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Predicting Stress: The Role of Romantic Relationship Satisfaction, Gratitude, Forgiveness, Emotional Intelligence

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A B S T R A C T

Stress is an inevitable part of a human's life. The study focused on role of romantic relationship satisfaction, gratitude, forgiveness and emotional intelligence on perceived stress by using people between the age of 18 to 30 years who were in a romantic relationship. The sample consisted to 201 individuals. To measure stress; perceived stress scale by Cohen (1988) was used. To measure romantic relationship satisfaction; relationship assessment scale by Hendrick SS (1988) was used. GQ-6 scale by McCullough et. al (2002) was used to measure gratitude. To measure forgiveness Heartland Forgiveness Scale by Thompson & Synder (2003) was used. TEIQUE-SF scale was used to measure trait emotional intelligence. Correlation and regression analysis were done to predict the effect of romantic relationship satisfaction, gratitude, forgiveness and emotional intelligence on perceived stress. It was found that there was significant negative relationship of relationship satisfaction, forgiveness and emotional intelligence on perceived stress.

Keywords: Perceived Stress, Romantic Relationship Satisfaction, Gratitude, Forgiveness, Emotional Intelligence, Stress

1. Introduction

1.1 Perceived Stress

Humans undergo a variety of emotions and feelings. Out of all of these, stress is one such emotion that a person from all walks of life experiences. No matter what age the person is, what occupation is he into and if he is single or has a better half, no person can escape from stress. It affects a person's mental and physical heath. Though, the level of stress is subjective as one person can have more stress than the other one, also a lot of factors such as personality, coping mechanisms etc affect how much stressful a person would be in adverse conditions. Studies have shown that people experience various physical, mental and social factors and that impacts their perception of stress. As these factors increase, so does their level of stress (Gonmei & Devendiran, 2017). It was also found that, when respondents face stress from family, academic, peer and social factors, they experience stress in physical/mental factor as well (Gonmei & Devendiran, 2017). A study done on 406 high school students found that, neuroticism was the strongest determiner of perceived stress and personality traits such as low self-efficacy, low self-esteem, high extraversion and high psychoticism also determined perceived stress. (Piekarska, J., 2020). People from different domains may have different factors contributing to stress. A study was done on dental students to see what factors contribute to stress, it was found that main source of stress was fear of facing parents after a failure and fear of failing a course (Acharya, S., 2003). Perceived stress is said to play a role in development of depression too. A study (Flores, E. Et. al, 2008) also saw the gender difference for impact of stress on depression and it found that, impact of perceived stress on depression was greater for women than it was for men. It also concluded that higher perceived stress was significantly related to increased depression and worse general health.

1.2 Romantic Relationship Satisfaction

Love is a powerful emotion that tends to bring a lot of positive changes and contribute towards pleasant feeling. It is a subjective emotion that can be confused with words such as attachment, care, sexual attraction, loyalty etc. but, all these are terms that come under the umbrella i.e., Love. The satisfaction that partners get out of their relationship plays a very important role in the psychological functioning of both the partners. Just the feeling of being unloved and not liked is sufficient to cause distress to a person. It has been found that attachment styles influence numerous aspects of adult relationship quality, including satisfaction, trust, interdependence, commitment, intimacy, self-disclosure, and others (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Individual's attachment style is said to be linked to relationship satisfaction. There are also some differences based on gender as Simpson (1990) showed that in dating couples, relationship satisfaction correlated positively with secure attachment and negatively with avoidant attachment for men and women, but anxious/ambivalent attachment was linked to low satisfaction for women only. Though usually love brings lots of positive emotions and feelings such as security, intimacy, care etc but, it does not always give all pleasant feelings, it can also have emotions such as jealousy, insecurity and stress attached to it. Morales, et al. (2009) did a study to find the effect of social networks in the corporate world and found that too much love can also have negative effects on firms. Also, there was an association of satisfaction with self-disclosure and partner's perceived disclosure, perceived partner perspective taking

is found to be correlated with relationship satisfaction while avoidant tactics were seen to be negatively correlated to satisfaction (Meeks, Hendrick & Hendrick,1998**).**

