

Gratitude and Self-Esteem in People with Physical Disabilities

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Abstract

In this study, we look at how disabled people's self-esteem and gratitude relate to one another. 80 people, 40 of whom were male and 40 female, were asked to fill out the Gratitude Questionnaire-Six Item Form (GQ-6) and the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (RSE). Previous studies highlight the importance of healthcare professionals' attitudes in creating a welcoming environment for persons with disabilities, which in turn boosts their self-esteem and appreciation. The present study's hypothesis postulated that, among people with impairments, there would be gender-specific variations in the correlation between self-esteem and thankfulness. Tools utilised included t-test and Pearson's correlation. The study's authors came to the conclusion that healthcare providers' attitudes significantly impact patients' self-esteem.

Keywords: Disabilities, healthcare systems, thankfulness, healthcare provider, self-esteem

Self-Esteem

The concept of self-esteem first appeared in the writings of Scottish philosopher David Hume in the 18th century. According to Hume, it is vital to value and maintain a good self-perception since it motivates individuals to reach their full potential. (Hume, 1978) The distinctive psychological concept of self-esteem originated in the writings of the philosopher and psychologist William James. Two tiers of the self have been defined by James. On one level are the ways of knowing, or the "I-self," and on the other level are the facts and understandings about the self, or the "Me-self." All three types of information that come from the I-self keeping track of one's own experiences make up the Me-self. Each individual has a material self, a social self, and a spiritual self. Integral to both self-esteem and the social self are all the qualities that other people notice and value. Representations of one's physical body and possessions make up one's material self, whereas one's spiritual self is concerned with one's representations and evaluative attitudes. There is still the view that one's self-esteem is best understood as the sum of their self-attitudes. (James, 1890)

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), developed by social psychologist Morris Rosenberg in, is a widely used tool for assessing self-esteem in the social sciences. Rosenberg defined self-esteem as a feeling of one's own worth (Rosenberg, 1965).

Gratitude

Gratitude resembles appreciation. The American Psychological Association characterises it as the recognition of what is significant and meaningful to the individual; it represents a general disposition of gratitude and/or appreciation (American Psychiatric Association, 2020).

Gratitude is both a condition and a characteristic. It can be experienced momentarily toward someone or something, yet it can also manifest as a sustained positive character characteristic (Jans-Beken et al., 2020). Robert Emmons (2002) asserts that the experience of thankfulness comprises two phases: The initial step is the recognition of positivity in one's existence. In this condition, we affirm life. We assert that life, in its entirety, is positive and encompasses

aspects that render it worthwhile. The recognition of received items satisfies us, both through their presence and the effort expended by the giver in their selection. Secondly, thankfulness entails acknowledging that the origins of this benevolence reside beyond the individual. One may express gratitude towards the creator, others, animals, and the planet, but not towards oneself. At this juncture, we acknowledge the blessings in our lives and the individuals to whom we owe our gratitude.

The stages of appreciation highlight the recognition of benevolence in our lives and its origins. This approach reveals the significance of all that enhances our lives and personal development.

Moreover, gratitude may be regarded as either a dispositional characteristic or a transient condition. Practicing gratitude in daily life is regarded as a character strength. Gratitude is a strength that may be cultivated through awareness and practice. (McCullough et al., 2002).

A person experiencing the emotion elicited by another's expression of gratitude is described as being in a state (Watkins et al., 2009).

Disability

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2014), disability is a set of physical or mental impairments that deprive the individual of independent personal and social life.

Nearly all individuals encounter a temporary or permanent handicap at some stage in life (WHO, 2012). A disabled individual, as defined in the extensive guide to disability rights legislation, is one who, per the medical commission of the Welfare Organisation, experiences physical, mental, psychological, or combined impairments that result in significant and enduring detriment to their overall health and functionality, as well as a decrease in social and economic autonomy. According to this approach, disabilities are classified into six primary categories: physical-motor, mental, visual, auditory, speech, and psychiatric (WHO, 2014).

