

Gratitude and Resilience of Young Adults: Examining the Mediating Role of Optimism and Social Support

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ABSTRACT

The present study explored the mediating effect of social support and optimism in the relationship between gratitude and resilience of young adults. To achieve this objective, a package of questionnaire consisting of Gratitude Questionnaire, Revised Life Orientation Test-Revised, Social Support Questionnaire, and Resilience Scale for Adults were administered to a convenience sample of 315 students of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Science and Technology University, Gopalganj. Their ages ranged from 19 through 26 with a mean age being 22.72 years ($SD = 1.23$). The results of independent sample t test reveals that there is no significant gender difference between male and female in social support number, optimism and resilience except support satisfaction and gratitude. Results of Pearson-product moment correlation reveals that gratitude, social support, optimism and resilience are correlated with one another. Findings of multiple regression analysis confirm the predictive role of support satisfaction, gratitude and optimism on resilience. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis confirms the partial mediating effect of optimism and rejects the mediating role of social support in the relationship between gratitude and resilience of young adults.

Keywords: Gratitude, Social Support, Optimism, Resilience, Young Adults

INTRODUCTION

The mainstream of psychology has mainly focused on the negative factors that threaten human mental health (Kardas, Cam, Eskisu, & Gelibolu, 2019). With the emersion of Positive Psychological movement, a significant redirection towards the exploration of optimal human flourishing and human strengths have started to be studied (Rusk & Waters 2013). Positive Psychology can be described as the science of positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, positive relationships and positive group and institutions (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Areas recognizing by positive psychology as crucial to the psychological good life include positive subjective experiences (e.g., happiness, life satisfaction), positive individual traits (e.g., character, values, interests), positive relationships (e.g., (friendship, marriage), and positive

groups and institutions (e.g., families, school, communities). Positive psychology namely positive individual traits consist of the study of strengths and virtues, such as gratitude, resilience, optimism, creativity, integrity, curiosity, wisdom and so on while, social support falls within the positive group and institutions domain.

Young adults are considered to be the building blocks of the society (Kumar & Dixit, 2014) and nurturing values and strengths among them is one of the core objectives of positive psychological research at present (Mary & Patra, 2015). Gratitude is a criteria of character strength and falls within transcendence category classified by Peterson and Seligman in 2004. Gratitude can be defined as a general state of thankfulness, appreciation as well as joy in response to receiving gift, whether the gift is a tangible benefit from other person or a time of peaceful happiness evoked through natural beauty. That is, gratitude requires one to acknowledge that one has obtained a positive outcome, opportunity, or benefit, due in part to an external source (Behzadipour, Sadeghi, & Sepahmansour, 2018; Emmons, & McCullough, 2004).

Feelings of gratitude towards God, others, life and existence could lead to mental prosperity and more satisfying interpersonal relationship (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000). Grateful people tend to experience more positive emotions, fewer negative emotions (Froh, Yurkewicz, & Kashdan, 2009) and greater overall well-being (Kardas, Cam, Eskisu, & Gelibolu, 2019; Lin, 2017; Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010); and experimental inductions or training of grateful feelings lead to increases in self-reported happiness as well (Witvliet, Richie, Root Luna, & Van Tongeren, 2019; Nguyen, & Gordon, 2019; Behzadipour, et al., 2018; Lyubomirsky, Dickerhoof, Boehm, & Sheldon, 2011). There is also ample evidence that practicing gratitude can improve physical health in addition to helping people balance their emotions and improve their relationship. Research has shown that gratitude can reduce depressive symptom, can reduce blood pressure, and improve sleep quality as well as improve overall physical health (Jackowska, Brown, Ronaldson, & Steptoe, 2016; Hill, Allemand, & Roberts, 2013). Gratitude facilitates healthy eating behavior as well (Fritz, Armenta, Walsh, & Lyubomirsky, 2019).

