

Gratitude as a Predictor of Psychological Wellbeing Among Young Adults: A systematic Analysis

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Researches have shown that how positive characteristics in young adults help them to cope with the ongoing life challenges. Theorist and researchers have unveiled the benefits of gratitude and its impact on psychological wellbeing. The current systematic analysis aims to explore and understand how gratitude contributes towards the psychological wellbeing of young adults. Moreover, if there are any significant gender differences in the gratitude and psychological wellbeing among young adults. For this purpose, published data from last 10 years was filtered, studies that have used standardized measures to evaluate gratitude and psychological wellbeing in younger adults were reviewed. Sixteen studies with overall sample of young adults out of 3987 studies were included in this systematic analysis on the basis of the inclusion criteria which has been explained by PRISMA flow diagram. The results of the analyzed literature illustrate that gratitude significantly contributes to the psychological wellbeing of young adults; gratitude fosters other positive characteristics as well. Moreover, analysis based on empirical studies revealed that women have more tendency to show gratitude as compared to men.

Keywords: Gratitude, Psychological wellbeing, Young adults, systematic analysis

Young adults hold a significant position as they are the future of every family, culture, society, and country. This age group has huge responsibilities on them regarding education, career, social relations and family which put them in a continuous struggle to choose and decide the best for them. In Pakistani society the young adult men and women have their own challenges; for women to marry early, perform household chores and compromise on self and for men to wait for

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relationship commitments, be the breadwinner and look for the whole big joint families; making their life mentally and emotionally exhausting (Shah et al., 2025).

The increase in responsibilities, biological changes, keeping up with the social circle, trying hard each day to survive better; makes life a challenging situation. With all these circumstances in life young adult's mental wellbeing is impacted. Park and Woo (2025) reports that young adults are more susceptible to mental health related problems because of all the life changes they go through, therefore, there mental wellbeing is impacted more as compare to other age groups.

Poor mental health leads to low self-esteem, poor grades, failures in college and university, inability to become part of a healthy social circle or make new relationships. Ali et al. (2026) show that in Pakistan it is more prevalent because of the enormous amount of comparisons, social pressure and living in joint families significantly impacts young adults psychological wellbeing. Therefore, it is essential to identify that how young adults psychological wellbeing could be improved with everything that goes on in their lives.

To improve the psychological wellbeing and to prevent the negative impact of unfavorable life circumstances and poor mental health experts focus on the strengths of people in order to create an overall positive impact on the life. Khan and Butt (2022) demonstrates that psychological wellbeing is greatly influenced by the positive qualities that people have in them. Among many positive qualities that young adults carry in them, gratitude is an essential strength that people hold, it is a strong emotion that spreads within people and outside in the environment, it not only improves a person's psychological wellbeing but also builds positivity in the society. Gratitude is essential in human flourishing as it promotes wellbeing, fosters healthy relationships and growth, prevents from stress and dysfunction, and promotes resilience (Calleja et al., 2024). Gratitude, a word that is very common not just in the field of psychology but to everyone. The more public gratitude is becoming the more complex meanings it holds. Gratitude is more than appreciating something; it's beyond being grateful towards someone. Gratitude as a virtue, Scholars believe gratitude is a virtue as people do kind acts for others without any motive, it comes from within. Navarro and Tudge (2020) argue that gratitude is a moral virtue. When comparing it to ingratitude that is the opposite; Ingratitude is considered as an evil act by the society. Therefore, its contradictory gratitude is a morally good act.

Gratitude as an emotion, McCullough et al. (2001) explains gratitude as a moral emotion by theorizing that gratitude contributes

towards three moral functions: First, the beneficiary realizes and reacts to the benefit they have received from someone's good act. Second, the person receiving the benefit is motivated to do something beneficial for others and the benefactor, and third is this acts reinforce for the benefactors to do more kind acts in future. This shows how gratitude not only contributes towards positive emotions but also influences positive cognitions and behaviour. According to broaden and build theory of positive emotions, Positive emotions makes a person experience more positivity i.e. broadening the thinking process and behaviour and building up the personal resources. Just like that gratitude also broadens the experience of the present thoughts and actions; it enables a person to be more open towards what he/she is experiencing in the present (Kardas & Yalcin, 2021).

