

The Impact of Gratitude Practice on Peer Relationships and Empathy among Adolescents

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Abstract

Gratitude is an emotion like appreciation involves being thankful recognizing that something happens to you it is also for acknowledging that someone is responsible for it may be specific person in your life, an impersonal source like nature or divine entity. Gratitude practices are not complex of difficult; it doesn't need to be practice by any specific tools or training. The more you practice it the better you become and put yourself in a grateful state of mind. Gratitude practice involves gratitude journaling, gratitude wall or board activity, gratitude letters gratitude meditation or reflection. Gratitude journaling is recording or reflecting things that you are grateful for on a regular basis. This is an intervention study that aims to discern the effects of gratitude practices on peer relationships and empathy among adolescents. a sample over 30 adolescents by using Quasi-experimental design for data collection, utilizing the 'peer relationships questionnaire Rigby & Slee (1993) and Bukowski (1994)' and 'empathy questionnaire for adolescents Davis's Interpersonal Reactivity Index (1983) and Bryant's Empathy Index for Children and Adolescents (1982)'. the finding from this study are expected to reveal a high level of peer relationship and high level of empathy by using gratitude practices among adolescents. This research contributes valuable insights into to gratitude practices impaction on peer relationship and empathy of adolescents

Keywords: Gratitude practices, Peer relationship and Empathy.

Systematic review

A substantial body of research identifies self-compassion and gratitude as key psychological resources supporting adolescents' prosocial development and social well-being. Self-compassion, defined as a kind and mindful response to personal suffering, has been consistently associated with greater psychological well-being and reduced emotional distress among adolescents (Neff, 2003; Marsh et al., 2018). Beyond intrapersonal benefits, self-compassion has been shown to enhance empathy, social connectedness, and concern for others, thereby promoting positive interpersonal functioning (Neff & Pommier, 2013). Empirical evidence further indicates that self-compassion is positively associated with prosocial behaviour, with both cross-sectional and experimental studies demonstrating that individuals higher in self-compassion are more likely to engage in helping and cooperative actions (Lindsay & Creswell, 2014; Yang et al., 2019). Addressing gaps in longitudinal research, Yang et al. (2021) found that self-compassion predicted subsequent increases in gratitude and prosocial behaviour among Chinese adolescents, with gratitude and prosocial behaviour serving as between-person mediators, highlighting self-compassion as

a foundational capacity for positive social development. Gratitude, conceptualized as an other-oriented moral emotion involving appreciation of benefits received, has been widely linked to well-being, social bonding, and prosocial behaviour (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Wood et al., 2009). Numerous studies demonstrate that gratitude promotes helping behaviour, altruism, empathy, and reciprocal prosocial responses, thereby strengthening social relationships (Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006; McCullough et al., 2008; Algoe et al., 2008). Developmental research further shows that gratitude is positively associated with adolescents' prosocial tendencies and life satisfaction and can be reliably measured in youth populations (Froh et al., 2011). Extending moral emotion theory, Zhang (2022) reported that gratitude positively predicted prosocial behaviour among Chinese adolescents, with meaning in life mediating this relationship and self-esteem moderating the link between meaning and prosocial behaviour. Gratitude has also been identified as a protective factor in social adversity contexts; for instance, gratitude and forgiveness were found to predict prosocial bystander behaviour in bullying through increased happiness among Mexican adolescents (García-Vázquez et al., 2020). Family and environmental influences further underscore the role of gratitude, as emotionally warm parenting has been shown to reduce cyberbullying perpetration attitudes by fostering trait gratitude and cognitive empathy (Chen et al., 2020). However, emerging literature cautions against viewing gratitude as uniformly prosocial, as it has been associated with self-monitoring and social intelligence, suggesting that gratitude expressions may sometimes serve impression management or strategic social goals (Gulliford et al., 2019). Research among young adults further indicates strong interrelations among empathy, compassion, and gratitude, with notable gender differences favouring females in empathy and compassion but not consistently in gratitude (Saha, 2024). Overall, the literature positions gratitude—often cultivated through self-compassion, emotional warmth, empathy, and meaning-making processes—as a central mechanism underlying adolescents' prosocial behaviour and social adjustment, while emphasizing the importance of contextual and motivational considerations in understanding its social functions (Ahmadi et al., 2020).

