

## Assessment of gratitude and well-being and their relationship: influence of select demographic variables

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### ABSTRACT

Gratitude is the appreciation of what is valuable and meaningful to oneself and represents a general state of thankfulness and/or appreciation. Wellness refers to diverse and interconnected dimensions of physical, mental, and social well-being that extend beyond the traditional definition of health. Wellness has been an area of interest in the field of research for a long time. The present study explores the extent of gratitude and well-being among the selected sample and to find out the relationship between gratitude and well-being. The sample consisted of 396 respondents, of which 202 were aged 16-25 and 193 samples aged 26-40. Their statuses being student, employed and unemployed samples. The scales used to measure gratitude and well-being are the Gratitude Questionnaire-six item form (GQ-6, McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002) and Well-being Index by WHO (1998). The data was analyzed using chi-square test, product moment correlation, Independent samples t test and one-way ANOVA. The results revealed that majority of the sample had low gratitude and wellbeing. There was a positive correlation between gratitude and well-being. Respondents in the age group of 16-25 years had higher gratitude scores than respondents in the age group of 26-40 years. Students had higher gratitude scores, followed employed samples and unemployed respondents had least gratitude. In wellbeing, unemployed samples had higher well-being, followed by employed samples and students had least well-being.

**Keywords:** *Gratitude, Well-Being, Demographic Variables*

Positive psychology is that field of science that teaches us human beings to practice gratitude, mindfulness and so forth to improve our lives. Gratitude is often synonymous with the word thankfulness but using the word thankfulness to describe an underrated emotion such as gratitude can be quite limiting. There are several definitions of gratitude. Robert Emmons, a leading researcher on gratitude in psychology defines gratitude in such a manner “has been conceptualized as an emotion, a virtue, a moral sentiment, a motive, a coping response, a skill and an attitude. It is all of these and more. Minimally, gratitude is an emotional response to a gift. It is appreciation felt after one has been beneficiary of an altruistic act” (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000).

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Gratitude has shown to enhance well-being, happiness life satisfaction, quality of life connectedness with others, higher optimism (Toepfer & Walker, 2019; Van de Creek et al, 2002; Kerr, O'Donovan, Pepping, 2015; Ghalesefidi, Maghsoudi & Pouragha, 2018). It also increases self-esteem, self-acceptance related emotion and social support (Rash, Kwantlen and Prkachin, 2011). It reduces anxiety, aggression and emotional distress levels, cortisol levels (Kerr, O'Donovan, & Pepping, 2014; Deng et al, 2019; Jackowska, Brown, Ronaldson and Steptoe, 2016). This very question can be applicable to different age groups. Many studies have been done among the youth (Emmons & McCullough, 2003, 2004; Froh et al., 2011) to check the relationship among the two variables and a few to check the if this relationship is age dependent. Therefore, this association has be thoroughly tested. The current status and person's stage in life also definitely affects the results, therefore, this is another demographic group the relationship has been tested in.

All religions that exist today teach us one thing that in common, it is to be grateful for what one has. One method of practicing gratitude is through prayer. In the world of science, there is a rise in atheism where gratitude is practiced in various other alternate methods. There is a chase for happiness in materialistic things/goals and gratitude is the practice of taking a moment to sit and be grateful for things one currently has and this practice that takes only about a few minutes can have tremendous benefits such as the ones mentioned above. It helps one focus on the things they do have and find contentment in that rather than commodities. Due to the political, social and the deteriorating environment that we live in today, one can get easily distressed. To be able to cope with all the personal and the societal stressors it is important to be positive, look at the bright side of things and be grateful for what one has. Therefore, this study is necessary to study the gratitude aspect in the Indian context and whether it is related to well-being. It is hypothesized that gratitude and well-being are related to each other and demographic variables will have significant influence over gratitude and well-being.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Sample*

On the whole, we employed a total of 396 samples with 202 of male respondents and the remaining 194 of them with female samples. Among the total sample, there were 200 young adults among which they consisted of 100 males and 100 females. There were 196 adults, among which 102 were male and 94 were female in the entire sample there were 299 students, 45 employed and 52 unemployed respondents. Stratified random sampling was employed for the sample selection.

