Expression of Gratitude and Subjective Well-Being Among University Teachers

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Abstract: The present study was conducted to investigate the relationship between gratitude and subjective well-being amongst university teachers. It was hypothesized that gratitude is positively related to subjective well-being and that age, gender and gratitude would be positive predictors of subjective well-being. Data was collected from 206 teachers (129 males and 77 females) from Government College University, Lahore and University of Punjab, Lahore. The Gratitude was measured with Gratitude Questionnaire-Six Item Form (GQ-6). Cognitive and affective aspects of subjective well-being were assessed with Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) and The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS), respectively. *Correlation analyses* showed significant positive correlations among gratitude, life satisfaction, positive affect and age of teachers. The relationship of gratitude with negative affect was non-significant. There was a positive correlation between subjective well-being and positive affect and a negative correlation of subjective well-being with negative affect. *Regression analyses* revealed that gratitude and age, not gender, are significant predictors of subjective well-being. Findings of this research provide a meaningful insight about the nature of association between gratitude and subjective well-being in Pakistani culture. The study supports the hypothesis that those who hold higher level of gratitude also have higher level of life satisfaction.

Key words: Gratitude · Subjective Well-Being · Positive Affect · Life Satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

The importance of 'Positive Psychology of Gratitude' and its role in enhancing the subjective well-being (happiness) of people in everyday life cannot be undermined. Positive psychology focuses on those aspects of the human condition that lead to happiness, fulfillment and flourishing [1]. It tends to promote a range of beneficial outcomes including a sense of optimism, hope, forgiveness and life satisfaction in day to day life. Gratitude is among the most desirable character strengths that are related to subjective well-being and happiness [2].

Getting praise even on a little achievement in life enhances the enjoyment of benefits. If praise is simply a verbal expression of gratitude even then this expression completes the enjoyment of benefits in life [3].

The word Gratitude is derived from Latin root *'gratia'* meaning grace, graciousness or gratefulness. Gratitude means a feeling of being grateful for gift or condition of being thankful [4]. Gratitude is a pleasant state and is linked with positive emotions including contentment, happiness, pride and hope [5].

Gratitude has different aspects and utilitarian functions in human life [6]. Gratitude as an affective trait refers to predisposition towards certain types of emotional standings. This predisposition sets the threshold for the occurrence of particular emotional states. The people who score highly on measures of gratitude as an affective trait tend to experience low threshold or to say higher level of positive effects such as happiness, vitality and hope. At the same time, these people also experience relatively high threshold or to say low levels of negative effects such as resentment, depression and envy [7].

Cognitive component of gratitude is an attribution-dependent state that results from a two-step cognitive process: (a) recognizing positive outcome of gratitude and (b) recognizing that there is an external source for these positive outcomes [8].

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The moral aspect of gratitude portrays gratitude as a virtue. Virtues have been defined as character traits that a human being needs to flourish or to live well [9]. The emotional aspect of gratitude involves a feeling of emotional indebtedness towards another person. Fredrickson in 2002 speculates that gratitude helps people deal with stress and negative emotion [10].

The term Subjective well-being (SWB)is defined as a person's cognitive and affective evaluations of his or her life. These evaluations include both cognitive judgment of life satisfaction and affective evaluations of moods and emotions. Diener defines subjective well-being (happiness) as a combination of positive affect (in the absence of negative affect) and general life satisfaction [11]. Though life satisfaction, pleasant and unpleasant affects are interrelated but they must be studied independently to gain a complete picture of overall subjective well-being [12, 13].

Affective component of SWB refers to an evaluation of one's life in the form of affect or emotion. Subjective well-being has been found to be a function of the independent dimensions of general positive and negative affectivity. Positive Affect (PA) reflects extent of enthusiasm and alertness. High PA is a state of high energy, full concentration and pleasurable engagement. Low PA is characterized by sadness and lethargy. In contrast, high Negative Affect (NA) means subjective distress, un-pleasurable engagement and a variety of aversive mood states including anger, contempt, disgust, guilt, fear and nervousness. Low NA is a state of calmness and serenity [14].

Cognitive component of SWB is also known as 'life satisfaction'. It refers to a person's evaluation of his or her life in the form of cognitions based on one's own unique set of criteria. Life satisfaction complements happiness and affective dimensions of positive functioning. Life satisfaction is defined as 'a global assessment of a person's quality of life according to his own chosen criteria' [15].

