



Effect of Gratitude General on Mental Wellbeing of Adolescents

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Abstract

One of the worst effects of COVID-19 can be seen on the psychological and mental wellbeing of the people. Adolescents, without adequately developed coping strategies, struggled the most. Though the worst of COVID seems to be over but the effects on mental wellbeing are seen to be long lasting. Even after two years of the onset of COVID-19, this effect has not diminished. Looking for the ways to mitigate the effect of COVID-19 on mental wellbeing of adolescent students, investigators aimed to study the effect of gratitude general on their mental wellbeing. A randomized sample of 88 adolescent students was taken from private school of Chandigarh. An experimental design was used for the study. Students were randomly divided into two groups-control and experimental groups. Warwick Edinburg Mental well-being scale (version 1) by Stewart- Brown et al. (2008) was administered to the students at pre-test and post test stage of the experiment. The experimental group was asked to write gratitude journal, as an intervention, twice a week for five weeks before the post test. T-ratio statistics was employed using SPSS software- IBM, ver.20, on mean mental wellbeing scores of pre- test, post- test and gain (difference in pre-test and post –test scores). The results showed that, firstly, at the pre-test stage, mean mental wellbeing scores of control group were more than experimental group and the t-ratio value showed the difference to be significant. At the post-test stage, after administering intervention, that is, after the students were asked to write gratitude journal, the analysis showed that mean mental wellbeing scores of experimental group were more than the control group and t-ratio value showed the mean difference of scores to be significant. Further comparing mean mental wellbeing scores of control group for pre-test and post-test, no significant difference was seen. But for experimental group, a significant difference was seen between pretest and post- test scores Hence gratitude journal as an intervention showed a significant positive effect on mental wellbeing of adolescent students of private school of Chandigarh.

Key words: COVID-19, mental wellbeing, gratitude, gratitude general

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I. Introduction

During the unprecedented spread of corona virus normal life was disrupted globally in more than one ways. Strict health measures were taken to curb the virus. It included lock downs and confinements for the infected. These measures affected the social life very badly. People were working from home, children were studying online. All these things contributed to stress and anxiety. Above all, sufferings and death of loved ones and fear of contact of virus played havoc on the mental wellbeing. Though worst of pandemic seems to be over and everything is trying to function normally but some adverse effects on mental well being are long lasting.

The probabilities of outbreak of pandemics in future cannot be denied and implications of these can prove to be detrimental to mental wellbeing. So the researches should try to study the ways and techniques which can diminish its negative effects and build personal strength and mental resources that can help a person to effectively respond to life challenges, promote resilience and mental wellbeing.

One accessible mental resource for adverse mental health consequences could be paying gratitude for what one has or receives from others, tangible or intangible.

Gratitude

The word gratitude is derived from Latin word 'Gratia' means grace, graciousness or gratefulness. It is the appreciation of what is valuable and meaningful to one and represents a general state of thankful and/or appreciation.

Gratitude is appreciating what one receives, tangible or intangible, and acknowledging goodness in one's life (Jayakumar & Gupta, 2021).

Park et al. (2004) discovered that gratitude is a trait which possesses fundamental connection to wellbeing and life satisfaction.

Gratitude is an emotion holding such immense power that it's capable of bridging gaps and bringing people closer, (Rogers, 2021). A rich man can be grateful for the leisure and dynamic life he has, whilst a poor man can be grateful for life's simplicity and peace.

Gratitude helps to cope with anxiety and uncertainty by focusing the mind on things and processes one value in his/ her life. Positive psychology researches show that positive emotions like gratitude promote happiness and wellbeing. According to McCullough et al. (2001) gratitude increases conditions for more pro social behavior as it motivates the grateful person to behave pro socially towards other people in present as well as in future.

Gratitude journal

Gratitude journal is documenting or recording on regular basis, things that one is thankful for or appreciate in life. These things can be tangible like a gift received from someone or intangible like an act of kindness. Gratitude journal can be written daily or weekly basis but needs to be done consistently. It can increase overall feeling of happiness and reduce anxiety and depression.

