

Research Paper

The Role of Gratitude and Mindfulness in Predicting Psychological Well-being among Indian Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

The present study explored how gratitude and mindfulness forecast psychological well-being in Indian emerging adults. While the bulk of psychological research has historically concentrated on disorders and deficits, recent work increasingly examines positive traits that foster well-being. The study evaluated the separate and joint effects of gratitude and mindful awareness in an Indian sample. One hundred twenty-three participants were recruited via convenience sampling and completed an online questionnaire. Validated measures—the Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6), the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), and Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale—were administered. Spearman's rho and multiple linear regression were used for analyses. Findings showed that both gratitude and mindful awareness correlated positively with psychological well-being, with mindful awareness exhibiting a stronger association. Regression results indicated that both predictors significantly explained well-being, together accounting for a notable share of variance. The findings highlight the importance of positive psychological resources in promoting mental health and suggest the usefulness of integrating gratitude- and mindfulness-based practices in interventions aimed at enhancing well-being.

Keywords: *Correlation, Gratitude, Mindfulness, Psychological Well-being, Regression, Young Adults*

Emerging adulthood is a pivotal developmental stage characterised by considerable transitions, opportunities, and stressors. While advancements in education, technology, and globalisation have expanded possibilities for growth, they have simultaneously intensified pressures related to academic performance, career uncertainty, financial stability, and social comparison. In the Indian context, these stressors are further compounded by rapid socio-cultural changes, shifting family dynamics, and heightened expectations of success. As a result, young adults often experience considerable psychological strain, even in the absence of clinically diagnosable disorders.

Historically, psychology has prioritized maladaptive conditions such as anxiety, depression, and stress; however, contemporary perspectives within positive psychology advocate a shift toward understanding factors that enable individuals to function optimally and lead meaningful lives. Rather than merely addressing deficits, this approach highlights the

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importance of psychological strengths and resources that contribute to overall well-being and flourishing (Seligman, 2011).

Within this perspective, **psychological well-being** goes beyond merely lacking mental illness and encompasses deeper facets of human functioning—such as life purpose, personal development, and self-actualization. Ryff's multidimensional framework defines well-being through components including self-direction, mastery of one's environment, satisfying relationships, self-acceptance, life purpose, and personal development (Ryff, 1989). Complementary accounts like Self-Determination Theory highlight that satisfying core psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—is vital for well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Together, these frameworks portray well-being as dynamic and influenced by both internal dispositions and contextual factors.

Among positive psychological capacities, gratitude and mindfulness have been identified as important contributors to well-being. **Gratitude** denotes noticing and valuing positive life aspects and acknowledging external sources of those benefits (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). It is linked to greater life satisfaction, better interpersonal functioning, and increased emotional resilience. The Broaden-and-Build model posits that positive emotions like gratitude broaden cognitive and behavioral options, fostering long-term personal resources (Fredrickson, 2001).

Mindfulness denotes sustained present-moment attention characterized by openness and nonjudgment (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Drawing from contemplative traditions and empirical research, mindfulness improves attentional control, emotional regulation, and cognitive adaptability. The Mindfulness-to-Meaning framework proposes that mindful awareness helps people reframe experiences in adaptive ways, supporting psychological well-being (Garland et al., 2015).

Although both gratefulness and present moment awareness have independently demonstrated robust links with well-being, their combined influence remains relatively underexplored, particularly within the Indian context. Conceptually, these constructs may operate in a complementary manner. Mindfulness facilitates awareness of present experiences, while gratitude enhances appreciation of those experiences. Together, they may contribute to improved emotional regulation, adaptive coping, and sustained psychological functioning.

Given the cultural emphasis on relational interdependence, introspection, and spirituality in India, examining these constructs within this context is especially relevant. Investigating how gratefulness and mindful awareness together relate to psychological well-being among Indian emerging adults has applied value for designing culturally attuned mental health interventions.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A substantial and growing empirical literature highlights gratitude's beneficial role for psychological well-being across varied groups. Gratitude is typically framed as a positive psychological resource that improves adaptive functioning. Meta-analytic evidence (e.g., Dickens, 2017) indicates that gratitude-focused programs lead to meaningful gains in well-being and strengthen internal coping. Similarly, structured gratitude practices in college

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samples have been associated with increased positive affect and better coping strategies (Klibert et al., 2019).