Gratitude, like other positive emotions, help individuals build psychological and social resources and promote resilience (Caleon, Ilham, Ong, & Tan, 2019). Resilience can be defined as the ability to maintain the persistence of one's orientation towards existential purposes (Sisto, Vicinanza, Campanozzi, Ricci, Tartaglini, & Tambone, 2019). More specifically, resilience is the ability to bounce back from adversity and successfully adapt to any situations. Over the past decades, much progress has been made in understanding the relationship between gratitude and resilience and a significant relationship has been found between these constructs (Caleon et al., 2019; Vieselmeyer, Holguin, & Mezulis, 2017; Wilson, 2016; Mary & Patra, 2015).

Additionally, gratitude is linked to a number of positive emotional and social outcomes such as increased feelings of social connectedness, greater perceived social support, less stress and reduced depressive symptoms (Lambert, & Fincham, 2011; Wood, Maltby, Gillett, Linley, & Joseph, 2008). Research has shown that people with high gratitude score tend to get more social support and buffers from stress and depression (Kong, Ding, & Zhao, 2015). Furthermore, gratitude also serves as a protective mechanism following trauma or adverse situations (Vieselmeyer et al., 2017). Like social benefits, gratitude has some personality benefits as well

such as enhance optimism, reduce materialism, and make people more giving. For example, Huffman and other (2014) found that writing a gratitude letter and counting blessings had high utility scores and were associated with substantial improvements in optimism. Another study on gratitude intervention resulted in greater tendencies towards positivity and an expanded capacity for happiness and optimism (Lashani, Shaeiri, Asghari-Moghadam, & Golzari, 2012).

Optimism and resilience go together. There is good ground in the previous studies that suggest a positive relationship between optimism and resilience such that optimism predicts resilience (Carver, Scheier, & Segerstrom, 2010; Bonanno, 2005). Similarly, social support and resilience share a strong connection with each other (Ong, Vaingankar, Abdin, Sambasivam et al., 2018). Few research (Kong, Yang, Yan, & Li, 2020; McCanlies, Gu, Andrew, & Violanti, 2018) has shown that social support serves as a mediator in the relationship between gratitude and well-being. That's why we conceptualize that there might be a mediation effect of social support and optimism in the relationship between gratitude and resilience and formulated the research objectives accordingly.

Early adulthood is a critical period of life-span development including both physical and psychological development and people tend to demonstrate more stable levels across adulthood or even improve. Though individuals at this stage are more enthusiastic but sometimes they showed lack of patience and the experience of gratitude is least among young adults. Gratitude may nurture creativity, intrinsic motivation, purposefulness among young adults and promote resilience. Additionally, gratitude helps people feel more positive emotions, relish good experiences, improve their health, deal with adversity, and build strong relationship. So, it is very important to practice gratitude as well as other positive qualities. Besides, on the basis of present adverse circumstances it is very essential to practice positive quality like gratitude. Practicing gratitude is a virtue. However, taking all these issues, discussed above, it is considered that this study will be important in terms of contributing to positive psychology research in the literature, providing evidence-based data for teacher and practitioners working in the field, and determining the role of chosen variables in predicting and mediating psychological resilience. On the other hand, research findings are expected to contribute to the issue of positive adult development which has become an important subject of research in the field of mental health, namely positive psychology and foster the development of limited studies conducted in Bangladesh.

Objectives

The objectives of the study were to explore whether:

- a) Gratitude, optimism, social support, and resilience are associated with one another.
- b) Gratitude, optimism, and social support can predict resilience of young adults.
- c) Gratitude promotes resilience through optimism and social support.

Hypotheses

The following were the study's specific hypotheses:

- a) Gratitude, optimism, social support, and resilience will be associated with one another.
- b) Gratitude, optimism, and social support would predict resilience of young adults.
- c) Gratitude will promote resilience through optimism and social support.

METHODS

Participants

The present study included 315 young adults studying at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Science and Technology University, Gopalganj. Among the participants 160 (50.8%) were female and 155 (49.2%) were male. The participants were selected conveniently from this University. Their ages ranged from 19 through 26 with a mean age being 22.72 years ($SD = 1.23$). The participants were from lower class to upper class family background with most of the participants were from middle class (81.9%) family background. Among the participants, about 86.0% were from nuclear families and another 14% were from joint families.