Conscious focus on gratitude can make life more meaningful, fulfilling and productive (Roger, 2021). One way of focusing consciously on gratitude can be by writing gratitude journal regularly.

Mental Wellbeing

According to WHO (2004) mental health is a state of mental wellbeing that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It is more than the absence of mental illness or disorder.

Stewart-Brown et al. (2008) described mental wellbeing as it covers essentially two perspectives: 1. subjective experience of happiness and life satisfaction (Hedonic perspective) and 2. positive psychological functioning, good relationships and self realization (Eudaimonic perspective). So, it relates to persons psychological functioning, life satisfaction and ability to develop and maintain good relationships. It includes ability to maintain sense of autonomy, self acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life and self esteem.

Present study and its significance

COVID crisis has created havoc globally as far as mental health is concerned. The mental wellbeing was badly affected due to isolations, lock downs, disruption of daily routines, lack of human interactions and online mode of work and much more. It presented a greater challenge for adolescents as young people age (13-17) lack psychological capabilities and coping strategies. (Jones, Mitra & Bhuiyan. 2021).

According to report by UNICEF (2020) young people feel less motivated to do activities they usually enjoyed before COVID. They have started perceiving the future negatively and there is a greater concern about physical and mental wellbeing.

Anxiety, depression, disturbance in sleep pattern and impaired social interactions are most common presentations of impact of COVID on mental wellbeing of adolescents (Meherali et al., 2021).

Even though the protection of COVID vaccine is now available for the children and schools are also open, pandemic related stress may have lasting effects on developing minds of the adolescents.

Though worst may be over it is important to monitor mental wellbeing of adolescents and evolve strategies to improve their mental health.

With this view in mind, researchers, in the present study, tried to investigate the effect of writing a gratitude journal on mental wellbeing of adolescent students.

The mental wellbeing of students was accessed with the help of WARwick- Edenberg Mental wellbeing Scale version 1. The students were then randomly divided into two groups: control group and experimental group. Experimental group was made to write gratitude general twice a week. Every time they were ask to focus on different aspects about themselves, future and relationships. For example, they were encouraged to write what they appreciate about themselves or the qualities which they are thankful for. Another aspect was to be thankful for their relationships like parents, siblings and friends etc. they were also made to focus on qualities like optimism, confidence and problem solving. Their expressions were open ended. The participants were only made aware of things they could be thankful for without judging them as their responses

were not collected. At the end of ten such sessions the mental wellbeing post test was administered to both control group and experimental groups.

II. Review of literature

Bohlmeijer, Kraiss, Watkins, & Schotanus-Dijkstra (2020) aimed to evaluate the impact of 6 week gratitude intervention for people with low to moderate well-being and moderate symptomatology of depression and anxiety up to 6 months follow up. 17 Dutch adults were taken for the study. The sample was randomly divided among the three different conditions, that is, a 6-week gratitude intervention, a 6-week self-kindness intervention as an active control condition and a waitlist control condition. In comparison to the self-kindness intervention ($d=.63$ at post-intervention and $d=.40$ at 6 weeks follow-up) and waitlist control ($d=.93$ at post-intervention and $d=.66$ at 6 weeks follow-up), the thankfulness (gratitude) intervention was more successful in enhancing mental wellbeing. The findings also showed that on different measures of thankfulness, but not on distress, the gratitude intervention outperformed waitlist control and self-kindness training. The findings of this study indicated that, for individuals with low to moderate levels of wellbeing and moderate distress a 6-week thankfulness intervention is an efficient, low-intensity intervention for boosting mental well-being but not distress atleast in higher-educated women. The sustained effects on various measures of gratitude up to 6 months follow-up suggest that it is possible to promote a lasting appreciative perspective on life.

