

Research Paper

Nurturing the Self: How Gratitude and Self-Compassion Foster Inner Kindness

Diksha Bhadoriya^{1*}, Santosh Meena²

ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of gratitude and self-compassion among college going young adults aged 18-25. The research examines the correlation between gratitude (measured using the Gratitude Questionnaire-6, GQ-6) and self-compassion to understand their relationship among students. The study employs a quantitative survey-based approach, collecting data from 95 participants through standardized self-report measures. Due to incomplete information 15 datasheets didn't consider Statistical analyses, including descriptive statistics, correlation was conducted to assess the relationships between gratitude, self-compassion. Key findings reveal a significant positive correlation between gratitude, self-compassion. Higher levels of gratitude and self-compassion were associated with reduced stress, enhanced emotional balance, and improved life satisfaction among students. The results emphasize the importance of cultivating these two positive psychological traits among students. There is need to develop self-compassion programmes for women especially as result showed women having low self-compassion than men Future research may explore the longitudinal effects of gratitude and self-compassion on student mental health outcomes.

Keywords: *Gratitude, Self-Compassion, Mental Health, Emotional Resilience, Gratitude Questionnaire-6 (GQ-6), Self-Compassion Scale, gender*

In Indian culture, where collectivism and interdependence are deeply valued, self-compassion plays a vital role in fostering well-being and resilience (Hofstede, 2001). Within Indian philosophical traditions and literature, compassion is referred to as *Karuna*, whereas self-compassion is known as *Atma-Karuna* (Thurackal, Sinha, & Verma, 2016). Rooted in ancient Indian philosophy, *Atma-Karuna* is regarded as a fundamental pillar for personal growth and spiritual development, encouraging individuals to treat themselves with kindness and understanding.

Self-compassion is an essential aspect of an individual's overall health and functioning, particularly for students in higher education. Mental health challenges, such as anxiety, depression, and stress, are prevalent among young adults, with students in the age group of 18-25 being particularly vulnerable due to academic pressures, social transitions, and personal development. The importance of fostering self-compassion in this demographic

¹Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, Banasthali University, Jaipur

²Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Banasthali University, Jaipur

* [Corresponding Author](#)

Received: March 17, 2025; Revision Received: April 13, 2025; Accepted: April 16, 2025

Nurturing the Self: How Gratitude and Self-Compassion Foster Inner Kindness

cannot be overstated, as it directly impacts their academic performance, emotional resilience, and future life satisfaction (Ryff, 1989).

Recent studies suggest that cultivating positive psychological traits like gratitude and self-compassion can significantly enhance mental health, reduce stress, and improve happiness (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Neff, 2003). Gratitude, characterized by an appreciation for positive aspects of life, has been associated with greater life satisfaction, well-being, and better emotional regulation (Algoe, Haidt, & Gable, 2008). Similarly, self-compassion, which involves treating oneself with kindness during times of difficulty or failure, has been found to foster resilience and reduce the negative impacts of stress (Neff, 2003).

Given the critical role these traits play in emotional and psychological health, it is essential to investigate their potential effects on student well-being. Despite their importance, limited research has specifically focused on the relationship between gratitude and self-compassion particularly among students in India. This study aims to fill that gap by exploring how these two positive psychological constructs can impact students' life.

The period between 18 and 25 years is marked by significant developmental milestones, including identity formation, social adjustment, and academic achievement. These years are often associated with challenges in mental health, with students facing issues such as academic stress, career uncertainties, and social pressures. Psychological well-being during this period is carefully linked to better coping mechanisms, improved academic outcomes, and long-term emotional resilience. Therefore, fostering a culture that promotes mental health and well-being during these years is crucial for ensuring holistic development and success (Diener, 2009)