Measuring Instruments

The following measures were used in the current study and they were administered in the following sequence:

1. Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6)
2. Life Orientation Test- Revised (LOT-R).
3. Social Support Questionnaire-Short Form (SSQ)
4. Resilience Scale for Adults (RSA)
5. Personal Information Form (PIF)

Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6):

The Bangla translated version (Nahar & Parvin, 2022) of the Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6) which was originally developed by McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang (2002) was used in this study. The GQ-6 is a brief, self-report assessment of the tendency to feel gratitude. Participants answer 6 items on a 1 to 7 (1 = "strongly disagree", 7 = "strongly agree") Likert Scale. Two items are reverse-scored (3 & 6) to inhibit response bias. Item responses are summed to obtain a scale score.

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 pro-social 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.

Life Orientation Test- Revised (LOT-R):

The Bangla version of the Life Orientation Test- Revised (Kamal Uddin, Nahar & Parvin, 2022) which was originally developed by Scheier, Carver, and Bridges (1994) was used in this study. LOT-R is the updated form of the original LOT (Scheier & Carver, 1992). The original LOT contained 12 items: 4 positively worded, 4 negatively worded, and 4 fillers. The revised scale was constructed in order to eliminate two items from the original scale, which dealt more with copying style than with positive expectations for future outcomes. The correlation between the revised scale and original scale was .95. The LOT-R is a self-report instrument containing 10 items for assessing individual differences in generalized optimism versus pessimism. Of the 10 items, 3 items (1, 4, and 10) measure optimism, 3 items (3, 7, and 9) measure pessimism and are reversed code items, and 4 items (2, 5, 6, and 8) serve as fillers as they are not scored to obtain an overall score. Sample items include: "In uncertain times, I usually expect the best". Respondents rate each item on a 5-point Likert Type scale: "0= strongly disagree", "1= disagree", "2= neutral", "3= agree", and "4= strongly agree". The possible score ranges from a

low of 0 to a high of 24 as items 1, 3, 4, 7, 9, and 10 are summed to obtain an overall score. The midpoint of the LOT-R is 12. Score above the scale midpoint reflects more dispositional optimism and below the midpoint score reflects more pessimism.

Social Support Questionnaire-Short Form (SSQ):

The Bangla Version of Sarason, Sarason, Shearin, and Pierce's (1987) Social Support Questionnaire (SSQ) was used in the present study. The short form of social support questionnaire consists of 6 items. Each item is a question that solicits a two-part answer. Part-1 asks participants to list all the people that fit the description of the question, and part-2 asks participants to indicate how satisfied they are, in general, with these people. For the later, participants will indicate on a six-point Likert-type scale ranging from very dissatisfied (1) to vary satisfied (6). For example, who can you really count on to be dependable when you need help? The participant's support satisfaction score will be the sum of his or her satisfaction responses divided by the number of items. Sarason et al., (1987) found internal consistency reliability between .90 and .93 for the scale, and demonstrated good scale validity (through relationships with other measures of support and with loneliness, depression and anxiety).

Resilience Scale for Adults (RSA):

The Resilience Scale for Adults (RSA) was developed by Friborg, Hjemdal, Rosenvinge, and Martinussen, in 2003. The Bangla version of this scale translated by Prokrity, Uddin, and Nahar (2018) was used for this present study. The Resilience Scale for Adults contains 33 items and comprises five factors labeled: personal competence ("I know if I continue, I will succeed"), social competence ("I can establish friendly relationship easily"), Family Cohesion ("Even in difficult situations, my family is optimistic"), Social resources ("there is always someone who helps me when I'm in need"), and Structured Style ("I sustain my daily rules even in difficult situations"). The internal consistency of all subscales of the RSA is satisfactorily high in terms of Cronbach's alpha. All subscales of the RSA were positively associated with one another, with correlation coefficient ranging from 0.23 to 0.58. Research has indicated that this scale contains high convergent criterion related validity (Jowkar, Friborg, & Hjemdal, 2010).

