

Research Paper

## Gratitude and Hope among College Students with Low and High Life Satisfaction

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### ABSTRACT

The present study investigated the levels of gratitude and hope among college students exhibiting low and high life satisfaction. The primary objective was to examine whether students with differing levels of life satisfaction also differed in their experience of these positive psychological traits. The study sample comprised male and female undergraduate students, aged 18 to 21 years, enrolled in both government and private colleges. A between-group research design with purposive sampling was adopted. Initially, the General Health Questionnaire (Goldberg & Williams, 1988) was administered to identify and exclude participants with probable psychological pathology. Participants scoring below the cutoff on the GHQ were subsequently assessed using the Life Satisfaction Scale (Diener et al., 1985) to classify them into low and high life satisfaction groups. Following this classification, both groups completed the Adult Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991) and the Gratitude Scale (McCullough et al., 2002) to measure their respective levels of hope and gratitude. Statistical analysis using independent sample 't' tests was conducted to determine the significance of group differences. The findings revealed that students with high life satisfaction reported significantly higher levels of hope and gratitude compared to their peers with low life satisfaction. These findings emphasize the close association between life satisfaction and positive psychological traits, highlighting the importance of interventions aimed at enhancing life satisfaction to foster hope and gratitude.

**Keywords:** *Gratitude, Hope, Life Satisfaction, College Students*

In the realm of positive psychology, gratitude, hope, and life satisfaction are pivotal constructs that significantly influence individuals' well-being. Understanding their interrelationships, especially among college students, is crucial for fostering environments that promote mental health and academic success.

Gratitude is a positive emotional response characterized by thankfulness and appreciation for the benefits received from others. It involves recognizing and acknowledging the good things that happen, resulting in a state of appreciation (Sansone & Sansone, 2010). Gratitude has been linked to various psychological benefits, including increased happiness and improved relationships (McCullough et al., 2002).

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Hope is defined as the expectation that one will have positive experiences or that a potentially threatening or negative situation will not materialize or will ultimately result in a favorable state of affairs (American Psychological Association, 2024). It encompasses the belief in the possibility of achieving one's desires and is closely linked to emotions like optimism (American Psychological Association, 2024). Hope is essential for setting and achieving goals, providing motivation and direction (Snyder et al., 1991).

Life satisfaction refers to an individual's overall assessment of their life experiences and contentment. It differs from happiness, which is a temporary emotional state, while life satisfaction is a more stable evaluation of life as a whole (Diener et al., 1985). Life satisfaction is influenced by various factors, including personal health, education, income, fulfillment, and social connections (Diener et al., 1985).

Among college students, these constructs are interrelated. Higher levels of gratitude and hope are associated with greater life satisfaction (McCullough et al., 2002; Snyder et al., 1991). College life, often marked by academic pressures and social challenges, can impact these psychological traits. Understanding how gratitude and hope influence life satisfaction can inform interventions aimed at enhancing students' well-being and academic performance.

Despite the growing body of research on gratitude, hope, and life satisfaction, there is limited empirical evidence examining these constructs simultaneously among college students. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the levels of gratitude and hope among students with low and high life satisfaction. The findings could provide insights into how fostering gratitude and hope can enhance life satisfaction, thereby contributing to the development of targeted interventions to support students' mental health and academic success.

### ***Tools:***

**General Health Questionnaire (Goldberg, 1972):** The General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-28) was utilized in the present study as a screening tool to identify probable cases of psychological pathology among participants. The GHQ-28 comprises 28 statements, each rated on a four-point Likert scale, designed to assess the current mental health status of individuals (Goldberg & Williams, 1988). Its psychometric properties have been widely established. Specifically, the test-retest reliability of the GHQ-28 has been reported at 0.77, indicating consistent responses over time, while the split-half reliability was found to be 0.92, reflecting strong internal consistency. Furthermore, the questionnaire exhibits high diagnostic accuracy, with sensitivity and specificity reported at 91.4% and 87%, respectively (Goldberg & Williams, 1988). For the purposes of this study, a cutoff score of six was adopted, with possible scores ranging from 0 to 28, to distinguish probable cases of psychopathology from non-cases. Participants scoring below this threshold were considered suitable for inclusion in subsequent assessments of life satisfaction, gratitude, and hope.

**The Satisfaction with Life Scale (Ed Diener, 1985):** The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), developed by Diener and colleagues in 1985, is a widely used self-report instrument designed to assess an individual's overall life satisfaction. Unlike measures that focus on specific life domains or transient moods, the SWLS evaluates global cognitive judgments of one's life, capturing a holistic sense of well-being. The scale comprises five items, each rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree"). Total scores are calculated by summing responses, with possible scores

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ranging from 5 to 35, where higher scores indicate greater life satisfaction. Score interpretation is categorized as follows: 5–9 (extremely low satisfaction), 10–14 (low satisfaction), 15–19 (moderate satisfaction), 20–24 (high satisfaction), 25–30 (very high satisfaction), and 31–35 (extremely high satisfaction). The SWLS demonstrates strong psychometric properties. Internal consistency is high, with Cronbach's alpha typically ranging from 0.87 to 0.94, and test-retest reliability is robust, with correlation coefficients between 0.82 and 0.90 over time. Construct validity is well-established, supported by significant correlations with related constructs such as positive and negative affect, happiness, and broader measures of psychological well-being. The SWLS has been validated across diverse populations, making it a reliable and effective tool for research and clinical applications. Its brevity and focus on global life satisfaction render it practical for both academic studies and psychological assessments aimed at understanding subjective well-being.

