

Gratitude, psychological well-being and happiness among college students: a correlational study

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ABSTRACT

In the past decade, a large number of studies have been conducted exploring the relationship between gratitude, psychological well-being and happiness. Empirical studies have indicated potential variations in the relationship between gratitude and well-being and few studies have even reported negative association between these constructs. The present study was conducted to examine the relationship between Gratitude, Psychological well-being and Happiness. The study was conducted on a sample of 200 college students. Participants were randomly selected and the sample consisted of both male (n = 67) and female (n = 133). Measures included The Gratitude Questionnaire, Ryff's Psychological Well-being Scale, and The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ). Findings suggest that there is a positive association among Gratitude, Psychological well-being, its dimensions and Happiness. Limitation and implications of the present study are discussed. The findings of the present study can lay a ground work for conceptualising a theoretical model of Gratitude and its estimator variables. Further research can focus on intervention study to improve Gratitude among adolescence population by implementing Gratitude based therapy, and thereby enhancing their Psychological Well-Being.

Keywords: *Gratitude, Psychological well-being, Happiness, Intervention, Mental Health*

Psychological well-being is the positive aspect of mental health. It is largely determined by people's own evaluation of their lives. When one's evaluation matches his expectations of life he feels satisfied and experience happiness. On the other hand, if a person in his evaluation finds life not satisfactory it may result in despair and affect his well-being. These evaluations may be cognitive or affective. The cognitive part is an information-based appraisal of one's life that is when a person gives conscious evaluative judgments about one's satisfaction with life as a whole. The affective part is a hedonic evaluation guided by emotions and feelings such as frequency with which people experience pleasant and unpleasant moods in reaction to their lives. The assumption is most people evaluate their life as either good or bad, so they are normally able to offer judgments. Further, people invariably experience a range of emotions, which have a positive effect or a negative effect on their mood and judgment of life. Thus, people have a sense of subjective

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well-being even if they do not often consciously think about it, and the psychological system offers virtually a constant evaluation of what is happening to the person (Diener 1997).

Psychological Well-Being is defined as “*a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his/her community*” (WHO). Good mental health is a sense of wellbeing, confidence and self-esteem. It enables an individual to fully enjoy and appreciate other people, day-to-day life and ones’ environment. When an individual is psychologically stable he can have positive relationships, and can use his abilities to reach his potential and to deal with life challenges.

In today’s era it is hard to find happiness and satisfaction among people. Every now and then, there is a clichéd question, ‘What is the meaning of life?’ or ‘What is the purpose of life?’ or ‘Why are we born? Are we living a happiest life? and What can lead a satisfied living?’ These all are some questions that are yet to be answered. A number of philosophers, spiritual leaders, psychologists and scientists have tried to answer these questions and have come up with some key concepts to attain the inner well-being for satisfied living, but still the world needs more. It’s not at all an easy job to make all people to live a happy life at once but there are chances to make initial steps as improving psychological well-being. By standing that point to improve the mental health and well-being, the feeling of gratefulness is a one amazing and easy way that can improve one’s overall well-being. There are lots of studies that support that the feeling gratitude can lead to a successful living and have a key to reveal the ultimate goal of life. In every religious festivals and seasonal festivals people are practicing rituals that shows gratitude towards God that where people believe that God/supreme conscious is the one who is offering everything for all living being.

Gratitude is a positive emotion, which is really important because it serves a purpose. A common definition from modern dictionaries of “gratitude is the quality of being thankful, readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness.” The word gratitude is derived from the Latin word “*gratia*”, which means grace, graciousness, or gratefulness (depending on the context). In some ways gratitude encompasses all of these meanings. Gratitude is a thankful appreciation for what an individual receives, whether tangible or intangible. With gratitude, people acknowledge the goodness in their lives. In the process, people usually recognize that the source of that goodness lies at least partially outside them.

A sizable body of research exploring the nature of consciousness, carried on for more than thirty years in prestigious scientific institutions around the world, shows that thoughts are capable of affecting everything from the simplest machines to the most complex living beings. This evidence suggests that human thoughts and intentions are an actual physical “something” with astonishing power to change the world. Every thought is tangible energy with the power to transform anything and everything. A thought is not only a thing; a thought is a thing that influences other things (Korb, 2012).

