

Gratitude and Subjective Well-Being of the Students- An Exploratory Study

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ABSTRACT

In the last decade, the discipline of positive psychology has developed a substantial number of interventions, focused on identification and understanding of human strengths and virtues to increase student's well-being. There is evidence that interventions based on practicing positive psychological virtues like, gratitude may enhance subjective well-being of the students. With this background, the study attempted to explore the positive human virtues like gratitude and the subjective well-being of the students and the association of Gratitude and their Subjective Well-being. A total of 110 undergraduate and postgraduate students from different courses between the ages of 18 to 25 years of both genders were selected as samples from different educational institutions of West Bengal employing convenience sampling approach. In terms of the relationship between gratitude and subjective well-being, it has been found that both the variables are positively correlated in a significant way. Gratitude and Subjective well-being in the participants are positively correlated with each other in a statistically significant way. So, by practicing this kind of positive psychological virtues, one's subjective wellbeing will be enhanced and it helps to live happier and more productive lives.

Keywords: *Gratitude, Wellbeing, Students, Positive Psychology, Virtues.*

Mental health problems affect quality of life, academic achievements and interpersonal relationships of the students and as a result, their subjective well-being gets hampered. Psychologists have recently emphasized the need for promoting student's well-being, beyond the existing focus on symptom reduction and there have been a growing number of calls within the field of psychology for a shift from a disease model toward an understanding of psychological wellness and the movement of positive psychology has been emerged, a field within psychology that seeks to study what makes life worthy and which human experiences constitute a good life. Therefore, psychologists should consider complementing existing practices by identifying strengths, like gratitude to enhance the subjective well-being of the students. This study is directed towards finding out the relationship between gratitude and subjective well-being among college and university going students.

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In *Character Strengths and Virtues (CSV)*, a book by Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman (2004), they attempted to identify six classes of core virtues consisting 24 "character strengths" as well as invented validated tools for measuring those strengths in an empirical manner, intended to provide a practical application of "Positive Psychology". The six virtues into which the 24 character strengths fall are: wisdom and knowledge (creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, love of learning, and perspective), courage (bravery, persistence, integrity and zest), humanity (love, kindness, and social intelligence), justice (teamwork, fairness and leadership), temperance (forgiveness, humility, prudence, and self-control) and transcendence (appreciation of beauty and excellence, hope, gratitude, optimism, and humor).

One of the key 24 character strengths is gratitude, falls under the virtue category of transcendence, defined as a sense of gratefulness and thankfulness in response to happening the good things in life or to receiving a gift, whether the gift be a tangible benefit from a specific other or a moment of peaceful bliss evoked by natural beauty.

Gratitude has been conceptualized in literature at both state and trait (disposition) levels (e.g., McCullough et al, 2003; Watkinset al, 2003). The current study is focused on trait gratitude. As a state, gratitude can be defined as a subjective feeling of wonder, gratefulness, and appreciation for outcomes received. As a trait, gratitude can be described as an individual predisposition to experience in life the state of gratitude (Chan, 2010). Gratitude can be experienced as an immediate emotional response to receiving some sort of benefit or gift, gratitude as a disposition, trait, or character strength represents the degree to which an individual typically experiences this emotion (e.g., how often, how intensely) (McCullough et al., 2002).

So, gratitude is a sense of thankfulness and joy in response to receiving a gift, whether the gift be a tangible benefit from a specific other or a moment of peaceful bliss that is evoked by natural beauty (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Well-being concerns the optimal experience and functioning and involves not only the absence of illness, but the presence of something positive (Personal growth, Positive relationships with others, Autonomy, Purpose in life and Environmental mastery). The field of subjective well-being (SWB) comprises the scientific analysis of people's emotional and cognitive evaluations of their lives—both at the moment and for longer periods including people's emotional reactions and evaluation to events, their moods, and judgments they form about their life satisfaction, fulfillment, and satisfaction with domains such as marriage and work.

