



Correlates of Gratitude among Young Adult Females

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ABSTRACT

Sorry, thank you and helping others are some of the virtues that children learn from their immediate caregivers at an early stage of socialization. A simple thank you after receiving an act of kindness is understood as a token of gratitude, which in turn brings happiness to both the recipient and the benefactor and encourages them to continue the cycle of sharing, donating and volunteering i.e., Pro-Social Behavior and providing selfless help, which is Altruism. At some point in life, we as individuals might have been hurt physically, mentally, or emotionally by someone close or even a stranger intentionally or unintentionally. Gratitude and Forgiveness are opposite sides of the same coin. The former being the acknowledgement of positive actions received by an individual for their benefit, whereas the latter being the positive reaction towards someone who might have caused some form of harm. The purpose is to study the relationship of Gratitude with Happiness, Forgiveness, Pro-Social Behavior and Altruism among young adult females of 18 - 25 years, (N = 49). Standardized tools were administered to the sample population to assess gratitude, happiness, forgiveness, pro-social behavior and altruism. The results showed a significant positive correlation of Gratitude with Forgiveness, Altruism and Pro-Social behavior. Incorporating gratefulness into our daily schedule increases acts of kindness towards individuals in our vicinity.

Keywords: Gratitude, Happiness, Pro-Social Behavior, Forgiveness, Altruism

Introduction

"The more grateful I am, the more beauty I see." Mary Davis

Gratitude is related to positive well-being and positive emotions in adults. Most religious approaches have emphasized the importance of gratitude in the life of a human being. Thank you, is a small word with the power to change the course of an individual's day. Offering a thank you for the seat in public transport, helping the elderly with groceries makes the person believe in humanity and motivates the person to continue with good deeds.

After being surrounded by struggles during recent times, the appreciation of the little things in life has kept us going one day at a time. Simple joys such as watching a movie, going on a long drive, having a meaningful conversation with family or the privilege to connect with our friends are all thanks to advances in technology. Not only in everyday life, but a study found that incorporating organization-based gratitude interventions in the workplace can contribute towards the growth in job satisfaction as well. (Waters, 2012).

Forgiveness is the most complex task for an individual when they have been offended. Forgiving someone requires an exceptional amount of strength and speaks about the character of a person. It is natural to pardon when the other person says sorry, whereas it is challenging when the opposite party is not conscious of the harm they have caused.

Happiness is a subjective term that has a wide range of interpretations. Happiness is a positive feeling towards a situation, moment, memory, or person. In adulthood, pleasant memories associated with a lullaby may bring happiness. It is common if a person is not happy 24 hours a day. A happy person may also experience feelings of sadness, anger, frustration among other emotions. According to a study, gratitude plays an essential role in the happiness of college students, whereas forgiveness did not contribute to the happiness of undergraduate students (Safaria, 2014).

In simple terms, Altruism is when a person behaves in the welfare of the individual(s) without the goal of gaining recognition or applause. It is the inherent purpose that motivates a person to act altruistically. An anonymous donation is an ideal example of this. The expectation of reciprocal altruism and gratitude is higher between adult friends as compared to adult siblings. Adult's siblings share emotional gratitude in contrast to friends. An individual may be close to both friend and a sibling and be grateful; reciprocity is an expectation in both relationships. (Rotkirch, Lyons, David-Barrett & Jokela, 2014)

Pro-Social behavior is a pattern in the behavior of an individual to help people in their community. It is sharing, donating out of the free will. For example: helping an elderly person cross the road or assisting a neighbor with groceries.

A research study designed by Koay et al., (2020) investigated social media-based gratitude interventions. Analysis of pre-intervention and post-intervention data presented an increase in levels of gratitude than the control group. No striking differences were observed in levels of stress and life satisfaction after the interventions.

Gratitude

"Gratitude is associated with a personal benefit that was not intentionally sought after, deserved, or earned but rather because of the good intentions of another person" (Emmons & McCullough, 2004). Emmons and McCullough (2003) investigated the effect of gratitude on the overall well-being of a person. Analysis of the data across 3 studies led to the interpretation that gratitude-outlook groups were higher on well-being as compared to their contemporaries. A qualitative study was conducted by Gottlieb & Froh (2019) on Gratitude and Happiness in Adolescents led to the conclusion that an effort to gain an understanding of the development of gratitude in adolescents can lead to an increase in well-being and happiness in adolescents.