Going by this point, each and every thought in an individual causes neurochemical changes, some temporary and some lasting. For instance, when people consciously practice gratitude, they get a surge of rewarding neurotransmitters, like dopamine, and experience a general alerting and brightening of the mind, probably correlated with more of the neurochemical norepinephrine. Now Neuroimaging technology brings a little closer to understanding why these exercises have these effects. The results suggest that even months after a simple, short gratitude writing task, people’s brains are still wired to feel extra

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thankful. The implication is that gratitude tasks work, at least in part, because they have a self-perpetuating nature: The more an individual practices gratitude, they become more attuned to it and the more they will enjoy its psychological benefits (Korb, 2012).

There are some notable exceptions to the generally positive results in research on gratitude. One study found that middle-aged divorced women who kept gratitude journals were no more satisfied with their lives than those who did not. Another study found that children and adolescents who wrote and delivered a thank-you letter to someone who made a difference in their lives may have made the other person happier but did not improve their own well-being. This finding suggests that gratitude is an attainment associated with emotional maturity (Harvard's Health Publication, Nov. 2011).

The feeling of gratefulness and human well-being are closely related and this study is trying to establish the relationship between Gratitude and other estimator variables of psychological well-being of people which has not been done by any other researchers yet in the field of Positive Psychology.

METHOD

Aim

The aim of the present study is to examine the relationship between Gratitude and Psychological Well-Being, Happiness among College students.

Objectives

1. To assess the level of Gratitude, Psychological Well-Being and Happiness among College students
2. To investigate the relationship between Gratitude, Psychological Well-Being, and Happiness among College students
3. To study the relationship of Gratitude with the six dimensions of psychological well-being

Hypotheses

1. Gratitude will be positively associated with Psychological well-being and Happiness.
2. There will be a significant relationship between Gratitude and the six dimensions of Psychological Well-Being viz. Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relations with Others, Purpose in Life, and Self-Acceptance.

Participants

The study was conducted on a sample of 200 college students who were pursuing UG or PG courses. The sample included both male (n = 67) and female (n = 133) students who were randomly selected from various Arts and science colleges in and around Coimbatore and Tirupur districts. Their age ranged between 15 to 24 years (Mean 19.5). Only those participants who were able to read and understand English language were selected in the sample.

Measures

The Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6, McCullough et al., 2002). The test consists of six propositions representing one single factor with acceptable internal consistency. Respondents indicate their response on a 7 Point Likert scale ranging from 'Strongly Disagree', 'Disagree', 'Slightly Disagree', 'Neutral', 'Slightly Agree', 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree'.

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Agree'. High scores indicate a higher level of a grateful disposition. Internal consistency is excellent (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.82$). It also has Convergent and Discriminant validity.

Ryff's Psychological Well-being Scale (Carol Ryff, 1995). RPWS consists of six dimensions namely known as self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, autonomy and positive relations with others by using 6-point likert scale from 'Strongly Disagree', 'Disagree', 'Slightly Disagree', 'Slightly Agree', 'Agree' and; 'Strongly Agree'. The RPWS has high level of reliability and validity as the value of the Omega (w) reliability coefficient of the six subscales as well as the whole instrument was above .70.

The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ). The OHQ was developed by Peter Hills and Michael Argyle, 2002. OHQ consists of 29 statements with 6 point Likert scale ranging from 'Strongly Disagree', 'Moderately disagree', 'Slightly disagree', 'Slightly Agree', 'Moderately Agree' and 'Strongly Agree'. The total score ranges from 29- 174. Higher the score indicates high level of Happiness. Also, the OHQ has adequate Reliability and Validity. The OHQ is a valid instrument for measuring happiness.

RESULTS

Table-1: The level of Gratitude, Psychological well-being, and Happiness among college students (N = 200).

S. N.	VARIABLES	MEAN	SD	LEVEL
1.	Gratitude (G)	31.72	7.17	Above Average
2.	Psychological well-Being (PW)	182.00	29.87	Above Average
2 a.	Autonomy(A)	29.82	5.75	Above Average
2 b.	Environmental Mastery (EM)	29.93	5.62	Above Average
2 c.	Personal Growth (PG)	30.63	5.67	Above Average
2 d.	Positive Relation with others (PR)	30.75	5.84	Above Average
2 e.	Purpose in Life (PNL)	30.21	5.57	Above Average
2 f.	Self-Acceptance (SA)	30.98	5.83	Above Average
3.	Happiness (H)	119.80	22.78	Above Average

Table 1 shows the level of Gratitude ($M = 31.72$) with a standard deviation of 7.17. It indicates that the college students participated in the present study have above average level of Gratitude. This further depicts that the participants from the modern era having a moderate awareness and positive attitude towards what they are given with or having for their livelihood. This attitude certainly develops through teaching and through experience. Though the participants are too young to have such experience this might be the result of parenting and learning from one's surroundings. Though overall results exhibit average level of gratitude among youngsters still individual scores of some participants reflects low level attitude towards gratitude, while analysing their score to find out the possible reason for their low stand which could possibly caused by their socio-economic background such as single parent kids, single kids and participants from very humble background shown the variation compared to the participants from normal background. Still this need to be verified further to know the influence of other factors where the present study has certain restriction in collecting data.

