

Effect of Practicing Gratitude on Mental Health: A Review

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ABSTRACT

Gratitude has gained increasing attention in the field of positive psychology as a fundamental emotion and practice that contributes to overall well-being. This research paper explores the relationship between gratitude and various aspects of positive mental health, including subjective well-being, resilience, self-esteem, and positive relationships. Gratitude can be defined as a state of thankfulness or appreciation (McCullough, 2002). Gratitude is a powerful emotion and mindset that has been increasingly recognized for its potential in promoting positive mental health. A negative mental health influences person's wellbeing negatively because mental health and wellbeing are closely related to each other. Gratitude has been found positively related with better wellbeing, life satisfaction (Wood et al., 2008). Being grateful and both state and trait level gratitude influences positively on person's mental health. Various studies proved that practicing gratitude positively relates with number of positive outcomes such as happiness, optimism, life satisfaction (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Through a comprehensive review of existing literature, this paper examines empirical evidence supporting the positive effects of gratitude on mental health outcomes and explores the underlying mechanisms that contribute to these effects.

Keywords: *Mental Health, Gratitude, Happiness*

Mental Health

Mental health is important as physical health. It consists of emotional, psychological, social health of a person. Mental health can be defined as a state of wellbeing where people understand his/her abilities, perform well and also contributes to society (Zdrowia, 2004). Mental health is goes beyond the absence of mental disease. It's vital to overall wellbeing. According to WHO's 2005 data it was estimated that, 1.2 million deaths due to mental disorder every year (Mathers & Loncar, 2006). Every year, about 800000 people commits suicide. Mental health problems are indicative of the onset of physical health problems, such as depression progression of both physical and social disability (Bruce et al., 1994; Penninx et al., 1998). A review study emphasis that mental disorders act as risk factors for suicide (Cavanagh et al., 2003). As a result, prevention, detection, and suitable management of mental health problems are an important for suicide prevention. Another systematic review evidence reported there is moderate to strong association exists between depression, anxiety and coronary heart disease (Hemingway & Marmot, 1999; Kuper et al., 2002).

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Gratitude

Gratitude is an attitude of showing thankful attitude and considered in various form like considered as “moral virtue, an attitude, an emotion, a habit, a personality trait, and a coping response” (Emmons et al., 2003). It can also be considered as character strength which is most significantly related with life satisfaction and wellbeing (Park et al., 2004). Sansone & Sansone, 2010 said that “the appreciation of what is valuable and meaningful to one and represents a general state of thankfulness and/or appreciation” is gratitude. Gratitude can be considered as both trait or state. As a dispositional characteristic, person practices gratitude daily in their life (McCullough et al., 2002). When a person experiences gratitude emotion at a specific time it is referred to as state (Watkins et al., 2009).

Gratitude and Mental Health

In a world often consumed by stress, negativity, and fast-paced living, practicing gratitude offers a transformative path to finding joy, contentment, and inner peace. Gratitude influences mental health directly and indirectly. It has significant positive effect for all age group people such as practicing gratitude reverse the old age adverse effect because it acts as a antidote to stress and negative thoughts and helps in to develop the resilience power (Fredrickson et al., 2003). In the same both state and trait level gratitude positively linked with optimism, happiness, wellbeing (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; McCullough et al., 2002). Wood et al., 2010 compared the score on wellbeing with gratitude intervention group and control group and highlighted that among gratitude intervention participants’ wellbeing is high. In the same sequence dispositional gratitude positively associated with better mental health in a form of high happiness and life satisfaction (Watkins et al., 2003). Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) suggested that practicing the exercise of counting blessing for a week is more powerful as compared to engaging in same activity only for three times in a week. Ramí rez et al. (2014) added that after writing gratitude letter to other increases the wellbeing feeling by decreasing the anxiety and depression among older participants.

Hořrder et al. (2013) highlighted that focusing on positive feeling associated with the feeling of wellbeing and happiness. The process involved being happy after gratitude expression may be the access and recollection of past positive information in memory that creates the feeling of happiness and enhance life satisfaction (Watkins, 2004). The researches highlighted that people are happier and more pleased with their lives when they pay attention to and remember the positive aspects of life more easily (Tamir & Robinson, 2007). Froh et al. (2009) demonstrated that after expressing gratitude there was increase in positive emotion. Gratitude attitude develop a mental framework that makes it possible to have a more optimistic, charitable perspective on the world (Wood et al., 2010). Dickerhoof (2007) demonstrated that gratitude exercise increases wellbeing. Chaplin et al., (2019) examine the effect of delivering gratitude reduces the materialistic strivings.