The Personal Information Form (PIF):

The PIF will elicit demographic, personal, and social information about respondent's gender, age, year of study, number of siblings, quality of relationship with siblings, family socioeconomic status, religious affiliation, types of family, quality of relationship with family members, etc.

Procedure

For main data acquisition, standard data collection procedure was followed. For taking consent at the beginning, each participant was briefed about the general purpose of the study and assured that their responses would be kept confidential and used only for research purposes. Participants were given a general instruction verbally, and were asked to read carefully the standard instructions of how to respond before going through the items of the scale attentively and were asked to give tick (✓) mark in the appropriate box. In addition, they were told not to leave any questions off the questionnaire. Additionally, whenever they had any difficulties comprehending the items, more clarifications were made. After completion of all items, they were asked to provide general demographic data (e.g., age, gender, socioeconomic status,

education, etc.). Although there was no time limit for the respondents to answer the items in the scale, it took 30 minutes on average to complete the task. On completion, every respondent was given a token gift with thanks for their participation in the study. Thus, the survey was administered and data were collected over a 6-week period from all the participants.

DATA PROCESSING AND ANALYSIS

Each participant's responses were scored according to the scoring principle of Gratitude Questionnaire, Life orientation test-revised, Social Support Questionnaire, and Resilience Scale for Adults. The data was then entered into the computer and run through SPSS for analysis. For main analysis, at first independent sample "*t*" test was carried out to examine the difference between male and female. Then simple correlation was calculated to examine the relationships among gratitude, social support, optimism, and resilience. In order to test the joint effect of gratitude, social support, and optimism on resilience, data were analyzed in multiple regressions, using gratitude, social support, and resilience as predictor and variables and resilience as criterion variable. In order to test the mediating effect of social support and optimism in the relationship between gratitude and resilience, data were further processes using hierarchical multiple regression. Finally, Sobel Test was applied to test the significance of mediating effect of social support and optimism.

RESULTS

In order to test the significance of the difference between male and female students in social support, gratitude, optimism and resilience, independent sample *t* test was calculated. Results presented in Table 1 show that there is no significant gender difference between male and female in social support number, optimism and resilience except support satisfaction and gratitude. Further inspection reveals that male students are more satisfied with their social support (female: $M=5.35$, $SD=.98$; male: $M=5.58$, $SD=.96$) whereas female students are more grateful to their lives (female: $M=32.47$, $SD=5.22$; male: $M=29.66$, $SD=4.91$).

Table 1. Independent sample t test for the significance of the difference between male and female in social support, gratitude, optimism and resilience.

Variables	Female ($n = 160$)		Male ($n = 155$)		<i>t</i>
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Social support number	15.63	8.36	14.82	6.29	.96
Average social support number	2.60	1.39	2.47	1.05	.96
Support satisfaction	32.12	5.88	33.50	4.57	-2.33*
Average support satisfaction	5.35	.98	5.58	.96	-2.33*
Gratitude	32.47	5.22	29.66	4.91	4.92***
Optimism	14.38	2.83	13.95	2.90	1.34
Resilience	69.00	16.45	70.06	15.18	-.59

*** $p < .001$ (two-tailed)

* $p < .05$ (two tailed)

In order to test the first objective, Pearson product moment correlation was calculated. Results presented in Table 2, show that there is no significant relationship between social support number and support satisfaction. Results also indicate that social support has relationship with gratitude, optimism, and resilience. That means, number of social supports received makes

students more grateful ($r = .12, p < .05$), more optimistic ($r = .18, p < .01$) and more resilience ($r = .11, p < .05$). Support satisfaction is also related to optimism and resilience. Gratitude also makes people more optimistic ($r = .34, p < .01$) and more resilient ($r = -.35, p < .01$). Results also reveal that optimism and resilient are correlated with one another. That means optimism makes people more resilient ($r = -.32, p < .01$).

Table 2. Correlation between social support number, social support satisfaction, gratitude, optimism, and resilience.