Additional meta-analytic work found a robust positive link between trait gratitude and well-being indices like life satisfaction and subjective happiness (Portocarrero et al., 2020). Experimental studies also show gratitude interventions can lower depressive symptoms across time (Bohlmeijer et al., 2021). Comparable positive patterns have surfaced in non-Western samples; for example, Fazal-e-Hasan et al. (2021) documented gratitude's beneficial role in such populations, while Czyżowska and Gurba (2022) found that gratitude-based practices significantly contributed to meaning in life and overall mental health among young adults.

Recent work continues to underscore the multifaceted advantages of gratitude. Kalogeropoulos and Papadopoulos (2024) found that keeping a gratitude journal improved students' academic outcomes and psychological well-being. Longitudinal data from Li et al. (2025) showed gratitude to be a robust longitudinal predictor of both subjective and psychological well-being. Additional studies have suggested that gratitude is also associated with enhanced empathy, engagement, and social connectedness (Montherow et al., 2025). In an applied context, Umriana (2026) demonstrated that gratitude-based psychoeducational programs significantly improved resilience and adaptive functioning among students.

Parallel to gratitude research, mindfulness has been extensively examined as a key determinant of psychological well-being. Early empirical work by Shapiro et al. (2008) established that mindfulness practices significantly improve well-being while reducing negative emotional states. Similarly, Bergen-Cico et al. (2013) found that mindfulness-based interventions contribute to improved psychological health, with benefits that can be sustained over time (Mitchell & Heads, 2015).

Meta-analyses and systematic reviews further corroborate these effects. Gotink et al. (2015) concluded that mindfulness-based approaches markedly improve quality of life and overall functioning. Marzabadi et al. (2018) reported that greater mindfulness is linked to lower stress, anxiety, and depression. Even brief mindfulness protocols have yielded measurable gains in psychological well-being (Schultz, 2019).

More recent studies continue to highlight the effectiveness of mindfulness in various contexts. Lima and Mendes (2020) reported improvements in attentional functioning and well-being following mindfulness training. Tasneem and Panwar (2022) identified mindfulness as a significant predictor of emotional regulation and psychological well-being. In clinical populations, Solomon et al. (2024) observed reductions in perceived stress among individuals undergoing mindfulness-based stress reduction programs. Similarly, Yuan and Hu (2025) found that mindfulness contributes to enhanced academic resilience among university students.

Although gratitude and mindfulness are often examined separately, emerging studies indicate they may operate interactively. Schultz (2019) proposed that mindfulness's link to well-being is partly mediated by gratitude and psychological flexibility. Voci et al. (2019) supported this, identifying gratitude and self-compassion as mechanisms connecting mindfulness to well-being outcomes.

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Individual differences also appear to shape combined effects. Marzabadi et al. (2021) reported that people high in both gratitude and mindfulness experience superior overall health outcomes. Similarly, Wang et al. (2025) identified gratitude as a mediating factor through which mindfulness exerts its influence on mental well-being in athletic populations. Overall, existing literature provides strong evidence that both these play significant roles in enhancing psychological well-being. While each construct independently contributes to positive mental health outcomes, their combined influence offers a more comprehensive understanding of well-being. However, limited research has systematically examined their joint predictive role within the Indian context, highlighting a critical gap that the present study seeks to address.