When people experience positive emotions, it leads towards positive thinking. These positive cognitions and feelings cause better functioning in life by increasing attention and focus (Huppert, 2009). Psychological wellbeing refers to healthy mental states. State of mind where a person has positive emotions, a satisfied outlook towards life, have healthy relationships, able to cope with the shortcomings of life and function effectively is psychological wellbeing. It focuses on the positive functioning of human beings like satisfaction, openness, flexibility, social relationships and overall wellbeing (Cakmak & Yigit, 2024). Psychological wellbeing can be understood in two perspectives, at first it is focused on seeking pleasure and avoiding pain, reflecting on happiness and at second level directs a person towards optimal functioning by having self-realization and finding meaning in life. The first part is referred as hedonic while the latter is called eudaimonic approach (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Psychological wellbeing is a concept that not only includes the psychological factors but also looks upon social and subjective dimensions; including the behaviors related to health and growth (Charry et al., 2020). According to Ryff (2013) psychological wellbeing has six dimensions namely, personal growth, autonomy, self-acceptance, environmental mastery, positive relationships and purpose in life. Psychological wellbeing and gratitude are closely related concepts. Gratitude has both, a direct and an indirect positive effect on the psychological wellbeing of young adults (Bali et al., 2022). Senger and Gallagher (2023) study shows that gratitude is a predictor of wellbeing in younger adults.

From all the theories and investigations explained, the understanding that is reflected is that to build a society where people have better wellbeing, gratitude development is crucial as gratitude results in positive outcomes and promotes psychological wellbeing.

Researchers argue that there are gender differences found in male and females in many areas of life. These differences are not only in terms of the physical and biological aspect but also psychologically males and females are different. This difference exists because of several reasons, like hormonal differences, biological makeup, societal and cultural upbringing. [Mehta et al. \(2024\)](#) investigation shows that women have neural junctions at each side of their hemisphere due to which their thinking becomes more holistic, better at verbal ability and perception as compared to men.

Men tend to have low levels of gratitude and psychological wellbeing as compared to females. Studies indicate females are more grateful ([Alvi et al., 2022](#)) and have greater psychological wellbeing ([Matud et al., 2019](#)) than males. Many gratitude interventions and studies have shown that gratitude contributes towards better mental health outcomes among young adults. Among Pakistani young adults' gratitude has shown the development of positive qualities ([Ali et al., 2022](#)).

This systematic study puts forwards reliable findings by including evidence based scientific work, showing the gaps in literature and identifying the crucial patterns that will benefit the Pakistani society by assisting the readers, philosophers, authors and health professionals to understand the impact of gratitude practices on young adults and there psychological wellbeing which could be then used to help the entire population by developing culturally relevant interventions. Pakistan is a developing country the youth, young adults, adults and old age individuals all suffer from the uncertainty of the economic conditions, poor health facilities and financial stressors. Young adults are the ones that are exposed to more damage and harm because of their position in the society, making them more vulnerable to mental health issues. Therefore, the most needed population that has to be understood, healed and grow is the young adults of Pakistan.

This study aims to explore the positive relationship of gratitude with psychological wellbeing among young adults and to find out if gratitude predicts psychological wellbeing among young adults by evaluating the existing literature. Additionally, this study aims to identify the gender differences; and bridges the culturally relevant areas of wellbeing and mental health among Pakistani young adults.

Research Objectives

1. To examine and synthesize the existing literature on the relationship between gratitude and psychological wellbeing among young adults.

2. To analyze the empirical evidences, exist on gender differences in gratitude and psychological wellbeing among young adults.

Method

Sample

The guidelines of Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) were used to gather the data. The literature was collected online as well as manually from research journals. Several websites like Springer Link, PubMed, Research Gate, PsycInfo and online research journals such as Pakistan Journal of Psychological Research, Frontiers in Psychology, Medline journals were used to gather online data.

Inclusion Criteria

Studies over past 10 years were searched to add in this systematic review. Only those studies that were conducted on young adults i.e. age ranging from 18-26 years old were included. Moreover, if any study included participants below 18 years or above 26 years but had young adult's population as well were also included. Researches that used standardized measures and quantitative methods for analyzing the levels of gratitude and psychological wellbeing were included. Studies that had gratitude as an independent variable along with other independent variables, psychological wellbeing and other variables as dependent variable were included only if the direct impact of gratitude on psychological wellbeing was assessed.

Exclusion Criteria

Researches that were conducted more than a decade ago were excluded. All those studies that assessed wellbeing, subjective wellbeing or life satisfaction rather psychological wellbeing were not included. Investigations that did not have young adult's population were excluded.