The affective and cognitive components of SWB correlate positively with each other. Nevertheless, researchers have found that some demographic variables like age, gender and education are predictors/determinants of subjective well-being [16]. Life satisfaction does not decline with age [17]. Gender differences in subjective well-being are small or nonexistent. On an average, women experience both positive and negative emotions more strongly and frequently than men [18]. Small but significant correlation between education and SWB is indicated[19]. Much of the relation between education and SWB results from the correlation of education with occupational status and income. Health, marriage, religion and life events may also influence subjective well-being.

To conclude, positive psychology has led to the better understanding of some of the human traits and competencies that are associated with life satisfaction and happiness [1]. There seems to be very little doubt that everybody desires and strives to be happy. So, achieving happiness (subjective well-being) is the ultimate goal of humanity. Gratitude and subjective well-being are closely related with each other. Gratitude is effective in increasing SWB as it builds psychological, social and spiritual resources [20]. Recent psychological researches have shown that gratitude plays an important role in our happiness, healthy adjustment to life and even in our mental and physical well-being and more satisfying deep personal relationships [6, 7].

The present study is based upon two logical assumptions: Firstly, we still lack in our understanding regarding interaction and dynamics of several important components of SWB e.g. gratitude, hope and forgiveness, etc. Secondly, the role of gratitude in SWB among people of the East is yet to be learned from the empirical data collected from non-western cultures. The present study is an attempt to add to our existing knowledge the relationship between gratitude and SWB among Pakistanis.

Keeping in view the rationale of the study, following hypotheses have been formulated:-

- There are positive relationships among gratitude, life satisfaction, positive affect and age of teachers.
- Negative affect is negatively related to gratitude and life satisfaction.
- Gratitude, gender and age are positive predictors of life satisfaction.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants: The current study employed cross sectional research design. A sample of 206 teachers was selected by using purposive sampling technique. It was recruited from both science and arts departments of the Government College University, Lahore and University of the Punjab, Lahore. The age range of the sample was 23 to 75 years (*M* = 38.24, SD =12.28). Description of demographic variables can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the sample (N = 206)

	GC University	Punjab University	Total
Gender			
Male	63	66	129 (62.6%)
Female	31	46	77 (37.4%)
Age			
Young (23-38 year)	55	62	117 (56.7%)
Middle-old (39-75 year)	39	50	89 (43.2%)
Marital Status			
Married	62	83	145 (70.4%)
Unmarried	32	29	61 (29.6%)
Education			
M.A/ M.Sc.	37	53	90 (43.7%)
M. Phil	38	33	71 (34.5%)
Ph. D	19	26	45 (21.8%)
Designation			
Lecturers	49	70	119 (57.8%)
Assistant Prof.	28	28	56 (27.2%)
Associate Prof.	8	10	18 (8.7%)
Professors	9	4	13 (6.3%)

Assessment Tools: Following three tools were used in the current study.

The Gratitude Questionnaire-Six Item Form (GQ-6): The Gratitude Questionnaire-Six Item Form assesses individual differences in the proneness to experience gratitude in daily life [6]. Each item is to be rated on 7-point Likert-type rating scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). This tool has shown valid and reliable assessment of experience, expression of gratefulness and appreciation in daily life received from others. The Cronbach alpha estimates for the six-item totals have ranged from.76 to.84. Confirmatory factor analyses yield goodness-of-fit indexes within acceptable ranges (*i.e.* Comparative Fit Index range from .90 to.95 and Standardized Root Mean Residuals typically range from .05 to.10) [6]. Reliability analysis (internal consistency) was carried out for GQ-6 in the present study which showed reasonably high reliability *i.e.* α value .70.

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS): The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) was used to assess the cognitive component of subjective well-being [15]. This scale consists of five items in all. Each item is to be rated on 7-point Likert-type rating scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). This scale has shown to have favorable psychometric properties including high internal reliability (α =.82) and coefficient alpha (α = .87), respectively [15]. Internal consistency of SWLS for present study was reasonably high (α value .79).

The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS): The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) measures the affective component of subjective well-being *i.e.* One's emotional well-being [14]. The twenty item measure has two ten item subscales for assessing general tendencies to experience positive (α = .88) and negative affect (α = .87). Each item is to be rated on 5-point Likert-type rating scale (1 = not at all; 5 = extremely). Sum of the scores for Positive and Negative Affects were obtained separately. Scores on each of the two scales can range from 10 to 50, with a high score indicating stronger effect for the scale content (How they generally feel). Based on current sample, reliability analysis (internal consistency) was carried out for PANAS subscales which showed reasonably high reliability *i.e.* α value ranging from .79 to .84.