1.3 Gratitude

Gratitude is a complex emotion that arises within the transactional dynamics of human relationships (Hlava, Elfers, & Offringa, 2014). The experience of gratitude is subjective and varied on person to person. Gratitude is an empathetic emotion that involves voluntary and free action. Some people believe that gratitude it a social etiquette that people follow while some opine that it is related to moral and values of a person (Fletcher, 1995) yet all agree that it involves recognition of benefit or kindness exchanged towards the beneficiary. Researchers after doing a lot of research on the topic have come to a conclusion that gratitude involves three basic elements that are, a benefactor, a benefit and a beneficiary (Roberts, 2004). Some also believe that acts of gratitude are done in order to set free from feelings of guilt, indebtedness, worthlessness and obligation. Other reasons for being grateful towards a person can simply be to increase the feelings of affiliation or make affiliative connections. Gratitude can be predicted by variety of factors. Two factors predicting gratitude have been identified by Algoe, Haidt, and Gable (2008) they found that feeling that benefactor was being sensitive to the receiver's wishes and needs and the level of enjoyment were two powerful predictors of gratitude. Gratitude and resilience are said to work as a protective mechanism by playing a role in promoting positive outcomes after a trauma, by decreasing post-traumatic stress and increasing posttraumatic growth (Vieselmeye, Holguin & Mezulis, 2017).

1.4 Forgiveness

Forgiveness has been the subject of interest for a lot of researchers in the past. Forgiveness is understood as an opening door for another person to begin again, and if absent builds a lot of resentment in a person that may develop into anger and hostility in future (Tutu, 1998). Forgiving a person has been valued and seen as morally good and considered indicative of merciful character (North, 1987). Some researchers believe forgiveness to be intrinsic and believe that the tendency to forgive others to be similar to tendency to take revenge when harmed (McCullough & Witvliet, 2002). The process of forgiveness includes series of steps starting from hurt, anger, information seeking and then finally last step that is resolution (Rosenak & Harnden, 1992). Though a lot of theories about forgiveness exist in literature, one theory proposes that forgiveness includes a process that involves set of three stages that are similar to those of recovery from trauma, the stages being; an impact of an event that follows a search of meaning that further leads to recovery (Gordon & Baucom, 1998). A lot of factors have been found to play a role in forgiveness. A study done by Lawler-Row, Younger, Piferi & Jones (2006) found the role of attachment style in forgiveness. It was found that securely attached individuals were not only more forgiving, but also expressed more positive emotions. Some researchers have also emphasized on role of personality factors in likelihood of bring forgiving towards others and seeing them as valuable and care worthy (McCullough & Witvliet, 2002). Similarly, a study done in 2008 revealed that personality traits such as narcissism, rigidity hinder the forgiveness process while, traits such as maturity, victim's empathy foster forgiveness (Glaeser, 2008). Various findings lay importance to different factors that affect forgiveness. A study was done on adults between the ages of 18 to 90 years found age to be the most crucial determiner of forgiveness (Mulle, Houdbine, Laumonier & Girard, 1998). Also, studies in literature believe that a person's understanding of forgiveness develops with age, as age progresses, so does their understanding of forgiveness (Enright, Santos & Al-Mabuk, 1989).

