

The Role of Gratitude in Emotional Well-Being Among Indian Young Adults: A Mediation Analysis of Positive Affect

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Abstract: Emotional well-being is an important indicator of psychological health, and identifying positive psychological factors that enhance well-being has become a major focus of positive psychology research. The present study examined the relationship between gratitude, positive affect, and emotional well-being among Indian young adults, with positive affect proposed as a mediator. A cross-sectional correlational research design was employed, and data were collected from 293 Indian young adults using standardized measures of gratitude, positive affect, and emotional well-being. Pearson correlation, multiple regression, and mediation analyses were conducted to examine the proposed relationships. The findings revealed significant positive associations among gratitude, positive affect, and emotional well-being. Gratitude significantly predicted emotional well-being, while positive affect emerged as a strong predictor of emotional well-being. Mediation analysis further demonstrated that positive affect partially mediated the relationship between gratitude and emotional well-being, indicating that gratitude contributes to emotional well-being both directly and indirectly through increased positive emotional experiences. These findings support the principles of positive psychology and highlight gratitude as an important psychological resource for enhancing emotional well-being among Indian young adults. The study also provides practical implications for designing gratitude-based interventions aimed at promoting mental health and well-being.

Keywords: Gratitude, Emotional Well-Being, Positive Affect, Young Adults, Mediation Analysis

1. Introduction

Emotional well-being is a fundamental component of psychological health and plays an important role in individuals' overall quality of life. It encompasses positive emotional functioning, life satisfaction, and the ability to cope effectively with everyday challenges. Young adulthood is a critical developmental period characterized by academic demands, career uncertainty, changing social roles, and increasing personal responsibilities, making the promotion of emotional well-being particularly important. Identifying positive psychological resources that enhance well-being has therefore become a growing area of research within positive psychology.

Among these psychological resources, **gratitude** has received considerable attention for its beneficial influence on mental health and well-being. Gratitude refers to an individual's tendency to recognize and appreciate the positive aspects of life and the contributions of others. Research has consistently demonstrated that grateful individuals experience greater happiness, optimism, resilience, and life satisfaction while reporting lower levels of stress and psychological distress. Rather than merely representing a positive emotion, gratitude is considered a stable psychological strength that contributes to healthier cognitive, emotional, and interpersonal functioning.

Another important construct associated with psychological well-being is **positive affect**, which reflects the experience of pleasant emotional states such as enthusiasm, interest, alertness, and joy. Positive affect has been identified as an important predictor of psychological adjustment and

emotional well-being. According to Fredrickson's Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions (2001), positive emotions broaden individuals' cognitive and behavioural repertoires, enabling them to build enduring psychological, social, and emotional resources. From this perspective, gratitude may promote emotional well-being by increasing positive affect, which subsequently strengthens overall psychological functioning.

Although previous studies have established positive associations among gratitude, positive affect, and well-being, much of the existing evidence has been derived from Western populations. Research examining these relationships among Indian young adults remains comparatively limited, particularly studies investigating the mediating role of positive affect. Addressing this gap, the present study examines the relationship between gratitude and emotional well-being among Indian young adults while exploring whether positive affect serves as a mediating mechanism linking these variables.

2. Literature Survey

2.1 Gratitude and Emotional Well-Being

A substantial body of research has established gratitude as an important predictor of emotional well-being across diverse populations. Studies have consistently demonstrated that individuals with higher levels of gratitude report greater life satisfaction, psychological well-being, and overall happiness. Wood et al. (2008) found that gratitude was positively associated with life satisfaction and negatively associated with psychological distress, suggesting that gratitude

functions as a protective psychological resource. Similarly, Saji and Simon (2022) reported significant positive relationships between gratitude, life satisfaction, and subjective well-being among Indian young adults. Comparable findings were observed by Hemarajareswari and Gupta (2022), who identified gratitude as a significant predictor of psychological well-being and happiness among Indian college students. More recent studies by Srivastava and Vandana (2024) and Peter and Rani (2025) further highlighted gratitude as an important psychological strength associated with resilience and emotional well-being within the Indian context.

2.2 Gratitude and Positive Affect

Research has also demonstrated that gratitude is closely linked with the experience of positive emotions. Individuals who regularly express gratitude tend to report greater levels of enthusiasm, optimism, contentment, and happiness. Cunha et al. (2019) found that gratitude interventions significantly increased positive affect and life satisfaction, suggesting that positive emotional experiences may explain the beneficial effects of gratitude on well-being. Likewise, Bazargan-Hejazi et al. (2021) reported positive associations between gratitude, hope, optimism, and overall psychological well-being. Evidence from intervention-based studies further supports these findings. Diniz et al. (2023), Kirca et al. (2023), and Choi et al. (2025) demonstrated that gratitude-based interventions produce significant improvements in psychological well-being, although the magnitude of these effects varies across study designs. Within the Indian context, Reetha and Kamble (2025) observed that structured gratitude journaling enhanced resilience and positive emotional experiences among college students, reinforcing the role of gratitude in fostering positive affect.

