

Gratitude Linking the Relationship Between Psychological Wellbeing and Negative Life Events in the Times of Covid-19 Among University Students

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The aim of the present research was to investigate gratitude affecting the association between psychological wellbeing and negative life events in the times of COVID-19 among university students. The study was conducted on students ($N = 300$) from different universities of Pakistan in the times of COVID-19 with mean age of 22.82 years ($SD = 2.86$). Participants were selected through purposive sampling. Three scales were used to measure the constructs that included Negative Life Events Scale (Newcomb & Harlow, 1986; Wills et al., 1992), Gratitude Questionnaire by McCullough et al. (2002) and Psychological Wellbeing Scale by Ryff and Keyes (1995). The study found that negative life events were negatively related to psychological wellbeing and positively related to gratitude. Moreover, psychological wellbeing had been found to be positively related to gratitude. Also, a link was found between the relationship among negative events of life and psychological wellbeing within the university students during the times of COVID-19. Results also revealed that gratitude does not act as a moderator between the relationship of negative life events and psychological wellbeing.

Keywords. Gratitude, psychological wellbeing, negative life events, Covid-19, university students

Everybody experiences negative life events that have an impact on their mental and physical health, such as the death of a loved one, fatal illness, discovering that they and their loved ones are at risk of contracting COVID-19, domestic conflicts, dismissal, financial difficulties, or changes in relationships. In this global epidemic, psychological wellbeing problems are becoming more and more

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frequent among the populace. Among them, students are larger whole of the population facing negative life events which affect their mental health. It is evident that students' poor effects their performance. A hale and hearty existence is beneficial for children, teens, adults, and elderly persons to experience inner serenity and mental wellness. This makes this a crucial aspect of life for everyone, but especially for young people when they are in school. As a result, it's critical to identify factors that affect students' psychological wellbeing as well as the unpleasant life events that have an impact on it. Overcoming these negative life events with thankfulness in order to thrive academically and lead healthy lives was another crucial research question that needed to be addressed throughout the current study. Remaining optimistic improves wellbeing and reduces negative feelings. Numerous positive psychological factors, such as expectancy, satisfaction, gratitude, optimism, calmness, and happiness, influence how people react to adversity in life. Moreover, thankfulness has been seen as a human attribute that improves people's lives by helping them cope with difficult situations.

The emotion of acknowledgment and appreciation that one has in response to charity, kindness, support, and preferences is known as gratitude. The word "gratitude" can signify different things to different people depending on their viewpoint. It can be an ethical virtue in a religious context, a mood, a routine, a strategy, or a quality of a person's character and coping mechanism in response to any difficult condition or incident. According to its definition, gratitude is a state in which a person must observe two things: (a) in order to arrive at a favorable conclusion; and (b) that a positive outcome must have come from an outside source (Emmons et al., 2003). Gratitude helps individuals to admit that their good fortune is creditable to someone (Emmons & Mishra, 2011).

Gratitude has a profound impact on an individual's psychological quality of life, regardless of religious background (Corona et al., 2020). Another source of recent findings on the current outbreak is a quick descriptive research at a University that looked at how appreciation aided in increasing students' emotional health during the COVID-19 outbreak (Bono et al., 2020). Emmons et al. (2003) conducted a study on life satisfaction, constructive and destructive affect, and thankfulness. A sample of about fifteen hundred children, aged eleven to twenty, were included in the study. The findings showed a favorable relationship between thanksgiving and life satisfaction as well as an optimistic outlook. The youths' age was discovered to have an impact on the link between depressed feelings and negative outcomes.

It is a series of events that alter lives and lead to negative outcomes (Armstrong et al., 2011). It also involves unpleasant, debilitating and generally unsettling experiences (Jackson & Finney, 2002). Such kinds of hardships are unwelcome, uncontrollably terrible life experiences (Armstrong et al., 2011). Many people experience some form of childhood trauma, which has an impact on each person differently. Studies show that negative life events, like bullying, the death of a close relative, serious illness, daily challenges, divorce, financial difficulties, misfortunes, natural disasters, social unrest, arguments with parents, and subpar academic results, are predictors of poor health in young people. There are also a few undesirable life experiences associated with COVID-19, such as it has been posing a risk to an individual's health and comfort, also if the family members are infected with the infection, and being not able to see your relatives, vacations being cancelled, and not being able to go on with everyday routine but only staying at home (Li et al., 2020).

During this worldwide deadly corona virus, the outcomes revealed a substantial rise in traumatic life experiences (Maher et al., 2021). Studies also show that adolescents experience negative life events in different ways than older students, and these differences increase emotional reactivity and recurrent expressive responses. These kinds of incidents are also associated with a higher risk of psychological issues, including anxiety and depression (Bifulco et al., 2000). There are many ways to cope with hassles as it has been found in a research that with the repeated trials of thankfulness as coping mechanisms, it becomes a continuous and developing process to decrease physiological as well as psychological stress among individuals (Houston, 1987).

