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Impact of Gratitude on Well-being and Happiness of Adolescents

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Abstract:

Adolescents' mental health has been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the global reaction to it, which includes adjustments to daily and academic schedules. Gratitude is a component of a broader life philosophy that emphasises observing and celebrating the good things in life. Gratitude makes a person more concerned towards others be it environment or another person. Gratitude makes human connections valuable. The expression of gratitude plays important role in adolescent stage of our lifecycle as our well being is impacted by it. A grateful person acknowledges the generosity of others and is optimistic. The sense of gratitude motivates a person to notice and appreciate the positive aspects of any situation. The present paper explores the relationship between gratitude, happiness and well being of adolescents. It also highlights that by nurturing gratitude the potential of well-being can be improved. The integrative framework of gratitude related to well-being, optimism, happy relationships, and adaptive personality traits is highlighted in the research paper.

Keywords: Gratitude, well-being, happiness, adolescents, positive psychology

1. INTRODUCTION:

The English word gratitude has its roots in the Latin word 'gratus', which denotes pleasing, thankful, kindness, graciousness, or appreciation. This can be a gift, assistance, a favor, or another act of generosity. Gratitude has been defined as "a feeling of thankfulness and joy in response to receiving a gift, whether the present is a concrete benefit from or any kind of favor or a joyful moment caused by natural beauty" (Peterson & Seligman, 2003). It is rightly said that the base of all other virtues is gratitude. According to Cicero (1851), "the moral memory of mankind" (Simmel, 1996 & Smith, 1976), this feeling is what "most instantly and directly urges us to reward."

Gratitude can result from sources like praise of one's abilities or from a setting that made successful work feasible. Gratitude is a feeling that is constantly centered on appreciating the good deeds of others (McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001). While appreciating the good

deeds of others people frequently come to the realisation that kindness has an origin that is at least partially external to them. They can use it to draw parallels between the past (remembering fondly and appreciating childhood or preceding blessings), the present (not taking good fortune for granted as it arrives), and the future (making preparations for the future) (maintaining a hopeful and optimistic attitude). Regardless of their innate or current level of appreciation, people can learn to have more of this attribute.

2. OBJECTIVES:

1. To understand the relationship between gratitude and adolescents' well-being and happiness.
2. To explore the benefits of nurturing of gratitude among adolescents.
3. To analyze the influence of gratitude in managing healthy social relationships.

3. METHODOLOGY:

The study is based on secondary sources of data. The data has been collected from journals, books, websites, etc. Research studies, theoretical and methodological contributions were considered to encompass substantive findings. The 42 research studies were referred to study the objectives.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW:

In 1998, when Martin Seligman developed positive psychology, a new branch of psychology, the systematic study of gratitude in the discipline of psychology started. The reinforcement on positive traits is focused in the study of positive psychology. The psychological study of gratitude has included an effort to comprehend the short-term experience of the gratitude response (state gratitude), individual differences in how frequently individuals feel gratitude (trait gratitude), and the relationship between these two. Gratitude is the feeling of appreciation one experiences when someone makes an effort to provide them something they appreciate (McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001; McCullough & Tsang, 2004). Through its promotion of reciprocal, prosocial conduct between a benefactor and recipient, gratitude serves to foster social bonds (Algoe & Haidt, 2004; Emmons & McCullough, 2004).

People often feel grateful when they get something they appreciate, consider valuable, or perceive to be selfless (Wood et al, 2008). According to McCullough et al (2001), gratitude makes people optimistic as they have been treated prosocially by another person. Gratitude motivates people to prolong their prosocial behavior. Thus, Gratitude is not just limited to interpersonal appreciation of others' generosity (Veisson, 1999) but also had a great role in maintaining healthy social relationships. Since gratitude is a major factor in determining how excellent social behaviour should be displayed, there is strong evidence that it increases prosocial behaviour. This is due to the fact that it teaches people to tolerate temporary setbacks in exchange for long-term benefits, which in turn help them to develop stronger life and interpersonal skills (Bartlett et al., 2006).

In the opinion of Simmel (1950) from religious perspective and moral viewpoint gratitude is

considered as a human virtue which improves self, promotes healthy relationships and is beneficial for the society. According to McCullough, et al. (2001), gratitude is a moral affect, which means it has ethical implications. According to their hypothesis, when someone is appreciative, they are motivated to act in a prosocial manner, energised to uphold moral principles, and inhibited from acting in a destructive way toward others. Gratitude is unquestionably linked to subjective well-being, whether it is a state or a trait emotion. In fact, happy individuals often express thanks (Watkins et al, 2004).

