



Levels of Gratitude and Psychological Well-Being among School-Going Adolescents in Low-Income Areas: A Case of Kibera Slum in Nairobi County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Gratitude has been found to promote psychological well-being across different populations. However, there is scant of similar studies among school going adolescents from low socioeconomic areas. The current study examined levels of gratitude and psychological well-being among school going adolescents in Kibera slum in Nairobi County, Kenya. The study had the following objectives: To establish the levels of gratitude among the school going adolescents in Kibera Slum, Nairobi County Kenya; To examine the levels of psychological well-being among the school going adolescents in Kibera Slum, Nairobi County Kenya. The study employed descriptive research design. The Target population was 853 students in low income in Kibera slum. A sample size of 265 was selected using random sampling to participate in the study. The study employed Gratitude Scale and Psychological well-being Scale to collect data. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results showed that 80% of school going adolescents had low levels of gratitude, 17.7% adolescents had moderate levels of gratitude and 2.3% adolescents high levels of gratitude. In regard to levels of psychological well-being, the results showed that 20.8% of the school going adolescents had high levels, 78.5% had average levels and 0.8% had lower levels of psychological well-being. The study recommends to parents, guidance and counselling teachers and other stakeholders working with adolescents to come up with strategies of enhancing their gratitude. This is because gratitude can be an intervention on promoting the psychological well-being of adolescents in secondary schools.

Key words: Gratitude, Psychological well-being, School going adolescents, Low income

INTRODUCTION

Gratitude is a sense of appreciation for an act of kindness performed by another person (McConnell, 2013). According to Carr (2015), gratitude is a psychological as well as a social quality in a human person with a moral purpose. In positive psychology, Emmons and Stern (2013) explains gratitude as a mindful appreciation of the benefit of another person. When assessing gratitude as a virtue, the following four main dimensions are assessed; Understanding of good done (conception of gratitude), emotions associated with gratitude, attitude related to gratitude and gratitude behaviours (Morgan et al., 2017). Additionally, the measure of gratitude should encompass a multi-dimensional aspect that is cognitive, affective, attitude and behavioural (Morgan et al., 2017).

Traits of gratitude can be found in a child in the early years of development around 8 years. This can be seen in a child's awareness and social cognitive appraisal traits of paying well with good. Additionally, the traits of gratitude can be strengthened and in turn a child can benefit in their well-being through a positive effect (Froh et al., 2014). As an emotion of altruism, gratitude has helped people to live in cooperation and to notice, and understand the need for exchanging benefits with others (Froh et al., 2014) hence gratitude is important in relationships and well-being. Baumsteiger et al. (2019) outlined three approaches that have shown effectiveness in fostering gratitude including (i) inspiring grateful reflections, (ii) benefit appraisal and (iii) expression. Inspiring grateful reflections is an effective method of promoting gratitude trait. This is carried out by encouraging people to always reflect on the things that happen every day in their lives. This results in positive emotions that lead to a habit of grateful thinking. The second strategy in promoting gratitude is benefit appraisal. It helps to look at the benefit that occurred to the person receiving the benefits, help also to look at the cost the helper incurred to help and lastly it focuses on the intention of the helper. The last intervention for gratitude is an expression which is done by encouraging people to appreciate those who benefited them either through letter writing among other ways (Baumsteiger et al., 2019).

In a study conducted by Curlee et al. (2022) paid attention to what is gratitude without a benefactor. The study found out that gratitude without a benefactor made the participant feel more obligated to their goals, become more spiritual, recognise resources within themselves and willingness to help others. There is a difference between benefit-triggered gratitude and general gratitude. Curlee et al. (2022) argued that benefit-triggered gratitude is a form of great fullness toward another person for a benefit from them while general gratitude is being grateful toward all things within a person's life.

As the person gains maturity, the gratitude trait produces positive effects. Among the positive effects include positive emotions and the well-being of a person such as happiness (Gottlieb & Froh, 2019). Psychological well-being is a multi-dimensional variable whose definition requires understanding the individual context from which it is being studied (Habelrih & Hicks, 2015). It refers to the positive aspect of the function of an individual that includes attitude, relatedness and personal growth (Burns, 2016). Morales-Rodríguez et al. (2020) argued that it can be defined with a goodness perspective (eudaimonia) as a part of the development of one true self. Additionally, Morales-Rodríguez et al. (2020) purport that psychological well-being is a product of a life lived well by a person and it has been linked with success in the life of a person. Over the past decades, Ryff (2014) associated psychological well-being with the positive functioning of a person like purpose in life, the realisation of oneself, and having self-knowledge.