Researchers found a significant positive relationship among forgiveness, gratitude and resilience in the youth from India. There were no differences in gender and culture that could be established among the variables of the study. (Kumar & Dixit, 2014)

Homan & Tylka (2018) investigated the gratitude model of body appreciation in women. Gratitude was said to have a significant impact on body appreciation and intuitive eating. Further, it was noted that a relationship with gratitude led to a decrease in self-worth based on appearance and comparison in eating.

Happiness

Lyubomirsky (2007) in her book *The How of Happiness* defined happiness as "the experience of joy, contentment, or positive well-being, combined with a sense that one's life is good, meaningful, and worthwhile."

A study designed by Nguyen & Gordon (2019) aimed to understand the relationship between Gratitude and Happiness in young children. Gathered evidence reported that domain-specific gratitude implied a higher level of happiness in children as compared to general gratitude. Thus, establishing a relationship between gratitude and happiness in young children.

Psychological well-being, personality and gratitude were crucial determinants for the prediction of happiness in young adults in the age range of 18 - 23 years (Singh, Salve & Sehgal, 2017)

Significant changes were noted in regional brain activity in the limbic system due to transient sadness and happiness in a sample of female volunteers. Activation of bilateral limbic and paralimbic structures, brainstem, thalamus and caudate/putamen was noticed during transient sadness. Whereas, transient happiness displayed a decrease in the regional cerebral blood flow (rCBF). Transient sadness and happiness impact separate regions of the brain in a varied manner and cannot be noted as contrasting activities in the parallel regions of the brain. (George et. al., 1995)

Forgiveness

Enright, Freedman & Rique (1998) defined forgiveness as one's "willingness to abandon one's right to resentment, negative judgment and indifferent behavior toward one who unjustly hurt us, while fostering the undeserved qualities of compassion, generosity, and even love toward him or her".

Through examination of separate corresponding literature on Gratitude and Forgiveness, the drawn inference was that the prior mentioned processes played a significant role in the development and nurturance of interpersonal relationships (Fincham & Beach, 2013).

A correlational study conducted by Sharma (2021) suggested religiosity had no significant relationship with gratitude and forgiveness as well as there was no significant correlation between gratitude and forgiveness.

In an examination of gratitude and forgiveness concerning subjective well-being among young adults (18 - 24 years) in Pakistan. It was implied that gratitude was not a significant predictor of subjective well-being, whereas, forgiveness was observed to be an anticipator of subjective well-being (Hermaen & Bhutto, 2020).

Altruism

Altruism refers to any behavior that is designed to increase another person's welfare, and particularly those actions that do not seem to provide a direct reward to the person who performs them (Batson, Ahmad & Stocks, 2011; Dovidio, Piliavin, Schroeder & Penner, 2006; Penner, Dovidio, Piliavin & Schroeder, 2005).

According to evolutionary theories, gratitude plays a significant role in the altruistic behavior of both the donor and the receiver. Gratitude encourages the benefactor for generosity and the beneficiary may further extend help towards an unknown third party (McCullough, Kimeldorf & Cohen, 2008)

Research by Andreoni & Vesterlund (2001) revealed that females are most likely to demonstrate altruism it is expensive as compared to males who were found to display altruism when it was cheap. They concluded that males can either be selfish or selfless, instead, females are more likely to be "equalitarians" that is to share equivalently.

Pro-Social Behavior

Prosocial behavior refers to "voluntary actions that are intended to help or benefit another individual or group of individuals" (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989). Higher levels of gratitude were expressed by individuals who received goodwill and these individuals helped others as compared to individuals who received help accidentally (Tsang, 2006)

Thank you, a simple word that holds power. Showing gratitude towards the helpers helps them gain confirmation into their valuable efforts as compared to when individuals are not aware of the benefits their efforts have caused. Individuals feel socially valued when they receive gratitude for their pro-social behavior (Grant & Gino, 2010)

A study by Abdullahi & Kumar (2016) analyzed the distinctiveness in Pro-Social behavior concerning gender. Results revealed that females were higher on dimensions that relate to understanding the psychological well-being of individuals and morals in the community. Further, no significant differences were found on the several other dimensions of pro-social behavior such as understanding of social responsibility, empathy towards other, personal distress, self-report altruism.