5. ASSESSMENT OF INDIVIDUAL VARIATIONS IN GRATITUDE:

Three scales that evaluate slightly distinct ideas have been created to examine individual variations in gratitude (Wood et al., 2008). The GQ6 (McCullough et al, 2002) assesses individual variations in how often and strongly people express appreciation. The Appreciation Scale (Adler & Fagley, 2005) evaluates eight various facets of gratitude, including conduct that shows gratitude as well as appreciation of others, things, the present moment, rituals, feelings of wonder, societal comparisons, existential concerns, and rituals. The GRAT (Watkins et al, 2003) evaluates a person's level of gratitude toward others, gratitude for the world in general, and absence of resentment toward their perceived shortcomings. According to a recent study, these measures are all actually evaluating the same perspective on life, which shows that all of these factors contribute to individual variances in appreciation (Wood et al., 2008).

The unifactorial GQ-6 (McCullough et al., 2002), the multifactorial Appreciation Scale (Adler & Fagley, 2005), and the multifactorial Thankfulness, Appreciation, and Resentment Test (GRAT: Watkins, Woodward, Stone, & Kolts, 2003) have been designed as measures to assess gratitude. These scales offer a broad definition of appreciation that is consistent with a life orientation approach. Each of these scales originated from a different view of what constitutes thankfulness. These three scales offer 12 sub-scales that measure eight various facets of thankfulness: (1) Individual variations in the experience of the thankful emotion, (2) respect for others (3) a concentration on what one has, (4) awe-inspiring reactions to beauty, (4) acts of thankfulness, (5) emphasizing the present's favourable aspects, (6) appreciation rising from (7) A recognition that life is finite, and an emphasis on the good in the here and now and (8) favourable social comparisons.

6. ADOLESCENT: A CHALLENGING PERIOD OF LIFE:

The period of adolescent age is a crucial stage and important time in life. Significant physical, social, emotional, and intellectual growth takes place during adolescence (Freud, 1958). At this period of development, even healthy growing individuals deal with challenges related to identity, autonomy, sexuality, relationships, and psychological adjustment. This stage is considered as a stage of transition between childhood and adulthood, and negotiation is difficult during most times during

this transformation period (Holmbeck & Kendall, 2002).

Adolescents typically suffer from rapid mood swings, high positive and negative affective valence, and sensations that make it difficult for them to maintain a steady level of positive affect owing to isolation. Most adolescents struggle with understanding of their relationships with family, friends, and other people as well as their search for their life's purpose. Due to the volatile nature of this developmental stage, early adolescence is typically associated with an increase in familial estrangement, relational disruption, and even depression (Silverberg & Steinberg, 1990; Steinberg, 1987). Adolescents that are happier typically exhibit fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety, as well as less substance abuse and aggressive behaviour (Valois et al, 2001). It is important to distinguish between the effects of gratitude and the reciprocity norm (i.e., cognitive awareness that one should compensate another person who has helped), in addition to demonstrating how gratitude facilitates helping behaviour in a manner distinct from how general positive states influence helping behaviour. In the past, psychologists have suggested that understanding of this social standard is the cause of a lot of reciprocal prosocial action (Pruitt, 1968; Walster et al, 1973; Wilke & Lanzetta, 1970).

6.1 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GRATITUDE, WELL BEING AND INCREASED HAPPINESS:

Positive psychology study shows a strong and long-lasting relationship between gratitude and increased happiness. Another renowned authority in this field, Dr. Seligman (2005), a Psychologist at the University of Pennsylvania, investigated the outcomes of multiple positive psychology therapies on 411 subjects and contrasted each with a control assignment of writing about childhood memories. When given the responsibility of writing and delivering a letter of gratitude to someone who had never been sufficiently thanked for their compassion as part of the week's assignment, the participants' satisfaction scores instantly increased noticeably. The favourable effects of this intervention lasted for a month and were more significant than those of any other. The majority of the research studies conducted suggests a link between adolescents' wellbeing, happiness and appreciation. The study by Kendlers, Liu, et al. (2003) adds to the growing body of evidence suggesting that gratitude may have curable effect on a number of diseases. Students who maintained daily gratitude journals reported feeling more alert, enthusiastic, determined, attentive, and energetic than those who focused on problems or made negative social comparisons (Emmons & McCullough, 2004).

Alkozei et al. (2017) presented a cognitive model and a psycho-social model to explain the relationship between gratitude trait and subjective well-being. Adolescents, who wrote weekly entries in gratitude journals exercised more, experienced fewer adverse health symptoms, felt better overall, and were more optimistic about the upcoming week than those who wrote weekly notes in

issues or neutral life events, according to the experiment conducted by Emmons & McCullough, (2004).

When investigating the effectiveness of thanksgiving interventions, there is some evidence that counting blessings once a week is more beneficial in boosting well-being than those who engaged in the same practise three times a week (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006). From these studies it is clearly evident that being thankful has a direct connection to well-being and increased happiness.

