

Happiness and Gratitude as Predictors of Life Satisfaction

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Abstract

Objectives: This study investigates the predictive roles of happiness and gratitude in determining overall life satisfaction, employing a quantitative research design grounded in the framework of positive psychology. **Method:** Utilizing standardized psychometric instruments, data were collected from a demographically diverse sample to assess levels of happiness, gratitude, and life satisfaction. **Results:** Statistical analyses, including correlational and multiple regression techniques, revealed that both happiness and gratitude significantly predict life satisfaction, with gratitude emerging as a particularly robust predictor. These findings underscore the importance of dispositional gratitude in enhancing subjective well-being and suggest that interventions aimed at cultivating gratitude may have substantial benefits for psychological health. **Conclusion:** The study contributes to the growing body of empirical literature on the determinants of life satisfaction and offers implications for therapeutic, educational, and policy-related efforts to foster well-being in various populations.

Keywords: happiness, gratitude, life satisfaction, positive psychology

Introduction

The quest for life satisfaction is central to human existence, and psychological research has increasingly focused on the factors that contribute to an individual's sense of well-being. Life satisfaction is defined as a subjective evaluation of one's overall quality of life based on personal criteria (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). Life satisfaction is a core component of subjective well-being, reflecting a person's evaluation of their overall quality of life according to self-defined standards and values (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). It is a cognitive assessment of one's life, distinct from temporary emotional states, and is influenced by various internal and external factors, including personality, social relationships, and socio-economic status. Diener et al. (1985) conceptualized life satisfaction as the extent to which an individual feels content with the state of their life, encompassing an individual's subjective judgment rather than objective life circumstances.

Research suggests that high levels of life satisfaction are associated with positive outcomes, such as better physical health, increased longevity, and improved mental well-being (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). For example, individuals who report high life satisfaction tend to experience lower stress levels, better coping mechanisms, and stronger interpersonal relationships, which contribute to overall life quality and resilience (Myers & Diener, 1995). Two factors commonly associated with higher life satisfaction are happiness and gratitude. Happiness, characterized by positive emotions and fulfillment, is a well-known component of subjective well-being (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). Gratitude, the recognition and appreciation of life's positives, has also been shown to enhance life satisfaction (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).

Happiness and Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction is also influenced by a variety of psychological constructs, such as happiness and gratitude, which are recognized as significant predictors of subjective well-being. Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1999) argue that happiness, as a reflection of positive affect, complements life

satisfaction by enhancing the individual's perspective on life's challenges and achievements. Happiness is a complex construct, often conceptualized as both a state of emotion and a general disposition. According to Lyubomirsky et al. (2005), happiness significantly enhances psychological and physical health, which contributes to life satisfaction. Singh and Jha (2008) carried out a study on 254 undergraduate students of technology and found that Grit, Positive Affect, Happiness and Life Satisfaction are significantly positively correlated.

Research by Diener et al. (1999) supports the notion that happiness has a strong positive impact on life satisfaction. People who report frequent positive emotions tend to evaluate their lives more favorably, suggesting a close link between happiness and life satisfaction. Joshanloo et al. (2016) examined the relationship between 4 conceptions of happiness and life satisfaction. They revealed that self-transcendence and conservation predicted life satisfaction positively and significantly. In addition, it was found that self-directed hedonism and self-enhancement interacted in their effects on life satisfaction.

Gratitude and Life Satisfaction

Gratitude, the tendency to recognize and appreciate life's benefits, is another predictor of life satisfaction. Additionally, gratitude has been shown to foster life satisfaction by encouraging a positive outlook on past experiences and current relationships (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Together, these factors illustrate the complex interplay of emotions and cognitions that contribute to life satisfaction. Emmons and McCullough (2003) found that people who regularly practice gratitude report greater life satisfaction and well-being. Furthermore, gratitude promotes social bonding and prosocial behavior, which can lead to increased life satisfaction (Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010). Gratitude interventions, such as gratitude journaling, have also been shown to improve well-being by fostering a positive outlook on life.

Empirical evidence shows that gratitude is positively associated with autonomy, environment mastery, personal growth, positive relationships with others, purpose in life, self-acceptance (Wood, Joseph, & Maltby, 2009), satisfaction with life (Lavy & Littman-Ovadia, 2011; McCullough et al., 2002; Wood et al., 2008a), and greater positive appraisal in life (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). In summary, while happiness and gratitude individually enhance life satisfaction, research suggests that these constructs may also interact to provide a cumulative effect on well-being (Wood et al., 2010). Happiness provides a sense of fulfillment, while gratitude reinforces this state by fostering an appreciation of one's experiences. Together, they create a reinforcing loop that enhances overall life satisfaction. This paper explores how happiness and gratitude contribute to life satisfaction, aiming to clarify their relative influence on well-being.