Need for the study

Previous researches had consistently demonstrated that both gratitude and mindfulness independently contribute to enhanced psychological well-being. Despite these advancements, several important gaps remain. *First*, most of the existing research is conducted in Western, European, or East Asian contexts, with comparatively fewer empirical investigations focusing specifically on Indian young adults. Given India's unique sociocultural environment—characterized by collectivistic values, spiritual traditions, academic pressures, and rapidly changing social dynamics—it cannot be assumed that findings from other cultural contexts directly generalize to this population. *Second*, although studies have examined gratitude and mindfulness separately, relatively fewer studies have systematically analyzed their *combined predictive power* on psychological well-being within a single integrated model. Many prior studies emphasize intervention outcomes rather than examining the comparative and joint contributions of dispositional gratitude and mindfulness as psychological traits. There remains limited clarity regarding which of these variables plays a stronger predictive role, and whether their interaction produces a synergistic effect on well-being. *Third*, while some mediation-based studies suggest complex interrelationships among mindfulness, gratitude, and well-being, there is insufficient research exploring the overall correlation among these three variables simultaneously, particularly within non-clinical young adult samples in India.

Therefore, this investigation seeks to address these gaps. By investigating their individual contributions, combined predictive effects, and overall interrelationships within a culturally relevant sample

Objectives

- Examine the relationship between gratefulness and psychological well-being in Indian young adults.
- Examine the relationship between present-moment awareness and psychological well-being in Indian young adults.
- Determine whether gratefulness predicts psychological well-being in Indian young adults.
- Determine whether present-moment awareness predicts psychological well-being in Indian young adults.

Hypotheses

- **H1:** Gratefulness and present-moment awareness will each be positively associated with psychological well-being in young adults.

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- **H2:** Gratefulness and present-moment awareness will be positively correlated with one another in young adults.
- **H3:** Gratefulness and present-moment awareness will predict psychological well-being in young adults.
- **H4:** The relative contributions of gratefulness and present-moment awareness in predicting psychological well-being will differ.

METHOD

A quantitative, cross-sectional correlational design was employed to assess associations among gratefulness, present-moment awareness, and psychological well-being at a single time point without experimental manipulation. Data were gathered via an online questionnaire (Google Forms). Participants provided informed consent that described the study purpose, confidentiality protections, and withdrawal rights. The survey collected demographic information followed by standardized instruments assessing gratefulness, present-moment awareness, and psychological well-being.

Sample

A convenience sample of Indian young adults aged 18–25 years was recruited. This age range represents a developmental phase marked by academic, occupational, and interpersonal transitions relevant to psychological well-being. The final statistics consisted of 123 participants who met the inclusion criteria. Participation was voluntary; non probability convenience sampling based on accessibility and voluntary willingness to participate.

Inclusion Criteria

1. Age between 18 and 25 years.
2. Participants should be Indian in nationality.
3. Participants should have sufficient English skills to understand and respond to the questionnaire.
4. Participants must have voluntarily agreed to participate.

Exclusion Criteria

1. Individuals below and above the mentioned age were excluded from the study.
2. Individuals with a current or previous history of psychological illness were not included in the sample.
3. Individuals who were unable to understand English.
4. Individuals who did not provide informed consent.
5. Individuals who submitted incomplete questionnaire responses were not included in the final sample.

Measures

1. **Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6):** Gratefulness was measured with the Gratitude Questionnaire–Six Item Form (GQ-6; McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2001). The GQ-6 contains six self-report items addressing intensity, frequency, and recognition of sources of good in life. Respondents used a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). Negatively worded items were reverse scored and summed; higher totals indicate stronger gratefulness disposition. The GQ-6 has demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha \approx .82$); Lashani et al. (2014) reported $\alpha = .71$ in a comparable sample.

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2. **Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS):** Present-moment awareness was assessed with the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS; Brown & Ryan, 2003), a 15-item self-report scale that captures everyday lapses versus mindful attention. Participants rated items on a Likert scale (details retained from original administration). (Continue measure description as needed.). Present -moment awareness items used a 6-point Likert scale from 1 (almost always) to 6 (almost never), with higher mean scores indicating greater dispositional present-moment awareness. The MAAS demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha \geq .82$) and four-week test-retest reliability (intraclass $r = .81$) across psychometric development studies (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Its convergent and discriminant validity are supported by associations with emotion regulation, well-being, and psychological distress measures. The scale takes roughly five minutes to complete and is extensively used in research on present-moment awareness and psychological well-being.
3. **Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB):** Psychological well-being was measured using Ryff's 18-item short form of the Scales of Psychological Well-Being (Ryff, 1989). Grounded in a eudaimonic framework, the measure assesses six core facets of positive psychological functioning: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. The brief form contains three items per domain for a total of 18 items. Participants rated items on a 6-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree; negatively worded items were reverse scored before computing subscale and total scores. The scale shows acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .79$) and has demonstrated convergent validity, with PWB scores positively associated with life satisfaction and positive affect and negatively associated with negative affect and health problems (Garcia et al., 2023).