1.5 Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is an interest area of a lot of researchers. The concept of emotional intelligence was introduced by Salovey & Mayer, (1990). A human undergoes a series of mixed emotions such as fear, happiness, anger, love, jealously, disgust etc., some of these are positive while some are negative emotions. Emotions particularly arise due to a person's changing relationships. A change in relationship with friends, family, work would lead to a change in emotions of a person as well (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 1999). Emotional intelligence refers to an ability to recognize the meaning of emotions and their relationships and to reason problem solving in the basis of it (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 1999). It has been seen that an increase in emotional intelligence is said to decrease alexithymia (Parker, et. al., 2001). Emotional intelligence is also found to have strong correlations with life satisfaction and work life satisfaction (Landa. et. al., 2006). Mayer & Salovey (1997) identified the four-branch model of emotional intelligence, the four branches being; perceiving emotions, using them to facilitate thought, understanding them and lastly, managing emotions. Perceiving emotions basically involves nonverbal expression of emotions, and is considered as an important starting point for understanding emotions. Using emotions to facilitate thought is the phase where emotions enter into cognition and promote thinking then understanding of emotions take place, for example, happiness is accompanied by wish to join others, anger is related to giving harm a person etc. Then, the final step of managing the emotions take place where an individual decides on giving importance to emotions valuable and just and ignoring the once that are overwhelming (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

2. Purpose

To study the impact of romantic relationship satisfaction, gratitude, forgiveness and emotional intelligence on stress.

2.1 Hypotheses

1. Romantic relationship satisfaction will be negatively related to stress

2. Gratitude will be negatively related to stress

3. Forgiveness will be negatively related to stress

4. Emotional intelligence will be negatively related to stress

3. Method

3.1 Measures

Students were presented with a personal information schedule (age, gender, contact number, email, medium of instruction) and questionnaires measuring perceived stress, romantic relationship satisfaction, gratitude, forgiveness and emotional intelligence.

Perceived Stress Scale. The ten-item scale by Cohen (1988) is used to measure an individual's perception of stress. The subject has to respond on a scale of 0-4 about how strong he has felt about the same in past one month for each question, where 0 means never and 4 is very often. Possible scores in this instrument range from 0 to 40 where higher score indicates higher perceived stress.

Relationship Assessment Scale. The seven-item relationship satisfaction scale by Hendrick, S. S. (1988) was used to measure romantic relationship satisfaction. It had 5 positively scored and 2 negatively scored items. Possible scores range from 7 to 35 with higher scores indicating higher relationship satisfaction.

GQ-6. It is a six item self-report questionnaire to measure individual differences in proneness to gratitude in daily life. It was developed by McCullough et. al. (2002). Gratitude score is found by adding the score from all items and then taking out an average. It can range from 1 to 7.

Heartland Forgiveness Scale. It is an eighteen-item scale developed by Thompson, L. Y., & Synder, C. R. (2003) that is used to measure trait forgiveness. The scale has three sub scales that measure Forgiveness of self, forgiveness of others and forgiveness of situations, adding these all gives a total forgiveness score. Total forgiveness score in the scale can range from 18 to 126.

TEIQue-SFm. It is a thirty-item scale by Petrides (2009). It was used to measure Emotional Intelligence. It is the shorter version of the original scale that has 153 items. Possible scores in shorter versions range from 30 to 350.

3.2 Sample and Statistical power

A sample of 201 college going students who were in a romantic relationship of age group ranging from 18-25 years participated in the study, out of which, fifty-five percent (N=111) were females and forty five percent (N=90) were males.

3.3 Procedure

These measures were presented to participants in the form of a booklet with a brief general introduction about the research, a consent form and instructions. College going students of age group 18-25 years who were in a romantic relationship were contacted and booklets were given to them. They were made to sit comfortably. They were given the booklet which included all the scales and two additional questions such as, 'Contributors of relationship satisfaction and reasons of their past breakups if any'. Half hour was given to fill it and then it was collected back.

3.4 Analysis

The model predicting romantic relationship satisfaction, gratitude, forgiveness and emotional intelligence was analyzed using stepwise regression (SPSS Statistics 20) based on a theoretical framework where variables were entered in increasing order of importance. Descriptive statistics of measures are reported in Table 1. While, contributors of relationship satisfaction are reported in Table 2. Tale no.3 depicts reasons of past breakups as listed by participants. Furthermore, Table 4 shows the correlation between romantic relationship satisfaction, gratitude, forgiveness, emotional intelligence and perceived stress. Table 5 shows stepwise regression.

