

## Gratitude as Human Strength: A Study of Gratitude and Well-being among College Students

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### ABSTRACT

Gratitude is an important positive concept that has drawn an intense interest with the advent of positive psychology. There is a growing body of research investigating the relationships between gratitude and psychological well-being and life satisfaction. However, there remains a scarcity of research examining the impact of relationship between gratitude and subjective well-being within Indian context. Present study, was conducted on the 300 college students ages ranged between 18 and 24. Participants were completed the measurements of gratitude and psychological well-being and satisfaction with life. Correlation and regression analyses were used to analyze the data in the present investigation. The correlation results revealed that there were significant positive relationships between gratitude and psychological well-being and satisfaction with life. The findings of hierarchical regression analyses showed that gratitude directly predicted the psychological well-being and life satisfaction among college students. The results suggest that enhancing gratitude could assist college students to experience greater well-being. This study highlights the importance of understanding the personal factors that influence well-being during the transition to university.

**Keywords:** *Gratitude, Positive Psychology, Psychological Well-Being, Life Satisfaction, College Students*

During their academic pursuits, university students encounter a multitude of obstacles and demands, including physical, social, financial, and emotional issues. Stress from homework, tests, and social interactions can lead to low psychological well-being and a dissatisfied quality of life for students. Numerous studies have found that because higher education requires a higher level of emotional and cognitive demands than other educational levels, it puts university students at risk for mental health problems. (Auerbach et al., 2018; Bruffaerts et al., 2018; Cleofas, 2020; Saleem, Mahmood, & Naz, 2013; Zivin, Eisenberg, Gollust, & Golberstein, 2009). Because of this, it's important to support a strategy that gives pupils a healthy psychological state and a fulfilling life.

In psychological constructs past studies have a propensity to concentrate on the potential consequences of negative emotions on individual behaviours and social interactions (Greenglass, 2006). Positive emotions and well-being emotions have drawn increasing

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attention in psychology study in recent years (Van Hoorn, 2007). Positive individual characteristics and adaptive constructs, human strengths, and virtues like subjective happiness, hope, optimism, and courage are crucial for raising one's quality of life, according to Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000). As a field of scientific inquiry, positive psychology seeks to understand and explain what makes life worth living and which human experiences constitute a good life. To help them explain how and why people flourish, researchers interested in positive psychology study topics such as positive emotions, character strengths and virtues, and valued subjective experiences (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Gratitude is one strategy from positive psychology that academics and practitioners are emphasizing more and more. Being grateful involves having a sense of self-worth, for God, other people, and the events in our lives (Behzadipour, Sadeghi, & Sepahmansour, 2018; Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Gratitude, is an overall attitude of thankfulness and is defined as the appreciation of important and worthwhile things (Kumari & Madnawat, 2016). Gratitude is believed to lead to mental health, happiness, and more satisfying interpersonal interactions (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000).

Gratitude is one of the emotions in social science that has received the least attention, despite the fact that there is empirical evidence supporting its importance for regular functioning (Wood, Joseph, & Linley, 2007). Studies on gratitude suggested that the majority of research on gratitude and wellbeing focuses on clinical groups. It indicated that gratitude had been studied extensively in clinical settings, which has led to the development of important clinical interventions (Bono, Emmons, & McCullough, 2004; Emmons & McCullough, 2003).

Furthermore, the majority of studies on gratitude, psychological health, and life satisfaction have been conducted in individualist cultures; in contrast, relatively few studies (Chen, Kee & Chen 2014; Sun, Jiang, Chu & Qian, 2014) have looked at gratitude and life satisfaction in collectivist cultures. According to Kitayama et al. (2000), countries that practice individualism and collectivism have different cultures. Additionally, Furukawa et al. (2012) found that children in individualist countries reported a stronger tendency to feel pride, while children in collectivist countries reported a larger tendency to feel remorse. As a result, the connection between the variables of interest may be impacted by cultural differences.

In setting the stage for the current study begins with an introduction to positive psychology and applications to youth. Finally, the purpose of the current study is to “Study of Relationship impact of gratitude on psychological well-being and life satisfaction of College Students.”

