

Research Paper

Examining the Social Benefits of Gratitude Among Middle Adolescents: A Correlational Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this exploratory study was to examine the social benefits of gratitude among middle adolescents. Using correlational analysis the hypothesis which states that the level of gratitude is positively related to the level of social maturity resulting in more satisfying social relations with adolescent peers, was tested. The sample consisted of 100 middle adolescents high school students studying in 4 private and government schools in Bengaluru, Karnataka, India. The purposive sampling technique was adopted to assess a male and female adolescent students belonging to the age group of 14 to 17 years. The Gratitude Questionnaire, developed by McCullough, Emmons, and Tsang, and the Social Maturity Scale developed by Nalini Rao was used to study the effect of gratitude on social maturity. The findings suggested there is a significant relationship between gratitude and social maturity among middle adolescents. The correlational analysis indicated that this statistically positive relationship can be interpreted as low levels of gratitude being characterized by low social maturity whereas higher levels of gratitude is associated with high socially maturity.

Keywords: *Middle Adolescents, Gratitude, Social Maturity*

Gratitude involves feeling thankful and the act of being appreciative for the blessings in your life. It involves recognizing and appreciating the kindness of others, anything wonderful around you, and the simple joys of everyday life, even life itself. Gratitude is an emotion similar to appreciation. The American Psychological Association defines this phenomenon as a sense of happiness and thankfulness in response to a fortunate happen stance or tangible gift.

According to Dr. Robert Emmons, the feeling of gratitude involves two stages (Emmons & McCullough, 2003) First comes the acknowledgment of goodness in one's life. In a state of gratitude, we say yes to life. We affirm that, all in all, life is good and has elements that make it worth living. The acknowledgment that we have received something gratifies us, both by its presence and by the effort the giver put into choosing it. Second, gratitude

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involves recognizing that sources of this goodness lie outside the self. One can be grateful to our creator, other people, animals, and the world, but not to oneself. At this stage, we recognize the goodness in our lives and who to thank for it.

Expressing thankfulness is the act of thanksgiving. Many of us get so caught up in our day-to-day routines that we fail to stop and acknowledge our fortunes and people who have made significant contributions in our lives. In some countries thanksgiving is designated to a day assigned to encourage people to reflect and to be mindful of the blessings we have.

Gratitude can be demonstrated in several ways. It can be expressed with a simple, verbal “thank you” or it can be indicated by a more overt practice of giving a hug, card, gift or a treat to a meal. Gratitude can be categorized into three main types: affective which involves feeling gratitude (the emotion of appreciation), cognitive which consists of thoughts of gratitude (reflecting on blessings), and conative which is gratitude shown by an act (expressing appreciation through behaviour). It is a conscious process and is learnt. It goes beyond reciprocity and indebtedness.

Psychologists state that gratitude is a change in mindset which results in personal growth, maintaining satisfying relationships and ensuring personal wellbeing. The gift of thankfulness shifts a person’s point of view, making them more optimistic and happier. Research has proven that people who practice gratitude in their lives have improved mental health, reduced stress levels, and overall wellness.

Psychological benefits of gratitude include positive emotions and thoughts, feeling more aware, increased self-satisfaction and enhanced mood. Physical benefits of gratitude include a stronger immune system, fewer body aches and pains, optimum blood pressure and cardiac functioning, and better sleep cycles. Social benefits of gratitude include better communication, more empathy, stronger interpersonal relationships, and more likeability among group members. By cultivating a sense of appreciation for the good things in life and expressing gratitude to others, individuals can build stronger social connections, enhance their social skills, and experience a greater sense of fulfilment.

Apart from fostering more positive and respectful communication, gratitude can deepen understanding and appreciation for others, leading to greater empathy and a stronger ability to connect with others. Being mindful of others' needs and being appreciative are a sign of prosocial behaviour. Responding with kindness and support, further strengthens social bonds and social support. The current study aimed to examine the social benefits of gratitude among middle adolescents. For a very long period of time gratitude has been mainly studied because of its positive link with personal psychological adaptation and well-being. Gratitude does not simply enrich the individual, but it also plays a key role in the wider context where the person lives by, for example promoting prosocial behaviours and enhancing reciprocity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Danioni, F., Ranieri, S., & Regalia, C. (2025) conducted a study on the moderating role of sex and age in the association between gratitude and social generativity. A sample of 237 Italian young adults aged 18–29 were asked to fill in a self-report questionnaire aimed at measuring the mentioned constructs. The moderation model carried out confirmed that the gratitude-social generativity association was significant and positive only for the female subsample, while age was not found to moderate this link. The findings stated that gratitude is a positive

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lens through which young adults may regard their relationships, thus enhancing their social generativity only in females.