4. Results

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of Stress, Romantic relationship satisfaction, Gratitude, Forgiveness and Emotional intelligence

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Stress	20.75	7.765	201
Relationship Satisfaction	28.89	5.435	201
Gratitude	5.25	1.082	201
Forgiveness	81.16	14.528	201
Emotional Intelligence	134.85	20.752	201

Table 2. Contributors of relationship satisfaction

Contributor	Frequency of people agreeing	Percentage
Communication	41	13.66
Trust	66	22
Understanding	63	21
Respect	16	5
Love	16	5
Time	10	3
Care	17	5
Sex	10	3
Loyalty	31	10
Forgiveness	2	0.6
Commitment	14	4.6
Transparency	14	4.6
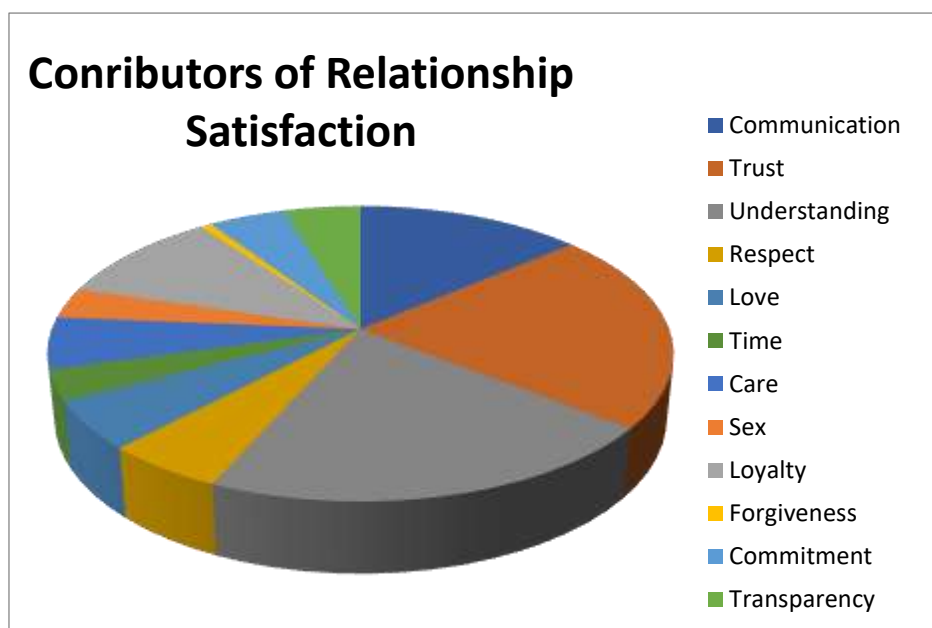
Table 3. Reasons for past breakups

Reason	No. of people agreeing	Percentage
Lack of communication	25	12.43
Infidelity	29	14.43
Distance	16	7.96
Insecurity	24	11.94
Toxic	10	4.97
Commitment	20	9.95
Compatibility	35	17.41
Time	13	6.47
Family	13	6.47
Immaturity	16	7.96

Reasons for past breakups

- Lack of communication
- Infidelity
- Distance
- Insecurity
- Toxic
- Commitment
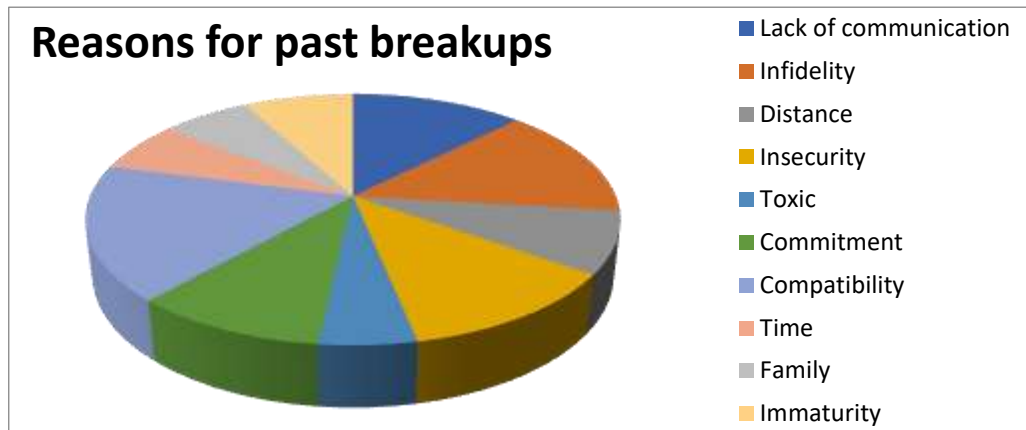- Compatibility
- Time
- Family
- Immaturity