### *Tools employed*

- 1. Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6):** Gratitude questionnaire was developed by McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, in the year 2002. It is a 6 item seven-point rating scale in which the subjects have to respond as “strongly disagree”, “disagree”, “slightly disagree”, “neutral”, “slightly agree”, “agree” and “strongly agree” and the scoring being 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7 respectively. For the negatively cued items (item 3 & 6), the scoring is reversed. The higher the score, the higher the gratitude. The GQ-6 has good internal reliability, with alphas between .82 and .87, and there is evidence that the GQ-6 is positively related to optimism, life satisfaction, hope, spirituality, religiousness, forgiveness, empathy and prosocial behaviour, and negatively related to depression, anxiety, materialism and envy. If the score is less than 35, it is determined as low/ below average gratitude. A score lying between 36-38 is

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determined as having an average gratitude score. A score lying within 39-41 is determined as having high gratitude.

- 2. WHO (Five) Well-Being Index:** The measure was first introduced in its present form in 1998 by the WHO Regional Office in Europe as part of the DEPCARE project on well-being measures in primary health care. It is a 5 item five-point rating scale in which the subjects have to respond as “All of the time”, “Most of the time”, “More than half of the time”, “Less than half of the time”, “Some of the time”, “At no time” over the last two weeks and score being 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 and 0 respectively and the score is calculated by totaling the figures of the five answers and multiplying it by four. The score can range from zero to one hundred, the higher the score higher the well-being scale is. The scale has adequate validity both as a screening tool for depression and as an outcome measure in clinical trials and has been applied successfully across a wide range of study fields. Cronbach's alpha for the WHO-5 was 0.87, indicating good reliability. Other studies have shown good Cronbach's alpha values for the WHO-5. If the score is less than 13, it is interpreted as having low levels of well-being and a score above 13 is interpreted as having high levels of well-being

### *Procedure*

The participants were first instructed to answer the required demographic information. They were then asked to fill The Gratitude Questionnaire-Six Item Form (GQ-6) which contained 6 statements such as “I have so much in life to be thankful for”, “I am grateful to a wide variety of people” etc. They had to rate how they felt with 1 being strongly agree and 7 strongly disagree. They were asked to fill the World Health Organization (five) well-being index. The participants had to fill this to the closest to how they felt from the past two weeks.

For the participants of young adults i.e. ages between 16-25 years, an online form was distributed among various educational institutes. For the older adults, they were explained what was the purpose of this research and with their consent, the questionnaires were filled. This was done physically, collected from door to door. It takes about five minutes to fill the questionnaires. The subjects were given questionnaires and collected as soon as they were finished. The data, thus collected from the respondents was scored, scrutinized, then analyzed.

The data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics included frequency, percent, mean and standard deviation. Inferential statistics included chi-square test to find out the significance of difference between frequencies of various levels of gratitude and well-being, to find out the relationship between gratitude and well-being Pearson's product moment correlation was employed, to find out the gender influence Independent samples t-tests were employed and one way ANOVA was employed to find out the significance of mean difference between respondents with various status for gratitude and well-being scores. Tables 1 to 3 present the analysis of the results obtained.

**RESULTS**

*Table 1 Distribution of the selected sample by various levels of gratitude and wellbeing and results of chi-square tests*

Variable	Range of scores	Interpretation	Frequency	Percent	Test statistics
Gratitude	<35	Low	355	89.6	$X^2 = 567.106$ ; $p = .001$
	36-38	Average	32	8.1	
	39-41	High	9	2.3	
Wellbeing	<13	Low	217	54.8	$X^2 = 3.646$ ; $p = .001$
	>13	High	179	45.2	

We find a large majority of the sample possessed low levels of gratitude to an extent of 89.6%, followed by 8.1% of them who had average levels of gratitude and only 2.3% of the sample had high levels of gratitude. Further, the chi-square test revealed a significant difference (Chi-square = 567.106;  $p = .001$ ), further confirming that the majority of the sample had low levels of gratitude.

In the case of well-being, 54.8% samples scoring below 13, indicating low levels of wellbeing and 45.2% samples obtaining above 13, interpreted as having high levels of gratitude. Further, the chi square test revealed a significant difference (Chi-square = 3.646;  $p = .001$ ), confirming that majority of the sample possessed less well-being.

*Table 2 Results of product-moment correlation between gratitude and wellbeing scores*

Variable 1	Variable 2	Correlation coefficient	Significance (P)
Gratitude	Wellbeing	0.103	.040

The correlation coefficient ( $r = 0.103$ ) indicates a positive and significant correlation between Gratitude and Well-being. Higher the gratitude, more was the well-being and vice-versa.