The survey on the self-esteem and body image of physically challenged individuals highlighted a substantial positive correlation between self-esteem and self-assessment with physical health (Strickland &

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Ahern, 2004). The presence of a physical impairment will diminish self-esteem. Dewanto and Retnowati (2015) found that people with disabilities who are grateful have been shown to have psychological well-being and positive thoughts compared to those who are not appreciative.

Positive psychology has produced many strategies to improve happiness and well-being during the past decade. Many of these interventions focus on gratitude and self-esteem, which have been strongly connected to psychological health in many populations. Research has studied the direct relationships between thankfulness, self-esteem, and well-being, as well as how these linkages may fluctuate under different contexts. Some research has shown weak, negative, or non-significant links. There has been a lot of research on gratitude and self-esteem in general populations, but little on people with physical disabilities. This gap in our understanding of these notions is essential.

Early work in related domains offers useful context. Tervo and Palmer (2004) demonstrated that training about disabilities cultivates empathy and more positive attitudes in medical practitioners, suggesting that exposure and education can shape affective responses toward disability. In the general population, Chopnik et al. (2019) found that gratitude interventions not only help individuals manage negative emotions but also lead to sustained increases in life satisfaction. Together, these studies highlight gratitude's potential as a target for interventions aiming to bolster psychological resources broadly.

More focused research on people with physical disabilities confirms and extends these findings. Lestari and Fajar (2020) reported that, among physically disabled adults, gratitude and self-esteem together accounted for 48.1 percent of the variance in optimism; participants scored high on gratitude and optimism, with self-esteem at a moderate level. Ismail et al. (2020) further showed that self-esteem in this population is sensitive to the attitudes of healthcare professionals and the availability of social support, underscoring the contextual nature of self-worth. The COVID-19 pandemic provided a natural experiment in stress exposure: Steptoe et al. (2021) observed that people over fifty with physical impairments experienced greater depressive symptoms, anxiety, loneliness, and sleep disturbance after the outbreak than their non-disabled peers, suggesting heightened vulnerability but also pointing toward potential resilience factors such as gratitude or self-esteem that warrant investigation.

Several correlational studies reinforce the link between gratitude and broader indicators of well-being in disabled samples. Gupta and Aman (2023) found a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.65$, $p < 0.01$) between gratitude and subjective happiness in adults aged 25–40 with physical disabilities, with gratitude predicting happiness ($\beta = 0.54$) even after controlling for demographics; these effects held across gender, disability type, and location. Similarly, Raj and Gupta

(2021), using the GQ-6 and the Subjective Happiness Scale in an Indian sample of 102 adults with physical disabilities, reported an identical correlation ($r = .65$) and regression coefficient ($\beta = .54$), reinforcing gratitude's predictive power for happiness, though they did not assess self-esteem. Nurdin et al. (2021) extended this work by showing that, among 30 adults with disabilities in Makassar, gratitude (measured via a shortened GRAT instrument) uniquely explained 26.5 percent of the variance in resilience alongside social support, again without directly measuring self-esteem.

Across these studies, the question of gender differences has yielded little evidence of systematic variation: Sævarsdóttir (2023) noted that both men and women with disabilities report comparable levels of gratitude and self-esteem, and that individuals with motor impairments are often able to express gratitude both physically and verbally—unlike some people with intellectual disabilities who may encounter greater difficulty with verbal expression. Taken together, the literature suggests that gratitude is a powerful correlate—and likely antecedent—of positive outcomes such as optimism, happiness, and resilience among people with physical disabilities, with self-esteem playing a complementary but context-dependent role. Future work should aim to clarify causal pathways, explore potential moderators (e.g., type and severity of disability), and develop targeted interventions that harness gratitude and bolster self-esteem to enhance the psychological well-being of this under-studied population.

