

The Gratitude Deficit: Prevalence & Correlates of Low Gratitude in Adolescents

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Abstract: Gratitude is considered a key positive psychological characteristic which has been linked to emotional well-being, resilience and interpersonal functioning in adolescents. But recent observations indicate increasing trends of low levels of gratitude among youth populations. The objective of this study aimed to investigate the descriptive profile of gratitude levels among adolescents and to explore the prevalence of low gratitude with respect to other psychological virtues. A pilot study was conducted on the sample of 150 adolescents from different educational institutions. The tool employed for the study was the Positivity Quotient Scale by Dr Rinita Jain which measures various attributes of positivity among them gratitude, honesty, kindness, optimism, lifestyle, cultural values and communication. The present study focuses on the gratitude as one of the positivity virtue to analyze the distribution of gratitude levels among adolescents. Frequency analysis revealed that 46.7% of the participants scored low on gratitude, 42.0% scored average and only 10.7% scored high on gratitude. Moreover, statistical observations indicated that gratitude was not significantly correlated to honesty. This suggests that gratitude may not be predicted only by internal moral traits. These findings indicate that adolescent gratitude may be more impacted by external environmental factors including family relationships, parenting styles, peer interactions, and socio-cultural experiences. Workshop based interventions to build gratitude, emotional literacy within the family and students could be introduced in schools and counselling settings to improve adolescent well-being. Future studies could investigate the role of parenting styles, social media exposure, attachment styles, and familial environments in the development of gratitude among adolescents.

Keywords: Gratitude, Adolescents, Emotional Well Being, Parenting Styles, Positivity Quotient, Low Gratitude.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is viewed as a time of significant changes in their persona which are characterized by physical development, hormonal changes, cognitive growth, and emerging social roles which they need to identify with. While adolescents are working through identity issues, emotional regulation, academic demands, and peer relationships, they face substantial psychological challenges (Steinberg, 2014). These challenges accompany them in the ways of stress, worry, emotional incompetence, and even becoming depressive mildly which can be converted into severe depressive disorder, and thus adolescence is an important area of research and intervention for psychology. Whereas the conventional models of psychology have been focusing on the diagnosis and cure of disorder, the advent of positive psychology has started focusing on understanding and cultivating human virtues and strengths leading to flourishing (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive Psychology gives lots of importance to the fact that gratitude plays an invaluable role in predicting adolescent behavior influencing self-satisfaction, emotional intelligence, and social

relationships. Mental Health requires interventions from Positive psychology to address and contributing in inculcating the positive attributes, one such attribute being Gratitude. So, gratitude has been identified as psychological factor which is important for the development of emotional resilience, academic achievement, and growth in teenagers. So, strengthening mental health and developing processes and capacities likely to improve mental health has risen on high priority. Some of the Positive Psychology elements like meaning, coping, self-compassion, courage, gratitude, positive emotions, positive interpersonal processes, high-quality relationships, and other strengths of character have been incorporated into new interventions for counseling and some effective programs already present like self-administered computer training, mental health first aid, groups of cognitive behavioral therapy, social media interventions and delivery of music therapy and counseling (Waters et al., 2022).

➤ Psychological Wellbeing

Psychological well-being (PWB) is generally understood as the "positive interpretation of dealing with

various challenges of life," and it captures one's feeling of expansion and self-realization to how individuals' attempts to create experiences of purposeful engagement (Zhou et al., 2022). Feeling dissatisfied with oneself, struggling to build relationships with others, being dependent on others, experiencing difficulty in controlling one's environment, not having life goals, and being unable to develop or remain still are some of the traits of low psychological well-being conditions (Irianto & Ardilla, 2021), impact on your thoughts, your feelings, and your actions, which definitely have an influence on your relationships and daily activities.

➤ *Gratitude*

According to the American Psychological Association, gratitude is recognized as feeling of appreciation and joy following the receipt of a gift, whether it be a material advantage or a fortuitous coincidence. It is examined in positive psychology not just as an emotion but also as a characteristic strength, coping mechanism, and moral quality that enhances general wellbeing.

According to research, gratitude is positively correlated with psychological, emotional, and social wellbeing (Jans-Beken et al., 2020). The fact that trait appreciation is a significant "predictor of wellbeing and other desirable life outcomes" is not surprising (Portocarrero et al., 2020).

According to Jans-Beken et al. (2020), gratitude is both a quality and a state. To put it another way, people might feel thankful for someone or something at a certain instant in time, and they can also feel thankful over a longer period of time as a trait.