The level of Psychological Well- Being, ($M = 182$) with a standard deviation 29.87. It shows that the college students participated in the present study have an above average level of

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Psychological Well-Being. The psychological Well-being refers to how people evaluate their lives. According to Diner (1997), the evaluation may be in the form of cognition or in the form of affect. The Cognition based evaluation is how an individual appraise their life as a whole and the affect is changes in Emotions and Feeling throughout ones' life. The participants of the present study have shown slightly high individual variations. The reason may be the Psychological Well-Being is closely related to one's thought, feelings, emotions and the outcome. The participants of the present study falls under the development cycle of late adolescence is the period of experiencing high emotion and behavioural changes. In this period children are usually struggling in selection of their thoughts also they are in great need of guidance in what to do and what not to do. So, they are still under the process of development that may be the reason behind the outcome of individual variations in Psychological Well-Being.

The Mean value of Happiness is 119.80 indicating a high level of Happiness among the participants with the SD of 22.778. The SD score shows that there is a high significant difference among individual participants in their level of Happiness. The participants in present study are neither children nor adults; they are under the transition period where they can have tremendous emotional and behavioural fluctuations. This emotional and behavioural uncertainty possibly could be a reason to understand or to prefer their needs and handle the failure. The current scenario gives children a platform to compare themselves with others by seeing global population. This may be a reason to come away from self-identity and run along with the masses. This uncertain stand of youngsters struggling in picking up a goal in which they are capable of, instead they making their self-suffer admitting to the flow of changes from the surrounding where they land up in failure. This is just a possible reason still further analysis required on why the generation Y having pretty high deviation in their level of Happiness despite of having good family background.

Table-2: The level of six dimensions of Psychological well –being among college students (N = 200).

Variables	Mean	SD	Level
Autonomy(A)	29.82	5.75	Above Average
Environmental Mastery (EM)	29.93	5.62	Above Average
Personal Growth (PG)	30.63	5.67	Above Average
Positive Relation with others (PR)	30.75	5.84	Above Average
Purpose in Life (PNL)	30.21	5.57	Above Average
Self-Acceptance (SA)	30.98	5.83	Above Average

Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation of the six levels of Autonomy (M = 21.82), Environmental Mastery (M = 29.93), Personal Growth (M = 30.63), Purpose in Life (M = 30.21), Positive Relations with others (M = 30.75) and Self-Acceptance (M = 30.98), with a standard deviation of 5.75, 5.62, 5 .67, 5 .571, 5 .84 and 5.83, respectively.

Table-3: The relationship between the gratitude and psychological well-being, happiness (n = 200).

Variables	1	2	3
1. Gratitude	1.00	.787**	.682**
2. Psychological well-being		1.00	.788**
3. Happiness			1.00

** ($p < 0.01$)

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Table 3 shows the relationship among Gratitude, Psychological Well-being and Happiness. The analysis of the data revealed that Gratitude has significant positive correlation with Psychological well-being ($r = .787$) and Happiness ($r = .682$). The correlation is found to be significant at .01 level and the strength of correlation among variables is moderate. It means that increase in one variable i.e. Psychological well-being is associated with increase in the level of Gratitude, Happiness and vice-versa. So, the results proved that the Gratitude and Psychological Well-being and Happiness are intra and interdependently related with each other, and also the variables can influence each other thus the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

Table-4: The relationship between the gratitude and the six dimensions of psychological well-being among the college students (N = 200).

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gratitude	1.00	.691**	.703**	.698**	.682**	.688**	.655**
2. Autonomy		1.00	.744**	.672**	.688**	.654**	.698**
3. Environmental Mastery			1.00	.712**	.714**	.739**	.676**
4. Personal Growth				1.00	.712**	.744**	.658**
5. Positive Relations with others					1.00	.764**	.699**
6. Purpose in Life						1.00	.727**
7. Self Acceptance							1.00

** ($p < 0.01$)

Table – 4 shows the relationships between the Gratitude and the six dimensions of Psychological Well-being namely Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relations with others, Purpose in Life and Self-Acceptance. The results reveal that the six dimensions of Psychological Well-Being, that are Autonomy ($r = .691$), Environmental Mastery ($r = .703$), Personal Growth ($r = .698$), Positive Relations with Others ($r = .682$), Purpose in Life ($r = .688$) and Self-Acceptance ($r = .655$) positively correlated with the Gratitude. It indicates there is positive relationship between the Gratitude and the six dimensions of Psychological Well-being. Thus the alternative hypothesis is accepted. As mentioned earlier, Gratitude is a positive variable and gives a positive experience to individuals in the Physical, Mental, Social, Emotional, and spiritual aspects. Mostly people who experience or practices gratefulness can have control over their thought and behaviour.