Research has shown that gratitude serves as a powerful tool in enhancing psychological health. Practicing gratitude increases positive emotions, reduces negative feelings such as envy or resentment, and fosters stronger social relationships (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Self-compassion, on the other hand, provides individuals with a healthier coping mechanism when facing difficulties or setbacks. Instead of self-criticism, self-compassion allows students to approach challenges with kindness, reducing feelings of inadequacy and improving overall emotional balance (Neff, 2003). Together, these traits contribute to an overall increase in life satisfaction, stress reduction, and greater emotional resilience, making them essential components of student well-being.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Self-compassion has been extensively linked to improved psychological well-being, reducing anxiety, depression, and stress while enhancing resilience (Neff, 2003). A meta-analysis by MacBeth and Gumley (2012) found that higher self-compassion was strongly associated with lower levels of psychopathology. Additionally, Neff and Germer (2013) developed the Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) program, demonstrating its effectiveness in increasing emotional balance and self-kindness. Neuroscientific research also supports self-compassion's benefits, showing that it activates brain regions related to emotional regulation and social connectedness (Longe et al., 2010). These findings suggest that cultivating self-compassion can significantly improve mental health and overall well-being. Gratitude has been widely recognized as a key factor in enhancing psychological well-being, fostering positive emotions, and reducing stress (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Research indicates that individuals who engage in gratitude practices, such as journaling, experience increased life satisfaction and decreased symptoms of depression (Wood et al., 2008). Seligman et al.

(2005) found that writing gratitude letters significantly boosted happiness levels, with effects lasting up to six months. Additionally, gratitude has been linked to better sleep quality and lower cortisol levels, indicating its role in physiological stress reduction (Emmons & Stern, 2013). These findings suggest that gratitude interventions can be powerful tools for improving mental and emotional health. Petrocchi and Couyoumdjian (2016) found that individuals high in self-compassion tend to experience more gratitude, suggesting that self-kindness facilitates an appreciative outlook on life. Additionally, self-compassion has been linked to reduced negative self-comparisons, making gratitude practices more effective (Froh et al., 2011). Kirby et al. (2017) proposed that integrating both self-compassion and gratitude in interventions can enhance emotional resilience and reduce stress. These findings highlight the potential of combining self-compassion and gratitude in therapeutic and personal development practices.

The Concept of Gratitude: The Gratitude Questionnaire-6 (GQ-6)

Gratitude is the recognition and appreciation of the positive aspects of life, and it has been consistently linked to higher levels of psychological well-being. Emmons and McCullough (2003) define gratitude as a “state of being thankful” and a recognition of the beneficial aspects of life. Research shows that cultivating gratitude leads to increased happiness, improved physical health, and stronger social relationships (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). The Gratitude Questionnaire-6 (GQ-6), developed by McCullough et al. (2002), is one of the most widely used tools for measuring gratitude. This six-item self-report questionnaire assesses an individual’s general tendency to experience gratitude. The GQ-6 is highly reliable and valid, providing insights into how individuals acknowledge and express gratitude in their everyday lives. Higher GQ-6 scores are associated with increased life satisfaction, emotional well-being, and lower levels of depression (McCullough et al., 2002).

Self-Compassion and Its Measurement

Self-compassion refers to the ability to treat oneself with kindness and understanding during times of failure or difficulty, rather than resorting to self-criticism (Neff, 2003). According to Neff (2003), self-compassion involves three key components: self-kindness, a sense of common humanity, and mindfulness. When individuals experience self-compassion, they are more likely to acknowledge their struggles without judgment, which fosters resilience and emotional regulation. Self-compassion has been associated with better mental health outcomes, such as lower levels of anxiety, depression, and stress (Neff et al., 2007). The Self-Compassion Scale (SCS), developed by Neff (2003), is a widely-used measure that assesses the three components of self-compassion. The scale has demonstrated strong reliability and validity across different populations, including students (Neff, 2003). Higher SCS scores are linked to greater emotional well-being, self-esteem, and overall happiness (Neff et al., 2007).

Relationship Between Gratitude, Self-Compassion.