Variables	Social support number	Social support satisfaction	Gratitude	Optimism	Resilience
Social support number	1				
Social support satisfaction	.07	1			
Gratitude	.12*	.09	1		
Optimism	.18**	.12*	.34**	1	
Resilience	-.11*	-.21**	-.35**	-.32**	1

** $p < .01$ (two-tailed)

* $p < .05$ (two tailed)

Table 3. Multiple regression coefficient of social support, social support satisfaction, gratitude, and optimism on resilience of young adults.

	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	<i>t</i>
	β	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	
Constant	126.28	6.98		18.06***
Social support number	-.07	.11	-.03	-.637
Social support satisfaction	-.46	.15	-.16	-3.01**
Gratitude	-.79	.16	-.26	-4.84***
Optimism	-1.12	.30	-.20	-3.69***

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$

Adjusted $R^2 = .18$ ($F_{4,310} = 18.54, p < .001$)

In order to calculate second objective, multiple regression analysis was done by using social support, support satisfaction, gratitude, and optimism as predictor variables and resilience as outcome variable. Results presented in Table 3 indicate that support satisfaction, gratitude and optimism are significant predictor of resilience. Adjusted R^2 value presented in Table 3 suggests that the model is significant and can explain 18% of the total variance.

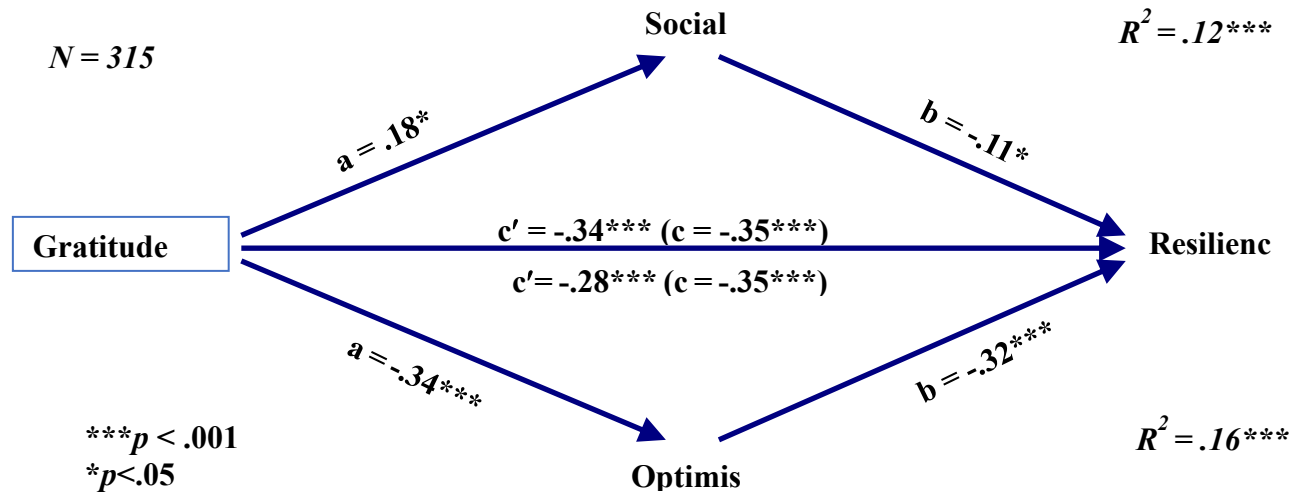


Figure 1. Path diagram showing the mediating effect of social support and optimism in the relationship between gratitude and resilience. Path coefficients are standardized regression coefficients (Betas).

In order to test the mediation effect of optimism and social support in the relationship between gratitude and resilience, hierarchical multiple regression analysis was calculated. Independent effect of gratitude ($\beta = -.35$, $p < .001$) on resilience is shown in Figure 1. The figure also shows that when social support and optimism was included in the regression analysis, gratitude and social support jointly explain 12% and gratitude and optimism jointly explain 16% of the variance in one's resilience capacity. Furthermore, to test the significant mediation effect of optimism and social support in the relationship between gratitude and resilience, Sobel test was applied. The Sobel test confirms significant partial mediating effect of optimism and rejects the mediating effect of social support.