Procedure

At first data extraction was done by following the above mentioned online data sources. The search to find out relevant researches started with keywords "Gratitude" "Grateful" "Gratefulness" "Psychological wellbeing" "Young Adults" and logical operates like "And" "Among" "In" "with".

Table 1. *Key Terms and Words used for Searching the Relevant Literature*

	Key words
1	Gratitude, Grateful, Gratefulness, Appreciation, Thankfulness, Acknowledging
2	Psychological wellbeing, Mental wellbeing, Wellbeing, Psychological Health, Mental health
3	Young Adults, Emerging adults, Undergraduate students, College students, University students
4	Correlation, Relationship, Impact, Effectiveness, Predictor, Association, Intervention
5	And, Or, Among, Amongst, With, In, Between

Table 1 enumerates the key terms that were used in a variety of combinations to extract the data from online data sources. A total number of 3987 studies were found through initial search. The studies were then filtered through the titles all those studies that were measuring Gratitude with “wellbeing” “subjective wellbeing” “adolescents” “school going population” “older adults” were excluded; studies were then filtered by selecting those that were conducted within 10, next 1073 studies were then filtered and only those 21 studies that were measuring “gratitude” “psychological wellbeing” along with other variables and had population of “young adults” “university students” “college students” were included.

Next these 21 studies were further analyzed in detailed among them 2 were unpublished dissertations and 1 was a conference paper, one had measured gratitude by self-developed scale, the reliability and validity was a concern and 1 had shown the positive relationship among gratitude and psychological wellbeing by measuring psychological distress. Therefore, all these research articles were excluded. Finally, a total of 16 studies were included in this research.

Figure 1. *PRISMA Flow Diagram Depicts the Flow of Information Through the Different Phases of a Systematic Review*

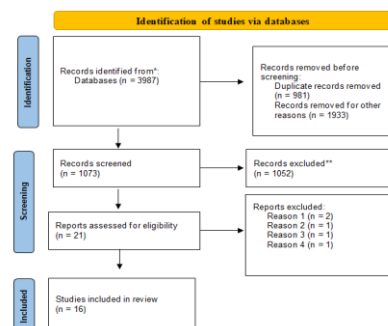


Figure 1, represent the flow diagram that depicts the flow of information through the different phases of a systematic review. It maps out the number of records identified, included and excluded, and the reasons for exclusions.

Results

Final shortlisted empirical researches on gratitude and psychological wellbeing among young adults has been reviewed by following a structured, methodical approach of systematic analysis and results are presented as follows:

Table 2: *Significant Details of the Study Including Authors Name, Publication Year, Research Design, Number of Participants and Measures of Study Variables*

#	Authors and Year	Research design	Sample Size	Measures of Gratitude	Measures of Psychological wellbeing
1	Saeed and Sarah Mahmood (2024)	Correlational	300	GQ-6	PWB
2	Máirean et al. (2019)	Experimental	135	GRAT	PWB
3	Bilong et al. (2021)	Correlational	149	GQ-6	PWB
4	Srivastava and Vandana (2024)	Correlational	300	GQ-6	PWB
5	Hemara jarajeswari and Gupta (2021)	Correlational	200	GQ-6	PWB
6	Kardas et al. (2019)	Correlational	510	GQ-6	FS
7	Czyżowska and Gurba (2022)	Experimental	80	EGI	PWB
8	Singh et al. (2017)	Correlational	109	GQ-6	PWB
9	Reza et al. (2024)	Correlational	358	GQ-6	PWB
10	Mead et al. (2021)	Correlational	138	GQ-6	WEMWBS
11	Kusumawati et al. (2022)	Correlational	619	GQ-6	PWB
12	Panhwar and Malik (2023)	Correlational	200	GQ-6	PWB
13	Arora et al. (2023)	Correlational	80	GRAT	PWB
14	Moltafet and Sharifi (2021)	Correlational	360	GQ-6	PWB
15	Naeem et al. (2021)	Correlational	378	GRAT	PWB
16	Nawa and Yamagishi (2024)	Correlational	71	GQ-6	PWB

Note. GQ-6 = The Gratitude Scale-6 item; GRAT = Gratitude Resentment and Appreciation Scale; PWB = Psychological Wellbeing Scale; EGI = Expressing Gratitude Index; FS = Flourishing Scale; WEMWBS = Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale.