Iodice, Malouff, & Schutte (2021) conducted the meta analysis to study the association between gratitude and depression. The Meta analysis was conducted on 62 published and unpublished articles, involving a total of 26,427 child, adolescent and adult participants. The results showed a significant association between gratitude and depression indicating that individuals who experience more gratitude have lower levels of depression. The results showed a strong relationship between higher levels of thankfulness (gratitude) and lower levels of depression, regardless of type of gratitude or depression measure utilized, the study's longitudinal or cross-sectional design, participant age, or the percentage of the female participants.

Komase, Watanabe, Hori, Nozawa, Hidaka, Iida, Imamura, & Kawakami (2021) did a systematic review to study the effects of gratitude intervention on mental health and well-being among workers. The study was confined to search five data bases. Appropriate research studies were selected from a large data base. Nine out of 1957 articles met the inclusion criteria. Eight studies adopted gratitude list interventions, showing a significant improvement in perceived stress and depression; however, the effects on well-being were inconsistent. Interventions with gratitude list four times or less did not report significant changes in any outcomes.

Geier & Morris (2022) did a quasi experimental study to investigate the impact of a gratitude intervention on mental well-being during COVID-19. A sample of 87 participants/ university students with 47 in experimental group and 40 in control group were compared. An analysis of covariance was used to analyze the data. The result showed higher mental wellbeing for experimental group as compare to control group after the gratitude intervention to experimental/ experimental group. Gratitude interventions may be effective in improving the mental wellbeing of university students during COVID-19 pandemic or such other crisis.

Objective

- To study the effect of gratitude journal on mental wellbeing of adolescents.

Hypotheses

- There is no significant difference in the mean mental wellbeing pre-test scores of adolescents between control group and experimental group.
- There is no significant effect of gratitude journal on mental wellbeing of adolescents on post-test scores.
- There is no significant effect of gratitude journal on mental wellbeing of adolescents on gain scores.

Tools used

1. Warwick Edinburg Mental well-being scale (version 1) by Stewart- Brown et al. (2008).
2. Gratitude journal written by the students.

Sample of the study

A random sample of 88 adolescents studying in a private school of Chandigarh was taken for the study.

Design of the study

Pre-test – post-test experimental design was used to conduct the study. Mental well being scale was administered to adolescent students as pre test and post- test. The sample was divided in two groups- control group and experimental group. Experimental group was made to write gratitude journal twice a week as an intervention. After five weeks pot-test was administered.

Procedure

The procedure of the study involved three steps. The sample was divided in two groups: control and experimental groups. In the first step, both the groups were administered the mental wellbeing scale as pre-test. In the second step, the experimental group was made to write gratitude journal twice a week for five weeks as an intervention. In the third step, both the groups were again administered mental wellbeing scale as post- test. The difference in pre-test and post-test scores of mental wellbeing was taken as gain scores and was analyzed to study the effectiveness of gratitude journal on mental wellbeing of students.

Statistical tools used

Descriptive statistics, such as mean, standard deviation, and inferential statistics such as t-test were employed to analyze the data.

Analysis of the data

Table1: Mean of pre-test scores of mental wellbeing of adolescents and t-ratio value between control group and experimental group

Groups	N	M	SD	SEm	Df	t-value	Level of significance
Control group	37	44.05	7.99	1.31	68	3.04	.01
Experimental group	33	37.39	10.28	1.79			

Table 1 shows the mean pre-test scores of mental wellbeing of adolescents divided in two groups- control group and experimental/ experimental group. The mean values of pre-test scores for control group and experimental group have been found to be 44.05 and 37.39 respectively. The t-ratio value for 68 degree of freedom has been found to be 3.04. The value is significant at .01 levels. Hence the hypothesis, “there is no significant difference in the mean mental wellbeing pre-test scores of adolescents between control group and experimental group,” may not be accepted. The two groups show significant difference in their mean mental wellbeing even before administration of any gratitude intervention. Control group showed higher mean value than experimental group.