Purpose

The purpose is to study the relationship of Gratitude with happiness, Forgiveness, Pro-Social Behavior and Altruism among young adult females.

Hypothesis

Gratitude will be positively correlated with Happiness, Forgiveness, Pro-Social behavior, and Altruism among females.

Method

Sample

Data of 49 females from the age groups of (18-25 years) was collected from Tricity (Chandigarh-Panchkula-Mohali).

Measures

Standardized tools used for the present research study were as follows:

1. **Subjective Happiness Scale:** Also known as the General Happiness Scale was developed by Lyubomirsky and Lepper in 1999. This scale consists of 4 items on a 7- point Likert scale. The 1st item ranged from (1= not a very happy person) to (7= very happy person); 2nd item ranged from (1= less happy) to (7= more happy) and the final two items ranged from (1= not at all) to (7= a great deal).
2. **The Gratitude Questionnaire- Six item form (GQ-6):** McCullough, Emmons & Tsang developed this 6 item questionnaire in the year 2002. The scale is on a 7-point scale, with anchors (strongly disagree, disagree, slightly disagree, slightly agree, agree and strongly agree).
3. **Bolton Forgiveness Scale (BFS):** Amanze and Carson (2019) developed this 15 item scale on a 6-point Likert scale. The 6 points ranged from 1- always false of me, 2- almost always false of me, 3-sometimes false of me, 4- sometimes true of me, 5-almost always true of me and 6- always true of me. This scale was divided into 3 subscales: a) BFS-coming to terms and letting go subscale (BFS-ctlg) (items 1,3,6,9,11,13 and 15), b) BFS- developing positive feeling subscale (BFS-dpf) (items 2,4,7,10 and 14) and c) BFS-giving benefit of doubt subscale (BFS-gbd) (items 5,8 and 12).
4. **Pro Socialness Scale for Adults (PSA):** Developed by Capara et al., (2005) consists of 16 items. The 5-point Likert scale was coded as (0- never/ almost never true, 1- occasionally true, 3-sometimes true, 4- often true & 5- almost always/always true).
5. **9-item SRA scale of Self Report Altruism:** This simplified version of self-report altruism was developed by Manzur & Olavarrieta (2021). This questionnaire consists of 9 items as compared to 20 items in its original version, on a 5-point Likert scale. The Likert scale was coded as 1-never, 2- rarely, 3- sometimes, 4- frequently and 5 -always.

Procedure

Administration of the above-mentioned standardized tools was undertaken on the sample with the assistance of Google forms. Participation in the study was voluntary on the part of the sample. For everyone, it was established that the data will stay confidential and will strictly be used for research purposes.

Analysis of Data

Results

Table 1: Shows N, Mean and Standard Deviation

	Gratitude	Happiness	Forgiveness (BFS)	BFS (coming to terms and letting go)	BFS (Developing positive feelings)	BFS (Giving benefit of doubt)	Altruism	Pro- socialness
N	49	49	49	49	49	49	49	49
Mean	5.77	17.6	62.8	32.2	19.3	11.6	27.5	4.23
Standard deviation	1.01	3.04	11.3	5.77	4.35	2.92	5.94	0.671

Table 2: Shows correlation for all the variables

	Happines s	Forgiven ess (BFS)	BFS (coming to terms and letting go)	BFS (Developin g positive feelings)	BFS (Giving benefit of doubt)	Altruis m	Pro- socialness	Gratitud e
Happiness	—							
Forgiveness (BFS)	0.227	—						
BFS (coming to terms and letting go)	0.271	** 0.871 *	—					
BFS (Developing positive feelings)	0.071	** 0.873 *	** 0.603 *	—				
BFS (Giving benefit of doubt)	0.253	** 0.806 *	** 0.572 *	0.682 ***	—			
Altruism	0.050	* 0.291	0.248	0.323 *	0.315 *	—		
Pro- socialness	0.096	0.075	0.112	0.114	-0.037	0.50 *** 3	—	
Gratitude	0.145	** 0.379	** 0.440	0.254	0.186	0.30 * 3	0.31 * 6	—

Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Discussion of Results

The results showed a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.303, p < .05$) between Gratitude and Altruism, with Pro-socialness ($r = 0.316, p < .05$). Results also showed a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.379, p < .01$) between Gratitude and Forgiveness. In addition, a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.440, p < .01$) was found between gratitude and the dimension of forgiveness; coming to terms and letting go. However, we found no significant correlation of Gratitude with Happiness.

The hypothesis stated that females will have a significant positive correlation of gratitude with forgiveness, happiness, altruism, and pro-social behavior. Results have led to the conclusion that gratitude has a significant positive correlation with forgiveness, altruism, and pro-social behavior. However, results showed no significant positive correlation between gratitude and happiness.

Further, a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.503, p < .001$) was noticed between pro-socialness and altruism. Altruism and Forgiveness also shared a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.291, p < .05$). A significant positive correlation ($r = 0.323, p < .05$) between altruism and the dimension of forgiveness (developing positive feelings). Altruism also showed a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.315, p < .05$) with the dimension, giving the benefit of doubt of the forgiveness scale.

In addition, Forgiveness had a significant positive correlation with dimensions; coming to terms and letting go ($r = 0.871, p < .001$), developing positive feelings ($r = 0.873, p < .001$) and giving benefit of doubt ($r = 0.806, p < .001$).

Forgiveness mediates the relationship between gratitude and rumination (constantly thinking about the same thing). Statistics indicated that individuals higher on gratitude were also highly forgiving, which in turn led to a decrease in rumination. Forgiving other and self also established a relationship between forgiveness and rumination (Çolak & Güngör, 2020)

An association between self-reports of gratitude and altruism in young adult female participants was established with “neural pure altruism” in the ventromedial prefrontal cortex (VMPFC) and nucleus accumbens. Results showed an increase in neural pre altruism response in VMPFC due to gratitude journaling (Karns, Moore & Mayr, 2017)

Conclusion

Gratitude shares a distinctive relationship with happiness, forgiveness, altruism and pro-social behavior. The study hypothesized that there will be a significant positive correlation of gratitude with happiness, forgiveness, altruism, and pro-social behavior in young adult females categorized under the age group 18 – 25 years. Results have shown with higher levels of gratitude there will be an increase in forgiveness, altruism, and pro-social behavior as the analysis of previous studies have stated. The study could not establish a significant positive correlation between gratitude and happiness which was acknowledged by reviewing the literature.

Additionally, individuals who tend to practise gratitude in their life display characteristics of altruistic behavior, pro-social behavior, and forgiveness. Results have shown that grateful females are inclined to accept the hurt others might have caused and are most likely to let it go by forgiving. Females who have a proclivity for forgiveness are also more likely to accept the pain they have endured, develop favourable thoughts toward the perpetrator of the wrongdoing, and give the other person the benefit of the doubt. However, a significant positive correlation between gratitude and happiness, which was previously observed in the review of the literature, could not be demonstrated. Furthermore, differences in gender in respect to these variables can be used to create comparison research.

Struggles during the past year have been strenuous on the overall health of individuals and society. There are examples of cohorts who have risen to the occasion to help their community regardless of the differences. Frontline workers have tirelessly provided support. A word of encouragement or gratitude may boost their morale and assist them in giving their best. As individuals, we have witnessed turmoil either in our personal life or in the lives of our loved ones. Sometimes it can be difficult to look past the despair.

Making gratitude a part of our normal routine could be beneficial to us as individuals as well as the society we are a part of. Journaling the minute things that we are thankful for every day could help us look through the hopelessness and motivate us to thank other people for the role they play in our lives. Gratitude can be embraced at our home, our workplace, for our friends or even a neighbor, towards a vendor.

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