Procedure: After taking permission from the chairpersons, teachers were contacted in their departments. Only those teachers who consented to participate in the study were given the questionnaires along with a covering letter providing general information about the research topic. Before responding, teachers were requested to carefully read the instructions. In the questionnaires, participants were also asked to provide information about their gender, age, education, marital status, monthly income, type of job, designation, institution in which they were teaching and subjects being taught at the time of the study. In total, 280 teachers were approached for the data collection. Out of these 206

teachers (73.57%) returned the filled in questionnaires. Out of participants who took part in the study, 35% teachers filled the questionnaires in the first meeting. Remaining 65% teachers requested to collect the filled questionnaires later.

RESULTS

Before conducting the analyses, values for the items missed by the respondents were replaced with the mean values as suggested by Field [21] and also by Cohen and Cohen [22]. Only 2% respondents missed the items nos. 2 and 6 of GQ-6 and 3% respondents missed the items nos. 7, 9, 11, 13, 18 and 19 of PANAS, respectively.

In order to examine the relationship between study variables Pearson correlation analysis was carried out. Although Pearson product moment correlation and regression analysis are normally used in case of continuous variables, calculating Pearson correlation between one categorical and one continuous variable and use of regression in case of categorical predictors has also been recommended. The categorical variables need to be with only two categories and are dummy coded [22]. Therefore, before calculating correlations, categorical variables were coded. For gender variable, male teachers were coded 1 and female teachers were coded 2. Remaining variables were treated as continuous.

As stated in hypothesis 1, gratitude is positively related with life satisfaction, positive affect and age. Results in Table 2 indicate significant positive correlation of gratitude with SWLS ($r = .42$; $p < .01$), Positive Affect ($r = .17$; $p < .01$) and Age ($r = .14$; $p < .05$). SWLS is also found to be positively related with Positive Affect ($r = .30$; $p < .01$) and Age ($r = .19$; $p < .01$). These positive relations show that grateful people tend to be more satisfied, have positive emotions in life and their life satisfaction increases with age. In hypothesis 2, negative relationship of Negative Affect with gratitude and life satisfaction was assumed. This relationship is partially supported as only Negative affect is inversely related to SWLS ($r = -.15$; $p < .05$) and positively related to gratitude. Positive Affect has no significant relationship with Negative Affect, Age and gender. Age has negative significant correlation with gender ($r = -.49$; $p < .01$).

To further clarify the relationship among possible predictors and criterion variables, a hierarchical regression analyses was conducted with life satisfaction as criterion variable and age, gender and gratitude as predictors. For regression analyses, age and gender (dummy coded: male = 1; female = 2) of teachers were entered in the first block and gratitude as independent variable was entered in second block. Results of regression analysis for life satisfaction as criterion variable are presented in Table 3. Overall the model explained 23% variance in life

Table 2: Correlations between study variables of university teachers (N = 206)

Variables	2	3	4	5	6
1. GQ-6	.42**	.17**	.03	.14*	.08
2. SWLS		.30**	-.15*	.19**	-.01
3. PA			.01	.02	-.03
4. NA				-.09	.11
5. Age					-.49**
6. Gender					

Note: GQ-6 stands for Gratitude Questionnaire Form-6, SWLS stands for The Satisfaction with Life Scale, PA stands for 'Positive Affect' and NA stands for 'Negative Affect'.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Table 3: Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Life Satisfaction (N = 206)

Predictors	Block 1			Block 2		
	B	*SE*	B	*B*	*SE*	β
Constant	19.42			8.59		
Age	.11*	.04	.25	.07	.03	.16
Gender	1.30	.90	.11	.38	.84	.03
Gratitude				.47**	.07	.40
ΔR^2		.04**		.19**		

*$p < .05$. **$p < .001$.

satisfaction; $F(3,202) = 6.23$; $p < .001$. Demographics in Block-1 explained 4% variance in life satisfaction; $F(3,202) = 5.19$; $p < .01$. In this block only age predicted life satisfaction significantly i.e. more the age of participants the better satisfied they were with their life. Gratitude in Block-2 explained 19% variance in life satisfaction; $F(3,202) = 17.06$; $p < .001$. The higher the gratitude level in the participants the more they had subjective well-being. Participant's gender did not have any significant additional predictive utility for SWLS.

DISCUSSION

The present study was conducted to investigate the relationship between gratitude and subjective well-being. Although, several previous researches have shown empirically that such relation exists but the findings are inadequate and especially the nature of association has remained unclear in Pakistani culture. In addition to studying the relationship between gratitude and subjective well-being, few other possible predictors of life satisfaction have been explored i.e. gratitude, gender and age.

