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My curiosity stemmed from one key question: "If gratitude is often considered a polite gesture or a common expression of emotion, how can the habit of gratitude become such a powerful psychological foundation for shaping one's life's meaning, satisfaction, and inner well-being?" Is gratitude simply about positive thinking, or is it deeper, a way of life that changes the way we view the world and our place in it?

After reading these four journals and summarizing them, I've found that gratitude is, for the most part, a way of life that changes the way we view the world and our place in it, and makes life feel more meaningful and worthwhile.

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Gratitude, Hope, Optimism and Life Satisfaction as Predictors of Psychological Well-Being*

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Research by Kardaş, Cam, Eskisu, and Gelibolu (2019) explored the relationship between four psychological strengths gratitude, hope, optimism, and life satisfaction in predicting psychological well-being among university students in Turkey. Involving 510 respondents from various universities, this study shows that the four variables are positively correlated, but gratitude emerges as the strongest predictor, far surpassing the others.

The main finding is astonishing: gratitude alone accounts for about 35 percent of the variation in psychological well-being. When hope is added, the contribution rises to 45 percent; with optimism, it reaches nearly 49 percent; and when life satisfaction is included, the total exceeds half 50.7 percent of the entire variation in psychological wellbeing.

Interestingly, gratitude is not merely a feeling of happiness or satisfaction. In this study, gratitude is understood as a comprehensive attitude that includes the ability to see beauty in simple things, appreciate the contributions of others, feel content despite limitations, compare oneself positively, and actively express gratitude. This is not blind optimism or empty hope, but a conscious recognition that many valuable things in life are received, not seized.

Unlike life satisfaction which is a cognitive assessment of how “good” one's life is gratitude is more active and relational. It does not merely evaluate life from the outside but brings meaning to life from within. That is why, even though life satisfaction is an important component of subjective well being, in the context of psychological well being (which is rooted in the tradition of eudaimonia a meaningful and purposeful life), gratitude has a stronger influence.

Hope and optimism also play an important role, but they come after gratitude. Hope provides direction through goals and strategies to achieve them; optimism provides confidence that the future will be good. However, gratitude provides roots it connects us to what already exists, to the people who have supported us, and to the beauty that often escapes our attention. In a fast-paced and stressful world, these roots are what keep us from falling.

The practical implications are clear gratitude based interventions such as writing down three things to be grateful for each day, sending thank you notes, or weekly reflections on the kindness received are not merely sentimental exercises, but psychological tools proven to improve mental well being. Especially among students who are prone to stress, anxiety, or feeling lost, cultivating gratitude can serve as an emotional anchor, helping them find value in their own lives.

More than that, these findings remind us that mental health is not only about treating wounds, but also about cultivating strength. In a culture that often emphasizes achievement, productivity, and self control, gratitude invites us to pause, look, and appreciate and it is precisely in that appreciation that the value of life is revealed.

So, the main conclusion is gratitude is not just a temporary emotion, but a life practice that transforms the way we exist in the world. It not only makes us feel better, but helps us understand why life is worth living even when it is not perfect. From a positive psychology perspective, gratitude is one of the most human ways to achieve a whole, meaningful, and peaceful life.



The Influence of Gratitude on the Meaning of Life: The Mediating Effect of Family Function and Peer Relationship

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A study by Zhang, Ye, Fu, and Zhang (2021) explored how gratitude influences meaning in life among Chinese college students, with a particular focus on the mediating role of family and friendship functioning. Involving 1,049 students with an average age of 18.6 years, this study showed that gratitude not only directly correlates with meaning in life, both in the form of the presence of meaning and the search for meaning, but also operates indirectly through the quality of social relationships individuals experience.

The main finding reveals that individuals who are more grateful tend to feel that their lives are more meaningful, and this occurs because they are better able to build and experience healthy family relationships and supportive friendships. In other words, gratitude not only enriches the inner self, but also strengthens social networks and it is through these networks that the meaning of life flourishes.