### Gratitude

Since gratitude is thought to have a significant role in social interactions and human behaviour, it is a positive idea that has piqued the interest of most studies (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Gallup, 1998). A subjective sense of awe and appreciation for existence could be referred to as gratitude (Emmons & Shelton, 2002). derived from the Latin word "Gratia," which can refer to gratitude, grace, or either depending on the situation. All of these interpretations of appreciation are included in some sense (Chipperfield, Perry & Weiner, 2003). According to McCullough, Emmons, and Tsang (2002), the idea of gratitude is defined as a consistent propensity that denotes “felt sense of wonder, thankfulness, and

appreciation for life. It can be expressed to others as well as to impersonal (nature) or nonhuman sources”.

Gratitude is defined by Wood, Maltby, Stewart, and Joseph (2008) as a mental and affective response that results from realizing and acknowledging the advantages that one has experienced. The perceived advantages that trigger gratitude can come from a variety of sources, such as receiving direct assistance, owning material goods, having good connections, experiencing the good in the moment, and performing well in comparison to others. 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 gratitude that is sustained across situations and time as well as a dispositional continuum on which individuals can vary.

### **Psychological Well-being**

According to WHO definition of psychological well-being is "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 or her community". Self-worth, assurance, and a feeling of well-being are indicators of good mental health. It makes it possible for someone to really appreciate and enjoy life, other people, and their surroundings. A person who is psychologically stable can use his skills to fulfil his potential and overcome obstacles in life. He can also form healthy relationships.

### **Life Satisfaction**

Diener, Oishi, and Lucas (2003) defined life satisfaction as an individual's overall cognitive assessment of how satisfied they are with their own life. According to Seligman (2002), life satisfaction is a cognitive aspect of subjective well-being that represents a person's current level of life satisfaction. According to Pavot and Diener (1993), it has been described as a "judgmental process in which individuals assess the quality of their lives on the basis of their own unique set of criteria."

### ***The Relationship between Gratitude and Psychological Wellbeing and Life Satisfaction***

Gratitude is an important positive concept that has drawn an intense interest with the advent of positive psychology. Despite of this gratitude is a factor that has long been ignored in previous research and very few studies have investigated the relationship between gratitude and outcomes of college students.

Research has demonstrated a strong correlation between gratitude and psychological well-being (PWB) as well as subjective well-being (SWB) (Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010; Kashdan, Uswatte, & Julian, 2006; Wood, Joseph, & Maltby, 2009). PWB entails a meaningful life with constructive activity and growth, whereas SWB involves little negative affect, frequent positive affect, and overall life satisfaction (Diener, 1984). (Wood, Joseph, & Maltby, 2009). Self-acceptance, healthy interpersonal relationships, personal development, a sense of purpose in life, environmental mastery, and autonomy are all components of PWB (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

In particular, the correlation between gratitude and PWB supports Fredrickson's broad and build theory. Froh, Sefick, and Emmons' (2008) study showed that gratitude affected teenagers in a way that was surprisingly similar to that of adults: it formed an upward spiral of happy emotion. Gratitude also had an innovative effect on school satisfaction. Fredrickson (2004), in particular, makes the hypothesis that teaching gratitude to kids

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stimulates positive processes like motivation and creativity, both of which expand their reservoirs of resources for well-being. Gratitude and well-being have been the subject of numerous research (Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010 for a summary).

Gratitude was found to be connected with all six PWB categories by Wood, Joseph, and Maltby (2009), even after adjusting for the Big Five personality traits. Furthermore, in a study of high school students conducted by Martin et al. (2014), higher PWB among students predicted academic motivation and engagement. There has been extensive research on the connection between happiness and gratitude (see Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010 for an overview). Given that experiencing gratitude often is a sign of being oriented toward recognizing and enjoying life's blessings, a substantial correlation between thankfulness and wellbeing seems reasonable (Wood, Maltby, Stewart, Linley, & Joseph, 2008). (Wood, Joseph, & Linley, 2007) An orientation toward the positive results in higher overall assessments of life and the application of more adaptive coping mechanisms, which can be particularly helpful for kids.