We can measure subjective well-being in a variety of ways. But the structure of subjective well-being has been conceptualized as consisting of two major components: life satisfaction judgments or cognitive component and emotional or affective component which include both positive and negative affect (Diener, 1984; veenhoven, 1984). Subjective well-being can be defined as a person's cognitive and affective evaluations of his or her life (Diener, Lucas, & Oshi, 2002).

The affective component of subjective well-being assesses positive and negative affect which reflect the amount of pleasant and unpleasant feelings that people experience over time in their lives.

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Cognitive component of subjective well-being has been assessed with “life satisfaction” (Andrews and Withey, 1976).

Cognitive component of subjective well-being refers to each student’s judgment of his/her satisfaction with life. These judgments may be global life satisfaction (e.g. life as a whole) or may involve specific areas of this person’s life (e.g. satisfaction with education, or marital satisfaction). Life satisfaction- -this term commonly used to operationally define happiness (Pavot & Diener, 1993) and served as the indicator of psychological well-being in the present study.

Several empirical studies have demonstrated links between gratitude and enhanced psychological functioning in students. Watkins et al. (2003) found strong correlations between gratitude and life satisfaction across three groups of undergraduate students. McCullough et al. (2002) found that a disposition toward gratitude was positively associated with a wide array of well-being indicators including life satisfaction, optimism, two constructs of hope and several domains of religiousness/spirituality.

METHODOLOGY

Participants and Procedure

A group of 110 undergraduate and postgraduate students between the ages of 18 to 25 were selected as samples from different Universities and colleges of West Bengal. The mean age of the sample was 21.73 years with SD of 1.72. Of the total sample 55 were boys and 55 were girls. The students were taken from different courses of the college and University employing convenience sampling approach. Informed consent was taken from the participants.

Inclusion criteria for the students are 1) the age range should be between 18 years to 25 years of age, 2) all participants' occupations are students of any college or university of West Bengal, 3) participants should be exposed to the test materials for the first time, 4) Individuals belong to middle to high Socio-economic status. 5) Participants should use a smartphone 6) Only the participants who were willing to participate in this study were included.

Measures

Semistructured socio-demographic Information Schedule were used to obtain details regarding age, sex, education level, occupation, family types etc. Gratitude and Subjective Well-being of the sample were assessed using The Gratitude Questionnaire-6 (GQ-6) and Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS).

The Gratitude Questionnaire-6 (Gq-6; McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002): This questionnaire is a six- item self-report questionnaire, used to assess the participants’ level of gratitude as a trait or disposition which includes all the four facets of grateful disposition namely, intensity, frequency, span and density of gratitude. The score can range from 6 to 42, with higher scores indicating greater levels of gratitude.

Satisfaction With Life Scale- SWLS (Diener, E., Emmons, R. A., Larsen, R. J., & Griffin, S. - 1985): The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), a 5-item scale was used to assess the level of global cognitive judgments of student’s satisfaction with their life as a whole. Scores can range from 5 to 35, with higher scores indicating more satisfaction with life.

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Statistical Analysis

In this study, all the scales were scored and quantitative analysis was performed through descriptive statistics like mean and standard deviation (SD), inferential statistics like independent “t” test to examine gender differences in gratitude and well-being. And Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was done to examine interrelationships among the above- mentioned variables.

RESULTS

Results were done to investigate whether male and female adults (college and university going students) differ significantly with reference to the gratitude and subjective well-being and whether there is a correlation between gratitude and subjective well-being or not.

In this study the groups didn't differ significantly in terms of showing gratitude towards the benefactor.

In the Table-1, the mean, SD and the result of t test of both of the groups were mentioned.

As shown in Table-2 when females and males are compared on the measure of Subjective Well-being, t- value has been found to be insignificant. It is inferred from that gender differences are not found on the measure of Subjective well-being of the students.

Correlational analysis among the variables as shown in Table-3 showed that gratitude and subjective well-being is positively correlated with each other in a significant way.