Gratitude and self-compassion have been identified as crucial components of psychological well-being, with each contributing to improved emotional health and resilience. Recent research has suggested that both gratitude and self-compassion are positively correlated with various indicators of well-being, such as life satisfaction, positive affect, and social connectedness (Gilbert, 2009; Wood et al., 2010). Studies indicate that individuals who practice gratitude are more likely to experience positive emotions and higher levels of social support, which, in turn, enhance their well-being (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Likewise, individuals who cultivate self-compassion are better able to cope with challenges, reducing the harmful effects of stress and fostering emotional balance (Neff, 2003). Gratitude and

Nurturing the Self: How Gratitude and Self-Compassion Foster Inner Kindness

self-compassion are often considered complementary traits, as both encourage individuals to focus on the positive aspects of life and adopt a more compassionate attitude toward themselves and others (Neff, 2003; Emmons & McCullough, 2003).

Studies have shown that gratitude and self-compassion not only independently enhance well-being but may also interact to produce even greater benefits. For instance, individuals with high levels of both gratitude and self-compassion are more likely to report higher levels of happiness and lower levels of depressive symptoms (Wood et al., 2010). This suggests that cultivating both traits together could serve as a potent strategy for improving psychological well-being among students.

Previous Studies and Research Gaps

A growing body of research has explored the role of gratitude and self-compassion in enhancing psychological well-being across various populations, including students. Emmons and McCullough (2003) demonstrated that gratitude is linked to increased well-being, and Neff (2003) found that self-compassion is associated with improved emotional regulation and mental health. However, there is limited research that examines the combined impact of both gratitude and self-compassion on student well-being, particularly in non-Western contexts. Most studies focus on either gratitude or self-compassion in isolation, without considering their potential interactive effects (Wood et al., 2010). Furthermore, much of the existing literature examines the effects of these constructs on general populations or clinical groups, while research on young adults in the age range of 18-25—an age group facing unique developmental challenges—remains sparse.

The current study seeks to fill these gaps by examining the relationship between gratitude and self-compassion of college/university students in India. By focusing on this specific demographic, the study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how these positive psychological traits can enhance student happiness and emotional resilience in a culturally diverse context.

Research Objectives and Hypotheses

The primary objective of this study is to analyse the relationship between gratitude, self-compassion, in college students aged 18-25. Specifically, the research aims to:

- Explore the relationship between gratitude & self-compassion.
- Explore the relationship between gratitude & self-compassion based on gender.

The hypotheses for this study are as follows:

- **H1:** There is a significant relationship between self-compassion and gratitude.
- **H2:** There is a significant difference in self-compassion among college students based on gender.
- **H3:** There is a significant difference in gratitude among college students based on gender.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Study Design

The study employs a quantitative research design using a survey method to investigate the relationship between gratitude, self-compassion among students aged 18-25. This design allows for the collection of numerical data, which can be analysed using statistical methods to identify patterns and relationships between the variables of interest. The survey-based

approach provides a reliable means of measuring the attitudes, behaviours, and psychological characteristics of participants in a standardized manner.

Participants

The sample consists of 80 participants, all university students aged between 18 and 25 years. This age group was selected because it represents a critical period in an individual's psychological and emotional development, particularly in the context of academic and social pressures. The participants were selected using convenience sampling from a university setting, which allows for easy access to the population but limits generalizability. Inclusion criteria included being a full-time student currently enrolled at the university and aged within the specified range. Participants were provided with informed consent forms and assured of confidentiality and anonymity in their responses.

Instruments Used

- **Gratitude Questionnaire-6 (GQ-6)** The Gratitude Questionnaire-6 (GQ-6), developed by McCullough et al. (2002), is a six-item self-report tool designed to measure an individual's general disposition toward gratitude. Each item is rated on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The GQ-6 assesses the frequency with which individuals experience feelings of gratitude in their daily lives. The total score is calculated by summing the responses, with higher scores indicating a greater tendency to experience gratitude. The GQ-6 has demonstrated strong internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.82$) and test-retest reliability (McCullough et al., 2002). It has been widely validated in various populations, including students, and is considered one of the most reliable measures of gratitude (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).
- **Self-Compassion Scale (SCS)** The Self-Compassion Scale (SCS), developed by Neff (2003), is a 26-item self-report scale designed to measure the three key components of self-compassion: self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. The SCS includes items such as "I try to be understanding and patient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like" (self-kindness) and "When I'm feeling down, I try to remind myself that feelings of frustration are part of life" (common humanity). Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always). The total score is computed by averaging the responses across the 26 items. The scale has shown strong internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.92$) and construct validity in previous studies (Neff, 2003). The SCS has been widely used across diverse populations and is considered one of the gold standards in measuring self-compassion.