Efficiency and wellbeing go hand in hand with psychological wellbeing. Being well-adjusted does not imply that an individual should always feel happy or contented. In fact, feeling negative emotions such as disappointment, pain, suffering, and misery is a normal part of life, and anyone who can effectively cope with these feelings is seen as psychologically sound. When negative emotions are dangerous, persistent, and impair someone's ability to go about their everyday life, PWB is decreased. Sensing good encompasses not only positive emotions like happiness and contentment, but also sentiments like consciousness, dedication, independence, and concern. The idea of working proficiently includes realizing one's potential, having a purpose, and forming positive relationships (Ryff et al., 1998).

Two complete strategies are explained by wellbeing research in the behavioral sciences. The first one speaks of subjective or hedonic wellbeing. Subjective wellbeing is based on hedonic principles, which

prioritize happiness and pleasure. The Greek word meaning pleasure is where the word hedonia originates. The eudemonic or mental fitness approach is the second tactic. Eudemonia has ancient roots, which are clearly visible when considering what a happy life was like during Aristotle's day. The root term for eudemonia is "eu," which means kindness or wellbeing, and the word "demon" which means soul. Eudaimonia, then, can be interpreted as the emphasis on leading a moral life or having a noble soul (Huppert, 2009). In a cross-sectional survey, findings revealed association between psychological wellbeing and the importance of appreciation and COVID-19 tension. The findings revealed that COVID-19 tension has a detrimental relationship with psychological health and with appreciation serving as a major mediating factor (Nguyen & Le, 2021). Social isolation, closing of social activities, and self-quarantine has restricted human social contact and, as a result, human psychological wellness, and emotional wellbeing, have been harmed (López-Carral et al., 2020).

The goal of this study was to examine the connection between bad experiences in life, psychological health, and the importance of gratitude in college students' lives during the COVID-19 pandemic. Detrimental events in life, such as bullying, arguments with parents, siblings, or peers, car crashes, subpar academic results, and social challenges, have been found to be risk factors for low or poor wellbeing as well as for depression or other mental health problems in students' lives. Positive familiarities, circumstances, and traits like joy, ecstasy, thankfulness, inspiration, love, forgiveness, flexibility, and kindness are the main psychological meanings of optimism and gratitude. Therefore, the aim was to find out if this helps people, especially the youth in our Universities to deal with difficulties and changes that take place in their lives particularly in the times of COVID-19.

Hypotheses

1. Negative life events are negatively related to psychological wellbeing among university students during COVID-19.
2. Negative life events are negatively related to gratitude among university students during COVID-19.
3. Gratitude is positively related to psychological wellbeing among university students during COVID-19.
4. Gratitude moderates the relationship between psychological wellbeing and negative life events such that it will weaken their relationship.

Method

Sample

The study utilized a correlational research design. Three-hundred ($N = 300$) university students with mean age of 22.82 years ($SD = 2.86$) from various universities in Pakistan were contacted for the study through purposive sampling applying online questionnaires. The information was gathered during a six-month period, from April to September 2020, which was the time when the Pakistan was suffering from the first wave of Covid-19.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Sample (N=300)

Variables	<i>f</i> (%)
Gender	
Male	87 (29.0)
Female	213 (71.0)
Total	300 (100)
Marital status	
Unmarried	261 (87.0)
Married	39 (13.0)
Total	300 (100)
Education	
Undergraduates	151 (50.3)
Graduates	107 (35.7)
Postgraduates	42 (14.0)
Total	300 (100)
Residence	
Rural	73 (24.3)
Urban	227 (75.7)
Total	300 (100)

Instruments

Negative Life Events Inventory

Newcomb and Harlow (1986) and Wills et al. (1992) presented 20-items inventory of negative life experiences in response to previous inventories of children's life events. Each item asked respondents whether they had experienced an incident in the previous year. A dichotomous response scale is used. The family is represented by 11 items, while the pubescent is represented by 9 items. The results

may be achieved simply combining all of the item scores together. A higher score indicates more negative life experiences.

Gratitude Questionnaire

Six items of Gratitude Questionnaire by [McCullough et al. \(2002\)](#) was administered as a self-report questionnaire. Its purpose is to assess individual variations in how thankful they are in everyday life. The results may be obtained by combining the scores of 5, 4, 2, 1, and then reversing the scores of 6 and 3. To the preceding total, add the items 3 and 6 that are in reverse order. The score should range from 6 to 42.