**The Gratitude Questionnaire (McCullough et al., 2002):** The Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6), developed by McCullough and colleagues in 2002, is a self-report instrument designed to assess an individual's disposition toward gratitude, both as a stable personality trait and as an emotional response. The questionnaire comprises six items, each rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree"), with two items reverse-scored to control for response bias. Total scores are obtained by summing individual responses, where higher scores reflect a greater tendency to experience gratitude. The GQ-6 has demonstrated robust psychometric properties. Internal consistency, measured by Cronbach's alpha, typically ranges from 0.82 to 0.87, indicating reliable inter-item correlations. Test-retest reliability over time has been reported around 0.80. Construct validity is supported by positive correlations with optimism, life satisfaction, hope, spirituality, forgiveness, and prosocial behaviors, and negative associations with depression, anxiety, materialism, and envy. Numerous studies have validated the GQ-6 as an effective measure of gratitude, demonstrating its sensitivity in reflecting well-being, positive affect, and life satisfaction, while inversely relating to negative emotional states.

**The Adult Hope Scale (AHS) (Snyder et al., 1991):** The Adult Hope Scale (AHS), developed by Snyder and colleagues in 1991, is a widely used instrument for assessing hope in adults, grounded in Snyder's theoretical conceptualization of hope as comprising two core components: pathways and agency. The pathways component evaluates an individual's perceived ability to generate viable routes to achieve desired goals, whereas the agency component assesses the motivational drive to pursue those pathways.

The scale consists of 12 items, including two 4-item subscales—Pathways and Agency—and four additional distractor items. Responses are provided on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("definitely false") to 7 ("definitely true"), with higher scores reflecting greater levels of hope. The AHS demonstrates strong psychometric properties, including high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values typically exceeding 0.80. Construct validity is well-established, with significant correlations observed between hope, optimism, and self-efficacy, supporting its theoretical framework.

## METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURE

The study employed a between-group research design to examine differences in gratitude and hope among college students with low and high life satisfaction. A purposive sampling and between group research design was opted for the study. Prior to data collection informed consent was secured from all participants. The sample consisted of male and female

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undergraduate students, aged 18 to 21 years, enrolled in government and private colleges. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who met the inclusion criteria.

Initially, the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-28) (Goldberg & Williams, 1988) was administered to all participants to screen for probable psychological pathology. Participants who scored below the established cutoff were considered eligible for the study, ensuring that only individuals without significant mental health concerns were included. Eligible participants were then assessed using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener et al., 1985) to categorize them into two groups: low life satisfaction and high life satisfaction. Following this classification, both groups completed the Adult Hope Scale (AHS) (Snyder et al., 1991) to assess goal-directed thinking, encompassing the pathways and agency components, and the Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6) (McCullough et al., 2002) to measure the participants' propensity for gratitude.

### *Analysis of results*

After data collection, mean scores for gratitude and hope were calculated for each group. Statistical analysis was conducted using independent sample 't' tests to determine whether significant differences existed between students with low and high life satisfaction.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of college students grouped by high and low life satisfaction across gender, age, family type, and college type. In the high life satisfaction group, 21 participants (47.73%) were male and 23 (52.27%) were female, whereas the low life satisfaction group included 19 males (52.78%) and 17 females (47.22%), indicating a slight predominance of females in the high life satisfaction group. Regarding age, the majority of participants were 18–19 years old, comprising 40.91% of the high and 44.44% of the low life satisfaction groups. Students aged 20–21 years formed 36.36% and 33.33% of the respective groups, while 19–20-year-olds represented the smallest proportion. Most participants in both groups belonged to nuclear families (77.27% in high and 80.56% in low life satisfaction groups). Similarly, a higher proportion of students were enrolled in government colleges (63.64% and 69.44%), with the remainder attending private institutions. Overall, the distribution across demographic variables was balanced, ensuring comparability between the two groups.

**Table 1: Demographic details of the sample:**

Areas	Categories	With High Life Satisfaction	Percentage	With Low Life Satisfaction	Percentage
Gender	Male	21	47.73	19	52.78
	Female	23	52.27	17	47.22
	<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Age	18-19 years	18	40.91	16	44.44
	19-20 years	10	22.73	8	22.22
	20-21 years	16	36.36	12	33.33
	<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Type of family	Nuclear family	34	77.27	29	80.56
	Joint family	10	22.73	7	19.44
	<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>100.00</b>

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Areas	Categories	With High Life Satisfaction	Percentage	With Low Life Satisfaction	Percentage
Type of college	Government college	28	63.64	25	69.44
	Private college	16	36.36	11	30.56
	<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>100.00</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Table 2: Mean, SD and t values on gratitude and hope among college students with low and high life satisfaction:**

