

Gratitude and Mental Health in Adults

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The present study was designed to probe the association of gratitude with mental health in adults. It was assumed that gratitude would significantly predict mental health (anxiety, depression, behavior control and positive affect and general distress) in adults. The combination of snowball and respondent-driven sampling was employed to collect data from the residents (n=160) of Faisalabad city. Following inclusive-exclusive criteria for sample selection and research ethics, data was collected using 6-item Gratitude Scale (McCullough, Emmons & Tsang, 2002) and 18- items Mental Health Inventory (Viet & Ware, 1983). Linear regression analysis has depicted gratitude as a significant predictor of mental health ($\beta = .156$, $t(158) = 1.979$, $p = .049$), of depression ($\beta = -.158$, $t(158) = -2.005$, $p = .047$) of behavioral control ($\beta = .401$, $t(158) = 5.509$, $p = .000$) and of positive affect ($\beta = .184$, $t(158) = 6.047$, $p = .020$) in adults. While, gratitude did not seem to predict anxiety ($\beta = -.087$, $t(158) = 13.091$, $p = .276$) and general distress ($\beta = -.028$, $t(158) = -.349$, $p = .728$). Conclusion of the present findings is that people who remain grateful for whatever they have been blessed in life, also remain mentally healthy.

Keywords: Gratitude, Mental Health, Adults.

With the emergence of the field of positive psychology, some positive personality attributes have steadily become the focused of attention all over the world, for instance; forgiveness, optimism, gratitude and so on. Philosophical and theological literature has documented gratitude requisite for normal human functioning (Emmons & Crumple, 2000). Gratitude refers to be in a state of thankfulness in response to whatever is available (Sansone & Sansone, 2010). Some elucidated gratitude as an emotion characterized by appreciating and thankful acts for helping hands (McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001). Gratitude is a general propensity to recognize another person's role in achieving benevolence and desired outcomes and to exhibit grateful emotions towards him or her (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).

Gratitude brings abundance of blessings for us. It refers to a pleasant state cultivating positive emotions like happiness, hope and contentment (Walker & Pitts, 1998). Gratitude seems to lessen the effects of materialistic striving (Polak & McCullough, 2006), perhaps for that, grateful people are perceived as optimistic, trustworthy and helpful (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002).

Grateful people have wider orientation of life and always view positive aspects of their life (Wood, Froh & Geraghty, 2010). Gratitude has strong connection with higher level of mental health (Aghababaei & Tabik, 2012). Gratefulness seemed to lessen the vulnerability of internalized and externalized disorders (Kendler et al., 2003). People with gratitude proclivity take sound sleep. It predicts subjective sleep quality and duration (Wood, Joseph, Lloyd & Atkins, 2009; Nelson & Harvey, 2003). Gratitude has significant connection with better sleep, less depressed mood, less fatigue and self-efficacy (Mills et al., 2015). It helps in healing from stress and negative emotions (Fredrickson, 2002).

People with grateful propensity seemed to be more energetic with less physical complaints as compare to non-grateful (McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001). Researches revealed the association of higher level of gratitude with greater satisfaction in life, more social support and less internalize symptoms (Hasemeyer, 2013). Level of stress and depression was reduced with the increase of gratitude (Wood et al., 2008). A significant relationship of gratitude was observed with self-esteem (Kong, Ding

& Zhao, 2015) and low narcissism (Farwell & Wohlwend-Lloyd, 1998).

It seemed to heal negative emotions including envy, resentment, disappointment, and bitterness (Csikzentmihalyi, 1999). In this way, gratitude further promotes interpersonal relationships (Algoe et al., 2008) and makes people happy because, gratitude enables them to count more positive events and recall pleasant past events (Watkin, Grimm & Kolts, 2004). A significant positive association of gratitude with life satisfaction and positive affect was found out, whereas gratitude significantly predicted subjective well-being among teachers (Ramzan & Rana, 2014).

Gratitude seemed to prevent psychiatric and physical health disorders (Kashdan, Uswatte, & Julian, 2006). Grateful people are less critical, less punishing and more compassionate towards others and self also that buffers in developing psychopathologies (Petrocchi & Couyoumdjian, 2013). It raises feelings of personal happiness and alleviates depression (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). People being in a grateful state showed less death anxiety (Lau & Cheng, 2012). Realizing the chief significance of gratitude for an individual and society, we envisioned to probe its benefits for one's mental health by assuming that;

Gratitude will significantly predict mental health (anxiety, depression, behavioral control, positive affect and general distress) in adults

Method

Research design

Relationship of gratitude with mental health was investigated by employing correlational research method. Whereas, prediction research design was opted to examine gratitude as a predictor of mental health. According to Creswell (2008), when research is interested in studying one or more variables as predictor of another variable, he or she must employ prediction research design.