Psychological Wellbeing Scale

[Ryff and Keyes \(1995\)](#) developed the Psychological Wellbeing Scale, which consists of 18 items. 15, 17, and 18 are the items for the autonomy subscale. The subscale items of environmental mastery are 4 and 8, whereas items 9, 11, 12, and 14 belongs to the individual development subscale. The subscale items for fostering relationships with others are 6, 13, and 16. The subscale items for reasons in life are 3, 7, and 10. The items on the self-acceptance subscale are 1, 2, and 5. The scores for items 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 17, and 18 should be flipped.

Procedure

Using Google Forms, an online questionnaire was created to gather data. Five demographic questions, a 20-item checklist of negative life events from [Newcomb and Harlow \(1986\)](#) and [Wills et al. \(1992\)](#), a 6-item gratitude questionnaire from [McCullough et al. \(2002\)](#), and an 18-item psychological wellbeing scale from [Ryff and Keyes \(1995\)](#) were all included in the questionnaire. The intention was to survey three hundred college students. Between April 2020 and September 2020, a period of six months, the data were gathered.

Results

The measurable examination of information was conducted by using SPSS. The Cronbach Alpha of the study variable scales was evaluated through reliability analysis. The relationship between the study variables was checked collectively through Pearson correlation analysis, and subsequently individually based on the hypothesis, through process macro moderation analysis.

Table 2
Psychometric Properties of the Study Scales (N = 300)

Variables	α	$M (SD)$	Range	Skew.	Kurtosis
Negative Life Events	.68	15.59 (2.97)	4-20	-.66	.22
Gratitude	.75	31.69 (4.96)	14-42	-.32	.02
PWB	.81	83.92 (11.21)	52-117	.29	-.16

Note. PWB = Psychological Wellbeing.

Results revealed that all the variables are reliable to use and are normally distributed with values of skewness ranged between -.66 to .29 and kurtosis ranged between -.16 to .22.

Table 3
Correlation Among the Study Variables (N = 300)

Variables	1	2	3
1. Negative Life Events	-		
2. Psychological Wellbeing	-.25**	-	
3. Gratitude	.13*	.45**	-

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Negative life events have a significant negative association with psychological wellbeing and a positive relationship with gratitude. Psychological wellbeing has a significant positive association with gratitude, as seen in the table above.

Table 4
Moderating Effect of Gratitude Between Negative Life Events and Psychological Wellbeing (N = 300)

Predictor	R^2	ΔR^2	F	β	95% CI	
					LL	UL
Criterion Variable: Psychological Wellbeing						
Model 1	.24	.24	46.83***			
Constant					82.81	85.03
Negative Life Events				.20***	1.07	3.33
Gratitude				.42***	3.63	5.88
Model 2	.24	.004	31.73***			
Constant					82.71	84.96
Negative Life Events				.20***	1.12	3.38
Gratitude				.42***	3.57	5.83
Negative Life Events X Gratitude				.06	-.44	1.78

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

Table 4 shows the effect of gratitude on the relationship between negative life events and psychological wellbeing. In Model 1, the R^2 value of .24 revealed that predictors explained 24% variance in the outcome. Although there is a significant interaction between negative life events and psychological wellbeing, as in Model 2, the R^2 value of .24 revealed that predictors explained 24% variance in the outcome. However, results revealed that gratitude does not moderate the relationship between negative life events and psychological wellbeing in university students during the time of COVID-19 as the interaction effect show nonsignificant differences.

Discussion

The goal of the current study was to determine how university students in Pakistan during the COVID-19 pandemic felt about their psychological wellbeing in response to unfavorable life situations. Additionally, it was believed that thankfulness would mitigate the association between unfavorable life experiences and psychological wellbeing. Numerous important findings from the current study reinforce and expand upon the earlier research.

According to the study's hypothesis 1, there is a negative correlation between negative life events and psychological wellbeing in COVID-19. Similarly, hypothesis 2 proposed a negative correlation between negative life events and gratitude. In support of hypothesis 1, Table 3 shows a negative relationship between negative life events and psychological wellbeing among University students in the times of COVID-19. The majority of earlier research indicates a detrimental correlation between unfavorable life experiences and spiritual health (Faircloth, 2017). According to a new report, the COVID-19 pandemic has a negative association with people's emotional health (Zacher & Rudolph, 2021).