In her concept of psychological well-being, Ryff (2014) asserts that self-acceptance, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, personal progress, and meaningful connections are all components of an individual's well-being. Self-efficacy, hope, life fulfilment, and happiness are some of the elements that are positively correlated with psychological well-being (Hezomi & Nadrian, 2018). Additionally, Morales-Rodríguez et al. (2020) found that Psychosocial attributes such as empathy, emotional intelligence and social skills among university students in Spain were favourably correlated with psychological well-being. According to a study conducted in the United States with adolescents in grades 8 through 12, those who spend a lot of time on social media and other electronic devices had lower levels of life satisfaction, self-esteem, and happiness than those who engaged in in-person interaction, sports, and other activities (Twenge et al., 2018). A poll of teenagers in grades 11 through 18 found that older girls showed lower levels of self-compassion than even older boys and early adolescents. Self-compassion has been linked to wellbeing. However, self has been associated with all aspects of well-being, except positive affect (Bluth & Blanton, 2015).

In their study, Cheng and colleagues sampled 2,393 adolescents aged between 15-19 years across the globe from poor areas. In Africa Johannesburg, South Africa, suicide ideation was at 39.6% among adolescent females, additionally, the study discovered that sadness and PTSD are common at 44.6% and 67% respectively and again with female adolescents. In Kenya, mental health issues are also as common as in other parts of the globe. Among these issues includes depression, anxiety disorders, and suicide. The task force for mental health has policies in place to help. However, quality care for people with mental health issues requires an effective psychological well-being intervention (Wango, 2020). With adolescents, family connectedness is significant to social and emotional well-being (Boer & Abubakar, 2014).

LITARATUIRE REVIEW

Levels of Gratitude among Adolescents

Gratitude is central to both psychological wellbeing and development of adolescents. Gratitude is a trait within a person that enables him or her to respond positively for benefits received from another person, situation, or super-being (Bausert & Froh, 2016). Among adolescents' gratitude is a barrier against suicide risks and bullying in schools. According to the results of a cross-sectional study, girls who experience victimisation and have low levels of appreciation are likely to exhibit more suicide symptoms than girls who have higher levels of gratitude (Rey et al., 2019). Wang et al. (2015) examined how children and teenagers from China and the United States express gratitude. The findings showed that regardless of society or gender, older children were more likely than younger ones to express gratitude. A study in China on the difference in expression of gratitude among 527 adolescents between the age of 7 to 14 years showed that adolescents are likely to express more gratitude compared to young adults (Liang & Kiang 2018).

Sood, and Gupta (2012) purported that in the United States there is no difference in levels of gratitude between different age blankets of adolescents. In Yogyakarta, Indonesia, Rahayu and Setiawati (2019) carried out research on the relationship between teenagers' psychological wellbeing and gratitude and the findings showed that highest percentage of gratitude was toward God. Another study by Hemarajarajeswari and Gupta (2021) on gratitude and well-being among the College students in India revealed that their gratitude was above the average. A study conducted by Zahra et al. (2022) in Indonesia showed that adolescents between 12-21 years have an average level of gratitude at 74.5%. However, a high level of gratefulness is seen among adolescents of age 20-21 while a low level of gratitude was recorded among adolescents between 16-18 years of age. Eliüsük-bülbul (2018) conducted an experimental study among Turkish university students where he put the experiment group under a 6 weeks intervention program. After the 6 weeks intervention program, results from this study showed an increase in gratitude scores between study group and control group.

In many societies, attitudes and behaviours of adolescents are subject of change. These changes are brought about by factors such as globalization, technological changes and evolving social norms. With this in mind, it is challenging to make specific arguments on levels of gratitude on Africa adolescents without proper research. Guse et al. (2019) on their study on subjective well-being and gratitude among adolescents in South Africa found that black adolescents' had higher levels of gratitude compared to white adolescents. Gratitude was linked with healthy relationships and fruitful social life (Bausert & Froh, 2016).