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to explore the relationship between Gratitude, Psychological well-being, and Happiness among college students. Three general conclusions emerged from the data. First, results revealed that college students had above average level of Gratitude, Psychological well-being, and Happiness. Second conclusion that emerged from the study is that all the three variables under study i.e., Gratitude, Psychological well-being, and Happiness were positively correlated. The strength of correlation was moderate to high and significant at .01 level. The third conclusion of the study is that Gratitude was found to have a significant positive and moderate correlation with all the six components of Psychological well-being namely Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relations with others, Purpose in Life and Self-Acceptance. This indicates that all the variables under study are interlinked. It implies that by enhancing one quality i.e. the level of Gratitude, other positive qualities like Psychological well-being and Happiness can be increased among individuals.

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Most notably, the findings of the present study support the hypotheses of this study, as it confirmed that Gratitude, Psychological Well-being and Happiness are intra and interdependently related with each other, and also the variables can influence each other. Thus, the alternative hypothesis is accepted. The feeling of Gratitude is one of the strong positive emotions which can make an individual to experience peace, good health, self-realization, determination, forgiveness, motivation and in-depth joy and pleasure of humankind. So, the one who feels highly gratitude for what he/she has in their life obviously will have the higher level of Psychological Well-being and Happiness.

This kind of experience obviously can give an ability to make choices according to one's own free will. The pressure from outside or internal dilemma can never influence one's power or skills of Autonomy. When the individual has peaceful mind and a healthy physique they can control over their environment or can able to have an influence on the events of their own life. When people succeed in controlling their thoughts and behaviour they can have a Positive Relationship with others. The peaceful mind can super wise and master one's behaviour in a critical situation and give an opportunity to establish a healthy relationship with others. The Grateful people tend to have high level of Self- Acceptance because the feeling of gratitude never let peoples' to see or value their self-low and they never lost hope. Further grateful people have high level of Learned Optimism, so that they see the obstacles with a positive attitude and more over that the great-full people always be like easy going and have a intense feel as nothing is stable. The people who have above mentioned qualities certainly tend to have a Purpose in Life. They are not just happy about what they are having they also want to experience the intense pleasure of giving. The giving to others may differ according to their roles as a son/daughter, as a parent, as a sibling, as a student and a citizen to the society. The feeling of Gratitude can bring a intense feeling of Purpose in Life in every individual.

Findings of the present study appear to be consistent with some earlier studies conducted in this area. The results confirmed the findings of Chen, (2012) conducted a study on "*Gratitude and Adolescent Athletes' Well-Being: The Multiple mediating* ", that there is a significant relationship between the Gratitude and Well- being. The results also confirm the findings of Froh JJ, Yurkewicz C, and Kashdan TB (2009) conducted a research on a topic of, "*Gratitude and subjective well-being in early adolescence: examining gender differences*" that there is a relationship between Gratitude and Subjective well-being as well. There are no much studies found to support the present the current study. The reason may be the investigator picked many numbers of variables which not yet done by another researcher.

Further, from the findings of the present study it can be suggested that Gratitude can be taken as the estimator variables of Psychological well-being and Happiness; that is, if an individual possess the attitude of Gratitude, s/he is likely to have higher level of Psychological well-being, Happiness and sound mental health throughout their life. Such individuals can live a happy, peaceful and satisfied life than others.

CONCLUSION

The present study investigated the relationship between Gratitude, Psychological Well-Being and Happiness among College Students. The result suggests that Gratitude and Psychological well-being and its dimensions are significant related to Happiness. The findings of the present study can lay a ground work for conceptualising a theoretical model of Gratitude and its estimator variables. By taking the current findings as evidence, researchers can further analyse the effect of enhancing Gratitude through psychological

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intervention programmes on well-being and happiness or vice versa. This will eventually help in treating clients with various psychological problems and it certainly benefits the therapists in treating patients. Further research can focus on intervention study to improve Gratitude among adolescence population by implementing Gratitude based therapy, and thereby enhancing their Psychological Well-Being.

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Conflict of Interest

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