Methods

The objectives of the study were to study the relationship of happiness and gratitude with life satisfaction among youth and to find out the predictors of life satisfaction among youth.

It was hypothesized that happiness and gratitude would be positively related with life satisfaction among youth. Further, happiness and gratitude would predict life satisfaction among youth.

Participants

The present study was conducted on a sample of 140 post graduate university students belonging to the age range of 21 to 26 belonging to various colleges of Kurukshetra University. The sample covered subjects from all walks of society but majority of subjects belonged to the middle socio-economic status and from all categories.

Tools

Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999)

The SHS is a 4-item scale of global subjective happiness. Two items ask respondents to characterize themselves using both absolute ratings and ratings relative to peers, whereas the other two items offer brief descriptions of happy and unhappy individuals and ask respondents the extent to which each characterization describes them. Subjective Happiness Scale has high internal consistency, which was found to be stable across samples. Test-retest and self-peer correlations suggested good to excellent reliability, and construct validation studies of convergent and discriminant validity confirmed the use of this scale to measure the construct of subjective happiness.

Gratitude Questionnaire (McCullough, Emmons & Tsang, 2002)

The GQ-6 is a short, self-report measure of the disposition to experience gratitude. Participants answer 6 items on a 1 to 7 scale (1 = "strongly disagree", 7 = "strongly agree"). Two items are reverse-scored to inhibit response bias. The GQ-6 has good internal reliability, with alphas between .82 and .87, and there is evidence that the GQ-6 is positively related to optimism, life satisfaction, hope, spirituality and religiousness, forgiveness, empathy and prosocial behavior, and negatively related to depression, anxiety, materialism and envy. The GQ-6 takes less than 5 minutes to complete, but there is no time limit.

Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985)

A 5-item scale designed to measure global cognitive judgments of one's life satisfaction (not a measure of either positive or negative affect). Participants indicate how much they agree or disagree with each of the 5 items using a 7-point scale that ranges from 7 strongly agree to 1 strongly disagree. The scale assesses the overall life satisfaction, and it has been used as a parameter for happiness in researches (Curer, 2004). Diener et al. have reported a validity (with the convergent, differential method) and reliability (Cronbach's alpha: 0.89) for this scale.

Results and Discussion

Table 1

Correlation matrix among happiness, gratitude and life satisfaction

Variables	Happiness	Gratitude	Life satisfaction
Happiness	1	-.03	.21*
Gratitude		1	.27**
Life satisfaction			1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

The present study identified statistically significant positive relationships between life satisfaction and two key psychological variables—happiness and gratitude. Specifically, the analysis revealed a moderate positive correlation between life satisfaction and happiness ($r = .21$, $p < .05$), and a slightly stronger correlation between life satisfaction and gratitude ($r = .27$, $p < .01$). These results indicate that individuals reporting higher levels of happiness and gratitude are also more likely to experience greater satisfaction with life.

The significant association between happiness and life satisfaction suggests that individuals who frequently experience positive emotions—such as joy, enthusiasm, and contentment—tend to

evaluate their lives more favorably. This finding is consistent with Diener et al. (1999), who emphasized that positive affect is a core component of subjective well-being and contributes significantly to individuals' global assessments of life quality. In this context, happiness functions not only as an emotional state but also as a cognitive lens through which individuals judge their overall life satisfaction.

The stronger correlation between gratitude and life satisfaction further highlights the importance of appreciation and acknowledgment of life's positive elements. Individuals who regularly express gratitude appear to experience a deeper sense of fulfillment and well-being. These findings support the work of Emmons and McCullough (2003), who found that individuals engaging in daily gratitude journaling reported significantly higher levels of life satisfaction compared to those who focused on neutral or negative aspects of their lives. Gratitude promotes a shift in perspective, allowing individuals to focus on abundance rather than deficiency, thereby enhancing psychological resilience.