It reflects that gratitude has a domino effect. A person is more likely to acknowledge the assistance and then return the favor if they feel grateful (Wood et al., 2010). It is assumed that those gratitude has reciprocal effect which means those who receive gratitude will also help others. Similarly, it's possible that those who aren't appreciated won't reciprocate in the future. Both people and society benefit from expressing thankfulness (Bono et al., 2004).

Gratitude is a component of many religions. For instance (Passmore & Oades, 2016), • Buddhism: The idea of dependent origination, which suggests that everything is interconnected, is exemplified by gratitude. Buddhists are grateful for the interwoven life concepts which they find very supportive when they recognize in ways how interdependent we are.

- Judaism: Those who follow this religion may begin each day with Modeh Ani, a brief Hebrew blessing that expresses gratitude to God for life.
- Christianity: Christians are expressive of their appreciation for God's benefits. These blessings are offered in the form of prayers and are intended for life which includes food, family, and all other things which can be provided by God.

➤ *The PERMA Model*

Dr. Martin Seligman, in his first speech as the new president of the American Psychological Association in 1998, shifted the emphasis from pathology and mental disease to researching positive aspects of life. Since then, ideas and studies have looked at how to define, measure, and create well being as well as positive psychology therapies that make life worthwhile (Rusk & Waters, 2015).

Seligman (2012) chose five elements that individuals pursue because they are intrinsically motivated and enhance wellbeing in order to construct a hypothesis to address this. These components are measured and defined apart from one another and are sought after for their own reason (Seligman, 2012).

According to Forgeard, Jayawickreme, Kern, and Seligman (2011), WBT is composed of the PERMA model, where each dimension collaborates to create a higher order construct that forecasts the prosperity of communities, companies, groups, and countries.

Each of the PERMA components has been found to be significantly positively correlated with physical health, energy, job satisfaction, life satisfaction, and commitment within businesses (Kern, Waters, Alder, & White, 2014). Additionally, compared to earlier assessments of distress, PERMA is a more accurate indicator of psychological distress (Forgeard et al., 2011). This demonstrates that actively addressing the PERMA components improves elements of well being. At the same time it also reduces psychological suffering.

• *Positive Emotions*

Positive emotions is inclusive of hope, curiosity, joy, love, compassion, pride, humor, and thankfulness. Positive feelings can be developed or learnt to enhance wellbeing, and they are a key sign of flourishing (Fredrickson, 2001). It enhances cognitive routine and behavior when people are able to explore themselves, enjoy life, and incorporate respectful feelings into everyday life and relate to future life fantasies. According to Tugade and Fredrickson (2004), positive emotions can strengthen resilience and counteract the negative impacts of negative emotions.

• *Engagement*

Seligman (2012) defines involvement as "being one with the music." It is consistent with the idea of "flow" proposed by Csikszentmihalyi (1989). This includes loss of self-consciousness and total immersion. According to research on engagement, people who try to use their strengths in new ways every day for a week were happier and less depressed after six months (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). In other words concentration of on task at hand and living in present.

• *Positive Relationship:*

According to the PERMA model relationships exist, when people feel loved, support each other, and appreciate genuinely. The relationships are interactions at various level with their life partners, interactive friends, immediate family

members, colleagues, seniors, mentors, guides, and the community at large are all considered relationships. Strong social networks help older persons maintain better physical health, and the social environment has been shown to be crucial in preventing cognitive decline (Siedlecki et al., 2014).

- *Meaning:*

Seligman (2012) explained meaning as looking for something bigger than ourselves. When faced with a major obstacle or hardship, having a goal in life helps people having understanding and concentrate on what matters most.

Meaning can be found in having a career, working for social and political cause, involving in a creative project, believing in a religious and spiritual being. This can be achieved in a profession one is working with, volunteering for a work or a project, participating in extra curricular activities or giving community service.

- *Accomplishment*

According to Kashdan et al. (2009), individuals who report having a purpose in life have longer lifespans, higher levels of life satisfaction, and fewer health issues. A sense of meaning can be obtained through personal beliefs on success: Having self-motivation to complete a task, conquering a task, and heading toward achieving the goals, all contribute to a sense of success. Because people may look back on their lives with pride, this promotes wellbeing (Seligman, 2012).

Perseverance together with drive to achieve set goals are two aspects of accomplishment. However, flourishing and well-being occur when achievement is linked to pursuing goals with an internal drive or working for something merely for the purpose of improvement (Quinn, 2018).