Overall, the research collectively shows that self-compassion and gratitude are closely linked and play an important role in adolescents' emotional health and social behaviour. Adolescents who are kind and understanding toward themselves tend to experience less emotional distress and greater well-being, and this self-compassion helps them become more empathetic, grateful, and socially connected. Gratitude, in turn, encourages adolescents to recognize the support they receive from others, which motivates them to act kindly, help others, and maintain positive peer relationships. These qualities support prosocial behaviours such as cooperation, empathy, and helping, while also reducing negative behaviours like aggression and bullying. Family warmth, emotional support, and a positive social environment further strengthen gratitude and empathy, leading to better social adjustment. However, research also suggests that gratitude is influenced by context and motivation, meaning it is most beneficial when it is genuine rather than used for social approval. Taken together, these studies indicate that self-compassion lays the emotional foundation for gratitude, and gratitude serves as a key mechanism through which adolescents develop empathy, prosocial behaviour, and healthy social relationships.

Introduction

Gratitude means noticing and appreciating the good things in your life. When you take a moment each day to think about what you are thankful for. Gratitude involves showing appreciation for the things in life that are meaningful or valuable to you. Gratitude is simply appreciating the good things you have. Taking time each day to recognize them can make you feel calm, happy, and more hopeful during difficult situations.

each day can brighten your outlook, boost your mood, and help you feel more positive in the face of challenges.

Empathy is ability to understand and share the feelings of another person. Rather than merely sympathising with someone's situation, empathy requires putting oneself in their shoes and experiencing their emotions from their perspective. Empathy is more important to build a strong relationship with one another, reducing stress, and enhancing emotional awareness.

Peer relationships are connections with people who are similar to us in age, interests, or background. They happen in many settings, such as school, college, and the workplace. Such relationships help us learn social rules and improve communication skills. Peer relationships are essential for social development and personal growth.

The association between gratitude and positive social outcomes can be explained through multiple psychological and interpersonal mechanisms. Primarily, gratitude enhances adolescents' awareness of supportive behaviours within their social environments. This heightened awareness facilitates perspective-taking and emotional sensitivity, which are fundamental components of empathy. Adolescents who engage in reflective practices focused on recognizing the kindness and support received from others are more likely to identify and understand their peers' emotional states, respond with compassion, and demonstrate supportive behaviours. These responses contribute to the development of trust and the maintenance of positive, supportive peer relationships (Preprints.org study, 2025).

The satisfaction of basic psychological needs, particularly relatedness and perceived social support, serves as a significant as empathy grows, people are more likely to show prosocial behaviours like helping and sharing. When adolescents experience feelings of acceptance, connectedness, and value within their peer groups, they are more inclined to engage in empathic and cooperative behaviours. Such positive interpersonal experiences further strengthen gratitude, fostering a reciprocal process that enhances empathy and improves the overall quality of peer relationships.

Gratitude practices include activities such as gratitude journaling, where individuals regularly note things they are thankful for, and gratitude letter writing, which involves expressing appreciation to significant others. Gratitude visits further strengthen relationships by personally sharing these letters. Verbal expressions of gratitude, such as saying "thank you," promote everyday positive interactions. Reflective gratitude practices encourage individuals to think about positive experiences and support received. Gratitude meditation combines mindfulness with appreciation to enhance emotional awareness. Group-based gratitude sharing helps build social connectedness and a supportive environment. Behavioural gratitude is expressed through kind and helping actions. Gratitude toward adversity focuses on finding meaning in challenging experiences.

Background of the study

Adolescence is an important stage for developing social skills, empathy, and peer relationships. Many adolescents today face difficulties such as peer conflict, poor social bonding, and reduced empathy. Gratitude is a simple and positive emotional practice that helps individuals recognize and appreciate support from others. Practicing gratitude does not require special training, tools, or resources, making it easy to use with adolescents. Regular gratitude practices help adolescents develop a positive mindset and emotional awareness. Gratitude encourages kindness, cooperation, and supportive behaviour among peers. It also helps adolescents understand others' emotions and respond with empathy. Positive peer relationships contribute to better emotional well-being and social adjustment. Gratitude practices can

reduce negative behaviours such as aggression and social withdrawal. Schools and counselling settings can easily include gratitude activities in daily routines. Studying gratitude practices helps identify effective ways to improve peer relationships. It also supports the development of empathy among adolescents. The findings of this study may help teachers, counsellors, and psychologists design simple interventions. This study highlights gratitude practices as a practical method for promoting healthy social development in adolescents.

Inclusion criteria

1. Undergraduate students adolescence age group 17 to 19 years
2. Students currently enrolled in a regular academic program during their period of data collection.
3. Participants who can understand and follow instructions related to gratitude practices and assessments.
4. Willingness to regularly engage in gratitude activities and complete pre- and post-assessments.

