

A study of gratitude and well being among adolescents

Sarita Sood¹, Richa Gupta²

¹(Lecturer, P G Department of Psychology, University of Jammu, India)

²(Research Scholar, P G Department of Psychology, University of Jammu, India)

Abstract: This paper reports the results of a study on adolescents' gratitude and well being. Gender and age differences were assessed. An association between gratitude, well being, age and gender was explored. Questionnaires were distributed to the participants and filled on the spot. Data from 200 participants 12-19 years of age was collected from two districts of Jammu and Kashmir, India. Independent samples t test and Product moment method was used for statistical analysis. The results revealed age difference in well being. An association between age and well being was also found. The results have an implication for future research. The findings of this study have applicability in school settings. The researcher emphasizes on replicating this research, and in finding out the trends in various cultures.

Keywords – Adolescents, Age, Gender, Gratitude, Well being.

I. INTRODUCTION

Gratitude is an acknowledgment made by a person to others for receiving anything of value. It is extended only when a benefit is evaluated positively or when it is not due to own effort. It is an emotion, positive in nature, associated with past and has potential to generate greater positive feelings in the future. Gratitude acts as an antidote to rumination which is an enemy of well being [1]. It also helps in generating optimism while overcoming negativity bias and in providing reason enough to be thankful for in life despite of several struggles that we come across. Gratitude has also been found to be associated with increase in happiness, life satisfaction, hope, empathy, self esteem, and positive emotions [2]. All the major world religions emphasize and profess highly of gratitude. As per Hinduism [3], "Father and mother are Gods of the family; even so, honor them as Gods with heartfelt service, all you of human birth." A glance at gratitude, perspective of Christianity [4], "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving." To quote gratitude from Islam, The Holy Qur'an [5] "O my Father, Great Elder, I have no words to thank you, but with your deep wisdom I am sure that you can see how I value your glorious gifts." Gratitude as viewed in Buddhism (Anguttara Nikaya 1.61)[6] "But the worthy person is grateful and mindful of benefits done to him. This gratitude, this mindfulness, is congenial to the best people." Talking of gratitude, Bahai' vision in the words of the Master, Abdu'l-Baha'[7], " In these times thanksgiving for the bounty of the Merciful One consists in the illumination of the heart and the feeling of the soul." It is evident that gratitude is indispensable as far human existence.

Gratitude is developed and is not innate [1]. Constant efforts made by close associates, such as: caretakers, parents, teachers, peers inculcate an attitude of gratitude in children. Gratitude is foundation of well being and mental health [8]. Ample of studies conducted earlier have provided scientific evidence of positive relationship between gratitude and well being [9]; [10]; [11]; [12]; [13]; [14]. A growing body of research has documented the wide array of psychological, physical, and relational benefits associated with gratitude from childhood to old age. However, contrary empirical findings are reported in some of the studies [15]; [16]. Review of the studies tabbing demographic differential in gratitude are suggestive of differences with respect to gender and age [17]; [18]; [19]; [20]; [21]. Similarly studies carried out to assess gender and age differences in well being demonstrate that such differences exist [22]; [23]; [24]. However, most of these studies reviewed are on adults. The research on gratitude and well being in adolescents is scanty [25]; [26]. For promotion of proper youth development, gratitude research is needed with adolescents [27]. The studies conducted so far on gratitude and well being are suggestive of need of probing deeper into this aspect. In the light of this, the current study was carried out with an objective of finding out gratitude and well being in male and female adolescents in early and late adolescence.

II. METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample comprised of 200 students studying in various schools in Jammu and Rajauri district of the state Jammu and Kashmir (India). Participants were in age range 12 to 19 years with a mean age of 14.11. Of these 100 of 200 (50%) were male and 50 of 200 (50%) were female. Of the total sample, 79.5 percent (159 of 200) were from rural areas and 20.5 % (41 of 200) were from urban areas. Forty four percent of participants (n

= 88) were in 6-8 grade and 56 % (n=112) were in grade 9-12. In the religion wise distribution of sample, 153 of 200 (76.5%) were Hindu, 29 of 200 (14.5%) were Muslim, 8 of 200 (4.0%), 9 of 200 (4.5%) were Sikh and only 1 of 200 (.5%) was Christian.

Procedure

Data was gathered from the students of grade 6th to 12th studying in various schools in district Jammu and district Rajauri. The students were approached and the purpose of research was clearly stated to them and confidentiality was assured. Consent of the students, showing willingness to participate, was sought and questionnaires were administered in groups. Doubts, if any, were clarified. The obtained data was screened and incomplete questionnaires were separated. In all 209 participants filled the questionnaires and nine of these were rejected. Data was interpreted individually as well as collectively. It was subjected to statistical analysis and results were obtained.

Measures

Gratitude was assessed using GQ-6 [28], a self report measure. Participants were required to rate the items on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Two items are reverse-scored to overcome any response bias. The possible scores range from 7 to 42.