RESULTS

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (N=123)

Variable	N	Mean	SD
1.Gratitude	123	32.00	5.72
2.Mindfulness	123	58.60	14.35
3.Psychological Well-Being	123	88.50	13.32

Table 2 Correlation Matrix of Study Variables (N=123)

Variable	1	2	3
1. Gratitude	—		
2. Mindfulness	.324***	—	
3. Psychological Well-Being	.474***	.500***	—

Note. Values represent Spearman's rho (ρ).

$p < .05^*$, $p < .01^{**}$, $p < .001^{***}$.

Table 3 Multiple Regression Predicting Psychological Well-Being from Gratitude and Mindfulness

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Intercept	46.176	6.307	—	7.32	< .001
Gratitude	0.585	0.184	0.251	3.19	.002
Mindfulness	0.403	0.073	0.434	5.51	< .001

Note. Models estimated using sample size of N=123

Model Summary: $R = .559$, $R^2 = .313$, $F(2, 120) = 27.30$, $p < .001$

DISCUSSIONS OF RESULTS

The present study examined associations among gratefulness, present-moment awareness, and psychological well-being, and assessed their predictive contributions to well-being among Indian young adults. Data were analyzed in Jamovi. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) summarized the data. Spearman correlation was used to examine relationships among variables. Despite minor departures from normality, regression analyses were performed because of the robustness of parametric tests with sample sizes over 100. Regression procedures evaluated predictive relations between variables. These analyses facilitated interpretation and addressed the study objectives.

Table 1 displays descriptive statistics and normality assessments. Participants showed moderate to high levels of gratefulness, present-moment awareness, and psychological well-being. While mindfulness satisfied the assumption of normality ($W = .981, p = .076$), gratitude ($W = .974, p = .017$) and psychological well-being ($W = .940, p < .001$) showed slight deviations. However, given the adequate sample size ($N = 123$), these deviations were considered acceptable due to the robustness of statistical analyses. The results support the role of positive psychological constructs in promoting mental health and align with the study's objectives and hypotheses.

As shown in Table 2, gratefulness correlated positively with psychological well-being ($\rho = .474, p < .001$), while mindfulness exhibited an even stronger positive association ($\rho = .500, p < .001$). In line with the first and second objectives, positive associations were observed between both predictors and psychological well-being, thereby supporting the first hypothesis (H1). *Thus, H1 is accepted.* Individuals who notice and value positive aspects of their lives reported higher well-being, consistent with prior research suggesting gratefulness fosters adaptive appraisals and greater life satisfaction (Emmons & McCullough, 2003), thereby enhancing emotional resilience and functioning.

A comparatively stronger association was observed between mindfulness and psychological well-being. This suggests that those more attentive to present-moment experiences and less judgmental in their awareness tend to demonstrate better emotional regulation and psychological flexibility. These processes reduce maladaptive reactivity and enhance overall functioning, thereby contributing to well-being. This aligns with literature emphasizing present-moment awareness in cultivating self-awareness and stress reduction (Kabat-Zinn, 2003), and supports its role as a robust predictor of well-being.

Table 2 also indicates a significant positive correlation between gratefulness and present-moment awareness ($\rho = .324, p < .001$), supporting H2. This suggests individuals higher in present-moment awareness are likelier to notice and appreciate positive experiences, fostering gratefulness—an interpretation consistent with research showing awareness processes enhance recognition of positive events (Brown & Ryan, 2003). This interconnectedness highlights complementarity between the constructs.

