

Research Paper

Perceived Stress, Gratitude and Altruism among Indian Young Adults and Middle-Aged Adults during Covid-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 pandemic has profoundly altered our lives; it has produced both negative and positive impacts on people's lives. This pandemic has taught us about how not to take even a small thing for granted, it has taught us the value of life and how to be grateful for everything in life. Likewise, pandemic also taught us about how to selflessly care for someone, being altruistic is the need of the hour. Many people went out of the way to help others, this shows how much we as humans have changed. Therefore, the current paper aims to study the Perceived stress, Gratitude, and Altruism among Indian young adults and middle-aged adults during the Covid-19 Pandemic. The study includes a sample of four hundred twenty-eight participants; two hundred forty-six young adults and one hundred eight two middle-aged adults were recruited. Due to the pandemic, all the data was collected through online postings on various applications. Three tools were used in the study; Perceived stress scale (PSS) developed by Cohen and Williamson (1988) to measure the perceived stress of the sample, The Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6) developed by McCullough et al. (2002) to assess the gratitude of the sample and Generative Altruism Scale (GALS) developed by Büssing et al. (2013) to measure the altruism of the sample. For statistical analysis, a t test was used to compare the means of the sample and Pearson correlation was used to measure the correlation between the variables. The results suggested that there is no significant difference in perceived stress among young adults and middle-aged adults, likewise, no significant difference was found in altruism among the sample, whereas, a significant difference was found in gratitude between the sample. This research also attempts to study the correlation between the variables; perceived stress, gratitude, and altruism. Correlation came out to be positive for all the variables, which means if perceived stress increases, gratitude, and altruism also increase, likewise, if gratitude increases altruism also increases. It can be seen in the study how increased stress led to increased pro-social behavior. More research needs to be done in the field, as a lack of reviews were seen in the study.

Keywords: *Perceived Stress, Gratitude, Altruism, Young Adults, Middle-Aged Adults, Covid-19 Pandemic.*

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According to the Transactional Model of Stress, stress is described as "constantly changing cognitive and behavioural attempts to address particular external and/or internal demands that are judged as tiring or beyond a person's resources" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Individual variables, such as social, emotional, and psychological aspects, cause people to react differently to the same stressor, according to the paradigm. COVID-19, the pandemic, has taken a toll on our lives. Many of us are confronted with difficulties that may be stressful, upsetting, and triggering emotions in both adults and children. Individuals' and communities' health, safety, and well-being may be impacted by public health emergencies (For example, economic loss, work and school closures, insufficient resources for medical response, and insufficient distribution of essentials can all lead to instability, uncertainty, and mental isolation. These effects may influence people who contract the disease and the general population, as a variety of emotional reactions (such as distress or psychiatric conditions), unhealthy behaviours (such as excessive substance use), and non-compliance with public health directives (such as home quarantine and vaccination). (Pfefferbaum and North 2020). Stressful life events have a substantial negative impact on a person's mental health and psychological functioning, resulting in psychological issues such as anxiety, mental confusion, social alienation, and depression. (Yildirim & Arslan, 2020). A study done during the pandemic revealed that the prevalence rates of psychological distress including stress and anxiety are significantly high (more than 25%) among the general population of China. (Qiu et al., 2020). People with a greater education had higher levels of discomfort, maybe due to their increased self-awareness of their health (Roberts, et.al.,2018). Similarly, because the elderly had the highest mortality rate during the epidemic, it's not unpredictable that they're more prone to be mentally affected (Qiu et al., 2020).

People appear to be affected differently by the present Indian lockdown depending on their sex, occupation, socioeconomic status, or where they live, among other variables. A person who is with his family and has all of his basic needs satisfied, may not be as distressed as someone who does not. Frontline workers (such as healthcare providers) would also be more distressed than others (such as software engineers) (Rehman, et. al, 2020). According to a survey conducted by Grover, et al. (2020), more than two-fifths of people are experiencing anxiety and sadness as a result of the lockdown and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Some studies have reported weight gain as a result of the ongoing pandemic's impact on people's lifestyles. (Dev, et.al., 2020 and Ghosh, et. al, 2020). Other studies reported that excessive use of social media has a major influence on mental health during pandemic (Ahmad & Murad, 2020; Gao et al., 2020; Ni et al., 2020).

As stated above, Covid-19 has been tough for everyone, so we need to cope with the distress caused by it, one way to cope with it is gratitude. Gratitude is stated to be a moral emotion and a disposition that leads to a higher level of appreciation (Wood et al. 2010). Lazarus and Lazarus (1994) defined gratitude as an "empathic emotion" that is related to feelings of gratitude for helpful and constructive benefits or gifts. Gratitude has an important role in achieving favourable psychological outcomes such as subjective well-being and other psychological health indicators. (Datu 2014; Wood et al. 2010; Kashdan et al. 2006). People lose their sense of control over their lives and their beliefs when faced with misfortune and uncertainty, such as a pandemic. When people realize that everything they have and rely on could be taken away, it's difficult to take anything for granted. People's attitude of gratitude for life will be enhanced when they are aware of their mortal limitations. (Jans-Beken, 2021). When people are experiencing emotional gratitude, it offers comfort to them (Gallup,

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1999) and helps to balance positive and negative effects, resulting in increased life satisfaction (Wood et al., 2010). According to a study by Wood et al. (2009), grateful people felt better about their living situations by managing better with stress and anxiety, slept better, and we're glad for their living conditions and assets. So, it is important to feel grateful about even little things, especially at the time of a pandemic.