Interestingly, this mediating effect is partial that is, gratitude still has a direct influence on the meaning of life, but most of its impact is mediated by interpersonal relationships. For example, grateful people tend to be more sensitive to their parents' kindness, more likely to express appreciation, and more open in communication all of which reinforce their perception of a healthy family functioning. The same is true in friendships gratitude encourages pro social attitudes, such as listening, trusting, and valuing friends, which in turn creates emotional bonds that provide a sense of security and purpose.

The study also found that friendships play a stronger mediating role in facilitating the search for meaning than family functioning. This makes sense in the context of late adolescence to early adulthood, when individuals begin to seek independent identities and spend more time and share experiences with peers. This is where gratitude becomes a kind of social glue it not only makes a person feel valued, but also encourages them to value others creating a positive cycle in which meaningful relationships lead to meaningful lives.

Furthermore, these findings are consistent with Barbara Fredrickson's broaden and build theory: positive emotions such as gratitude broaden thinking and build long term psychological resources one of which is a strong social network. From an evolutionary perspective, gratitude is even seen as an adaptive mechanism that strengthens cooperation and altruism, as it encourages individuals to recognize, remember, and reciprocate kindness thereby strengthening group bonds.

The practical implications are highly relevant, especially amid rising mental health issues among students. Gratitude based interventions such as writing thank-you letters, reflecting on three good things every day, or sharing gratitude in groups not only improve mood but also strengthen the social foundations that underpin life's meaning. This means that cultivating gratitude on campus or in educational settings is not merely a personal exercise, but an investment in building a supportive and meaningful community.

So, the main conclusion is gratitude is not just about appreciating what we have, but about recognizing and nurturing the relationships that make life worth living. It is a bridge between the heart and the world between personal experience and social connection. In an increasingly fragmented and individualistic world, gratitude reminds us that the meaning of life does not arise from solitude, but from community that is valued, nurtured, and appreciated.



ORIGINAL RESEARCH
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The Reciprocal Relationship Between Gratitude and Life Satisfaction: Evidence From Two Longitudinal Field Studies

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Research by Unanue et al. (2019) answers this question well through two longitudinal studies in Chile involving thousands of working adults. Instead of simply testing a one-way relationship from gratitude to life satisfaction these researchers dared to test the opposite direction, and found something that is rarely discussed: a mutually reinforcing relationship between gratitude and life satisfaction. In Study 1 ($N = 725$) with a one month measurement interval, and Study 2 ($N = 1,841$) with a three month interval, the results were consistent: gratitude at the initial time point predicted an increase in life satisfaction in the future, and conversely, life satisfaction at the initial time point also predicted an increase in gratitude in the future.

These findings revolutionize our understanding of the dynamics of psychological well being. Rather than viewing gratitude as the “cause” and life satisfaction as the effect, this research shows that the two are involved in a virtuous circle where one reinforces the other, creating a continuous positive spiral. A person who begins to feel more grateful will find their life more

satisfying and when life feels more satisfying, they become better able to see and appreciate the good around them, thereby increasing their gratitude.

Interestingly, this study was conducted in Chile, a Latin American country that is often overlooked in positive psychology literature, which is dominated by Western (American/European) or Eastern (Asian) samples. Thus, these findings expand the universal validity of the benefits of gratitude showing that this dynamic is not exclusive to individualistic cultures, but also applies in transitional cultural contexts, such as Chile, which has collectivist roots but is becoming increasingly individualistic. This challenges the assumption that the practice of gratitude is only effective in Western societies.

The psychological mechanisms behind this reciprocal relationship also make sense. Gratitude helps a person avoid the habit of adapting to happiness (hedonic adaptation), shifts attention away from upward social comparison, strengthens social relationships, and expands access to positive memories all of which improve cognitive evaluation of life (i.e., life satisfaction). Conversely, when people feel satisfied with their lives, they tend to be more positive in their assessment of gifts, the goodwill of others, and the meaning of everyday experiences, which in turn deepens their gratitude.