Regression analysis further addressed the fourth objective. The model was significant, $F(2, 120) = 27.30, p < .001$, explaining 31.3% of variance in psychological well-being ($R^2 = .313$). Both gratefulness ($\beta = .251, p = .002$) and present-moment awareness ($\beta = .434, p < .001$) were significant positive predictors, supporting H3. Together they accounted for a substantial portion of variance (31.3%), indicating combined importance for mental health

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outcomes. Although both variables contributed meaningfully, their standardized effects differed.

This pattern aligns with prior work (e.g., Howell, Digdon, Buro, & Sheptycki, 2008) showing present-moment awareness significantly predicts psychological well-being and interacts with positive cognitive traits like gratefulness to improve mental health.

Specifically, the findings supported the fourth hypothesis (H4), as one predictor demonstrated a stronger standardized effect compared to the other. *Thus, H4 is partially accepted*, as both variables significantly contributed, but one showed a stronger predictive influence. This suggests that processes related to attention regulation and emotional control may have a more immediate and direct impact on psychological well-being. This interpretation is consistent with prior research emphasizing the role of mindfulness in influencing core psychological mechanisms underlying well-being (Shapiro et al., 2006). At the same time, appreciation-based processes continue to play an important role by shaping positive cognitive and emotional orientations.

From a methodological standpoint, slight deviations from normality were observed, particularly in psychological well-being scores. However, the use of both parametric and non-parametric analyses ensured the robustness of the findings. This approach enhances the credibility of the results and minimizes potential statistical bias.

Overall, the findings fit within positive psychology, that emphasize strengths and positive experiences for mental health (Seligman, 2011). While one construct appears to contribute through fostering a positive outlook on life experiences, the other operates through enhancing awareness and emotional regulation. Together, they function in a complementary manner, promoting improved psychological functioning.

Applications

Interventions aimed at enhancing psychological well-being among young adults can benefit from incorporating both gratitude-based and present moment awareness -based practices. For example, gratitude journaling and reflective exercises may help individuals develop a more positive outlook, while present moment awareness practices such as meditation and breathing techniques can improve attentional control and emotional regulation.

Given the stronger predictive role of mindfulness observed in this study, interventions that focus on developing present-moment awareness may be particularly effective. At the same time, integrating gratitude practices can further strengthen emotional resilience and interpersonal functioning. These approaches can be implemented in educational institutions, counseling settings, and community-based programs as cost-effective strategies to promote well-being.

Limitations

Limitations include reliance on self-report measures, which may introduce response biases such as social desirability; the cross-sectional design, which precludes causal inference; and convenience sampling, which limits generalizability. These constraints warrant cautious interpretation.

Future directions

Future research should employ longitudinal and experimental designs to clarify directionality and causal mechanisms among gratefulness, present-moment awareness, and psychological well-being. Broader, more diverse samples across cultures and socioeconomic statuses would improve generalizability. Investigating mediators and moderators would deepen understanding of how these constructs interact to influence well-being.

Societal impact

Findings have societal relevance given rising mental health concerns among Indian young adults. By underscoring the roles of gratefulness and present-moment awareness, the study supports integrating these constructs into educational, clinical, and community interventions. Mindfulness training and gratefulness practices can be embedded in curricula, workplace wellness programs, and counseling to enhance resilience and preventive mental health care; these low-cost, evidence-based strategies can reduce distress, bolster coping, and improve societal well-being.

Overall, the present findings are consistent with both classical and contemporary research, reinforcing the robustness of the observed relationships. The alignment with prior studies enhances the external validity of the results and supports the integration of gratitude and present moment awareness -based interventions in psychological practice.

In sum, this study highlights the significant roles of gratefulness and present moment-based awareness in enhancing psychological well-being among Indian young adults. Both constructs were found to be positively associated with well-being and to significantly predict it, with mindfulness emerging as the stronger contributor. The findings underscore the importance of incorporating positive psychological strengths into mental health research and practice. By focusing on both awareness and appreciation processes, interventions can be designed to promote holistic well-being and support individuals in achieving optimal psychological functioning.

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Conflict of Interest

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