In contradiction to hypothesis 2, Table 3 reveals that negative life events have a positive correlation with gratitude in students studying in universities in the period of COVID-19. One of the earlier researches that demonstrated that gratitude has an indirect impact on negative events in university students' lives supports this association. There is no direct relationship between hard life circumstances and gratitude (Wei et al., 2022). The majority of research indicates a negative association between these factors, such as that which existed during the COVID-19 pandemic. This may be due to the fact that the questionnaires ask about harmful events that people have experienced in the past year, which can be used to examine negative life events. It is also possible that the participants are sufficiently resilient to have

dealt with trauma or events from the previous year when they filled out the questionnaires. Extraneous factors (including favorable weather, the day's mood, a strong religious conviction, and resilience) may also have an impact on participants' responses, which helps to explain the current study's findings. It is also evident that religious people express thankfulness even in the face of adversity. A person who practices more religion will be more appreciative of life's blessings, even when they are bad. Participants' higher levels of appreciation indicate that they do not want the researcher to think they are not appreciative. Therefore, the factors of conformity and religiosity are as important as irrelevant to the current investigation. Hypothesis 3 proposed a positive relationship between gratitude and psychological wellbeing. Results of the current also study support this proposition.

Hypothesis 4 stated that gratitude moderates the relationship between negative life events and psychological wellbeing in the spell of COVID-19. [Table 4](#) shows that the gratitude does not moderate the relationship between negative life events and psychological wellbeing in University going students during the period of COVID-19. This finding is also supported by one of the prior studies which revealed that gratitude does not moderate the relationship between the negative life events and psychological wellbeing ([Gungor, 2016](#)).

Limitations

The findings may be specific to Pakistan's cultural context and may not be applicable to other cultural or geographic settings. Cultural norms, values, and practices can all have a significant impact on the experience of gratitude as well as the impact of negative life events. The sample size was not appropriately large to find out prominent relationship and moderating effect of the variables. Because the correlation research approach was employed, a firm conclusion on causality could not be drawn. The research may have been less credible due to the use of self-report inventories, which may have caused transferring difficulties to have an impact on the results. Due to lockdown restrictions and the coronavirus's spread during COVID-19, the study was carried out virtually, preventing communication between the researcher and participants.

Suggestions

To address the relationship between variables and draw more precise conclusions about their connectivity, future research should consider the constraints of the current study and be planned as

longitudinal or experimental investigations. In a similar vein, it may be helpful if later researchers used protocols or intersessions to increase people's mercy and understanding via group counseling. Longitudinal studies that follow individuals over time can help researchers better understand the links between negative life events, gratitude, and psychological wellbeing. Longitudinal studies can show how changes in gratitude and wellbeing correlate with changes in life events. Qualitative research in the future may help to separately study the outcomes of research variables. Furthermore, group research with the participants' involvement programs among diverse samples are needed. After the COVID-19 lockout constraints had been lifted, further research with a broader sample size shall be an edge for obtaining more accurate data and for application of advanced interventions on university scholars so that they should be trained to deal with any such life threatening incidents in future as the current pandemic was; full of vulnerability and fear.

Implications

The study sheds light on the factors that influence psychological wellbeing during difficult times, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Understanding the role of gratitude and its moderating effect on the relationship between negative life events and wellbeing can inform interventions aimed at improving university students' and the general population's mental health. The study emphasizes the impact of religious faith and cultural factors on gratitude and its impact on wellbeing. This emphasizes the significance of taking cultural and religious diversity into account in mental health interventions and support systems. The study's findings add to the existing literature on gratitude, negative life events, and psychological wellbeing by providing a unique perspective and expanding the body of knowledge on these topics. It may encourage additional research in this area, which could lead to a better understanding of the mechanisms involved. The findings of the study can be used by educational institutions to develop programs and initiatives that promote gratitude and resilience among students. These initiatives may include gratitude journals, mindfulness practices, and mental health support services, which are especially useful during times of crisis. The study's findings may be used by policymakers and public health officials to inform mental health policies and strategies, particularly during public health emergencies. Recognizing gratitude's potential role in improving psychological wellbeing can help shape policies that prioritize mental health care.

The study can show how employees' wellbeing is impacted by workplace stress or unfavorable office occurrences, and how thankfulness can help people overcome these psychological challenges. The current study can also be used to measure the forgiveness and thankfulness levels of religious extremists, as well as the impact these attitudes have on their overall wellbeing and the levels of intolerance that have molded their personalities into extremist religious ideologies. It can also be used to monitor offenders to determine which events motivated them to engage in criminal activity and how unfavorable events in their lives are affecting their PWB.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the current study sought to investigate the effect of gratitude on the relationship between negative life events and psychological wellbeing among university students in Pakistan during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study found that negative life events have negative association with psychological wellbeing. It also showed a positive relationship between gratitude and negative life events. This disparity could be attributed to a variety of factors, including participant resilience and extraneous variables such as weather, mood, religious faith, and resiliency influencing responses. Gratitude has not been found to moderate the relationship between negative life events and psychological wellbeing, lending credence to previous research indicating that gratitude improves wellbeing. Overall, this study emphasizes the role of gratitude in linking the relationship between psychological wellbeing and negative life events among university students in Pakistan during the difficult times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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