One of the main objectives of the study was to examine whether gratitude is related with different aspects of subjective well-being (life satisfaction and positive affect), age and gender. Analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between gratitude and life satisfaction. It is consistent with our hypothesis *i.e.* grateful people appear to be satisfied with their life. This finding is consistent with early researches [6, 23, 24]. These researches empirically demonstrated that gratitude inductions led to increase in grateful emotions which in turn led to more generalized increase in subjective well-being.

Watkins, Woodward, Stone and Kolts [3] argue that gratitude plays an important role in our happiness, healthy adjustment to life and even in our mental and physical well-being. The present study also demonstrated positive relationship between gratitude and positive affect. Earlier studies on gratitude and positive emotionality extend support to our finding that people who tend to experience high levels of dispositional gratitude are prone to have positive affect [6]. Similarly, Fiest, Bodner, Jacobs, Miles and Tan illustrated that measures of gratitude as an affective trait were more closely linked to positive traits than negative ones [25]. Thus, gratitude appears to be the more effective elicitor of pleasant affect.

Analysis of our data also reveals not only a significant positive relationship between life satisfaction and positive affect but also a significant negative relationship between life satisfaction and negative affect. Researchers have shown that grateful people feel better about their lives and are more optimistic in their expectations. In 2002 and 2004, McCullough and colleagues have provided a support to our findings. Participants in their studies having higher satisfaction with life had positive affect, optimism and higher levels of gratitude in their daily mood on a day-to-day basis. Depressive symptoms were negatively associated with the mean level of grateful mood in participants' daily mood reports [6, 24]. On the basis of these findings it is obvious that grateful people tend to be happier, more optimistic, more satisfied with their lives and are less anxious or depressed than their less grateful counterparts.

Another major finding pertains to age, gender and gratitude as predictors of life satisfaction. Resulting equation model indicates that SWLS scores were predicted significantly by age and gratitude. On the other hand gender failed to exert a statistically significant additive effect on life satisfaction. These findings are in the proposed direction. Does the relationship between gratitude and SWLS result from gratitude causing happiness, or is it that happiness causes gratitude? In answer to this puzzle it can be said that happiness and gratitude may operate in a 'cycle of virtue' whereby gratitude enhances happiness but happiness enhances gratitude as well [26]. Similarly, Walker and Pitts illustrated that achieving something in life which is costly and valuable for recipient brought linear increases in the amount of gratitude and ultimately increased subjective well-being [5].

In present study, when compared to gratitude and age, gender did not predict life satisfaction. Sense of satisfied life may be at least equally important for both male and female. On the contrary, previous researches consistently show women may be more grateful than men. Krause also reached the same finding in which men felt less gratitude than women [27]. One reason of this phenomenon may be that women tend to be more expressive than men. Therefore, women are more likely to experience and express feelings of gratitude [28].

The present study provides an insight into the importance of positive psychology of gratitude and its role in enhancing the subjective well-being of Pakistani's. While summarizing the results of the present study, it is important to note that there are interesting similarities

between the present Pakistani data and the Western data reported above. The main findings are (i) Gratitude has a positive relationship with subjective well-being, positive affect and age and (ii) Gratitude and age are strong predictors of subjective well- being. It can be said that everyday manifestation of gratitude is vital for SWB and these similarities could be interpreted as indicating that gratitude in everyday life in both cultures is utilitarian. Furthermore the similarity in the main findings arising from two apparently different cultures suggests the possibility that this utilitarian aspect of gratitude in everyday life of people might also be present in other cultures as well. A great deal of further research in other cultures and countries would be required before such a conclusion can be made with confidence.

The present study will contribute significantly in the development of relatively new field of psychology. 'The Positive Psychology of Gratitude' will ultimately help and pave a way to answer the most fundamental question of human existence i.e. How to be happy?

Limitations and Suggestions: The study bore some limitations such as self-report measures were used. Therefore, there might have been some social desirability biases in the data. Study relied on convenience sample that belonged to public sector universities only. The findings, therefore, cannot be generalized specially to private sector universities. Similarly, teachers' duration of service, which could have been an important variable in terms of predicting the level of SWB, was not studied. Nevertheless, experimental researches are needed to confirm the cause and effect relationship between gratitude and SWB. Future researches may attempt to employ questions designed explicitly in a Pakistani context for identifying several other dynamics of gratitude and subjective well-being. It seems desirable to repeat the present study on a more generalized basis so as to see if the pattern of findings obtained from a sample of highly educated subjects is also present among the wider uneducated Pakistani population as well.

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