6.2 ACHIEVEMENT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS:

When a person's value system is dominated by materialistic ideals, their personal health suffers since it is more likely that the experiences that satiate their basic psychological needs would deteriorate, leaving them unfulfilled (Kasser et al. 2004). Gratitude, however, seems to have the opposite effect on one's wellbeing, maybe because it helps people achieve their basic psychological needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy (Kneezel and Emmons 2006).

In the study of review of appreciation, which demonstrated that emotional gratitude can serve to highlight the help received and encourage the extension of assistance to other people (McCullough et al, 2001). The process goes beyond simply appreciating and returning favours creating a helpful social environment in the society. There are numerous ways to feel and express gratitude. People express gratitude for their blessings. People who frequently show gratitude engage in more prosocial behaviours than those who do so infrequently (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002). An individual is more likely to act in a way that is both personally and socially helpful when they are feeling grateful because it emphasizes the idea that there is something to be grateful for in the world. Professor of Psychology Giacomo Bono of California State University remarked that the youths who participated in his study "had a substantial impact on various areas of positive mental health." Gains in gratitude were closely connected with increases in life satisfaction, happiness, favourable attitudes, and optimism during a four-year period. According to Carver et al. (2010) optimism represents a life orientation towards expecting future benefits as well as a propensity to envision the routes that would lead to these beneficial outcomes (Geraghty et al, 2010). According to Kashdan and Uswatte et al. (2006), gratitude is linked to better levels of daily subjective and eudemonic well-being in PTSD patients after symptomatology has been taken into account. It also demonstrates the average amount of gratitude that varies with and without a diagnosis of the illness differs in.

Gratitude improves a person's capacity for more positive emotions, enjoyable memories, better health, overcoming difficulties, and developing close relationships. Given its correlation to happiness, hope, pride, optimism, pleasant mood, self-actualization, easy interpersonal interactions, and a sense of community feeling, a thorough examination of gratitude is necessary if optimal psychological development among early/late adolescents is to be completely understood (Emmons & Shelton, 2002).

7. ROLE OF GRATITUDE BEYOND INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT:

Youth who are appreciative exhibit happiness with their friends, families, communities, and schools Froh et al. (2009). Gratitude promotes constructive social progress. Additionally, they mention engaging in helpful family and peer relationships and contributing their time. Furthermore, by encouraging young people to think about how others have benefited them, gratitude may raise self-respect (Froh et al. 2008). As a result, gratitude is crucial for healthy development as it enables children to comprehend how others uphold and sustain their lives. As stability and worth are inversely connected with materialism, this should improve those feelings.

It is important to distinguish between the effects of gratitude and the reciprocity norm (i.e., cognitive awareness that one should compensate another person who has helped), in addition to demonstrating how gratitude facilitates helping behaviour in a manner distinct from how general positive states influence helping behaviour. In the past, psychologists have suggested that understanding of this social standard is the cause of a lot of reciprocal prosocial action (Pruitt, 1968; Walster et al, 1973; Wilke & Lanzetta, 1970). As a moral reinforcer, admiration encourages prosocial behaviour by praising people for their prior good deeds (McCullough et al, 2001). A functional justification for the emotion of gratitude requires evidence that directly links controlled changes in its intensity to prosocial behaviour (McCullough et al., 2002).

According to research by Frank (1988) and Baumeister et al, (1994), emotions like gratitude, guilt, and love may be crucial in fostering trust by motivating one to engage in actions that benefit the relationship even when they are short-term costs to the individual. In the opinion of Rogers (1951) from a humanistic perspective, gratitude could be seen as naturally arising, unless environmental constraints prohibit it.

8. CONCLUSION:

"Gratitude is not only the greatest of the virtues, but the parent of all others," said Cicero. Although psychology has historically ignored the topic of gratitude, significant progress has been made in recent years in understanding gratitude and its beneficial benefits (Hohmann, 1966). Numerous studies have demonstrated the link between gratitude and improved wellbeing (McCullough et al, 2004, Desteno et al, 2010). These research studies have been welcomed by the positive psychology movement, which has started to try to include activities that encourage gratitude as an effort to improve general wellbeing and happiness. Gratitude is considered as the major component of positive psychology. It helps adolescents in fulfilling basic needs of personal growth and relationships and reduces vulnerability to health risks.

In order to fill the gap in the literature on gratitude and adolescents' well being it is essential to do more research on the impact of gratitude on well being of adolescents as to understand and explore the necessary interventions to inculcate gratitude in adolescent stage of an individual's life as

the conscious application of gratitude will enhance their well being to create a grateful and happy society. Adolescents may learn to enjoy the blessings of the present moment by becoming free from regrets from the past and anxieties about the future by just being taught to be grateful.

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