Sample

Sample was drawn from general population through snowball and respondent-driven sampling method. The sample size was one

hundred and sixty ($n = 160$) adults (Male = 80, Female = 80), between 21 to 55 years of age ($M = 31.1$, $SD = 7.61924$), residents of Faisalabad city. Participants with minimum educational degree of matriculation, with at least 2 years of marital duration, free from any mental or physical disease/disability and belonging to intact family were selected for the present study.

Measures

Personal Information Form (PIF): Demographic (personal) information (name, age, gender, education, marital status, employment status, family system, socio-economic status, and residential area) was assembled through Personal Information Form (PIF).

Gratitude Scale (McCullough, Emmons & Tsang, 2002): A six items Gratitude Scale (McCullough, Emmons & Tsang, 2002) was used to examine gratitude. All items are scored on 7-point Likert scale [Strongly disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Slightly disagree = 3, Neutral = 4, Slightly agree = 5, Agree = 6, Strongly agree = 7]. Cronbach's alpha ranged from .76 to .84, as reported by McCullough, Emmons and Tsang (2002).

Mental Health Inventory (Veit & Ware, 1983): Examination of mental health was done with help of eighteen items Mental Health Inventory (Veit & Ware, 1983). It has four subscales; Anxiety with 5 items, Depression with 4 items, Behavioral Control with 4 items and Positive Affect with 4 items. There is only 1 item to measure General Distress. All items are responded on 6 point rating scale (All of the time = 1, Most of the time = 2, Good bit of time = 3, Some of the time = 4, A little of the time = 5 and None of the time = 6). Reliability of Anxiety subscale is ($\alpha = .84$), of Depression scale is ($\alpha = .83$), of Behavioural control is ($\alpha = .63$), of Positive affect is ($\alpha = .85$) and for full scale is ($\alpha = .93$).

Procedure

The current study was carried out with the approval from affiliated institution and as well as from the authors/publishers to use their measurements for the present research. Written consent from every participant was taken first to proceed further. At this stage, briefing was given pertaining to the process of data

collection, confidentiality of personal information, responsibility on the part of researcher and rights of participants as well. When participants showed compliance with research procedure, they were requested to fill Personal Information Form, and then to respond, heedfully, to each item of the Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6) and Mental Health Inventory (MHI-18). After successful completion of data collection, items were scored following scoring instructions and afterwards statistically analyzed by applying

descriptive statistics and regression analysis using SPSS, Version- 20.

Results

Above mentioned summary of results demonstrated the variable of gratitude as significant predictor of mental health ($\beta = .156$, $t(158) = 1.979$, $p = .049$), depression ($\beta = -.158$, $t(158) = -2.005$, $p = .047$), behavioral control ($\beta = .401$, $t(158) = 5.509$, $p = .000$) and positive affect ($\beta = .184$, $t(158) = 6.047$, $p = .020$) in

Table 1: Summary of Linear Regression Analysis with Gratitude as a Predictor of Mental Health (Anxiety, Depression, Behavioral Control, Positive Affect and General Distress) in Adults

Dependent variable	R	R ²	ΔR^2	SEM
Mental Health	.156	.024	.018	7.85023
Anxiety	.087	.008	.001	3.76574
Depression	.158	.025	.019	3.36069
Behavioral Control	.401	.161	.156	3.11188
Positive Affect	.184	.034	.028	4.12457
General Distress	.028	.001	-.006	1.37969

Table 2: Summary of Analysis of Variance of Gratitude as a Predictor of Mental Health (Anxiety, Depression, Behavioral Control, Positive Affect and General Distress) in Adults

	Model	SS	df	MS	F	Sig
Mental Health	Regression	241.476	1	241.476	3.918	.049
	Residual	9736.924	158	61.626		
	Total	9978.400	159			
Anxiety	Regression	17.031	1	17.031	1.201	.275
	Residual	2240.563	158	14.181		
	Total	2257.594	159			
Depression	Regression	45.414	1	45.414	4.021	.047
	Residual	1784.486	158	11.294		
	Total	1829.900	159			
Behavioral Control	Regression	293.857	1	293.857	30.345	.000
	Residual	1530.043	158	9.684	5.518	.020
	Total	1823.900	159			
Positive Affect	Regression	93.867	1	93.867	5.518	.020
	Residual	2687.908	158	17.012		
	Total	2781.775	159			
General Distress	Regression	.232	1	.232	.122	.728
	Residual	300.762	158	1.904		
	Total	300.994	159			

Table 3: Summary of Coefficients of Gratitude as a Predictor of Mental Health (Anxiety, Depression, Behavioral Control, Positive Affect and General Distress) in Adults

	Un-standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig
Mental Health	.207	.105	.156	1.979	.049
Anxiety	-.055	.050	-.087	-1.096	.276
Depression	-.090	.045	-.158	-2.005	.047
Behavioral Control	.229	.041	.401	5.509	.000
Positive Affect	.129	.055	.184	2.349	.020
General Distress	-.006	.018	-.028	-.349	.728

adults. Related to other two dependent variables anxiety ($\beta = -.087$, $t(158) = 13.091$, $p = .276$) and general distress ($\beta = -.028$, $t(158) = -.349$, $p = .728$), gratitude did not emerge as significant predictor in the current study.

