



THE PSYCHOLOGY OF DAILY GRATITUDE AND ITS IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH ACROSS LIFE STAGES

¹Shreevidhya T, ²Ms. Kavya Vijayan,

¹PG Student, ²Assistant Professor,

¹Department of Psychology,

¹CDOE, JAIN (Deemed-to-be-University, Bengaluru – 78, INDIA

ABSTRACT

Gratitude has been increasingly recognized as a significant construct within positive psychology, contributing to various aspects of mental health and well-being. However, limited research has examined how its influence varies across different stages of life. The present study explores the relationship between daily gratitude and key mental health outcomes—emotional well-being, life satisfaction, and perceived stress—among adolescents, adults, and older adults. A quantitative cross-sectional design was employed with a sample of 120 participants equally distributed across three age groups. Standardized instruments, including the Daily Gratitude–Mental Health Lifespan Scale (DG-MHLS), PANAS, Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS), and Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10), were used. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, one-way ANOVA, Pearson correlation, and regression analysis. Findings revealed that gratitude is significantly associated with emotional well-being ($r = .50, p < .01$) and life satisfaction ($r = .40, p < .01$) but not significantly related to perceived stress ($r = -.06, p > .05$). Significant differences across age groups were observed for gratitude and positive mental health variables, while stress remained consistent. Regression analysis indicated that gratitude significantly predicts emotional well-being and life satisfaction but not stress. The findings highlight gratitude as a resource that enhances positive mental health outcomes, while its role in reducing stress appears limited. The study contributes to a lifespan understanding of gratitude and its psychological relevance.

Keywords: Gratitude, Mental Health, Emotional Well-being, Life Satisfaction, Perceived Stress, Lifespan Development

I.INTRODUCTION

The study of mental health has increasingly moved beyond the traditional focus on psychological disorders toward understanding factors that promote well-being and positive functioning. Within this shift, gratitude has emerged as an important psychological construct that influences how individuals perceive and experience their lives.

Gratitude is typically defined as the tendency to recognize and appreciate positive aspects of life, including support from others, favorable circumstances, and everyday experiences. It involves both emotional and cognitive processes, allowing individuals to assign meaning to positive events. Research suggests that gratitude is associated with greater emotional stability, improved relationships, and enhanced life satisfaction.

However, mental health is a multidimensional construct that includes both positive experiences, such as emotional well-being, and negative experiences, such as stress. While gratitude has been consistently linked to positive outcomes, its relationship with stress remains unclear.

Another important consideration is developmental context. Adolescents, adults, and older adults differ in emotional regulation, life experiences, and social roles. These differences may influence how gratitude is experienced and how it relates to mental health.

Despite growing interest, few studies have examined gratitude across multiple life stages within a single framework. The present study addresses this gap by examining how daily gratitude relates to emotional well-being, life satisfaction, and perceived stress across adolescents, adults, and older adults.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Gratitude has been widely studied as both an emotional state and a dispositional trait. It is considered a central construct within positive psychology, contributing to improved psychological functioning and overall well-being. Empirical research consistently shows that gratitude is positively associated with emotional well-being. Individuals who report higher levels of gratitude tend to experience more positive emotions, greater optimism, and stronger interpersonal relationships. Similarly, gratitude has been linked to life satisfaction, suggesting that it influences how individuals evaluate their lives.

Intervention-based studies further demonstrate that practices such as gratitude journaling can enhance well-being and reduce negative affect. However, findings related to stress are less consistent. While some studies suggest that gratitude may indirectly reduce stress through improved coping, others report weak or non-significant relationships.

Research within the Indian context highlights the cultural relevance of gratitude, emphasizing values such as interconnectedness and relational appreciation. Studies across adolescents, adults, and older adults suggest that gratitude is beneficial across stages of life, although its expression may vary.

A key limitation in existing literature is the lack of comparative studies across age groups. Additionally, many studies focus on single outcomes rather than examining multiple dimensions of mental health simultaneously. The present study addresses these gaps by adopting a lifespan perspective and examining multiple mental health outcomes within a unified framework.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

A quantitative cross-sectional design was used to examine relationships between gratitude and mental health variables.

3.2 Participants

The sample consisted of 120 participants:

- Adolescents (n = 40)
- Adults (n = 40)
- Older Adults (n = 40)

Participants were selected using stratified purposive sampling.

3.3 Measures

- Daily Gratitude–Mental Health Lifespan Scale (DG-MHLS)
- Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS)
- Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS)

- Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10)

3.4 Procedure

Participants completed questionnaires either online or offline after providing informed consent. Data was screened and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics.

3.5 Statistical Analysis

- Descriptive statistics (Mean, SD)
- One-way ANOVA
- Pearson correlation
- Linear regression

IV.RESULTS

Descriptive statistics indicated relatively high levels of gratitude ($M = 87.52$, $SD = 7.47$) and emotional well-being ($M = 36.74$, $SD = 4.07$), with moderate levels of life satisfaction ($M = 17.77$) and stress ($M = 21.18$).

ANOVA results revealed significant differences across age groups:

- Gratitude: $F = 108.58$, $p < .001$
- Emotional well-being: $F = 35.01$, $p < .001$
- Life satisfaction: $F = 11.83$, $p < .001$
- Stress: $F = 0.43$, $p = .653$ (not significant)

Correlation analysis showed:

- Gratitude & Emotional Well-being: $r = .50$, $p < .01$
- Gratitude & Life Satisfaction: $r = .40$, $p < .01$
- Gratitude & Stress: $r = -.06$, not significant

Regression analysis indicated:

- Emotional well-being: $\beta = .49$, $p < .001$
- Life satisfaction: $\beta = .39$, $p < .001$
- Stress: $\beta = -.06$, $p = .512$

V.ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The findings highlight gratitude as a meaningful contributor to positive mental health. The moderate relationship between gratitude and emotional well-being suggests that gratitude enhances positive emotional experiences. Similarly, its association with life satisfaction indicates its role in shaping broader life evaluations. However, the lack of a significant relationship with stress suggests that gratitude may not directly reduce negative psychological experiences. Stress appears to be influenced more by external and situational factors. The observed age differences further suggest that gratitude develops over time. Adults and older adults reported higher levels of gratitude, possibly due to greater life experience and reflective capacity. Overall, gratitude appears to function as a psychological resource that enhances positive functioning rather than reducing distress.

VI. CONCLUSION

The study demonstrates that gratitude plays a significant role in enhancing emotional well-being and life satisfaction across different life stages. However, its impact on perceived stress is limited.

The findings emphasize the importance of considering developmental context in psychological research and suggest that gratitude-based interventions may be more effective in promoting positive mental health than in reducing stress.

VII. LIMITATIONS

- Cross-sectional design limits causal interpretation
- Use of self-report measures may introduce bias
- Sample may not represent broader population
- External factors influencing stress were not examined

VIII. FUTURE SCOPE OF STUDY

Future studies should:

- Use longitudinal designs
- Include larger and diverse samples
- Examine mediating variables such as coping and resilience
- Explore cultural influences more deeply

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