Gratitude expressing experiments are now employed in clinical settings, and the outcomes of these clinical trials revealed that they are equally successful in reducing excessive concern and body dissatisfaction (Geraghty et al., 2010a, 2010b). Lambert et al., (2010) pointing out that practicing gratitude actives releases dopamine neurotransmitter which is associated with happiness. When person expresses gratitude, it improves overall wellbeing as practicing gratitude increases agreeableness, more open, and less neurotic trait (McCullough et al., 2002; McCullough et al., 2004; Wood et al., 2008; Wood et al., 2008). In the same manner appreciation trait strengthens and maintains relationships as well as satisfaction (Algoe et al., 2008; Algoe et al., 2010). Neuroscientists measured the brain’s response through functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) in respect to feelings of gratitude (Fox et al., 2015) and

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elicited gratitude feeling improves activity in brain area that deal with morality, reward, and judgment. Psychological researches discover many techniques for enhancing the gratitude which is helpful in clinical settings such as Journaling about things for which to be gratitude, composing a letter to express it, and practicing gratitude, writing thank you note, counting blessing are some strategies for enhancement of gratitude (McCullough et al., 2002). Engaging in gratitude practices and cultivating a grateful mindset has been shown to positively impact various aspects of individuals' lives, leading to greater satisfaction and overall well-being. Research has consistently demonstrated that individuals who regularly express gratitude experience higher levels of life satisfaction. Gratitude interventions, such as gratitude journaling, have been found to increase subjective well-being and overall life satisfaction (Seligman et al., 2005). By focusing on and acknowledging the positive aspects of life, individuals develop a more optimistic and positive outlook, leading to increased satisfaction with life as a whole. Moreover, gratitude has been shown to buffer the negative effects of stressful events on life satisfaction. Grateful individuals exhibit higher resilience in the face of adversity and are better equipped to cope with stressors (Wood et al., 2010). They are more likely to find positive meaning and growth in challenging circumstances, which contributes to their overall well-being.

Gratitude also plays a crucial role in enhancing psychological well-being. Studies have consistently found a positive correlation between gratitude and various dimensions of well-being, such as positive affect, self-esteem, and happiness (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Wood et al., 2010). Grateful individuals tend to experience more positive emotions and have a greater sense of self-worth, leading to higher levels of overall psychological well-being. Additionally, gratitude interventions have been shown to have lasting effects on life satisfaction and well-being. A study by Lyubomirsky et al. (2011) found that participants who engaged in a gratitude visit, where they expressed gratitude directly to someone, experienced increased happiness and life satisfaction even six months after the intervention. This suggests that gratitude practices have the potential to create long-term positive changes in individuals' well-being.

CONCLUSION

Present study was conducted with the purpose of how practicing gratitude influences the mental health of a person. Review highlighted that gratitude linked with better mental health. Researches explained the positive effect of gratitude on mental health, wellbeing, and happiness level of person (Priyanka & Singh, 2020; Robert RC, 1991). Moreover, it can be added grateful attitude enhances self-esteem, happiness and ultimately mental wellbeing of a person. A study by Emmons and McCullough, (2003) proved that by showing gratitude attitude enhances optimism view in different area of life such as health and exercise. When people are optimistic about them by understanding the scientific evidence and underlying processes, we can harness the power of gratitude to promote holistic well-being. Gratitude holds the key to unlocking happiness and living a joyful, fulfilled life. By embracing gratitude as a daily practice and mindset, we can shift our focus from what is lacking to what is abundant, savoring the beauty and goodness that surrounds us. This paper emphasizes the importance of cultivating gratitude, highlights its positive impact on happiness, and provides practical guidance for incorporating gratitude into our lives. By embracing gratitude, we open ourselves to a world of joy, contentment, and a deeper appreciation for the simple blessings that make life truly meaningful.

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Conflict of Interest

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