Gratitude among Disability Practitioners

Alsafasfeh et al. (2020) surveyed 168 special-education staff in Jordan, using a 40-item gratitude scale with five subscales. Their findings indicate moderately high gratitude levels ($M = 3.78$) and small but significant correlations (r 's .20–.28) between gratitude and dimensions of psychological fitness. While valuable for understanding gratitude in professional caregivers, this work does not speak directly to self-esteem or to disabled individuals themselves (Alsafasfeh et al., 2020).

Qualitative Insights into Gratitude

Kasiyanti et al. (2019) conducted a phenomenological study of two adolescents with lower-limb amputations. They identified themes of heartfelt gratitude, verbal expression, and grateful deeds, providing rich descriptions of how young people with disabilities experience gratitude. Although offering depth and texture, the study's $N = 2$ design precludes quantitative links to self-esteem or broader generalization.

Studies Measuring Both Gratitude and Self-Esteem

Lestari and Fajar (2020) are the only authors to date to administer both gratitude and self-esteem scales within a single sample of 106 adults (18–35 years) with non-congenital physical disabilities. Their Indonesian translations of a 20-item gratitude measure ($\alpha = .887$) and a 21-item Coopersmith self-esteem

scale ($\alpha = .817$) showed good reliability; both constructs predicted optimism ($R^2 = .481$). Crucially, however, they do **not** report the direct bivariate correlation.

Gaps in the Literature

Although research on gratitude and self-esteem has expanded within positive psychology, studies focusing on individuals with physical disabilities remain limited. While evidence suggests a positive link between gratitude and self-esteem, little is known about the mechanisms driving this relationship (Lestari & Fajar, 2020). Most existing studies rely on cross-sectional designs, leaving uncertainty about whether gratitude fosters long-term self-esteem improvements. Additionally, while gratitude-based interventions have been studied in other populations, their impact on individuals with physical disabilities is largely unexplored.

Research has also yet to fully examine the role of mediators like social support and resilience in shaping the gratitude-self-esteem dynamic. While some findings indicate no significant gender differences (Sævarsdóttir, 2023), more studies are needed to confirm whether this holds across diverse cultures and disability types. The influence of social and environmental factors, such as family support and workplace inclusivity, is also understudied despite evidence that professional attitudes can impact self-esteem (Ismail et al., 2020).

The long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on gratitude and self-esteem among people with disabilities remain unclear, though studies suggest heightened depression and social isolation (Steptoe & Gessa, 2021). Additionally, most research has focused on Western samples, leaving cultural and socioeconomic variations largely unexamined. Addressing these gaps through longitudinal and intervention-based studies would provide deeper insights into fostering psychological well-being in this population.

Objectives

To investigate the correlation between self-esteem and gratitude in individuals with physical limitations.

To examine gender disparities in self-esteem and gratitude among individuals with physical limitations.

To enhance the current literature on psychological well-being among individuals with physical limitations.

To offer insights for interventions designed to improve self-esteem and gratitude within this demographic.

Hypotheses

H1: There will be a positive relationship between self-esteem and gratitude among individuals with physical disabilities.

H2: There will be a significant gender difference in levels of self-esteem and gratitude among individuals with physical disabilities.

Method Sample -

Data was collected from 80 adults (40 male and 40 female) with physical disability residing in North India. Purposive sampling was used.

Inclusion Criteria -

Participants should be able to read questionnaires in English

Participants should be willing to participate in the research Participants must have a physical disability

Exclusion Criteria -

Participants who do not live in North India

Participants who are not literate

Tests and Measures -

Rosenberg’s Self-Esteem Scale (RSE), developed in 1965, uses ten items rated 1 (Strongly Agree) to 4 (Strongly Disagree), with negative items reverse-scored, to gauge overall self-worth. It boasts excellent internal consistency (Guttman reproducibility = 0.92), strong two-week test–retest reliability ($r = 0.85–0.88$), and solid contemporaneous, predictive, and construct validity.