*Table 3 Mean gratitude and wellbeing scores of respondents in different age groups and status and results of test statistics*

Variable	Age groups	Number of samples	Mean	Standard Deviation	Test statistics
Gratitude	16-25	200	29.13	6.13	$t = 10.451$ ; $p = .001$
	26-40	196	23.60	4.20	
Wellbeing	16-25	200	50.73	19.15	$t = 1.622$ ; $p = .106$
	26-40	196	53.42	13.33	
	Position				

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Variable	Age groups	Number of samples	Mean	Standard Deviation	Test statistics
Gratitude	Students	299	27.15	6.06	F=11.497; P=.001
	Employed	45	24.96	6.10	
	Unemployed	52	23.27	3.36	
Wellbeing	Students	299	50.94	17.02	F=3.621; P=.028
	Employed	45	53.29	16.82	
	Unemployed	52	57.46	12.23	

From the table, it is clear that gratitude scores of the respondents in the age group of 16-25 years was 29.13 which was found to be significantly higher than respondents in the age group of 26-40 years (mean 23.60). Independent samples t-test revealed a significant mean difference between respondents in the age group of 16-25 years and 26-40 years ( $t=10.451$ ;  $p=.001$ ). However, in well-being scores respondents in different age groups did not differ significantly ( $t=1.622$ ;  $p=.106$ ).

Status of the respondents had significant influence over both gratitude ( $F=11.49$ ;  $p=.001$ ) and wellbeing ( $F=3.621$ ;  $p=.028$ ) scores. In the case of gratitude students (mean 27.15) were found to have highest gratitude scores, followed by employed ones (mean 24.96) and unemployed respondents (mean 23.27) had least scores. When well-being scores were analyzed, unemployed respondents had high wellbeing scores (mean 57.46), followed by employed ones (mean 53.29) and students had least well-being scores (mean 50.94).

## **DISCUSSION**

*The main findings of this study are*

1. Majority of the sample had low gratitude and wellbeing.
2. A positive correlation was observed between gratitude and well-being.
3. Respondents in the age group of 16-25 years had higher gratitude scores than respondents in the age group of 26-40 years.
4. Students had higher gratitude scores, followed employed samples and unemployed respondents had least gratitude.
5. In well-being, unemployed samples had higher well-being, followed by employed samples and students had least well-being.

It is clear that gratitude was positively related to well-being, hence the hypothesis formulated is accepted. Chopik, Newton, Ryan, Kashdan, and Jarden, (2017) found that the associations between gratitude and subjective well-being remained relatively constant across the lifespan. Kerr and O'Donovan (2014) demonstrated that gratitude could be cultivated and it led to enhanced life satisfaction, connectedness with others, higher optimism and reduced anxiety. Deng et al (2019) in their studies on prison inmates found that experimental groups which underwent the intervention of practicing gratitude through a few exercises showed increased well-being and decreased levels of aggression compared to control group. Jackowska, Brown, Ronaldson and Steptoe (2016) were successful in decreasing emotional

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distress levels and thereby increased the subjective well-being. A study done in 2002 by McCullough, Emmons and Tsang, showed that envy and materialism have a negative correlation with gratitude. Envy is an emotion that does not let one focus on what one has; rather it makes one focus on what one is lacking in and what the other has. The results of the present study are in agreement with the studies done elsewhere, and it has been established from empirical data that gratitude has a positive effect on well-being and facilitates psychological well-being.

In the present study, 16-25 years had higher gratitude scores than respondents in the age group of 26-40 years, which is quite contrary to the studies done by Chopik, Newton, Ryan, Kashdan, and Jarden, (2017), found that the experience of gratitude was greatest in older adults and least in middle aged and younger adults. Students had higher levels of gratitude in comparison to the employed and the unemployed sample. This may be due to an awareness of increased competition in today's world and they are aware they are fortunate to have access to the resources. The unemployed have higher levels of gratitude after students. This could be because having a job alone in an overpopulated country like India is something to take pride in because despite having impressive qualifications, one struggles to find a job in this country. Hence, being grateful for being employed could be one reason they have higher gratitude levels in comparison to the unemployed samples.

Gratitude, as discussed earlier, is beneficial in one's social life, physical health and mental health. There are multiple ways it can be practised depending on the time one has and which method is more effective in their case and personal preferences. Gratitude should be taught at a young age, starting in educational institutes. Health professions should be informed on daily practices such as gratitude and mindfulness, small steps that one can take every day to improve one's life, to be able to teach their patients. Industrial psychologists should conduct workshops that teach employees to practice gratitude, mindfulness and so forth in order to have the employees working at their optimum level.

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***Conflict of Interest***

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