Table2: Mean of post-test scores of mental wellbeing of adolescents and t-ratio value between control group and experimental group

Groups	N	M	SD	SEm	Df	t-value	Level of significance
Control group	37	43.30	7.96	1.30	68	2.277	.05
Experimental group	33	48.27	10.28	1.79			

Table 2 shows the mean post-test scores of mental wellbeing of adolescents divided in two groups- control group and experimental/ experimental group. The mean values of post-test scores for control group and experimental group have been found to be 43.30 and 48.27 respectively. The t-ratio value for 68 degree of freedom has been found to be 2.77. The value is significant at .05 levels. Hence the hypothesis, “There is no significant effect of gratitude journal on mental wellbeing of adolescents on post-test scores,” may not be accepted. Alternatively, gratitude general has a significant effect on mental wellbeing of adolescent students. Further, it is seen that, after the gratitude journal intervention, higher mental wellbeing has been found for experimental group as compared to control group. This result is supported by the studies conducted by Bohlmeijer, Kraiss, Watkins, & Schotanus-Dijkstra (2020), and Geier & Morris (2022).

Table 3: Mean of gain scores of mental wellbeing of adolescents and t-ratio value between control group and experimental group

Groups	N	M	SD	SEm	Df	t-value	Level of significance
Control group	37	1.41	.762	.12	68	6.85	.01
Experimental group	33	10.88	8.38	1.46			

Table 3 shows the mean gain scores of mental wellbeing of adolescents divided in two groups- control group and experimental/ experimental group. The mean values of gain scores for control group and experimental group have been found to be 1.41 and 10.88 respectively. The t-ratio value for 68 degree of freedom has been found to be 6.85. The value is significant at .01 levels. Hence the hypothesis, “There is no significant effects of gratitude journal on mental wellbeing of adolescents on gain scores,” may not be accepted. Alternatively, gratitude journal has a significant effect on mental wellbeing of adolescent students. Further, it is

seen that, after the gratitude journal intervention, higher mental wellbeing has been found for experimental group as compared to control group. This result is supported by the studies conducted by Bohlmeijer, Kraiss, Watkins, & Schotanus-Dijkstra (2020), and Geier & Morris (2022).

III. Results and discussion

The results of the study showed a significant difference in mental wellbeing of students between two groups (control and experimental groups) before and after administering the intervention of gratitude journal. If we compare the mean mental wellbeing scores of control group and experimental group of pre-test and post-test before any gratitude journal intervention, it is found that mean mental wellbeing scores of control group (44.05) is greater than experimental group (37.39), whereas, in case of only post test scores, the mean mental wellbeing scores of control group (43.30) is lesser than experimental group (48.27). This clearly shows the effect of gratitude journal is significantly higher for experimental group, where gratitude journal was administered, than, control group, where gratitude journal was not administered. Also, if we compare mean mental wellbeing scores of control group only in case of pre-test and post – test, then it is found that the difference is not much significant and even the mean mental wellbeing score has decreased in post-test. For experimental group in pre-test and post- test, the difference is quite commendable. The significant effect of gratitude journal is also seen between control group and experimental group when gain scores were used to analyze the data.

The results clearly show the significance of writing a gratitude journal. The adolescent may have realized that in spite of problems and stresses they have many things to be grateful for. They became aware of their personal strength and qualities which they could appreciate. Paying gratitude change their outlook towards life positively (Kumar, Edwards, Grandgenett, Scherer, DiLillo, & Jaffe, 2022)

Experimental group in comparison to control group may have realized that there are many people and relationships in their life which they can cherish. This awareness helped to dissolve the negativity. So the experimental group scored more on attributes like confidence and optimism for future.

IV. Conclusion

Developing the habit of writing a gratitude journal on regular basis among adolescents can prove to be very beneficial not only in mitigating the adverse effects of COVID on their mental wellbeing but also help them to be better prepared mentally and emotionally for any adversity or problem in future.

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