[Table 2](#), outlines a clear depiction of each of the study included in this analysis. The table provides names of authors along with year, research design, number of participants, scales used to assess gratitude and psychological wellbeing in each study.

Major Findings Based on Systematic Analysis

During the times of Covid 19, [Saeed and Mahmood \(2024\)](#) conducted a research among university students which highlights a significant positive relationship between gratitude and psychological wellbeing. Moreover, this study also reflects upon the negative life events and found out that adverse life events are negatively associated with psychological wellbeing and positively linked with gratitude. Another study conducted by [Kusumawati et al. \(2022\)](#) during Covid' 19 has shown that among all the factors gratitude is the most important one to contribute towards an individual's psychological wellbeing.

People had been suffering from post-pandemic side effects. Yet, Gratitude is found to be improving a person's psychological wellbeing during those times ([Mead et al., 2021](#)). Gratitude is the most significant predictor of psychological wellbeing among other predictive variables which are life satisfaction, hope and optimism. Gratitude holds alone 35.4% variance in psychological wellbeing ([Kardas et al., 2019](#)).

A pre-post experimental study has shown that gratitude intervention has increased the psychological wellbeing among young adults. Moreover, gratitude was found to reduce stress, anxiety, depression and insomnia ([Czyżowska & Gurba, 2022](#)). Another experimental study by [Măirean et al. \(2019\)](#) features the association of trait gratitude with psychological wellbeing in undergraduate level students. The study further established that participants' affective states played a meditational role in trait gratitude and psychological wellbeing. Additionally, the researchers conducted a brief state gratitude intervention which showed state gratitude has no meditational impact on the association of psychological wellbeing and trait gratitude.

Trait gratitude was found to be a predictor of psychological wellbeing ([Naeem et al., 2021](#)). This investigation gratitude and psychological wellbeing has a moderately positive relationship. Moreover, participants had reported moderate levels of psychological wellbeing and trait gratitude; where, females, participants had an increased level of gratitude and psychological wellbeing as compared to males.

Studies conducted on college students have shown significant positive correlation among gratitude and psychological wellbeing.

[Srivastava and Vandana \(2024\)](#) shown that female students have higher levels of gratitude, psychological wellbeing and life satisfaction as compared to males. [Hemarajarajeswari and Gupta \(2021\)](#) also worked on college students and found that they have high gratitude, psychological wellbeing and happiness. And all the three variables have a positive relationship with each other.

[Singh et al. \(2017\)](#) study revealed that gratitude and psychological wellbeing are related positively to one another and contributes towards a person's happiness. In a correlational research on undergraduate university student's gratitude has shown to have significantly positive correlation with psychological wellbeing and happiness ([Bilong et al., 2021](#)).

Gratitude and resilience has significant correlation with psychological wellbeing. Along with this the study also explored the gender differences and differences in urban and rural population. Females have more gratitude, resilience and psychological wellbeing. Whereas, no difference as found in urban and rural people ([Panhwar & Malik, 2023](#)).

[Arora et al. \(2023\)](#) Showed that gratitude has a negative correlation with psychological wellbeing and optimism, whereas optimism is positively correlated with psychological wellbeing among young adults and adult population. Further, Investigations showed the differences across age groups of 18-27 and 30-60. The differences showed that individuals of 30-60 years of age had more optimism and psychological wellbeing.

Gratitude, self-esteem and social support predict psychological wellbeing. Gratitude is moderately and positively correlated with psychological wellbeing. Moreover, self-esteem has a moderately positive correlation with psychological wellbeing and social support has a weak significant correlation with psychological wellbeing ([Moltafet & Sharifi, 2021](#)).

Study investigating the impact of Gratitude and other positive variables on psychological wellbeing and subjective wellbeing found out that gratitude facilitates psychological wellbeing. Gratitude was also found to maximize daily life satisfaction and positive emotions ([Nawa & Yamagishi, 2024](#)).

The more gratitude people have in them the more psychological wellbeing was present. Thus gratitude and psychological wellbeing have a constructive effect on one another ([Reza et al., 2024](#)).

Discussion

All the investigations in this systematic analysis have shown that how gratitude has persistently improved young adults lives in every aspect and has significantly positively contributed to their psychological wellbeing. This implies that researchers and theorist should work on how to build gratitude among people as it will lead towards healthy outcomes. The present study also highlights the researches from the time of COVID'19. The world is well aware of this pandemic and its adverse impact on people. All the humanity was physically, emotionally and mentally affected by the pandemic. Pakistan being a developing country faced even more difficulty during these times.