Gulliford, L., Morgan, B., Hemming, E. et al. (2019) conducted a study on Gratitude, Self-Monitoring and Social Intelligence: A Prosocial Relationship? The study attempted to explore gratitude in a more critical light in order to question whether gratitude always functions in a prosocial manner. The theoretical relationship between gratitude, ingratiation and impression management behaviours were explored with reference to social intelligence and self-monitoring as key constructs that might underlie gratitude's shadow side. The argument assumed that the apparent prosocial nature of gratitude might, sometimes, mask manipulative and self-serving goals. Preliminary empirical evidence of the relationship between gratitude, social intelligence and self-monitoring was then provided. In Study 1, 1,311 participants completed self-report tests on gratitude, self-monitoring and social intelligence. The results demonstrated small-to-medium and significant correlational links between these constructs. Study 2 explored whether practicing gratitude could lead to changes in impression management skills, specifically social intelligence, through the design and delivery of a gratitude versus pride intervention. This intervention (N = 36) provided the first preliminary evidence that practicing gratitude can function to increase participants' levels of social intelligence.

Algoe, et.al, (2013) examined the social functions of the emotion of gratitude via expression. The study tested the critical hypothesis that being the target of gratitude forecasts one's relational growth with the person who expresses gratitude. The study employed a novel behavioural task in which members of romantic relationships expressed gratitude to one another in a laboratory paradigm. As predicted, the target's greater perceptions of the expresser's responsiveness after the interaction significantly predicted improvements in relationship quality over 6 months. These effects were independent from perceptions of responsiveness following two other types of relationally important and emotionally evocative social interactions in the lab, suggesting the unique weight that gratitude carries in cultivating social bonds.

In a study on Being Grateful is Beyond Good Manners: Gratitude and Motivation to Contribute to Society Among Early Adolescents Jeffrey, Froh, Giacomo Bono and Emmons, longitudinally examined early adolescents' gratitude and their social integration, or motivation to use their strengths to help others and feel connected to others at a macro level. Middle school students (N = 700) completed measures of gratitude, prosocial behaviour, life satisfaction, and social integration at baseline (T1), 3-months (T2), and 6-months (T3) later. Using bootstrapping to examine multiple mediators, controlling for demographics and social integration at T1, the researchers found that gratitude at T1 predicted social integration at T3 and that prosocial behaviour and life satisfaction at T2 mediated the relation. Further meditational analyses showed that gratitude and social integration serially enhanced each other and that gratitude may help to initiate upward spirals toward greater emotional and social well-being.

Another study conducted by Imelda, Caleon, Ronnel, King, et al, (2017) aimed to develop and examine the effects of a socially oriented gratitude intervention (SOGI) on secondary students' gratitude level and interpersonal relationships. To these ends, they used a quasi-experimental research design. The experimental group participated in the two-week intervention during a class subject focusing on character and citizenship education (CCE) while the wait-list control group went on with regular CCE activities. All participants

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completed a questionnaire a week before and a month after the implementation of the SOGI and control activities. The changes in relatedness scores were statistically significant in relation to parents and peers, but not in relation to teachers. In particular, the experimental group generally maintained the quality of their relationship with their parents and peers while the control group reported a decline in these relationship domains. The change in gratitude levels did not differ significantly between the experimental group and control group, but the effect size associated with the mean gratitude change of the experimental group was found to be larger than that of the control group and comparable to what is commonly reported in other published gratitude intervention studies. The students' feedback reveals the social, cognitive and affective benefits of the SOGI.

METHODOLOGY

Problem Statement: Examining the social benefits of gratitude among middle adolescents.

Hypothesis: The level of gratitude is positively related to the level of social maturity resulting in more satisfying social relations with adolescent peers.

Variables

- Independent Variable – Levels of gratitude
- Dependent Variable – Levels of social maturity

Research Design- An exploratory study using correlational analysis.

Sample: The sample consisted of 100 middle adolescents high school students studying in 4 private and government schools in Bengaluru, Karnataka, India. The purposive sampling technique was adopted and the participants consent as well as their parents /guardian's consent was obtained on a Consent Form. The adolescents, both male and female belonged to the age group of 14 to 17 years. The data was collected from students studying in Holy Angels High School and SFX High Schools, which are private aided institutions and BBMP High School, BBMP PU College which are government institutions.

Tests Used for Assessment

These scales used were the Gratitude Questionnaire (2002) developed by McCullough, Emmons, and Tsang, and the Social Maturity Scale (1998) developed and standardized by Dr.Nalini Rao.

The Gratitude Questionnaire-Six-Item Form (GQ-6) is a self-report questionnaire designed to assess individual differences in the proneness to experience gratitude in daily life. The GQ-6 is a six-item scale that measures dispositional gratitude. The primary purpose of the GQ-6 is to assess an individual's level of gratitude in various life situations.

Participants were asked to answer 6 items on a 1 to 7 scale. Higher scores generally indicate a stronger disposition towards gratitude, while lower scores suggest a less grateful disposition.

The GQ-6 has good internal reliability, with alphas between .82 and .87, and there is evidence that the GQ-6 showed criterion validity and is positively related to optimism, life satisfaction, hope, spirituality and religiousness, forgiveness, empathy and prosocial behaviour, and negatively related to depression, anxiety, materialism and envy.