Exclusion criteria

1. Students diagnosed with psychiatric disorder or currently underlying psychiatric treatment.
2. Participants currently receiving psychotherapy or structured psychosocial interventions targeting empathy, social skills, or interpersonal functioning.
3. Students with significant communication difficulties that may hinder accurate assessment of empathy or peer relationships.
4. Students unwilling or unable to consistently complete gratitude activities or assessments.

Methodology

Aim

The study aims to explore whether gratitude practices involves in increasing in empathy and peer relationships of students.

Objectives

1. To evaluate the effect of gratitude practices on empathy levels among adolescents.
2. To evaluate the effect of gratitude practices on peer relationships among adolescents.
3. To examine how gratitude practices daily will effective in empathy and peer-relationship.

Hypotheses

Null hypotheses

1. There is no significant effect of gratitude practices on empathy levels among adolescents aged 17–19 years.
2. There is no significant effect of gratitude practices on peer relationships among adolescents aged 17–19 years.

Alternative Hypotheses

1. Gratitude practices have a significant effect on empathy levels among adolescents aged 17–19 years.
2. Gratitude practices have a significant effect on peer relationships among adolescents aged 17–19 years.

Discussion

The present study focused to examine the effects of gratitude practices on empathy and peer relationships

among adolescents aged 17–19 years. The findings of the study may show that gratitude practices significantly enhance both empathy levels and peer relationships among adolescents. These results support the alternative hypotheses and suggest that regular engagement in gratitude-based activities has a positive influence on adolescents' social and emotional functioning.

Gratitude practices help adolescents become more aware of the support, kindness, and positive experiences they receive from others. This increased awareness encourages perspective-taking and emotional sensitivity, which are core components of empathy. When adolescents regularly reflect on what they are grateful for, they become more attentive to others' feelings and needs, leading to improved empathic understanding and compassionate responses. This finding is consistent with previous research showing that gratitude enhances empathy and prosocial behaviour by promoting emotional awareness and concern for others.

The study also found that gratitude practices improve peer relationships among adolescents. Expressing gratitude through journaling, reflection, or verbal appreciation strengthens social bonds and promotes positive interactions. Adolescents who practice gratitude are more likely to communicate kindly, cooperate with peers, and maintain supportive friendships. Gratitude fosters trust, mutual respect, and emotional closeness, which are essential for healthy peer relationships. These findings align with earlier studies suggesting that gratitude strengthens social connectedness and relationship quality.

Furthermore, gratitude practices may satisfy basic psychological needs such as relatedness and belongingness. When adolescents feel valued and supported within their peer groups, they are more likely to make focus in empathic and cooperative behaviours. This creates a positive cycle in which gratitude enhances empathy and peer relationships, which in turn further reinforce grateful feelings. The simplicity and accessibility of gratitude practices make them particularly suitable for adolescents in educational and counselling settings.

Overall, the results highlight gratitude as an effective and low-cost intervention for promoting social well-being among adolescents. The findings support existing literature emphasizing the role of positive emotional practices in enhancing empathy and improving peer relationships during a critical developmental stage.

Conclusion

The present study concludes that gratitude practices have a significant positive impact on empathy and peer relationships among adolescents aged 17–19 years. Adolescents who regularly engage in gratitude activities demonstrate higher levels of empathic understanding and stronger, more positive peer relationships. Gratitude encourages emotional awareness, kindness, and appreciation of social support, which are essential for healthy social development.

The findings suggest that gratitude practices are simple, practical, and effective tools that can be easily incorporated into school programs, counselling sessions, and daily routines. By fostering empathy and improving peer interactions, gratitude practices contribute to better emotional well-being and social adjustment among adolescents. This study highlights the importance of promoting gratitude as a positive psychological intervention to support adolescents' social and emotional growth.

Implications of the Study

1. Gratitude practices can be considered an effective intervention for enhancing empathy among adolescents.

2. Regular engagement in gratitude activities contributes to improved peer relationships and social connectedness.
3. The simplicity and cost-effectiveness of gratitude practices make them suitable for implementation in educational institutions.
4. Incorporating gratitude-based activities may help promote adolescents' emotional well-being and reduce interpersonal difficulties.
5. The findings support the integration of gratitude practices into counselling, life-skills, and social-emotional learning programs.

Limitations of the Study

1. The study aims to be conducted with a limited sample of undergraduate adolescents (17–19 years), which could restrict the generalizability of the findings to other age groups or settings.
2. The quasi-experimental research design limits the ability to establish a strong cause–effect relationship between gratitude practices and the outcome variables.
3. Reliance on self-report measures of empathy and peer relationships may have introduced response bias or social desirability effects.
4. The duration of the gratitude intervention was relatively short, preventing assessment of long-term or sustained effects.
5. Potential confounding variables such as family background, peer environment, and individual personality differences were not controlled

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