Ii and Christian (2022) conducted a descriptive study in Ghana that included 247 participants from a music university during the global pandemic, found that levels of gratitude were lower went low as a result of the pandemic. This could mean that gratitude traits among adolescents have been affected by the new norm of the Global pandemic. Higher degrees of gratitude are associated with a positive outlook on one's own circumstances as well as the settings and circumstances around them (Alanoglu & Karabatak, 2021). Srirangarajan et al. (2020) purports that because of cultural differences in values there is huge variation on levels of gratitude in different cultures.

Levels of psychological well-being among adolescents

Twenge et al. (2018) purport that in America, adolescent well-being decreased since 2012 linking this to screen technology among young people. Adolescents' well-being was higher when they were in social activities, compared with screen activities like video games. High levels of psychological

well-being led to optimal mental health (Viejo, et al., 2018). Yasmin et al. (2015) surveyed adolescents' psychological well-being between ages 12- 18 years in Pakistan and Gilgit-Baltistan. Results revealed that 23.2% of the sample had a poor degree of psychological well-being, while 43.4% of the sample had a moderate level. Another survey conducted in Yogyakarta Indonesia by Rahayu and Setiawati (2019) found that youth have high levels of purpose in life which is manifested with desire to self-actualize in their careers.

Autonomy is one of the elements of Ryff's concept of psychological well-being, which also includes environmental mastery, positive relationships, self-acceptance, purpose in life, and personal growth. Charry et al. (2020) conducted a study on autonomy and psychological well-being among adolescents in Spain and Colombia using a sample size of 1146, 506 Spaniards and 640 Colombian youths of age between 16-21 years. Results showed a difference in autonomy with the highest score recorded with Spanish young people. Additionally, a study on the psychological well-being of youth between 13-17 years in Spain reveals a medium level to high level of psychological well-being and a noticeable increase in interpersonal relationships at the end (Gómez-López et al. 2019).

Easow and Ghorpade (2017) conducted a study in India with adolescents on psychological well-being. Results revealed that 84% of the adolescent had adequate psychological well-being, 11% had moderate and 5% had inadequate psychological well-being. When related to factors affecting psychological well-being, 83.3% of the adolescent had moderated well-being. In a subsequent study, Geng and He (2021) discovered that mainland Chinese children between the ages of 10-15 who were emerging teenagers experienced psychological well-being levels that varied by gender. In comparison to boys, girls appeared to be performing better in terms of psychological health. Overall, Geng and He (2021) assert that familial and educational settings are safeguards for kids' wellbeing in mainland China.

According to a study conducted in South Africa with adolescents aged 15 to 17 years old using mental health continuum short form scale, 60% of the teenagers reported lower levels of psychological well-being (van Schalkwyk & Wissing, 2010). Van Schalkwyk and Wissing, (2010) additionally points out that psychological wellness are experienced and expressed through positive relationships, and purpose in life (meaning). These two aspects of wellness are two main dimensions of Ryff's model of psychological well-being. Another experimental study conducted in South Africa with adolescents, testing the impact of the EAGALA model of intervention on the well-being of adolescents found a difference in the control group and experimental group's psychological well-being (Boyce, 2018). A significant improvement was seen in the psychological wellbeing dimensions of life purpose, healthy relationships, personal development, and environmental mastery after participating in the EAGALA intervention programme for 4–8 sessions. Agbesanwa et al. (2022) studied adolescents from the south-western part of Nigeria in local government schools and the results showed that 56% of the teenagers had high levels of psychological well-being scoring high in self-autonomy and personal growth.

In Ghana Mazzucato and Cebotari (2017) conducted a large-scale study with children of parents who are in constant migration. In Ghana's high emigration regions, 2,760 secondary school students were sampled. Results from the study suggest that children growing up in a family experiencing family transition has lower levels of psychological well-being. Additionally, change of caregivers for children or having a poor relationship with migrant fathers was linked to low levels of mental well-being. On the other hand, a sample of 226 samples of males and females from senior secondary schools in Ghana was used to test the link between academic stress and social support on psychological well-being. Results showed that while boys experienced high levels of academic stress, they had greater psychological well-being, which was partly attributed to socialisation into gender norms. Girls scored higher on perceived social support but high on sadness.