The GQ-6 (McCullough, Emmons & Tsang, 2002) is a six-item, 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) Likert scale measuring gratitude—its recognition, response, and feeling. Total scores sum all items, with two reverse-scored to curb bias. It shows solid internal consistency ($\alpha = .76–.84$) and moderate temporal reliability: diary-based mood correlations over 14–21 days yielded $r = .37$ and $r = .49$ (both $p < .01$).

Procedure

The target population was contacted through telephonic conversation. After obtaining their consent, the form was sent to them. The responses were collected for further analysis.

Results

Pearson’s r was applied to calculate the correlation coefficient between Self-Esteem and Gratitude.

The correlation coefficient between Self-Esteem and Gratitude = $.26(n = 80)$ p - value = $.018059$

This suggests a weak positive correlation exists, which means there is a mild tendency for high X variable scores to go with high Y variable scores (and vice versa). For Self - Esteem, t - values significant at 0.05 level = $.00082$ and at 0.01 level = $.00041$. For Gratitude, t - values significant at 0.05 level = $.8079$ and at 0.01 level = $.4039$. The t -value obtained for self - esteem was more than the critical value at 0.01 and 0.05 significance level. Hence, the results are significant. For gratitude, t -value was found to be less than the critical value at 0.01 and 0.05 significance level and therefore, the result was not significant in this case. This implies that there is no significant difference in levels of gratitude among males and females but there are differences in scores for self-esteem.

Table 1 Means, SDs and t ratios

Variables	Males(n=40)		Female(n=40)		t
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Self-Esteem	30.75	4.38	27.63	3.61	3.48
Gratitude	34.75	5.08	34.48	4.87	0.24

Discussion

This research was conducted in order to compare and contrast gratitude and self-esteem in physically disabled men and women and find out any gender inequality in the respective field. As was in the previous studies trying to shed light on related psychological categories, the findings indicate a negative and insignificant relationship existed between gratitude and self-esteem. Gratitude might have a part in self-esteem affecting people with physical constraints although the relationship was not sturdy.

This outcome corresponds with Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, which suggests that positive affect broadens the cognitive and behavioral repertoire of citizens and rallies the psychological resilience of people (Fredrickson, 2001). Gratitude is a positive emotion that can help a person build self-worth by cultivating the value of their support system and strengths. According to the studies conducted earlier, gratitude is a trait that has a positive relationship with self-esteem, because gratitude increases the degree to which an individual examines herself and contributes to good health (Wood et al., 2007). This relationship indicates that there is a possibility that persons with gratitude practices can feel good about themselves in ways that can positively affect their psychic health. Also, it has been acknowledged that self-esteem was one of the key predictors of life satisfaction and thus the effect of gratitude on self-esteem could possibly have expanded its effects to life satisfaction (Rosenberg, 1965).

The analysis displayed a mildly positive correlation between self-esteem and gratitude between both genders, and thus, gratitude is likely to be a contributor to self-esteem, and other mediator variables are also expected to contribute highly. In the studies done earlier, the significance of self-reflection, social skills and personal success have been noted in having influence when it comes to self-esteem and not just gratitude (Neff & Vonk, 2009). This observation also shows that interventions to be applied to improve the self-esteem of the people with physical disabilities are recommended to comprise several psychological and social aspects instead of being limited to the gratitude-enhancing strategies.

Also, it turned out that there was no significant variability in the appreciation of an individual by gender, and it does not contradict studies that demonstrate that gratitude is a stable trait of individuals regardless of gender (Kashdan et al., 2009). Despite the apparent variations in expressed gratitude between the female and the male sex due to the peculiarities of socialization, gratitude has an effect on psychological well-being that seems to be equal among different genders (Algoe et al., 2010). This observation implies that persons with physical disability whether male or female get a sense of gratitude in comparable ways, and its impact on self-esteem may be similar regardless of gender.