Discussion

Like previous studies, the present paper also proved the association of gratitude with mental health. Resultantly, it is inferred that people having propensity for gratitude are more likely to be mentally healthy in terms of less depressive state, more positive affect and behavioral control. Mental well-being is closely connected with gratitude (Rosmarin, Pirutinsky, Cohen, Galler & Krumrei (2011). Sense of gratefulness develops more positive view of life. It is commonly observed that grateful people rarely complain from others and seem to be satisfied with their life, even in painful circumstances. Plausibly, gratitude is a positive emotion cultivated in positive feeling/behaviors which are quintessential for being mentally healthy. Positive emotions positively influence cognitive state leading to optimal functioning ((Fredrickson, 2001)

Feelings of satisfaction and positive view of life enable people to deal life situation efficiently while drawing their attention towards their potentials. Mentally healthy people are able to recognize their strengths, capable to handle daily stressors and play a pivotal role in community development (WHO, 2014). Gratitude prevent cursing own fate; diminish feelings of worthlessness while increasing sense of well-being in all domains of life.

Gratitude elicits pleasant affect navigating positive perception of life, for this reason, gratitude, in many researches, seemed to have significant association with positive affect and life satisfaction (Rana, Tahir & Ramazan, 2013). It also have been confirmed in the present study that participants who reported more gratitude also reported more positive affect.

There is no doubt in saying that people who always remain grateful usually have good intentions for others. They hardly harbor negative emotions of jealousy and envy. They feel satisfied, no matter, they achieve less in life than others. Grateful individuals do not prefer social comparisons and exhibit less envious towards others (Emmons & Mishra, 2011). Absence of negative emotions and feelings enable person to have control over his or her behavior. More positive feelings and intentions strengthen self-esteem and increase sense of mastery. These characteristics help in dealing life adversity and maintaining healthy relationship. Gratitude is essential for building relationship (Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006) and prosocial behavior (Kini et al., 2016). Due to that, people have firm control over their behavior, specifically in problematic situation. As also found out in the current study that participants reported more gratitude also reported more behavioral control.

The present study also confirmed that people with grateful tendency are less likely to develop depression. Gratitude impedes negative impacts of materialism (Polak & McCullough, 2006). In fact, gratitude develops wider orientation of life that encompasses appreciation of

positive aspects of the world. People with depressive state pay attention to negative aspects. Gradually, they have narrow orientation towards life; as a result, they are unable to see anything expect darkness in everywhere. Here, gratitude works for depressive people by encouraging them to acknowledge the goodness exist in their surroundings so that clouds of sadness and hopelessness could be removed. Previous studies also reported that grateful people always recollect pleasant and positive memories from previous experiences; consequently, their focus of attention is paid to appreciation rather than deprivation (Watkins, 2004). Once a person overcomes his feelings of deprivation, he starts taking interest in daily activities, becomes optimistic and has much in life to look forward. This state of mind decreases the level of depression. Remembering positive events increases happiness and reduce depression (Seligman et al., 2005). Gratitude is association with happiness, adjustment in life and over all physical and mental health (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).

Studies also reveal a non-significant association of gratitude with anxiety despite determining overall mental health. Anxiety has been defined as nervousness, tension, high strung, difficulty calming down, rattled or upset, restlessness and fidgety (Veit & Ware, 1983). Today, we have different stressors in life which make us worried such as; accidents, violence, terrorism and so on. People with grateful propensity try to be happy and satisfied for what they have but significant stressors which sometime become uncontrollable and resulted in tension and restlessness. Scientific literature has elucidated that constant and irregular stressors are significantly positively associated with anxiety (Mahan et al., 2010). It also seems to be the significant cause of general distress in daily life, as observed in present study that gratitude did not significantly determine general distress among participants.

Conclusion

It is concluded that gratitude is a significant predictor of mental health, depression and behavioural control and positive affect in adults. Albeit, the present study was basic type of

research conducted to explain the relationship between gratitude and mental health, despite that, it provides new avenues for developing psychological interventions. In short, pragmatic use of gratitude will not only strengthen interpersonal relationships but also remove the clouds of frustration from the society.

Implications

The concept of gratitude is not new for us. In Holy books, it has been mentioned many times that people should be gratitude for having benevolence. Offering prayers for five times in a day is the way of exhibiting gratitude towards Allah (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000). Scientific evidences of significance of gratitude in one's life further strengthen its religious concept and practical implications in community. People by showing gratitude surely may benefit their own self. Paying thanks in daily life strengthens the sense of well-being. Probably owing to this, grateful people seem to be agreeable and open (McCullough et al., 2002). Though, the present scientific investigation was done in Pakistan, therefore, we people can reform our society being thankful towards Allah and His human beings. In this way, negative emotions of jealousy, grudge and hatred are possible to be declined. Notwithstanding, the present study was basic research, it has implications for mental health professionals who can generate gratitude based psychological interventions to benefit their patients suffering from mental health problems.

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