The Sub-Saharan African population of 10-24 years is a third of the whole population. This context is characterised by high rates of poverty, HIV prevalence, limited educational opportunities, and conflict Kabiru et al. (2013). Although Spinhoven et al. (2022) claim that there is not enough trustworthy evidence, it has been observed that teenagers in sub-Saharan Africa have low levels of wellbeing and quality of life. Spinhoven et al. (2022) conducted a study in western Kenya, Siaya County with a sample size of 3998 girls. Results from the study showed that 28.2%, 36.1%, 35.7 % of the sample size had their quality of life at low, average, and high respectively. Increased problems with quality of life among girls within Kenyan population are associated with physical sexual violence. From the study, it is evident that levels of psychological well-being among adolescents vary according to the environment and depending on age and sex. Hence this study ought to find out what is the level of well-being among adolescents who are school-going and come from low-income areas in the metropolitan area of Nairobi.

The study was grounded on Self-determination theory. It is a motivation that is applied in many domains of the functioning of people including parenting, education, health care, sporting and physical activities (Deci, et al., 2017). Human beings are curious, vital and self-motivated. They are always inspired, and determined to learn new skills and apply their learnt skills responsibly (Ryan, & Deci, 2017). Deci et al. (2017) suggest that the personal performance of people and psychological well-being is affected by personal motivation. Additionally, Ryan and Deci (2017) argued that self-determination theory inquires both about factors and other factors in the social surrounding that affect personal motivation, those that cause antisocial behaviours or those that affect psychological well-being. Jang, et al. (2016) purport that individual psychological needs are an inherent motivation a person has that leads an individual toward full functioning and psychological well-being. Autonomy, relatedness, and the feeling of competency are ways that self-determination theory has been conceptualized. These are very essential to a person's psychological well being and growth of a person (Jang et al., 2016). The study was guided by two objectives which were:

1. To examine levels of gratitude among school-going adolescents in low-income areas of Nairobi.
2. To assess levels of psychological well-being among schooling adolescents in low-income areas of Nairobi.

METHODOLOGY

Research design is a framework that the researcher uses to determine the parameters of their investigation (Selvam, 2017). To gather and examine the data for this study, a quantitative research approach was used. The study employed descriptive research design. The design was suitable for the study because study aimed at examining the levels of gratitude and psychological well-being among adolescents from the low socio-economic areas. This study was carried out in a secondary school from low-income areas within the metropolitan areas of Nairobi. The total population was 853 secondary school students, 25 TSC teachers and 5 board teachers. The study employed stratified random sampling to select a sample size of 265 participants from form one to form four.

To facilitate the study, the researcher adopted two scales of gratitude and psychological well-being. McCullough, Emmons, and Tsang (2002) scale of gratitude with 6 items was adopted to measure gratitude among school-going adolescents in the metropolitan area of Nairobi. On the other hand, psychological well-being was measured using Ryff's (2014) shortened version with 18 items. The questionnaire captured the demographic characteristics of age, gender, class and religion. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics with aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study was set out to examine the levels of gratitude and psychological well-being among the adolescents in low socio-economic area and particularly in Kibera slums in Nairobi County, Kenya. The section begins by presenting the demographic characteristics of the participants followed by the objectives of the study.

Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Descriptive statistics were run to analyse demographic details of the participants which were age, religion, class and gender.

Table 3

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Age Range	Frequency	Percent
12-14	30	12
15-17	178	70.9
18-21	43	17.1
Total	251	100
Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	117	46.6
Female	134	53.4
Total	251	100
Class	Frequency	Percent
One	77	30.7
Two	71	28.3
Three	55	21.9
Four	48	19.1
Total	251	100
Religion	Frequency	Percent
Christian	197	78.5
Muslims	54	21.5

Results presented in Table 1 showed that majority of the participants were between age of 15-17 (70.9%) followed by those who were aged between 18-21 (17.1%). The lowest number of participants in the study was aged between 12-14 (12%). Based on the gender of the participants, females were slightly higher 134 (53.4%) compared to the male counterparts 117 (46.6%). In regard to class, for one participants were slightly higher 77 (30.7%) compared to

participants in form two 71 (28.3%). The lowest participants in the current study were from form four 48 (19.1%) followed by participants in form three (21.9%). Majority of the participants were Christians 197 (78.5%) followed by participants Muslims 54 (21.5%).