2.3 Mediation Studies

Growing research suggests that gratitude may influence emotional well-being through underlying psychological mechanisms rather than solely through direct effects. Sun and Kong (2013) demonstrated that positive affect partially mediated the relationship between gratitude and life satisfaction, highlighting positive emotions as an important explanatory pathway. Similarly, Bryant et al. (2021) and Scurtu-Tura et al. (2024) reported mediation-based evidence supporting the role of gratitude-related emotional processes in promoting well-being. Longitudinal findings by Akyl et al. (2025) further strengthened this perspective by demonstrating the mediating role of gratitude in the relationship between social support and mental well-being over time. In the Indian context, Srivastava and Pushkar (2025) identified meaning in life as a partial mediator between gratitude and mental health, indicating that gratitude contributes to well-being through identifiable psychological pathways. Despite these findings, studies examining **positive affect as a mediator between gratitude and emotional well-being among Indian young adults remain limited**, thereby highlighting the need for the present investigation.

3. Problem Definition

Although considerable research has demonstrated positive relationships among gratitude, positive affect, and emotional well-being, several gaps remain in the existing literature. Most empirical evidence has been generated from Western populations, limiting the understanding of these relationships within different cultural contexts. Studies conducted among Indian young adults remain comparatively limited, particularly those examining gratitude as a positive psychological resource influencing emotional well-being.

Furthermore, while previous research has independently established the associations between gratitude and well-being and between gratitude and positive affect, relatively few studies have investigated the psychological mechanism through which gratitude contributes to emotional well-being. Specifically, limited evidence exists regarding the mediating role of positive affect among Indian young adults. Addressing this gap, the present study examines whether positive affect serves as a mediating mechanism linking gratitude and emotional well-being, thereby contributing to the growing body of positive psychology research within the Indian context.

Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- 1) To examine whether Indian young adults who report higher levels of gratitude also experience better emotional well-being.
- 2) To explore whether positive affect is a factor that links gratitude with emotional well-being.
- 3) To assess the extent to which positive affect contributes to the overall relationship between gratitude and emotional well-being.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were proposed:

H₁: Higher levels of gratitude will be associated with higher emotional well-being among Indian young adults.

H₂: Young adults with higher gratitude are expected to experience higher levels of positive affect.

H₃: Positive affect will be positively associated with emotional well-being.

H₄: Positive affect is hypothesized to partially mediate the relationship between gratitude and emotional well-being.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The present study employed a cross-sectional correlational research design to examine the relationships among gratitude, positive affect, and emotional well-being among Indian young adults. The design was considered appropriate for investigating the associations among the study variables and for testing the mediating role of positive affect in the relationship between gratitude and emotional well-being.

4.2 Participants

The study was conducted on 293 Indian young adults aged between 18 and 25 years. Participants were recruited using a convenience sampling technique through online platforms and educational networks. Individuals who were within the specified age range and provided informed consent were included in the study.

4.3 Measures

1) Gratitude

Gratitude was assessed using the Gratitude Questionnaire–Six Item Form (GQ-6) developed by McCullough, Emmons, and Tsang (2002). The scale measures dispositional gratitude, reflecting the tendency to recognize and appreciate positive experiences and the benevolence of others. Responses are recorded on a 7-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater levels of gratitude.

2) Positive Affect

Positive affect was measured using the Positive Affect subscale of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) developed by Watson, Clark, and Tellegen (1988). The subscale consists of 10 items assessing the extent to which individuals experience positive emotional states such as enthusiasm, alertness, and inspiration. Participants respond using a 5-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater positive affect.

3) Emotional Well-Being

Emotional well-being was assessed using the World Health Organization Well-Being Index (WHO-5) developed by the World Health Organization (1998). The scale consists of five positively worded items assessing subjective psychological well-being and positive mood during the previous two weeks. Responses are recorded on a 6-point scale, with higher scores indicating better emotional well-being.

4.4 Procedure

Data were collected through an online survey. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses, and informed that participation was voluntary. Electronic informed consent was obtained before participants completed the questionnaire. The survey included demographic questions followed by the standardized psychological measures.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical principles for research involving human participants. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any stage without any penalty.

4.6 Statistical Analysis

The collected data were analysed using Jamovi and JASP statistical software. Descriptive statistics were computed for all study variables. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among gratitude, positive affect, and emotional well-being. Multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the predictive role of gratitude and positive affect on emotional well-being. The mediating role of positive affect was examined using JASP through mediation analysis with bootstrapping procedures (5,000 resamples). Statistical significance was evaluated at the 0.05 level.