Data Collection Process

Data collection was carried out over a period of two weeks. Participants were recruited from the university through email invitations and were provided with an online survey link. The survey consisted of two parts: the Gratitude Questionnaire-6 (GQ-6) and the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS). After participants completed the questionnaires, they were instructed to submit the responses electronically. The survey was designed to be anonymous, ensuring that no personally identifiable information was collected. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without any consequence. Data were stored in a secure, password-protected file to maintain confidentiality.

RESULTS

H1: There is no significant relationship between self-compassion and gratitude among college students. The data related to this objective was analysed with the help of spearman correlation. Spearman correlation was calculated between self-compassion and gratitude among college students.

Table 1: Correlation between self-compassion and gratitude among college students.

| Variable | N | r | p |
|---------------------------|----|-------|-------|
| Self-compassion gratitude | 80 | 0.282 | 0.011 |

The Spearman correlation of self-compassion and gratitude among college students is 0.282, and the corresponding p-value is 0.011. And it is significant at 0.05 level. Analysis of the table indicates that there is a significant positive correlation between self-compassion and gratitude among college students, and the correlation coefficient indicates that the relationship is weak. Thus, the alternative hypothesis is accepted and there is a statistically significant relationship between self-compassion and gratitude among college students. A study by Kerr et al. (2015) demonstrated that self-compassion interventions increased gratitude, suggesting that when individuals treat themselves with kindness, they are more likely to acknowledge and appreciate positive aspects of life. Additionally, self-compassion reduces self-criticism and negative emotions, which can otherwise hinder gratitude (Petrocchi & Couyoumdjian, 2016). Moreover, Neff and Germer (2013) found that self-compassion promotes adaptive coping strategies, making it easier for individuals to focus on gratitude rather than ruminate on difficulties. This positive mindset fosters resilience and overall well-being, strengthening the connection between these two psychological constructs.

H2: There is a significant difference in self-compassion among college students based on their gender. The data related to this objective was analysed with the help of Mann – Whitney U test. Mann – Whitney U test was calculated for gender difference in self-compassion among college students.

Table 2: Mean, z-value and p-value of self-compassion among female and male

| Variable | Group | N | Mean | z | p |
|-----------------|---------|----|-------|-------|-------|
| Self-compassion | Females | 45 | 35.36 | 1.981 | 0.048 |
| | Males | 35 | 45.64 | | |

Mean value for self-compassion in females is 45.64 and in males is 35.36. The Mann Whitney U Test was done to check if there is any significant difference between the females and males. The z-value for self-compassion is 1.981 and the corresponding p-value is 0.048. According to the results, since the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected, and it indicates that there is a significant difference in self-compassion among college students based on their gender. Yarnell et al. (2015) conducted a meta-analysis and confirmed that women consistently score lower on self-compassion, likely due to greater tendencies for rumination and self-judgment. Additionally, higher levels of self-compassion in men might be linked to societal expectations that discourage emotional expression. Since self-compassion involves recognizing one's suffering without over-identifying with it, men may find it easier to maintain emotional balance, while women may struggle with self-judgment and over-identification (Yarnell & Neff, 2013). Overall, studies indicate that women tend to have lower self-compassion than men, likely due to higher levels of self-

criticism and rumination. However, cultural and contextual factors can influence these findings. Future research should explore how self-compassion interventions can be tailored to different genders to promote emotional well-being for both men and women.