Humans have previously demonstrated compassion for those in need, such as during wars or natural calamities. The stakes are high in this pandemic, though, because the risk of contracting the disease from the person you're assisting isn't present in combat or catastrophe scenarios. In the context of contagious disease, assisting others selflessly, even if it has bad implications for the helper, is a good idea. Altruism is the name given to this philosophy by Auguste Comte in 1875. It refers to an action performed for the benefit of the other and not for self-promotion or internal well-being. (2005, Post). Without the circle of mutual support and concern, human civilizations cannot exist (Judge, 2019). That is why human communities have evolved via mutual reliance and cooperation. In the midst of a pandemic, cultural cognition is one of the factors that influence altruistic behavior. It can be seen in the study done by Schaffner (2020), it shows that individualism and economic profiteering have proven ineffective in dealing with the epidemic in cultures that have traditionally prioritized pro-social behavior and community well-being over individualism and economic profiteering. Even modest efforts to be made at an individual level to combat illness have proven to be more effective when focused on the repercussions it can have on others rather than only on one's own self. In sustaining hand-washing cleanliness among healthcare professionals, Grant and Hofmann (2011) discovered that appealing to altruistic instincts won out over appealing to self-interest.

Due to the ongoing pandemic, everyone's lifestyle has changed, some have become more inclined towards prosocial behavior some have become more stressed. And these changes have affected everyone at different scales, young adults must have affected in a different way and middle-aged adults indifferent. Hence, the current study aims to explore the stress, gratitude, and altruism during the times of pandemic among Indian young adults and middle-age adults.

METHODOLOGY

Aim

The present study aimed to see the stress, gratitude and altruism among the young adults and middle-aged adults.

Objective:

- To assess the difference between the stress of young adult and middle-aged adult.
- To assess the difference between the Gratitude of young and middle-aged adult.
- To assess the difference between the Altruism of young and middle-aged adult
- To assess the relationship between the variables, i.e., stress, Gratitude and Altruism.

Hypothesis:

- Hypothesis 1: there will be a significant difference between the stress of young adult and middle-aged adult.
- Hypothesis 2: there will be a significant difference between the Gratitude of young and middle-aged adult.

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- Hypothesis 3: there will be a significant difference between the Altruism of young and middle-aged adult.
- Hypothesis 4: there will be a significant correlation between the variables, i.e., Stress, Gratitude and Altruism.

Sample

The sample of two hundred forty-six young adults and one hundred eight two middle-aged adults (N=428) aged between eighteen to thirty-five from India was taken for this study. Participants from both the groups were from different socioeconomic classes – low, medium, and high.

Instruments

Three measures were used in this study,

1. **Perceived stress scale (PSS):** Developed by Cohen and Williamson (1988) to measure psychological stress. The PSS-10 contains ten items, each of which is graded on a 5-point Likert scale (0 = Never to 4 = Very Often). In an adult American population, its Cronbach alpha coefficient is 0.78. (Cohen & Williamson, 1988). The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the long version of PSS-10 (PSS-14) in Iran was 0.76. (Safaei & Shokri, 2014).
2. **The Gratitude Questionnaire – Six Item Form (GQ-6):** Developed by McCullough et al. (2002) to assess dispositional gratitude using six items on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree). McCullough et al. (2002) used confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to show that the GQ-6 provides a single factor with good internal consistency (= 0.82).
3. **Generative Altruism Scale (GALS)- nine item:** Developed by Büssing et al. (2013) to assess the altruism of adolescents and young adults. Internal consistency is good in adolescents for both the 11 and 9 item versions (Cronbach's alpha =.81). All items were rated on a four-point Likert scale, with 0 = Never to 3 = Very Often indicating the intensity of the attitude or behavior.

Normality Testing

All of the variables, including perceived stress, gratitude, and altruism, were found to be normally distributed. A visual inspection of their histograms, normal Q-Q plots, and box plots, as well as a Shapiro- Wilk's test ($p > 0.05$) (Shapiro & Wilk, 1965), revealed that the perceived stress scores were approximately normally distributed for both young adult and middle-aged adults, with skewness of -0.18 (SE= 0.21) and kurtosis of -0.25 (SE= 0.43) for the young adults and skewness of 0.01 (SE= 0.18) and kurtosis of -0.69 (SE= 0.35) for the middle-aged adults. Similarly, both young adult and middle-aged adults' gratitude scores were roughly normally distributed ($p > 0.05$), with skewness of 0.15 (SE= 0.21) and kurtosis of -0.09 (SE= 0.43) for young adults and skewness of 0.04 (SE= 0.18) and kurtosis of 0.41 (SE= 0.35) for middle-aged adults. For both young people and middle-aged adults, altruism scores were roughly normally distributed ($p > 0.05$), with skewness of 0.36 (SE= 0.21) and kurtosis of -0.11 (SE= 0.43) for the young adults and skewness of 0.02 (SE= 0.18) and kurtosis of 0.82 (SE= 0.35) for the middle-aged adults.