DISCUSSION

In this study, the relationships between gratitude, optimism, social support and resilience in university students studying in different academic years were examined, and the created mediation model was tested. Pearson product moment correlation analysis reveals that most of the study variables in the present study have significant positive correlations with each other. More specifically, results of the study reveals that social support has significant relationship with gratitude, optimism, and resilience. That means, number of social supports received makes students more grateful, more optimistic and more resilience. The findings of the present study are supported by the previous study. For example, Ong and others (2018) reported that social support and resilience share a strong connection with each other whereas Kong and associates (2015) reported that high gratitude score tend to get more social support and buffers from stress and depression. Results also presents that support satisfaction is also related to optimism and resilience. Gratitude also makes people more optimistic and more resilient. Results also reveal that optimism and resilient are correlated with one another. That means optimism makes people more resilient. All these findings are consistent with that of a few other previous studies which shows optimism, gratitude, resilience and social support are associated with one another (Caleon et al., 2019; Huffman et al., 2014).

The second objective of this study was to identify whether gratitude, social support, and optimism could predict resilience of young adults. Result reveals that resilience of young adults can be predicted by gratitude, optimism, and support satisfaction, but not by social support number. Most of the findings are consistent with previous research. For example, Caleon and others (2019) found that gratitude serves as psychological and social resources and promote resilience as well where a few researches did not find gratitude as a predictor of resilience (Kumar & Dixit, 2014).

Carver and associates (2010) found optimism as predictor of resilience. However, this study rejects the predictive role of social support number although high quality positive social support is considered as crucial element for enhancing resilience (Ozbay et al., 2007). Other studies (Yıldırım, & Tanrıverdi, 2021; Ong et al, 2018) also found social support as predictor of resilience. In case of the present study, maximum participants were detached from family members and stayed in dormitory. Besides this, they are more involved with technology for different purposes. At present, technology has transformed our way of interaction with one another as well as our conceptualization of social support.

We perceive social support differently and it affects our day-to-day life differently. For example, social media are designed to bring people closer but it can have opposite impact on people's lives. Primack and associates (2017) found that high use of social media causes three times more feelings of isolation than those who did not use social media more very often. Similarly, Hunter and associates (2022) reported that smartphone has detrimental effect on perceived social support. Therefore, it can be determined that social support is an essential condition for resilience but technology uses and other associated factors may reduce the protective value of social support in modern world.

The third and final objective of this study was to explore whether social support and optimism can mediate the relationship between gratitude and resilience of young adults. The main finding confirms the partial mediating effect of optimism and rejects the mediating effect of social support in the relationship between gratitude and resilience. The partial mediating effect of optimism provides evidence that gratitude helps to improve optimism in individual which indicates that people who are high in gratitude will be more optimistic in any adverse situation in their life. As a result, gratitude along with optimism increases the resilience capacity of an individual. This finding is in line with earlier studies as well.

Miranda and Cruz (2020) indicated that optimism enabled students to overcome difficulties in college. Moreover, Students who are more optimistic also exhibit higher levels of resilience. Optimistic individuals are more resilient while facing problems than less optimistic persons (Kleiman et al., 2017; Gómez Molinero et al., 2018; Pathak and Lata, 2018; Charoensukmongkol, & Suthatorn, 2018). Additionally, it can be said that it promotes the growth of internal resilience among young adults. However, independent effect of social support is significant in present study but the mediating role is insignificant which rejects our hypothesis. This result gives evidence that gratitude is associated with a number of positive traits and social support is one of them (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002). As a result, no mediating effect of social support was found in the present study but further research is required to confirm the findings.

LIMITATIONS

The study had some limitations which may affect the applicability of the findings in other situations like the study was conducted on small sample and selected based on purposive sampling technique. Besides, the sample were drawn from single University which limits the scope of generalization of the findings. Studies on a large sample is needed in future to explore this area in details.

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