Table 4. Correlation between Perceived stress, Relationship satisfaction, Gratitude, Forgiveness and Emotional intelligence

Variables	Perceived Stress	Romantic Relationship Satisfaction	Gratitude	Forgiveness	Emotional Intelligence
Perceived Stress	1				
Romantic Relationship Satisfaction	-.297**	1			
Gratitude	-.212**	.107	1		
Forgiveness	-.424**	.121	.182	1	
Emotional Intelligence	-.279**	.147	.204	.263	1

p<0.01**, p<0.05*

Table No. 5 Stepwise Regression Analyses of Romantic Relationship Satisfaction, Forgiveness, Gratitude, Emotional Intelligence and Stress

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Adjusted R^2	F
	B	Std. Error	Beta				
1 (Constant)	33.007	2.842		11.614	.000		
Romantic Relationship Satisfaction	-.424	.097	-.297	-4.390	.000	.084	19.268
2 (Constant)	48.117	3.535		13.611	.000		
Romantic Relationship Satisfaction	-.357	.089	-.250	-4.003	.000		
Forgiveness	-.210	.033	-.393	-6.308	.000	.233	39.792
3 (Constant)	51.272	3.892		13.174	.000		
Romantic Relationship Satisfaction	-.342	.089	-.239	-3.849	.000		
Forgiveness	-.199	.034	-.373	-5.931	.000		
Gratitude	-.849	.451	-.118	-1.882	.061	.243	6.756
4 (Constant)	55.458	4.339		12.782	.000		
Romantic Relationship Satisfaction	-.322	.089	-.225	-3.633	.000		
Forgiveness	-.183	.034	-.343	-5.356	.000		
Gratitude	-.700	.452	-.098	-1.547	.124		
Emotional Intelligence	-.051	.024	-.136	-2.110	.036		
						.256	6.698

a.   Dependent Variable: Perceived Stress

b.   Predictors in the model: (Constant), Forgiveness

c.   Predictors in the model: (Constant), Forgiveness, Relationship satisfaction

d.   Predictors in the model: (Constant), Forgiveness, Relationship satisfaction, Emotional intelligence

5. Discussion

The study focused on role of relationship satisfaction, gratitude, forgiveness and emotional intelligence in predicting stress. Most of the studies in literature focused on other factors such as attachment styles, coping mechanisms etc, but in this study, we tried to evaluate the effects of relationship satisfaction, gratitude, forgiveness and emotional intelligence on stress.

Hypothesis 1 stated that relationship satisfaction will have a negative relationship with stress. Our results revealed that increase in relationship satisfaction would lead to decrease in stress thus, this hypothesis was accepted. There are findings parallel to our findings in literature. One such study was done by Røsand, et. al, 2012 on 62,956 couples to assess contribution of risk factors for emotional distress among men and women. It was found that relationship dissatisfaction was the strongest predictor for both men and women that lead to increase in emotional distress and stress as a whole (Røsand, et. al, 2012). One study was done to see association between stress related psychiatric disorders and marital satisfaction and it concluded that relationship dissatisfaction leads to development of stress related disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder and depressive disorder in women and dysthemia in males (Whisman, 1999). Another study that supported our findings was done in 2011, it found that pregnant ladies who had dissatisfied relationship had to undergo more stress. Thus, having a satisfied relationship with partner can lead to tolerating some amount of stress (Røsand, et. al, 2011). One meta-analysis using evidence from 64 articles revealed that hostile marital conflicts lead to unsatisfied relationships was linked with relevant elevation of cortical levels that is a result of increasing stress (Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001).