Power and strength are often shattered when people face significant changes in their life. The Pakistani young adults faced significant negative impacts due to loss of jobs, managing work and studies at home. Yet, they survived COVID'19 powerfully as their psychological wellbeing was still maintained by the gratitude they possess. [Saeed and Mahmood \(2024\)](#) investigation reveals that among Pakistani young adults, gratitude was found to be a predictor of psychological wellbeing.

Over the years the researchers have shown the continuous burden that the Pakistani people undergo every day and its intense negative impact on their mental wellbeing. Mental distress, anxiety and depression had been reported persistently by the young adults of Pakistan ([Malik et al., 2025](#)). Yet, the people of Pakistan continuously grow and flourish this could be because the culture and religion emphasis on gratitude practices. [Meddour and Khairunniza \(2025\)](#) study shows that Muslim and Pakistani university students practice gratitude more, have greater life satisfaction and spirituality.

The results from the included pre-post experimental studies have shown that gratitude intervention has a significantly positive impact on the psychological wellbeing of young adults. When people consciously practice gratitude they are viewing their life as a blessing, appreciating small things, acts of kindness and improving overall wellbeing. [Majeed and Gul \(2025\)](#) research shows that practicing gratitude has increased positive emotions and awareness of the blessings by the divine god.

One of the investigations included in this systematic analysis showed unique findings. [Arora et al. \(2023\)](#) found out negative correlation of gratefulness with psychological wellbeing. The findings are contradictory and surprising, it is known to all that gratitude is a positive emotion, it's a virtue, a character strength that people have in

them. The negative impact seen on the psychological wellbeing could have occurred due to various reasons, such as small sample size and measuring state gratitude in a condition where participants might be facing some life issues.

Another possibility for such findings could be that the culture, religion or society where participants belong might be those who do not appreciate the practice of gratitude. Therefore, the participants have low levels of gratitude, and because of other factors they have good psychological wellbeing in them. Findings of this analysis reveal that gratitude has positive association with psychological wellbeing and is also linked to other positive emotions and increases life satisfaction. Gratitude not only enhances the wellbeing but it is also found to reduce depression, anxiety and elevate positive emotions (Diniz et al., 2023). This signifies the importance of identifying, building and promoting gratitude practices among people especially of those belonging to developing countries like Pakistan.

The studies have well presented the connection of gratitude with psychological wellbeing in young adults, intervention based researches have also shown how gratitude is positively linked with psychological wellbeing this approves the first hypothesis of this study. The additional analysis of the studies has shown that females have more gratitude and psychological wellbeing than males. This verifies the second hypothesis of the present systematic analysis. It is known that men and women are biologically different; this difference in the biological mechanism, culture and social expectations leads to a difference in psychological factors as well. Li (2022) research suggests that woman have higher gratitude display as compared to males. Moreover, gratitude expression makes people generally happy about themselves and life.

Thirteen out of fourteen studies included in this systematic analysis have shown the benefits that gratitude holds for younger adults. Gratitude enhances pleasure, positivity, contentment and overall wellbeing. It is essential for the educationist, mental health workers and social workers of developing countries like Pakistan to focus on working and cultivating positive variables like gratitude among the struggling young adults for their better psychological wellbeing.

Limitations and Suggestions

This systematic review included only quantitative studies due to which relevant literature might have missed. Studies that had used standardized tools to identify the psychological wellbeing and gratitude are kept in the present study; this excludes other significant researches

that could have made the study more generalized. Literature from selected databases was filtered out and only published studies were included; this could've resulted in missing out of important studies.

All significant work, published and unpublished should be considered to use in the future studies to limit publication bias and obtain comprehensive literature. The use of meta-analysis in future work is recommended for strong statistical evidence in the findings. Future analysis should include both qualitative and quantitative researches, standardized measures and other measures like focus groups, interviews and open ended questions to yield rich data.

Conclusion

This systematic review analyzed total sixteen research papers. All the studies have shown a positive correlation of gratitude with psychological wellbeing among young adults. Except one research that has shown negative relationship. Moreover, gender differences were also identified i.e. males have less gratitude and psychological wellbeing as compared to females. The current literature well aligns with the findings of this systematic analysis. Showing that gratitude is a predictor of psychological wellbeing among young adults. The findings are essential for the social and mental health experts, theorist, researchers and educators in building of gratitude and improving the psychological wellbeing among young adults.

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