For the measurement of well being, WHO-Five Well-being Index (WHO-5) developed by Psychiatric Research Unit, World Health Organization [29] was used. It included positive worded items only covering positive mood, vitality, and general interests. The response options were on 6-point scale (0= at no time, 5=all the time). Total possible score ranged from 0 to 25. Total score of 13 and below indicated poor well being.

Statistical analyses

Data collected from the questionnaires was mainly analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences for Windows Version 20. Following statistics were applied:

Descriptive statistics: Mean, Standard Deviation

Inferential statistics: Independent samples t test

Correlation Analysis: Pearson’s Product Moment method

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An independent samples *t* test indicated that gratitude scores for male ($M=30.01$, $SD=4.46$) and female participants ($M=30.33$, $SD=4.11$), had no significant difference $t(198)=.527$, $p=.599$. Similar findings has been revealed in the researches carried out earlier [30]. Various other studies [17]; [20] has provided contrary evidence indicative of existence of gender differences in gratitude.

Table 1 Comparison of gratitude scores among adolescents as per gender and age

Variable	Category		Mean	S D	<i>t</i> value
Gender	Male	100	30.010	4.466	.527
	Female	100	30.330	4.119	
Age	12-15 years	168	30.160	4.307	.070
	16-19 years	32	30.218	4.255	

The results given in Table 1 revealed no significant difference in the level of gratitude among the adolescents in age group 12-15 years and 16-19 years. Contradictory results were obtained in the earlier investigation of the similar issue [18]; [19]; [21] showing difference in gratitude as per the age.

In order to test gender differences in well being, independent samples *t* test was conducted. The test was found to be statistically non significant $t(198)=.244$, $p=.808$. Table 2 reveal the mean differences between the two groups in terms of their well being. There was marginal difference in the mean scores. Contrary findings are reported in most of the studies reflecting differences in well being on the basis of gender [22]; [23]; [24]. From the review carried out, a study on Turkish adolescents [31] provided supporting evidence for the findings of current research.

Table 2 Comparison of well being scores among adolescents as per gender and age

Variable	Category		Mean	S D	<i>t</i> value
Gender	Male	100	16.360	4.231	.244
	Female	100	16.190	5.539	
Age	12-15 years	168	16.773	4.806	.679**
	16-19 years	32	13.656	4.728	

**significant at .01 level

Results from independent samples *t* test (Table 2) indicated that adolescents in the age group 12-15 years ($M=16.77$, $SD=4.80$) scored higher on the well being than in the age group 16-19 years ($M=13.65$, $SD=4.72$), $t(198)=.679$, $p=.001$. The difference between the two groups in well being appeared to be significant. Similar

findings were reported in a study on Turkish adolescents [31] with younger adolescents aged 15 years reporting better well being than those of 17 years of age.

Table 3 Correlation analysis of gratitude, well being, gender and age

	Gender	Age	Gratitude
Gratitude	.037	.005	1
Well Being	-.017	-.233**	.111

**significant at .01 level

Table 3 reveals results obtained by Pearson correlation analysis. The relationship between adolescents' age and well being is low and negative. These results are statistically significant. An association between age and well being has also been reported [32]. It was found that well being increases with age. As opposed to this, in the current study the well being has been found to decrease with age. No associations between gratitude and well being were found in this study. As expected, not all investigators have confirmed associations between gratitude and well being [15]; [16]; [33].

Results of this research show that gender is not important for adolescents' gratitude and well being. In the light of abundance of contradictory findings in the literature we cannot state with certainty whether such a trend exists in adolescents. These findings need to be investigated in terms of possible cultural influences. Maybe in Indian culture the children are trained, right from the beginning of their socialization process, to express gratitude towards others and both male and female children receive similar training. In addition to this age is found to be an important factor for the well being of adolescents. We have come up with higher well being in early adolescence years than in later adolescence. It could be said that with an increase in age, level of well being declines. It might be said that those who are in age group 16 years to 19 years are exposed to more stressful situations. As the participants of this study have been selected from various schools, comprising only of the student population the burden of board examination in secondary and senior secondary class could be one possible reason of decline in well being in this group. No association between gratitude and well being has been found in this research. It reveals that having gratitude does not ascertain well being in adolescents. These findings are confirmed within the study as results reflect no differences in gratitude, differences in well being are evident. Though the results of this study are not parallel with the review on related variables it gives an idea of investigating deeper in order to know the possible reasons of such findings.

IV. CONCLUSION

Studies on adolescents' gratitude and well being are scanty. This study will add to the existing knowledge. This study is carried out only in the areas easily accessible to the researchers and needs to be replicated to establish the findings. Findings of this study are applicable for the schools as the adolescents from various schools were taken up in this study. Since adolescents are similar on gratitude irrespective of gender and age. In the schools training programs designed to inculcate gratitude may be introduced for the students in adolescence period. Special interventions for the adolescents in senior classes to reduce their stress level should be designed to enhance their well being. Future studies may be directed towards exploring the possible factors responsible for well being. Similar research oriented to find out trends in various cultures might be beneficial.

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