However, the study found significant gender differences in self-esteem, where males reported higher self-esteem levels than females. This finding is in line with previous research suggesting that gender plays a role in self-perception and self-worth. Studies have shown that males often exhibit higher levels of self-esteem due to factors such as societal expectations, traditional gender roles, and differences in self-evaluative tendencies (Kling et al., 1999). Females, on the other hand, may experience lower self-esteem due to greater societal pressures, body image concerns, and the internalization of external evaluations (Gentile et al., 2009).

Furthermore, when it comes to people with physical disabilities, it seems that scholarly research provides somewhat more female-specific psychological issues, namely, greater susceptibility to stigma, discrimination, and lack of social support (Shakespeare, 2006). This could affect their self-esteem and general well being negatively. Findings show that they need gender-based interventions addressing self-esteem issues of disabled females, as it would result in a more egalitarian psychological support network.

Implications

The presence of social support and a favorable attitude towards intellectually disabled people in society seems to be a major component in mental health. The existence of strong social supports leads to the attainment of more stable self-esteem and the increased feelings of gratitude since the people with disabilities obtain emotional and practical support which shapes the feelings of gratitude and being a part of the community (Algoe, et al., 2008). The participating factor of social support in the relationship between gratitude and self-esteem could also be further examined in future literature to focus on the extent of its effectiveness.

Limitations

Although it can be of great help, this study presents several limitations, as well. To begin with, it is necessary to mention that the outcomes are not allowed to spread to the general audience because of the small size of the sample. Their results could have been more precise using a bigger and representative sample. Second, the geographical and cultural factors might have results as the research was done on a limited part of North India. In future studies, the study needs to sample individuals with diverse ethnicities and geographical origins to determine the ability to generalize findings to the rest of the societies. Third, the results may be affected by such factors as social desirability or personal differences in explaining the meanings of thankfulness and self-esteem since the tests were in self-report format.

Also, the process of collecting data was not easy because the study was done by students who could not access many resources and participants. Contacting a larger sample, in particular, people with physical deficiency, presupposed strict access to permission

and availability issues that were hard to overcome. The option of convenience sampling could have also impacted the results because the participants do not give a complete picture of the entire population of handicapped persons. The fact that it was a challenge to attract the balanced gender sample might have contributed to the obtained findings as well.

Scope for Further Study

Further studies on gratitude and feelings of self-esteem among people with disabilities might be extended in many ways. First, the longitudinal work could give more information on the role of gratitude in affecting self-esteem in the long-run, and also whether the interventions that aim to increase gratitude have moderated effects in improving self-esteem in the long-run. Second, examining these variables at various stages of age could show the process of gratitude and self-esteem formation and evolution throughout the life of people with physical disabilities. Third, the qualitative methods that may be applied to this study include interviewing or using a case study, as they will give more insight into the investigations of personal experience of gratitude and self-esteem. Finally, coordination with medical workers may provide further insights into the treatments that are designed to enhance psychological health in this patient group, especially through considering resilience, coping resources and psychological health outcomes.

The ways in which comprehensive facilities influence the formation of self-esteem and appreciation among persons with disabilities represent an area of paramount importance to be explored in the future. Research has indicated that persons with disabilities facing increased access to inclusive settings feel an enhanced self-worth, empowerment, and belonging to society (Pfeiffer, 2001). Future research should focus on the effects of policy change and inclusive programs that may affect gratitude and self-esteem, thus providing practical information to increase the quality of life of such a population.

Conclusion

This article contributes to the knowledge in positive psychology by determining the relationship between thankfulness and self-esteem among physically limited people. The results indicate a weak positive relationship, which shows that the appreciation of gratitude can have various benefits in improving self-esteem and general well-being. The high presence of gender differences in self-esteem points to the need to conduct special interventions aimed at improving the psychological well-being of women with impairment. Further research is needed to assess the mechanisms involved and the implications of this study to help more people build psychological resilience with physical constraints.

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