5. Results and Discussion

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Reliability of Study Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α
Gratitude	31.70	6.13	.742
Positive Affect	34.20	8.00	.867
Emotional Well-Being	13.60	5.68	.873

5.1 Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

The descriptive statistics indicated moderate to high levels of gratitude, positive affect, and emotional well-being among the participants. Positive affect recorded the highest mean score ($M = 34.20$, $SD = 8.00$), followed by gratitude ($M = 31.70$, $SD = 6.13$), whereas emotional well-being showed a mean score of 13.60 ($SD = 5.68$). The reliability analysis demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency for all three instruments, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .742 to .873, indicating that the measures were reliable for assessing the study variables among Indian young adults.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix

Variable	1	2	3
Gratitude	—		
Positive Affect	.404***	—	
Emotional Well-Being	.334***	.540***	—

5.2 Correlation Analysis

Pearson's correlation analysis revealed significant positive relationships among all study variables. Gratitude showed a moderate positive correlation with positive affect ($r = .404$, $p < .001$) and emotional well-being ($r = .334$, $p < .001$). Positive affect demonstrated the strongest association with emotional well-being ($r = .540$, $p < .001$). These findings indicate that individuals reporting higher gratitude were more likely to experience greater positive affect and better emotional well-being.

The observed relationships are consistent with previous literature suggesting that gratitude promotes positive emotional experiences, which contribute to improved psychological well-being. Studies by Wood et al. (2008), Cunha et al. (2019), and Reetha and Kamble (2025) similarly reported positive associations among gratitude, positive emotions, and well-being. The findings therefore provide support for the proposed hypotheses and reinforce gratitude as an important positive psychological resource.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	P
Gratitude	0.128	0.050	.138	2.59	.010
Positive Affect	0.344	0.038	.485	9.07	< .001
Model Summary					
R	R ²	Adjusted R ²			
.555	.308	.303			

5.3 Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictive effects of gratitude and positive affect on emotional well-being. The overall regression model was statistically significant ($R = .555$, $R^2 = .308$, Adjusted $R^2 = .303$), indicating that approximately 30.8% of the variance in emotional well-being was explained by the predictors.

Positive affect emerged as the strongest predictor of emotional well-being ($\beta = .485$, $p < .001$), while gratitude also significantly predicted emotional well-being ($\beta = .138$, $p = .010$). The variance inflation factor (VIF = 1.20) suggested the absence of multicollinearity between the predictors.

These findings indicate that although gratitude independently contributes to emotional well-being, positive affect exerts a comparatively stronger influence. This observation is consistent with Fredrickson's (2001) Broaden-and-Build Theory, which proposes that positive emotions enhance psychological functioning by expanding individuals' cognitive and behavioural resources.

Table 4: Mediation Analysis

Effect	Standardized Estimate (β)	SE	p	95% CI
Direct Effect (Gratitude → Well-Being)	.138	.056	.014	[.016, .237]
Indirect Effect (Gratitude → Positive Affect → Well-Being)	.196	.030	< .001	[.143, .260]
Total Effect (Gratitude → Well-Being)	.334	.057	< .001	[.213, .437]

5.4 Mediation Analysis

The mediating role of positive affect in the relationship between gratitude and emotional well-being was examined using bootstrapped mediation analysis. The indirect effect of gratitude on emotional well-being through positive affect was statistically significant ($\beta = .196$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.143, .260]), as the confidence interval did not include zero. The direct effect remained significant ($\beta = .138$, $p = .014$), indicating partial mediation.

These findings suggest that gratitude enhances emotional well-being both directly and indirectly by increasing positive affect. In other words, individuals with greater gratitude are more likely to experience positive emotions, which subsequently contribute to higher emotional well-being.

The present findings corroborate previous mediation studies by Sun and Kong (2013), Bryant et al. (2021), and Akyıl et al. (2025), which demonstrated that gratitude influences well-being through identifiable psychological pathways. The

results also support the central assumptions of positive psychology by highlighting positive affect as an important mechanism linking gratitude with emotional well-being among Indian young adults.

6. Conclusion

The present study examined the relationships among gratitude, positive affect, and emotional well-being among Indian young adults and explored the mediating role of positive affect. The findings demonstrated significant positive associations among all three variables, indicating that individuals with higher levels of gratitude tend to experience greater positive affect and better emotional well-being. Positive affect emerged as the strongest predictor of emotional well-being and was found to partially mediate the relationship between gratitude and emotional well-being. These findings support the theoretical assumptions of positive psychology and highlight gratitude as an important psychological resource that contributes to well-being both directly and indirectly through positive emotional experiences. The study further provides empirical evidence from the Indian context and underscores the potential value of gratitude-based interventions in promoting emotional well-being among young adults.

7. Future Scope

Future research may employ longitudinal or experimental designs to establish causal relationships among gratitude, positive affect, and emotional well-being. Studies involving more diverse populations across different socio-economic, occupational, and cultural backgrounds would improve the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, future investigations may examine other potential mediators or moderators, such as resilience, self-compassion, optimism, emotional intelligence, or perceived social support, to provide a broader understanding of the mechanisms through which gratitude enhances emotional well-being. Intervention-based studies evaluating the effectiveness of gratitude-focused programmes may also offer valuable practical implications for mental health promotion.

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