H3: There is a significant difference in gratitude among college students based on their gender. The data related to this objective was analyzed with the help of Mann – Whitney U test. Mann – Whitney U test was calculated for gender difference in gratitude among college students.

Table 3: Mean, z-value and p-value of Gratitude among female and male

| Variable | Group | N | Mean | z | p |
|-----------|---------|----|-------|-------|-------|
| Gratitude | Females | 45 | 41.15 | 0.252 | 0.801 |
| | Males | 35 | 39.85 | | |

Mean value for gratitude in females is 41.15 and in males is 39.85. The Mann-Whitney U Test was done to check if there is any significant difference between the females and males. The z-value for gratitude is 0.252 and the corresponding p-value is 0.801. According to the results, since the p-value is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis is accepted, that is, there is no significant difference in gratitude among college students based on their gender. Kashdan et al. (2009) found that women reported higher levels of gratitude in both self-reports and experimental settings. This finding aligns with the idea that women are generally more emotionally expressive and socially oriented than men, which may contribute to their greater tendency to acknowledge and appreciate positive experiences. Though in the same year Toussaint and Friedman (2009) conducted a meta-analysis and concluded that while some socialization factors may influence how gratitude is expressed, the emotional and psychological impact of gratitude does not differ significantly between men and women. Our study also shown no difference based on gender.

DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the correlation between self-compassion and gratitude among college students. The Spearman correlation of self-compassion and gratitude among college students is 0.282, and the corresponding p-value is 0.011, and it is significant at 0.05 level. The p-value is less than 0.05, and the null hypothesis is rejected, and it indicates that there is a significant positive correlation between self-compassion and gratitude among college students, and the correlation coefficient indicates that the relationship is weak. Table 2 shows the mean, z-value and p-value of gratitude among females and males. Mean value for self-compassion in males is 45.64 and in females is 35.36. The z-value for self-compassion is 1.981 and the corresponding p-value is 0.048. The p-value is less than 0.05, and the null hypothesis is rejected, and it indicates that there is a significant difference in self-compassion among college students based on their gender. The findings of the study are supported by previous research, with significant difference in self-compassion among college students based on their gender (Yarnell & Neff, 2013) Table 3 shows the mean, z-value and p-value of gratitude among females and males. Mean value for gratitude in females is 41.15 and in males is 39.85. The z-value for gratitude is 0.252 and the corresponding p-value is 0.801. The p-value is greater than 0.05, and the null hypothesis is accepted, that is, there is no significant difference in gratitude among college students based on their gender.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study suggest a significant but weak positive correlation between self-compassion and gratitude among college students. The Spearman correlation coefficient (0.282, $p = 0.011$) indicates that as self-compassion increases, gratitude also tends to increase, though the relationship is not strong. Additionally, the study reveals a significant gender-based difference in self-compassion, with females displaying higher self-compassion levels (Mean = 45.64) than males (Mean = 35.36). The corresponding z -value (1.981) and p -value (0.048) support this conclusion, aligning with previous research (Yarnell & Neff, 2013). However, no significant gender-based difference was found in gratitude, as indicated by the z -value (0.252) and p -value (0.801). These findings contribute to the growing body of literature on self-compassion and gratitude, emphasizing the importance of self-compassion as a psychological trait that varies by gender but does not necessarily predict gratitude differences. Future research could explore underlying factors influencing these relationships and consider interventions to enhance self-compassion and gratitude among college students.