The literature makes clear the connection between subjective well-being and gratitude. Research on a sample of undergraduate students between the ages of 18 and 26 has revealed a relationship between dispositional thankfulness and several dimensions of psychological well-being (Kashdan, Uswatte, & Julian, 2006; Wood, Joseph, & Maltby, 2009). In particular, there was little relationship between gratitude and autonomy, moderate relationships with life's purpose and environmental mastery, significant correlations with personal development, and favorable relationships with other people's self-acceptance (Kashdan, Uswatte, & Julian, 2006; Wood, Joseph, & Maltby, 2009).

A recent study looked at the connections between life happiness, psychological health, and gratitude. The study's variables all exhibited statistically significant positive relationships with one another, according to the findings. Numerous investigations have demonstrated a favorable correlation between these factors. Accordingly, a number of research have demonstrated a positive correlation between gratitude and wellness (Witvliet, Richie, Root Luna, & Van Tongeren, 2019) as well as a positive correlation between gratitude and life satisfaction (Robustelli & Whisman, 2018; Yang, Zhang & Kou, 2016). In adults, gratitude has been associated with a host of favorable physical, social, and emotional consequences. People who are more appreciative are typically in good physical and mental health (Krause, 2006).

A cognitive evaluation procedure that evaluates a person's life based on predetermined standards is how life happiness is conveyed (Shin & Johnson, 1978; Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985). According to this theory, one of the elements of subjective well-being is life satisfaction. This suggests that life satisfaction, together with positive-negative affectivity, is a crucial concept for expressing people's well-being and serving as a cognitive assessment of life.

Numerous researches have connected happiness, life satisfaction, and wellbeing with gratitude. (Yurkewicz & Kashdan, 2009; Deckerhoof, 2007; Chen & Kee, 2008; Wood, Joseph & Maltby, 2008). Gratitude was found to be a stronger predictor of life satisfaction in a study than the highly regarded qualities of love, wisdom, humor, perseverance, and a passion for learning. Additionally, research has shown a correlation between positive psychological categories like gratitude and subjective well-being (Froh, Yurkewicz, & Kashdan, 2009; Wood, Joseph, & Maltby, 2008).

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Several studies have indicated a positive correlation between each of these factors. In this regard, a number of studies have shown a positive correlation between life satisfaction and gratitude (Robustelli & Whisman, 2018; Yang, Zhang & Kou, 2016) as well as a favorable relationship between happiness, hope, and gratitude (Witvliet, Richie, Root Luna, & Van Tongeren, 2019). According to Kong, Ding, and Zhao (2014), persons who are extremely appreciative are typically satisfied, optimistic, and have a high sense of self-worth. According to Szczesniak and Soares (2011), people who feel grateful are less inclined to exact revenge on others and do not think that unfavorable things happen to them. Ferhat, Zekeriya, Mustafa, and Sedat (2018) looked at the associations between characteristics related to psychological well-being, life satisfaction, gratitude, optimism, and hope within college students registered in various towns and universities. The study's variables all exhibited statistically significant positive relationships with one another, according to the findings.

Therefore, on the basis of literature following hypotheses have generated in the present study: H1: Gratitude would be positively related to psychological well-being of college student. H2: Gratitude would be positively related to life satisfaction of college student.

### **METHOD**

#### *Design and Participants*

The study was a cross-sectional research design. In the present study, we hypothesized a casual model consisting of 7 key constructs, such as- gratitude, life satisfaction & psychological well-being. We represented the relationship between these variables. The hypothesized model had 1 predictor variables (i.e. Gratitude) and criterion variables (life satisfaction and psychological well-being). Participants were selected across public colleges. The samples consist of 300 students from different degree colleges in Rae Bareilly (U.P.). The age of the sample ranged between 18 to 24 years. Data were obtained on the basis of response by means of structured questionnaires.

#### *Measures*

##### **Gratitude scale**

Gratitude scale developed by McCullough, M. E., Emmons, R. A., & Tsang, J. (2002) was used to assess the gratitude among college students. The scale consisted of six items and each was on a 7- point scale (1 represent 'strongly disagree' and 7 represent 'strongly agree'). Internal consistency coefficient of the scale was 0.82.