Further supporting evidence comes from Wood, Joseph, and Maltby (2009), whose research demonstrated that gratitude significantly predicts well-being and life satisfaction, even after accounting for major personality dimensions such as extraversion and neuroticism. Their study suggests that gratitude serves as a stable psychological trait that fosters optimism and emotional balance. Additionally, Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade (2005) reported that engaging in intentional activities—such as expressing gratitude or performing acts of kindness—resulted in sustained increases in happiness and life satisfaction over time, emphasizing the potential long-term benefits of gratitude-based practices.

In sum, the current findings, supported by existing literature, reinforce the role of both happiness and gratitude as crucial predictors of life satisfaction. While both constructs contribute meaningfully, gratitude appears to exert a particularly stable and enduring influence on individuals' overall sense of well-being.

Table 2
Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis
Dependent Variable: Life Satisfaction

Step p	Variable	R	R ²	R ² - Change	β	F	Sig.
1	HAPPINESS	.269	.072	.072	.269	7.655	.001
2	HAPPINESS + GRATITUDE	.334	.112	.039	.198	6.089	.001

The summary of regression analysis revealed that there are two potent predictors of Life Satisfaction with overall multiple R of .334, which jointly account 11% ($R^2 = .112$) of variance in Life Satisfaction among youth. Happiness emerged as a first significant predictor of Life

Satisfaction with $R=.269$ and $R^2 =.072$ (variance=7%) and F-ratio is 7.65 which is significant at .001 probability level.

At step two, Gratitude emerged as second significant predictor of Life Satisfaction with increased $R =.333 = R^2 =.039$ (variance=4%) and F-ratio is 6.089 which is significant at .001 probability level. The regression model accounted for 11% of the variance in life satisfaction, indicating that happiness and gratitude together strongly predict life satisfaction. Gratitude emerged as the stronger predictor of life satisfaction compared to happiness. These results confirm the prognostic significance of Happiness and Gratitude on Life Satisfaction among youth.

The regression results demonstrated that happiness and gratitude together accounted for 11. % of the variance in life satisfaction, indicating that these constructs, while not the sole predictors, play a notable role in shaping youths' subjective well-being. Notably, gratitude emerged as the stronger predictor in the final model, contributing an additional 4% of variance beyond happiness. This supports the view that cultivating a sense of appreciation and thankfulness may have a more enduring impact on life satisfaction than momentary feelings of happiness alone.

These results align with prior research. For example, Emmons and McCullough (2003) found that individuals who engaged in daily gratitude journaling reported higher levels of life satisfaction and psychological well-being than those who focused on daily hassles. Similarly, Wood, Joseph, and Maltby (2009) identified gratitude as a key predictor of life satisfaction and well-being, even after accounting for personality traits. These findings suggest that gratitude not only functions as an emotional response but also fosters a cognitive orientation toward recognizing and appreciating the positive aspects of life. Moreover, the role of happiness in predicting life satisfaction is consistent with Diener et al. (1999), who found that positive affect—an essential component of happiness—was a critical determinant of individuals' judgments about their life satisfaction. This suggests that individuals who regularly experience joy, enthusiasm, and contentment are more likely to evaluate their lives positively.

In addition, Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade (2005) emphasized that intentional activities such as expressing gratitude or performing acts of kindness could produce lasting increases in happiness and satisfaction. Their work reinforces the idea that fostering positive emotions and grateful attitudes are effective strategies for enhancing life satisfaction over time.

Conclusion

In summary, the study provides empirical support for the significant role of happiness and gratitude in predicting life satisfaction among youth. While both constructs are important, gratitude appears to offer a slightly stronger contribution. By fostering positive affect and a grateful disposition, individuals may experience greater overall satisfaction with their lives. These findings emphasize the importance of integrating positive psychology practices into educational and developmental settings to nurture well-being and resilience in young populations.

Implications

These findings suggest that promoting gratitude and happiness can improve youth well-being. Practical strategies such as gratitude journaling, mindfulness, and focusing on personal strengths may help increase life satisfaction. Therefore, educators, counselors, and mental health professionals should include these approaches in their programs to support emotional growth. Future research should explore these relationships further and consider the potential benefits of gratitude-based interventions for enhancing well-being and also use long-term (longitudinal) studies to better understand cause-and-effect relationships. It is also important to study different age groups, cultures, and backgrounds to ensure the findings apply widely. Finally, using

interviews or open-ended methods can offer deeper understanding of how young people experience happiness and gratitude in daily life.

Counsellors, educators and parents can foster life satisfaction among youth by instilling gratitude and advocating happiness building skills. Such efforts would have far reaching positive implications for mental as well as physical health among youth.

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