Hypothesis 3 states that forgiveness will have a negative relationship with stress. Our results supported this. Thus, it was accepted, this means that increase in forgiveness would lead to decrease in stress. There are researches in literature that have found similar results to ours. A study was done on 61 chronic lower back pain patients to see relationship between forgiveness to pain, anger and psychological well-being and it was found that patients with a high forgiveness score had less anger, pain and psychological distress such as stress (Carson, et. al., 2005). A longitudinal study was done on 182 women to see if forgiveness at time 1 was able to predict psychological distress at time 2, it was found that an increased forgiveness led to a decrease in psychological distress at both time 1 and at time 2 (Orcutt, 2006). A study was done on 259 adults to see impact of increased forgiveness on health-related psychosocial variables like stress, anger, and it found after getting forgiveness-based training program, there was significant impact of forgiveness on perceived stress (Harris, et. al., 2006). Lundahl, et. al. (2008) in their meta-analysis of past fourteen papers also found that after taking the forgiveness training, people were more forgiving and showed less negative effect like perceived stress. In a recent study done on 403 undergraduate students of the Midwest, it was found that there increase in self-forgiveness leads to decrease in perceived stress and depressive stress (Liao, - H & Wei., 2015).

Hypothesis 4 was that, there will be a negative relation of emotional intelligence with stress. Our results were consistent with our hypothesis; thus, the hypothesis was accepted. There are certain studies in the literature that support our results. Thus, depicting that lack of emotional intelligence can lead to stress. Moreover, a study was done on 630 Pakistani employees to see impact of emotional intelligence competencies on stress in job, the results indicated a positive relationship between the two and it was found that there is a strong impact of emotional intelligence competencies leading to higher emotional intelligence was seen to reduce stress on job (Rahim, 2010). Another study was done on 224 managers to measure the relationship between emotional intelligence, subjective stress, distress, general health, morale, quality of working life and management performance. It was found that managers who were high on emotional intelligence had less subjective stress and they also had better health, well-being and demonstrated better performances (Slaski & Cartwright, 2002). Another study was done on 180 nurses in Spain examining the interrelation among emotional intelligence, work stress and general health. The findings report that nurses who were higher on clarity and emotional repair reported less stress and emotional intelligence is seen as a protective factor against stress and as a factor that facilitates health (Landa, et. al., 2008).

Hypothesis 2 states that gratitude would have a negative impact on stress. Our results did not support our hypothesis thus, this hypothesis was not accepted. There are some studies that saw findings similar to our findings. A study was done in 2009 on 161 healthcare professionals where each participant was randomly assigned to one of the two conditions which were, hassle or gratitude. Towards the end of the study, it was found that practitioners after gratitude manipulation were more grateful, more satisfied with life but also had higher perceived stress as compared to hassle group (Ki, 2009). Another study that supports our result was done in 2011 on 247 college going students. The main aim of the study was to see effects of relaxation and gratitude interventions on stress outcomes. The results did see a relationship between relaxation interventions leading to lower negative effect, while gratitude interventions were seen to have no effects on any outcome also, in terms of stress no group difference was found between control and experimental group (Gavian, 2011). As the amount of stress also influences well-being of an individual, thus studies that suggest that well-being improvement or stress reduction highly associated with gratitude interventions may be subject to placebo effect (Davis, et al., 2016; Wood, Froh & Geraghty, 2010).).

6. Conclusion

The findings of the study indicate that relationship satisfaction, forgiveness and emotional intelligence can have severe impact on perceived stress. It is seen that having a high relationship satisfaction, forgiveness and emotional intelligence can reduce stress. While, having a higher gratitude is not a cause for less stress.

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