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The Social Maturity Scale was developed by Dr. Nalini Rao which assesses the degree to which an individual performs age-appropriate behaviours. The responses are recorded on the 4-point rating scale protocol. The scale contains 90 items with 3 dimensions and 9 sub-dimensions.

The 90 items assessed 3 dimensions of social maturity which are, Personal Adequacy, Inter-Personal Adequacy and Social Adequacy and 9 sub dimensions, which are -

1. Personal Adequacy: i) Work Orientation ii) Self-Direction iii) Ability to Take Stress
2. Inter-Personal Adequacy: i) Communication ii) Enlightened Trust iii) Cooperation
3. Social Adequacy: i) Social Commitment ii) Social Tolerance iii) Openness to Change

The maximum social maturity score is 360 and the minimum mature score is 90. High Scores represents the most mature response. The reliability of this scale is reflected in correlation co-efficient obtained on all the sub-scales which are significant at .01 level and validity is reflected in the correlation coefficient obtained between the scores, on Hindi, English and Kannada versions which is also .98 which is very high.

Procedure

The researcher approached the selected schools and after obtaining consent from the parents /guardians of the consenting students and ensuring they were middle adolescents in the age group of 14-17 years, the researcher oriented the students with the objectives of this study. The students were then asked to respond to the gratitude questionnaire and social maturity scale. Sufficient time was given for the students to respond to both the tests and any doubts relating to any items on the scale were clarified.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The responses of the students were scored and interpreted using the key and norms respectively of both the scales. The data was then analysed to determine whether levels of gratitude were positively related to levels of social maturity in this sample of middle adolescents.

Table 1- Correlation Between Very Low Levels of Gratitude and Social Maturity

Variables	Mean	N	p-value
Social Maturity	105.0	46	0.004
Level of Gratitude (6-34 Very Low)	31.68		

Data was analysed to examine the relationship between very low levels of gratitude and social maturity among middle adolescents in the pre-test phase. The mean social maturity score was 105 while the mean gratitude score for this subset was 31.68. The p-value ($p = 0.153$) is below the 0.01 threshold, indicating a strong and significant relationship between very low levels of gratitude and social maturity. From the sample 46 students scored very low on feelings and expression of gratitude and scored fairly low on social maturity.

Table 2 - Correlation between Low Levels of Gratitude and Social Maturity

Variables	Mean	N	p-value
Social Maturity	167.0	24	0.014
Level of Gratitude (6-34 Very Low)	35.67		

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The relationship between low levels of gratitude and social maturity among middle adolescents in the pre-test phase was analysed. The mean social maturity score was 167.0 while the mean gratitude score for this subset was 35.67. The p-value ($p = 0.014$) is lesser than the conventional significance threshold of 0.05, indicating that the relationship between low average levels of gratitude and social maturity is statistically significant with moderate levels of correlation.

Table 3 - Correlation Between High Levels of Gratitude and Social Maturity.

Variables	Mean	N	p-value
Social Maturity	253.0	18	0.006
Level of Gratitude (38-40 High)	21.42		

Correlation analysis also examined the relationship between high average levels of gratitude and social maturity among middle adolescents in the pre-test phase. The mean social maturity score was 253.0 while the mean gratitude score for this subset was 21.42. The p-value ($p = 0.006$) is lower than the significance threshold of 0.01, indicating that the relationship between very high levels of gratitude and social maturity is statistically significant.

Table 4- Correlation Between Very High Levels of Gratitude and Social Maturity

Variables	Mean	N	p-value
Social Maturity	309	12	0.004
Level of Gratitude (41-42 High)	20.80		

The data analysis examined the relationship between very high levels gratitude and social maturity among middle adolescents in the pre-test phase. The mean social maturity score was 309, while the mean gratitude score for this subset was 20.80.

The p-value ($p = 0.004$) is below the conventional significance threshold of 0.05, indicating that the relationship between high level of gratitude and social maturity is highly significant. This suggests that there may be a strong positive association between high level gratitude and social maturity within this subset to confirm a meaningful relationship.

Therefore, the hypothesis which states that there is a positive relationship between gratitude and social maturity among middle adolescents is confirmed by the findings of this study. Students who experienced and expressed very little gratitude were less socially mature when compared to those who showed and experienced more gratitude. Whether higher levels of gratitude result in greater social maturity or whether greater social maturity results in the ability to feel and express gratitude still needs to be examined in detail. The understanding and empathy needed to appreciate a goodwill gesture is likely to help create stronger social bonds and maturity in managing satisfying and stable relationships with peers. At the same time the researcher observed that greater social maturity means greater personal, inter-personal and social adequacy which may result in the need to be more thankful since expressing gratitude results in social acceptance.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study suggests that there is a significant relationship between gratitude and social maturity among middle adolescents. The correlational analysis indicates that this statistically positive relationship can be interpreted as low levels of gratitude being

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characterised by low social maturity whereas those with higher levels of gratitude are more socially mature.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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