The practical implications are powerful. In educational, clinical, or organizational contexts, interventions do not always have to start with teaching people to be grateful. Sometimes, increasing life satisfaction for example, through improved working conditions, social support, or the achievement of personal goals can naturally trigger an increase in gratitude, which then reinforces life satisfaction. This opens up flexibility in the design of well being interventions: we can enter from either side, because the two reinforce each other.

However, researchers also offer an important caveat: while this cycle can be “virtuous,” it can also be “vicious.” Low gratitude can decrease life satisfaction, which then makes it harder for a person to feel grateful triggering a negative spiral. Therefore, intervening at any point in this cycle can be key to breaking the chain of psychological suffering.

So, the main conclusion is: gratitude and life satisfaction are not two separate entities, but two sides of the same coin human well-being. They feed off each other in a dynamic reciprocal flow, creating the foundation for a life that is not only happy, but also full of appreciation and meaning. In the words of Chilean poet Violeta Parra, who inspired the title of this study: “Thank you to life, which has given me so much.” It turns out that a satisfy life does make it easier to be grateful and gratitude itself makes life feel more worthy of gratitude.

Gratitude and Life Satisfaction: Mediating Role of Perceived Stress

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The study conducted by Yildirim and Alanazi (2018) focused on how gratitude relates to life satisfaction among Arab students in Saudi Arabia, with particular attention to the role of stress as a mediating factor in this relationship. This study involved 141 students with an average age of 23.8 years (123 females and 18 males), and the results showed that stress acted as a full mediator between gratitude and life satisfaction.

In general, the results of the study found that students who had higher levels of gratitude tended to report greater life satisfaction. However, this effect was indirect. Gratitude first works by reducing perceived stress levels, and it is this reduction in stress that ultimately leads to increased life satisfaction. Thus, gratitude does not simply make a person happier, but rather creates a calmer, more controlled, and positive emotional state so that individuals are able to assess their lives more positively.

These findings are in line with Lazarus and Folkman's transactional stress theory, which states that stress arises when a person perceives life's demands to exceed their abilities or resources. In this context, gratitude helps shift the focus from difficulties to appreciation of positive things, from threats to social support, and from uncertainty to trust. Thus, gratitude does not eliminate problems, but changes perceptions of them so that their burden feels lighter.

The uniqueness of this study lies in its location, Saudi Arabia, a country with collectivist cultural characteristics and strong religious values. Since most similar studies have been conducted in Western countries, this study makes an important contribution to cross-cultural understanding of the psychological benefits of gratitude. The results show that regardless of cultural differences, gratitude continues to function as an important mechanism in reducing stress and improving subjective well-being.

The implications are particularly relevant for education and mental health services, especially in Muslim communities. Practices of gratitude, such as writing a list of things to be grateful for or daily reflection, can serve not only as spiritual activities but also as effective methods for reducing stress and increasing psychological resilience. In a culture that encourages

patience and acceptance of trials, gratitude can be an effective way to nurture mental health without ignoring the realities of life.

Of course, this study has limitations, such as its cross sectional design, which cannot confirm a definite cause and effect relationship, and a sample consisting mostly of young women. It is possible that the relationship between gratitude, stress, and life satisfaction is reciprocal for example, individuals with higher life satisfaction may find it easier to feel gratitude, or low stress levels may allow gratitude to arise naturally. Nevertheless, the results of the study provide a strong basis for the idea that gratitude can be an important strategy for improving well-being through stress reduction.

Overall, this study confirms that gratitude is not only a pleasant emotional experience, but also a psychological tool that helps a person cope with life's pressures. By minimizing the perception of stress, gratitude provides space for life satisfaction to grow, even in challenging circumstances. In the midst of a world increasingly filled with uncertainty, gratitude teaches us that contentment does not always arise from changes in external circumstances but from our ability to see what we already have with a sense of appreciation.