##### **The satisfaction with life**

Life satisfaction scale developed by Diener (1985) was used to measure life satisfaction of students. No of items in this scale is 5. Each item in had 7 response options (1 represent 'strongly disagree' and 7 represent 'strongly agree'). Reliability of this scale was ranged from .52 to .68

##### **Psychological well-being scale**

This scale is developed by Ryff and Keyes, (1995) to measure the psychological well beings of respondents. It consists of 18 items which measures six dimensions of psychological wellbeing (Autonomy, Environmental mastery, Personal growth, Positive Relations, Purpose in life, Self-acceptance) and each item is scored using a seven-point scale. Each item had 7 response options from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. The internal consistency coefficient of this scale was ranged from 0.72 to 0.88.

### Personal Data Sheet

Questions pertaining to demographic information were included in the personal data sheet. Demographic data included: Age, Gender, Class, Stream, Area and Overall Health.

### Procedure

The students were provided access to all the measurements as well as the personal data sheet, and they were instructed to carefully read the questionnaire's instructions. Each participant received an explanation of the nature and objectives of the study. Additionally, participants received assurances regarding the data's confidentiality. 300 out of the 320 surveys that were initially administered to the target group were found complete. Participants were allowed to take their own time to complete questionnaire. There was no time limit to complete the questionnaires. Researchers verbally explained the instructions and reading of the items if required. Participants completed questionnaires within 20-25 minutes.

### Data Analyses

Scoring of all the questionnaires have been done according to responsive manuals. Analyses the data was done with the help of SPSS.

## RESULTS

*Table:1 Correlation between predictor and criterion variables*

Predictor Variable	Criterion Variable	
	PWB	LS
Gratitude	.232***	.219***

\* $p < 0.05$  \*\* $p < 0.01$  \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

Table1 recorded the relationship between Gratitude, Psychological well-being and Life satisfaction. Findings of the table 1 indicated that the Gratitude was significantly positively correlated with psychological well-being (.232,  $p < 0.01$ ), Life satisfaction ( $r = .219$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

*Table 2 Results of hierarchical regression analysis predicting Psychological wellbeing and life satisfaction from gratitude*

Predictor Variable	Criterion Variable			
	Psychological well-being		Life Satisfaction	
Control variables	Step1	Step2	Step1	Step2
Age	.107	.119	-.037	-.025
Gender	-.011	-.014	-.047	-.051
Class	.209***	.168***	.275***	.236***
Stream	.017	.013	.043	.040
Area	.092	.064	-.092	-.119
Health	.053	.028	.105	.080
Independent variable				
Gratitude		.189***		.184***
R <sup>2</sup>	.081	.113	.089	.120
ΔR <sup>2</sup>	.081	.033	.089	.031
ΔF	4.292***	10.759***	4.787***	10.316***

\* $p < 0.05$  \*\* $p < 0.01$  \*\*\* $p < 0.001$   $df \text{ step1} = 6, 293, \quad df \text{ step2} = 7, 292$

Regarding the relationship between gratitude and psychological well-being the findings of the table 2 indicated that at step 1 demographic variables significantly predicted PWB,  $F(6, 293) = 4.292$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , accounting for 8.1% of the variance. At Step 2, the gratitude accounted for a further, significant 3.3% of the variance,  $\Delta F(7, 292) = 10.759$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Concerning the relationship between gratitude and Life Satisfaction the findings of the Table 2 indicated that the demographic variables significantly predicted LS,  $F(6, 293) = 4.787$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , accounting for 8.9% of the variance. Gratitude accounted for a further, significant 3.1% of the variance,  $\Delta F(7, 292) = 10.316$ ,  $p < 0.001$ .

As can be seen in the Table 2, results indicated that, gratitude was found to significantly predicted all the criterion variables such as PWB ( $\beta = .189$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) and LS ( $\beta = .184$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). Indicated that the Gratitude was significantly positively correlated with Psychological well-being ( $r = .232$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), Life satisfaction ( $r = .219$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

### DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to explore the relationship between Gratitude, Psychological well-being, and life satisfaction among college students. It was hypothesized in the present study that Gratitude would be positively related to psychological well-being and life satisfaction of college student. The major general findings of the study revealed that that all the three variables under study i.e., Gratitude was positively correlated with psychological well-being and life satisfaction.