Scale	Group	N	Mean	SD	t
Gratitude	With Low life satisfaction	36	24.05	6.43	3.43*
	With High life satisfaction	44	28.98	4.36	
Hope	With Low life satisfaction	36	38.35	7.05	5.12**
	With High life satisfaction	44	47.54	8.40	

P = \* 0.05; P = \*\*0.01 (Significant at 0.05 and 0.01 level)

Table 2 presents the mean scores, standard deviations, and independent sample t-values for gratitude and hope among college students with low and high life satisfaction. Regarding gratitude, students with low life satisfaction (n = 36) scored a mean of 24.05 (SD = 6.43), while those with high life satisfaction (n = 44) had a higher mean of 28.98 (SD = 4.36). The t-value of 3.43 was significant at the 0.05 level (p < 0.05), demonstrating a significant difference between the groups in their experience of gratitude.

For hope, students with low life satisfaction (n = 36) had a mean score of 38.35 (SD = 7.05), whereas students with high life satisfaction (n = 44) had a higher mean of 47.54 (SD = 8.40). The computed t-value of 5.12 was significant at the 0.01 level (p < 0.01), indicating a statistically significant difference between the two groups.

The present study found that college students with high life satisfaction reported significantly higher levels of gratitude compared to their peers with low life satisfaction. This aligns with existing literature highlighting the positive relationship between gratitude and life satisfaction among university students. For instance, a study by Hemarajareswari and Gupta (2024) found a significant positive correlation between gratitude and life satisfaction among college students. Similarly, a study by Datu and Mateo (2015) revealed that gratitude positively influenced life satisfaction among Filipino adolescents, suggesting that fostering gratitude can enhance well-being in diverse cultural contexts. Furthermore, research by Froh et al. (2009) demonstrated that gratitude was positively associated with life satisfaction, relationship fulfillment, and fewer physical symptoms among college students. These findings support the notion that cultivating gratitude can lead to improved overall well-being. Additionally, a study by Mathur et al. (2024) indicated that gratitude positively affected mental well-being, which in turn led to higher life satisfaction among students. This highlights the importance of promoting gratitude as a means to enhance students' mental health and life satisfaction. The present study's findings are consistent with existing research, emphasizing the significant role of gratitude in enhancing life satisfaction among college students.

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The present study found that college students with high life satisfaction reported significantly higher levels of hope compared to their peers with low life satisfaction. This aligns with existing literature highlighting the positive relationship between hope and life satisfaction among university students. For instance, a study by Zarei and Fooladvand (2022) examined the mediating role of hope and resilience in the association between family functioning and life satisfaction among female university students during the COVID-19 outbreak. The findings revealed that hope significantly mediated the relationship between family functioning and life satisfaction, emphasizing the protective role of hope in enhancing life satisfaction during challenging times.

Similarly, research by Gungor, Young, and Sivo (2021) demonstrated that hope moderated the effects of negative life events on psychological distress and life satisfaction among U.S. college students. Their study highlighted the importance of hope in buffering the adverse effects of stressors and promoting life satisfaction. The present study's findings corroborate existing research, emphasizing the significant role of hope in enhancing life satisfaction among college students. These results suggest that interventions aimed at fostering hope could be beneficial in promoting students' well-being.

### CONCLUSIONS

- The present study aimed to examine gratitude and hope among college students with low and high life satisfaction and to determine whether these positive psychological traits differ based on students' life satisfaction levels.
- College students with high life satisfaction reported significantly higher levels of gratitude than students with low life satisfaction.
- Students with high life satisfaction also showed significantly higher levels of hope compared to their peers with low life satisfaction.
- The study demonstrates that students with low life satisfaction exhibit comparatively lower levels of hope and gratitude, highlighting a potential area for psychological support or interventions.

#### *Limitations:*

- The study employed a cross-sectional, between-group design, which limits the ability to infer causal relationships between life satisfaction and levels of hope and gratitude.
- The sample was restricted to college students aged 18–21 years from selected government and private colleges, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other age groups, educational levels, or cultural contexts.
- Only students scoring below the cutoff on the General Health Questionnaire were included, which excludes students with mild to moderate psychological difficulties and may affect the representation of the broader student population.
- The study did not account for other factors influencing hope and gratitude, such as personality traits, socio-economic status, family support, or academic performance.
- The use of purposive sampling may introduce sampling bias, reducing the ability to generalize the findings to all college students.

#### *Implications:*

- The study highlights the importance of incorporating interventions that foster gratitude and hope in college programs to enhance students' overall life satisfaction.

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- Findings suggest that college counselors and psychologists can design targeted strategies to support students with low life satisfaction, aiming to improve their positive psychological traits.
- Educational institutions may develop workshops or training modules focusing on hope and gratitude exercises to promote mental well-being and resilience among students.
- The study emphasizes the role of positive psychology practices in academic settings, emphasizing that enhancing hope and gratitude can contribute to better emotional and psychological functioning.
- The findings suggest potential benefits for peer-support and mentoring programs, where students with higher life satisfaction can model and cultivate positive traits like hope and gratitude in others.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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