Levels of Gratitude among Adolescents from low-income areas of Nairobi metropolitan area

The first objective was to examine the levels of gratitude among the adolescents from low-income in areas of Nairobi metropolitan area. Descriptive statistics were run and the findings were presented in table 2.

Table 2

Levels of gratitude among students

Levels of Gratitude	Frequency	Percent
LOW	221	88
MODERATE	29	11.6
HIGH	1	.4
Total	251	100

The results in table 2 showed that majority of the participants 221 (88%) had low levels of gratitude, followed by those who had moderate gratitude 29 (11.6%). It is only one participant scored high in gratitude 1 (4%). The findings of this study contradicted the findings of Liang and Kiang (2018) who conducted a study in China on the difference in expression of gratitude among 527 adolescents between the age of 7 to 14 years and showed that adolescents are likely to express more gratitude compared to young adults. The results difference may attributed by difference in culture. Probably children in China are trained to express gratitude compared to children in Kenya. In addition, the results were in disagreement with findings of Zahra et al. (2022) who conducted a study in Indonesia and showed that adolescents between 12-21 years have an average level of gratitude at 74.5%. However, a high level of gratefulness is seen among adolescents of age 20-21 while a low level of gratitude was recorded among adolescents between 16-18 years of age. The results may be as a result of culture and socio-economic differences whereby in some cultures children are taught express gratitude which may not be the same in some African countries. Moreover, the findings were not in line with the findings of Guse et al. (2019) on their study on subjective well-being and gratitude among adolescents in South Africa who found that black adolescents' had higher levels of gratitude compared to white adolescents. Gratitude was linked with healthy relationships and fruitful social life (Bausert & Froh, 2016). The difference in expressing gratitude between black and white adolescents may be attributed to socio-economic status. The children from low socio-economic status are likely are likely to lack their basic needs and in the process of been helped learn about gratitude compared to children from well up families. The low level of gratitude in the present study could also be linked with changing norms of the society. Change in value norms has led to rise in individualistic society leading to a decrease in gratitude traits. Hussong et al. (2021) argued that nurturing gratitude is courses of socialisation that parent have on their children. However, in low-income areas this might be contrary because parents occupied in making means of life and may not have time for their children.

Levels of psychological well-being among adolescents in low-income areas of Nairobi metropolitan area

The second objective was to Levels of psychological well-being among adolescents in low-income areas of Nairobi metropolitan area. Descriptive statistics was carried out and results are presented in table 3.

Table 3

Levels of psychological wellbeing of adolescents

Levels of psychological wellbeing	Frequency	Percent
Low	79	31.5
Average	112	44.6
High	60	23.9
Total	251	100.0

Results in table 3 showed that majority of respondents 112 (44.6%) had average levels of psychological well-being, 79 (31.5) had low levels of psychological wellbeing while 60 (23.9%) of the respondent had high levels of psychological well-being. The current finding of were in agreement with Yasmin et al. (2015) findings who surveyed adolescents between ages 12- 18 years psychological well-being in Pakistan and Gilgit-Baltistan. Yasmin et al. (2015) cites that 43.4% of the sample had moderate psychological well-being while 23.2% of the sample had a low level of psychological well-being. Additionally, the currentstudy finding confirms Gómez-López et al. (2019) findings on the psychological well-being of youth between 13-17 years in Spain who had medium level to high level of psychological well-being. The findings of the current study contradicted the findings of Mazzucato and Cebotari (2017) who conducted a large-scale study with 2,760 secondary school adolescents of parents who are in constant migration and results showed that children growing up in a family experiencing family transition has lower levels of psychological well-being.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that there are low levels of gratitude among adolescents brought up in socio-economic areas. The low level of gratitude in the present study could also be linked with changing norms of the society. Change in value norms has led to rise in individualistic society leading to a decrease in gratitude traits. Though the participants scored low in gratitude, they scored in psychological well-being. That means even when there is a absence of gratitude among the children from low socio-economic status, children are likely to report high levels of psychological well-being.

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