Further, hierarchical regression analyses were run by taking gratitude as predictor variable and life satisfaction and psychological wellbeing as criterion variables. The findings of the hierarchical regression analyses revealed that gratitude significantly positively predicted life satisfaction and psychological wellbeing. It implies that students who exhibit greater gratitude also have a tendency to be psychologically healthy. The result offers more empirical support for the relationship between gratitude and psychological well-being, according to other research (Aghababaei, Błachnio, & Aminikhoo, 2018; Behzadipour, Sadeghi, & Sepahmansour, 2018; Hemarajarajeswari & Gupta, 2021; Tian, Huebner, & Du, 2016). The current study shows that when pupils are more grateful, their overall psychological well-being scores rise. It also implies that an individual's psychological well-being increases with their level of admiration for themselves, their surroundings, and the people in them.

Loi and Ng (2021) suggest that cultivating an attitude of gratitude may improve wellbeing. Several beneficial improvements in the emotional state are influenced by gratitude, which improves a person's psychological well-being (Măirean, Turliuc, & Arghire, 2019). By facilitating the recall of pleasant memories or events, gratitude also improves well-being (Sheldon, Kashdan, & Steger, 2010). Therefore, having a happy recollection of a life-improving experience is advantageous to those who are appreciative. Furthermore, gratitude is the appreciation of different viewpoints, including being content with little things, acknowledging the assistance of others, remaining upbeat, cultivating positive relationships with others, and expressing gratitude (Kardas et al., 2019). Students' psychological well-being will gradually rise if all of these things are done.

Similarly, gratitude is significantly and positively associated with several domains of life satisfaction and overall life satisfaction because gratitude helps people feel more positive emotions, relish good experiences and build strong relationship. A long these lines, a number of empirical studies have shown that a significant relation exists between gratitude

and life satisfaction and in some research works gratitude is even regarded as a robust predictor of life satisfaction (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Froh, Yurkewicz, & Kashdan, 2009; Lavy & Littman-Ovadia, 2011; Lambert, Clark, Durstchi, Fincham, & Graham, 2010; Lyubomirsky, Dikkershoof, Boehm, & Sheldon, 2011).

Thus, gratitude could be considered as an adaptive psychological strategy by which human beings interpret their everyday experiences and at the same time receive its benefits. Experimental evidence has found support for the hypothesized causal link from gratitude to life satisfaction. Priming or experimentally inducing gratitude leads participants to feel better about their lives as a whole and to experience more life satisfaction (Emmons and McCullough, 2003; Rash et al., 2011). People higher in trait gratitude are more likely to perceive benefits as gifts, which could lead gratitude to increase life satisfaction through this cognitive amplification process. In other words, “gratitude should increase our enjoyment of a blessing” (Watkins, 2004, p. 176). Also, expressing gratitude on a regular basis might lead to a happier and more fulfilling existence, claim Singh, Salve, and Shejwal (2017). When people express appreciation, their brains release dopamine and serotonin, which improve mood and make them feel good (Chowdhury, n, d.). Similarly, feeling grateful reduces negative emotions like sadness anger, and anxiety and increases positive ones like joy, happiness, love, and fulfilment (Greenberg, 2015). Consequently, when people are feeling more thankful, they focus more on their positive feelings than their negative ones, which leads to happiness.

### CONCLUSION

The current study examined the relationship between college students' gratitude psychological well-being and life satisfaction. Building a theoretical model of gratitude and the factors influencing it can be facilitated by utilizing the findings of the current study. Using these results as evidence, researchers can look at how life satisfaction and well-being are affected by increasing gratitude through intervention programs, or vice versa. This is definitely helpful to therapists in treating patients, and it will eventually help with the treatment of patients with a range of psychiatric difficulties. Future studies should focus on intervention strategies that use gratitude-based counselling to improve the psychological health of teenagers.

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The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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