Table-1 Mean, SD, & t-value of Gratitude in females and males with respect to the variable, namely Gratitude

Variable	Female (n=55)		Male (n=55)		t test
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Gratitude	30.49	5.855	29.85	5.87	0.569

Table-2 Mean, SD, & t-value of Forgiveness in females and males with respect to the variable, namely Subjective well-being

Variable	Female (n=55)		Male (n=55)		t test
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Subjective Well-being	21.38	6.28	21.38	6.60	.000

Table-3 Correlations among Gratitude and Subjective Well-being

Variable	Gratitude	Subjective Well-being
Gratitude	1	.389**
Subjective Well-being	.389**	1

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

DISCUSSION

Gratitude is conceptualised as a disposition towards feeling thankful to a variety of people and for a variety of things in life. While gratitude has been conceptualized both as an emotional state and a dispositional trait, the current study focused on trait gratitude, which is an enduring thankfulness that is sustained across situations and time as well as a dispositional continuum on which individuals can vary. Gratitude can be classified as human strengths and virtues (Peterson and Seligman 2004) which helps to improve our overall well-

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being. Values and strengths among human beings have been the asset of society. Youth of any society is considered to be the building block of its society. The young adult years can be considered as a time of adversity whereby attending college and university might be associated with a moderate amount of stress. This transition period in student's life requires them to cope with various adjustment such as interpersonal, financial, academic issues in order to adapt to the new phase of life. Therefore, a deeper understanding regarding the variables involved in coping with adversity appears to be crucial for college and university students. In this study it was identified if there is any significant difference among male and female college and university going students in order to express gratitude and how enhanced levels of well-being are linked to one's response of gratitude to interpersonal events. The association among the two mentioned variables has also been analysed.

When the data was analyzed on the basis of gender, it was found that there was no significant difference between males and females on the dimensions of gratitude. This finding might be either due to the participants' intellectual superiority because of which they were able to overcome the gender differences and acquire a comprehensive perspective for these values, or, it might be because these values are imbibed among participants uniformly regardless of their gender as all of them are the college and university going students. Therefore, both males and females gave preference to this construct at the same level.

In several researches it is found that Gender-differentiated prior experiences cause men and women to have somewhat different skills and attitude which in conjunction with gender roles, cause sex differences in social behaviour and emotions. Social enactment as expectations of the society might lead women to experience and express more of positive emotions including reporting higher subjective well-being (Froh et al, 2008). Anthropological and cross-cultural psychology is expected to help researchers to reach a final conclusion regarding gender differences in subjective well-being. The interdisciplinary approach needs to be followed in future research to reach a final conclusion in this domain of research.

From the result it is inferred that gender differences are not found on the measure of Subjective well-being. The several studies on subjective well-being in relation to gender show mixed results. Investigators (Human Development Report 2002, New York: Oxford University Press) examined self-ratings of health, neuroticism and subjective well-being in a group of men and women. The result was found that men and women do not differ on the measure of subjective well-being. The findings of the current research are consistent with this study.

Across several studies, it is found that gratitude was positively associated with a wide array of well-being indicators including life satisfaction, optimism, hope (McCullough et al. 2002) and gratitude has also been linked to lower psychopathology.

The results pertaining to the inter correlation indicated that there was a significant positive correlation between gratitude and subjective well-being.

CONCLUSION

Gratitude in young adults is related with social, emotional, and physical benefits and overall life satisfaction. So, from this study it is concluded that:

- Significant gender differences do not emerge on the measures of gratitude. These findings are emerged might be because of these values are imbibed among

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participants uniformly regardless of their gender in a way that they were able to overcome the gender differences and acquire a comprehensive perspective for these values, as all of them are the college and university going students and may be having more or less similar intellectual superiority.

- No significant gender differences were found on the measure of subjective well-being.
- Gratitude and Subjective well-being in the participants are positively correlated with each other in a statistically significant way.

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Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest.

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