REFERENCES

- Algoe, S. B., Haidt, J., & Gable, S. L. (2008). Beyond reciprocity: Gratitude and relationships in everyday life. *Emotion, 8*(3), 425-429.
- Diener, E. (2009). Subjective well-being: The science of happiness and a proposal for a national index. *American Psychologist, 55*(1), 34-43.
- Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (2003). Counting blessings versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84*(2), 377-389.
- Emmons, R. A., & Stern, R. (2013). Gratitude as a psychotherapeutic intervention. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 69*(8), 846-855.
- Froh, J. J., Yurkewicz, C., & Kashdan, T. B. (2011). Gratitude and subjective well-being in early adolescence: Examining gender differences. *Journal of Adolescence, 32*(3), 633-650.
- Gilbert, P. (2009). *The compassionate mind: A new approach to life's challenges*. New Harbinger Publications.
- Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations*. SAGE Publications.
- Kashdan, T. B., Mishra, A., Breen, W. E., & Froh, J. J. (2009). Gender differences in gratitude: Examining appraisals, narratives, the willingness to express emotions, and changes in psychological needs. *Journal of Personality, 77*(3), 691-730.
- Kerr, S. L., O'Donovan, A., & Pepping, C. A. (2015). Can gratitude and kindness interventions enhance well-being in a clinical sample? *Journal of Happiness Studies, 16*(1), 17-36.
- Kirby, J. N., Tellegen, C. L., & Steindl, S. R. (2017). A meta-analysis of compassion-based interventions: Current state of knowledge and future directions. *Behavior Therapy, 48*(6), 778-792.
- Longe, O., Maratos, F. A., Gilbert, P., Evans, G., Volker, F., Rockliff, H., & Rippon, G. (2010). Having a word with yourself: Neural correlates of self-criticism and self-reassurance. *NeuroImage, 49*(2), 1849-1856.
- MacBeth, A., & Gumley, A. (2012). Exploring the relationship between self-compassion and psychopathology: A meta-analysis. *Clinical Psychology Review, 32*(6), 545-552.
- McCullough, M. E., Emmons, R. A., & Tsang, J. A. (2002). The grateful disposition: A conceptual and empirical topography. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 82*(1), 112-127.

Nurturing the Self: How Gratitude and Self-Compassion Foster Inner Kindness

- Neff, K. D. (2003). The development and validation of a scale to measure self-compassion. *Self and Identity*, 2(3), 223-250.
- Neff, K. D., & Germer, C. K. (2013). A pilot study and randomized controlled trial of the mindful self-compassion program. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 69(1), 28–44.
- Neff, K. D., Kirkpatrick, K. L., & Rude, S. S. (2007). Self-compassion and adaptive psychological functioning. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 41(1), 139-154.
- Petrocchi, N., & Couyoumdjian, A. (2016). The impact of gratitude on depression and anxiety: The mediating role of criticizing, attacking, and reassuring the self. *Self and Identity*, 15(2), 191–205.
- Ryff, C. D. (1989). Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57(6), 1069-1081.
- Seligman, M. E. P., Steen, T. A., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). Positive psychology progress: Empirical validation of interventions. *American Psychologist*, 60(5), 410-421.
- Thurackal, J. T., Sinha, V., & Verma, K. (2016). Self-compassion and mental health: Indian perspectives. *Indian Journal of Positive Psychology*, 7(3), 325–329.
- Toussaint, L., & Friedman, P. (2009). Forgiveness, gratitude, and well-being: The mediating role of affect and beliefs. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 10(6), 635-654.
- Wood, A. M., Froh, J. J., & Geraghty, A. W. (2010). Gratitude and well-being: A review and theoretical integration. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 30(7), 890-905.
- Wood, A. M., Maltby, J., Gillett, R., Linley, P. A., & Joseph, S. (2008). The role of gratitude in the development of social support, stress, and depression: Two longitudinal studies. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 42(4), 854-871.
- Yarnell, L. M., & Neff, K. D. (2013). Self-compassion, interpersonal conflict resolutions, and well-being. *Self and Identity*, 12(2), 146–159.
- Yarnell, L. M., Stafford, R. E., Neff, K. D., Reilly, E. D., Knox, M. C., & Mullarkey, M. (2015). Meta-analysis of gender differences in self-compassion. *Self and Identity*, 14(5), 499–520.

Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Bhadoriya, D. & Meena, S. (2025). Nurturing the Self: How Gratitude and Self-Compassion Foster Inner Kindness. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 13(2), 439-447. DIP:18.01.040.20251302, DOI:10.25215/1302.040