical health and sick-leave)
- Employees high on life satisfaction tend to have strong health, and this was indirectly related to sick-leave
- Employees high on personal growth tend to have more sick-leave



# Conclusions

- Theoretically, interesting finding that personal growth is unrelated to health and positively related to sick-leave
  - Psychological mechanisms: Organizational commitment? Exhaustion? Not enough challenge? Obsessive vs harmonious passion (Vallerand, 2003). Causal direction?
- Methodological
  - Representative sample?
  - Objective vs subjective measure
- Some people with poor health have high SWB, whereas conversely, some people with low well-being have strong health (Ryan and Deci, 2001)



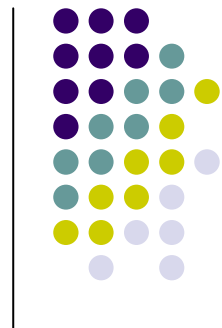
# Implications

- If these results are replicated – how will that affect positive psychology at work?
  - Personal growth believed to increase motivation, work performance and stronger health
  - Arranging for personal growth at work
- If these results are due to psychometric reasons,
  - Improve measurement of health and sick leave



# Conclusions

- Further research
- Applicability in daily practice
  - Should we strive for personal growth at work?
  - Life satisfaction is important for health and sick-leave





# References

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