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RESULTS

Table 1 Independent sample parametric test between young adults and middle-aged adults across normally distributed variables

Variables	Mean	S. D.	T-statistics
Perceived Stress			
Young adults	25.28	5.13	-.870
Middle aged adults	25.79	5.02	
Gratitude			
Young adults	36.93	3.92	-4.250**
Middle aged adults	38.84	3.81	
Altruism			
Young adults	32.89	4.20	1.231
Middle aged adults	32.25	4.63	

***significant at 0.01 level.*

Table one indicates the t statistics between both the age groups i.e., young adults and middle-aged adults. Young adults and middle-aged adults for the aspects which were normally distributed. Results reveal that difference between the perceived stress of young adults and middle-aged adults was not significant. ($t=-0.870$, $p>0.01,0.05$). Likewise, no significant difference was found in altruism also ($t= 1.231$, $p>0.01, 0.05$). But, significant difference between the Gratitude of young adults and middle-aged adults. ($t= -4.250$, $p<0.01, 0.05$).

Table 2 Pearson correlation between the perceived stress, gratitude and altruism.

	Perceived stress	Gratitude	Altruism
Perceived Stress	1		
Gratitude	.243**	1	
Altruism	.278**	.263**	1

***Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Table 2 indicates the correlation between perceived stress, gratitude and altruism. There's a positive correlation between perceived stress and gratitude as the Pearson coefficient (r) came out to be 0.243 which is significant at 0.01($p<0.01$). Likewise, the correlation between gratitude and altruism is also positive, the Pearson correlation here is 0.263 (r) which is significant at 0.01($p<0.01$). Again, a positive correlation was found between altruism and perceived stress, the Pearson correlation came out to be 0.278 (r) which is significant at 0.01 ($p<0.01$).

DISCUSSION

The current paper demonstrates the differences in the level of perceived stress, gratitude and altruism during the times of Covid-19 among young adults and middle-aged adults. Findings suggested that there was no significant difference in the perceived stress of young adult and middle-aged adults, which means our first hypothesis is rejected. Contradicting our findings, research conducted by Whitehead (2020) suggested that perceived stress and negative affect was found higher in older adults' midst of Covid-19 pandemic. Another research stated that older adults have lower perceived stress than younger adults (Jiang 2020).

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Results also suggest that there is a significant difference in gratitude among young adults and older adults, stating that our second hypothesis was accepted. Middle aged adults scored higher on the gratitude scale. There is very few research on the relationship between age and gratitude. The majority of the studies (e.g., Froh et al., 2011; Froh, Sefick, & Emmons, 2008) focused on childhood and adolescence. But there was research suggested that older adults have the most gratitude experiences, while middle-aged and younger adults have the least. (Chopik et al. 2017).

Findings also suggested that there is no significant difference in altruism of young adults and middle-aged adults. According to the research conducted by Freund, et.al. (2014), older persons not only place a higher value on contributions to the public good, but they are also more willing to act altruistically than younger adults.

This research also suggests the correlation between the perceived stress, gratitude, and altruism is positive and significant, which means the last hypothesis was accepted. As a positive relationship was found, if perceived stress increases, gratitude, and altruism are also increasing. A possible reason for this can be, as a result of the "extra time" at home during the lockdown, many people experienced both good and negative changes in their attitudes and behaviors (Büssing, et al., 2021). Jans-Beken and Wong (2019) found that gratitude for both positive and negative elements – existential gratitude (Jans-Beken and Wong, 2019) – predicted greater wellbeing in those with PTSD symptoms, whereas gratitude for only positive features – trait gratitude – did not (Jans-Beken and Wong, 2019). This demonstrates the importance of accepting and transforming frustration, powerlessness, and hurt into growth and thriving for excellent mental health. On the other hand, during pandemics, altruism may harm people's mental health because altruistic individuals may feel more nervous for patients and helpless because they are unable to aid those who have been infected (Feng et al., 2020). A positive correlation was also found between gratitude and altruism, which means if gratitude increases, the altruistic behavior also increases. Parallel to our findings, research done by Karns, et. al, (2017) reported that gratitude is associated with increased altruism.

The study overall indicates that there's no significant difference between perceived stress and altruism levels among young adults and middle-aged adults, which means both the age groups were affected equally in aspects of perceived stress and altruism during pandemic. Whereas, a significant difference was found in gratitude between young adults and middle-aged adults, also middle-aged adults scored higher on a scale, which signifies that they are more thankful and appreciative than younger adults. This study also demonstrates the correlation between the perceived stress, gratitude and altruism, the correlation came out to be positive which denotes that if the perceived stress increases the gratitude and altruism also increases. It can be inferred that during the times of covid, people became more altruistic and grateful towards others.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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