Compared to achieving external goals like fame or money, achieving internal goals like growth and connection results in greater improvements in wellbeing (Seligman, 2013).

➤ *Benefits of Gratitude*

- *Emotional Benefits:*

Our long-term happiness can be increased by more than 10% by just writing down our blessings for five minutes each day (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005).

Researcher Chih-Che Lin (2017) discovered that a high degree of thankfulness had a significant favorable effect on psychological wellness, self-esteem, and depression even after controlling for personality. Gratitude fosters pleasant feelings, lessens envy, and increases resilience, according to research (Amin, 2014).

Gratitude is a protective factor against suicidal ideation in stressed and depressed people, according to a study on the effects of gratitude on depression, coping, and suicide (Krysinska, Lester, Lyke, & Corveleyn, 2015).

- *Social Benefits:*

According to a recent study, showing thankfulness to our friends and significant others improves the quality of our relationships (Algoe, Fredrickson, & Gable, 2013). Those who are more thankful have access to more social assistance, which is not surprising given the other social advantages of appreciation. Higher levels of gratitude also result in lower levels of stress and depression, according to the same study that supported this finding (Wood, Maltby, Gillett, Linley, & Joseph, 2008). This suggests that gratitude makes us gaining the social support which is needed to get through trying times.

- *Benefits to the Personality:*

It has been demonstrated that keeping a gratitude diary improves optimism by 5% to 15% (Amin, 2014). This means that the more we reflect on our blessings, the more we discover them!

Research has demonstrated that encouraging thankfulness increases individuals' propensity to share with others, even if it means sacrificing themselves and even if the recipient is a stranger (DeSteno, Bartlett, Baumann, Williams, & Dickens, 2010). It is.

- *Benefits for Career:*

Studies on gratitude have demonstrated that it improves your managerial qualities, including your capacity to give praise and inspire your staff as a mentor and advisor (Stone & Stone, 1983). • Those who are more appreciative than others are also less likely to be impatient while making financial decisions, which results in better choices and less pressure from the need for immediate satisfaction (DeSteno, Li, Dickens, & Lerner, 2014).

- *Health Benefits:*

Participants in a study on gratitude visits reported a 35% decrease in depressive symptoms for a few weeks, and those who kept gratitude journals reported a comparable decrease in depressive symptoms for the duration of the journaling (Seligman et al., 2005).

When hypertensive patients "count their blessings" at least once a week, their blood pressure significantly drops, improving their general health (Shipon, 1977). A two-week gratitude intervention improved participants' wellbeing by lowering blood pressure and improving sleep quality (Jackowska, Brown, Ronaldson, & Steptoe, 2016).

II. METHOD

A. *Research Design*

The current research study used a quantitative, cross-sectional, non-experimental descriptive-correlational research approach to investigate adolescents' levels of Gratitude and how it relates to honesty.

➤ *Participants:*

150 teenagers from different educational institutions made up the sample. A straightforward sampling technique was used to choose participants, who came from a variety of educational backgrounds.

B. Variables

- Gratitude is an independent variable (predictor variable).
- Honesty is the dependent variable (outcome variable).

The study primarily focused on assessing gratitude levels and examining its association with honesty.

➤ Materials and Measures:

For the present study data were collected using the Positivity Quotient Scale (PQS) developed by Dr. Rinita Jain. Gratitude, honesty, friendliness, optimism, lifestyle, cultural values, and communication are among the many aspects of positivity that are measured by the scale. The Gratitude Sub-scale and the Honesty Sub-scale were used in this study. With an overall reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of 0.87 (replace with the actual reliability number if available), the Positivity Quotient Scale has shown good psychometric qualities.

➤ Procedure:

The study's goal was explained to participants, and they were given the assurance that their participation would be voluntary and confidential. The school and college students were given the Positivity Quotient Scale in a group setting. Participants completed the scale on their own after receiving instructions on how to complete the questionnaire. The scale's standardized scoring technique was used to the gathered responses.

III. RESULTS

The distribution of appreciation levels among the teenage participants (N = 150) was investigated using descriptive statistical analysis. According to frequency analysis, only 16 participants (10.7%) showed high levels of thankfulness, whereas 70 participants (46.7%) showed low levels, and 63 people (42.0%) showed average levels. These results show that while relatively few teens in the sample showed high levels of appreciation, a sizable fraction indicated lower levels.

A Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis was used to look at the connection between honesty and thankfulness. Higher levels of gratitude were not linked to higher levels of honesty among the participants, according to the data, which showed that the correlation between honesty and gratitude was not statistically significant ($p > .05$). As a result, the null hypothesis that there is no connection between honesty and thankfulness was upheld. The results are indicative of low to average level of thankfulness and adolescents being sceptical to give credits to those who help them. They have created their world where they struggle to acknowledge. With this it is also found that there is not significant correlation between honesty and appreciation which is suggestive of presence of variables other than moral values which impact gratitude at larger scale.

Thus the result makes us aware of importance of both environmental and contextual influences shaping the adolescents development phase with inclusion of gratitude as

a personality dimension which are family dynamics, parenting styles, relationships with the peers and socio cultural determinants.

IV. DISCUSSION

The objective of the study was to determine the level of gratitude among adolescents and to find out the correlation of gratitude with honesty, another positivity dimension .

The results showed the low level on gratitude with only few having appreciative qualities.

These findings proves the study's assumption and hypothesis that gratitude level is low among adolescents which means they are less appreciative. With this it also clearly indicates that honesty and appreciation were not strongly correlated, suggesting that for being thankful does not need other positivity virtues like moral or character traits. Thus evidently the result shows that it is futile to think any correlation between Gratitude and Honesty and that they are independent and not supportive of each other.

The findings are well assumed and are indicative of thoughtful worries written in the literature review that despite the significance of gratitude is acknowledged for positivity virtues like resilience, emotional intelligence and positive interpersonal interactions, adolescents today may have lesser levels of it. Gratitude has been promoted in earlier studies as a protective psychological shield that supports and indicates approving mental health outcomes. This study clearly depicts that adolescents are vulnerable with shifting of social dynamics, becoming self focused, changing academic expectations and ways with more digital participation and influences. The well accepted notion that positivity virtues are correlated are unproven with the discovery that gratitude in no way linked to honesty. This implies that there are some innate, situational and contextual factors which affects gratitude. As the results came from a sample of adolescents selected from various educational institutions and were assessed using a standardized psychological tests and tools, their interpretations can have significant influence on cognition and restructuring the assumptions with the findings. However, this was just an exploratory and pilot study and should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results.

V. LIMITATIONS & FURTHER STUDIES

- The current research lacks the study of intervening variables which makes it difficult to completely explain completely why most of the adolescents of today find it hard to express less thankfulness.
- Future studies should include intervening variables like the impact of social media use, school environment, parenting styles, and family environments. For this the studies should incorporate qualitative techniques which might be including focused groups and interviewing them may also offer a deeper understanding of how adolescents think, perceive and display gratitude in their daily lives. These methods would help in demonstrating and

identifying the social contextual variables that influence gratitude in addition to personal positivity traits.

- Additionally, the study is instrumental in bringing more fruitful investigation. One of them is examining the connection between social media use and gratitude which stand important at present time. The upcoming researches should explore how continual online presence, social comparison of adolescents, and effective digital communication patterns impact the growth and expression of gratitude on growth and development. Such studies can be enriching and insightful for providing information on the modern elements influencing adolescent's well being.

VI. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the results of this study have significant applications to be promoted among adolescents. At school level, within family system and the experts of mental health should focus on inculcating gratitude as a life skill because the findings suggest a significant percentage of adolescents showing low levels of gratitude. This can be implemented with Awareness programs on Emotional literacy, family outreach with meaningful conversations, giving students introspective exercises and activities which brings and promote gratitude. This should be integrated into educational curriculum so that it can be implemented as an integral necessity of adolescent's inclusive educational path. Increasing gratitude will definitely lead to better relationships at all levels, increased resilience, becoming optimistic towards life, and increased and enhanced emotional competence. The findings also suggest that rather than assuming that gratitude itself naturally emerge alongside other positivity virtues, the strategical interventions should take into consideration the social and environmental experiences of adolescents.

So, it can be concluded that the present study found that low gratitude was prevalent among adolescents, which supports concerns about declining gratitude levels in this populations. The findings also indicates that gratitude is not necessarily linked with honesty which implies that we need to consider the environmental and contextual factors like family, parenting styles, social context other than individual's moral values alone as positivity virtue. These results makes us attentive towards the importance of developing gratitude and thus focused interventions within schools, families, and counselling settings and highlights the need for additional research to understand the social and environmental factors that collaborate to gratitude development during adolescence.

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➤ Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest

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