

**Gender Differences in the Relationship between Gratitude and Happiness among Orphans in Perak**

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**ABSTRACT**

Being an orphan is not by choice, nor by chance, it is perhaps, destined. Living in an orphanage is far beyond a person's wish. The undesirable situation may influence a person's or specifically, a child's psychological well-being. Thus, this research is focused on examining and analyzing the relationship between gratitude and happiness among orphans in Perak, Malaysia. It further aimed at identifying gender differences in terms of gratitude and happiness. The sample consisted of 160 participants that comprised of 98 males and 62 females from two selected orphanages in the state of Perak. Two survey questionnaires; Gratitude Questionnaire-Six Items (GQ-6) and Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ), were used to measure the level of gratitude and happiness among the samples. The result showed that there was a significant correlation between orphans' level of gratitude and happiness. This finding implies that orphans' happiness and feeling of gratefulness is not affected although they do not have biological parents. They still appreciate and feel grateful in spite of circumstances. It was found that both genders differ in terms of gratitude. Yet, there is no significant difference in happiness between genders. Future study should consider spirituality element that might have an influence on orphans' psychological well-being.

*Keywords:* Gratitude and happiness, orphans, orphans in orphanage, quantitate study, spirituality element

**Introduction**

As human beings, we experience many obstacles and issues throughout our life span. Each and every one tends to react differently toward the same situation due to varying experiences and characteristics. Whilst, different situation may switch a person to various emotional states such as how he feels about the world and himself (Compton, 2005). Some people might act negatively toward problems or obstacles that they face. Yet, there are some who know very well on how to appreciate even a little pleasure and enjoy their lives without blaming circumstances.

Male and female are different in perceptions, experiences, feelings and ways of responding to situation. They could also differ in terms of feeling of gratitude or happiness that they experience. A meta-analysis done by Kashdan, Mishra, Breen, & Froh (2009), found that females tend to feel more grateful than males. They have also found that

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women tend to endorse higher traits of gratitude and fewer burdens compared to men. They have identified that males are less likely to express, feel or perceive gratitude as compared to females. In contrast, another study done by Froh, Yurkewicz, & Kashdan (2009) has concluded that males are more grateful than females. This mediation study was done among 154 middle school students and found that males tend to receive more social benefit compared to females.

Likewise, a research by Sharma & Gulati (2015) has found that females tend to feel happier than males. 360 adolescents participated in this study, which has used three different scales. Moreover, it was implied that females tend to perceive their life as happy despite of socio-economic hardship. Males on the other hand reported higher levels of psychoticism compare to females. In contrast, Umar, Farid, Warraich, & Luqman (2016) found that there is no significant difference in terms of happiness between males and females. Nearly 200 head of families participated in the study and it was concluded that happiness in terms of materialistic values, class and status do not differ between genders.

Therefore, in this research we are dedicated to explore the relationship between gratitude and happiness among orphans in Perak region. It further aims to identify the gender differences in terms of gratitude and happiness. This study could be significant in introducing other types of educational programme that could enhance or nourish orphans feeling of gratification. It could also contribute to development of facilities, resources and services rendered by the orphanage homes. All these efforts could assist in keeping those students stay grateful and happy despite of their misfortunes. It can also increase awareness among society on the psychological needs of orphans.

Three research questions were generated to fulfil the objectives of present study:

1. Is there any significant correlation between gratitude and happiness among orphans in Perak?
2. Is there any significant difference in gratitude between male and female orphans in Perak?
3. Is there any significant difference in happiness between male and female orphans in Perak?

### **Methodology**

This research adopted quantitative design where it used the product of statistical summary and analysis to present the results (Shaughnessy, Zechmeister, & Zechmeister, 2009). Besides, non-probability sampling will be used; there is no guarantee that each orphan has the chance to participate in this research (Shaughnessy et al., 2009). Furthermore, priority will be given based on the orphans' availability and willingness to participate in this research, which is known as convenience sampling (Shaughnessy et al., 2009). Moreover, respondents were drawn from the population at one time, which refers to cross-sectional design.

### **Participants**

160 orphans from 2 purposefully selected orphanage homes participated in this study. Among them are 98 male and 62 female orphans at the age ranges from 7 to 18 years old.

### **Instruments**

Two types of survey questionnaires were used to measure gratitude and happiness; the Gratitude Questionnaire-Six Items (GQ-6) designed by McCullough, Tsang & Emmons (2001) and Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ) by Hills & Argyle (2002)

respectively. The Gratitude Questionnaire- Six Items (GQ-6) was designed to access individual differences in the proneness to experience gratitude in daily life (McCullough, Tsang, & Emmons, 2001). It consists of six items for the participants to rate using 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree). For example, “as I get older, I find myself more able to appreciate the people, events, and situations that have been part of my life history”. A total of gratitude score calculated by adding up all the items answer rating by the respondents from 1 to 7 through item 1 to 6. Items 3 and 6 are reverse scored. The minimum scoring for GQ-6 would be 6 and the maximum scoring would be 42. The higher scores of GQ-6 indicate higher levels of gratitude while lower scores indicate lower levels of gratitude. Study showed that GQ-6 has internal reliability ranged from 0.76 to 0.84 using the Cronbach alpha test (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002).

The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ) was designed to get a snapshot of the orphans’ current level of happiness. It consists of 29 items. The language used in the questionnaire is simple and straightforward thus, assisting the participants to understand. It made them answer those questions easily and in a shorter period of time. For example, “life is good” and “I am very happy”. Respondents are asked to rate accordingly by using 6 point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree and 6 = strongly agree). Throughout the total number of 29 questions, 12 questions including 1, 5, 6, 10, 13, 14, 19, 23, 24, 27, 28, and 29 are marked as reverse scored items.

The lowest possible scoring is 29 and the highest is 174 while 124.7 being the average score. Therefore, score for happiness is equal to the total scoring divided by 29. Higher scoring of OHQ indicates higher levels of happiness and vice versa. Study showed that OHQ has internal reliability of 0.90 using the Cronbach alpha test, and validity of 0.89 and 0.90 alpha coefficients through the studies conducted among students in USA, UK, Canada and Australia (Abedi, Jafari, Liaghatdar, & Samiee, 2008). This also approved the reliability and validity of OHQ (Abedi et al., 2008).

### **Literature Review**

Being an orphan is often viewed as a disadvantage by the society. There are a lot of orphanage homes available in the country, but most of it are lacking in resources to provide those children with unconditional love, attention and security that a normal family can offer. Moreover, this is also beyond the caretakers’ control. This would immensely affect orphans’ self-esteem which may lead to behavioural problems, delinquency and poor academic performance. It is proven in a study by Fawzy & Fouad (2010) where lack of psychosocial support as orphans also lowered their self-esteem. In the end, it could also lead to anxiety and depression.

The psychosocial distress will definitely increase level of insecurity due to limited social attachment by significant others (DeWitt & Lessing, 2010). Moreover, a study by Kirkpatrick, Rojjanasrirat, South, Sindt, & Williams (2012) found that orphanage children showed deviant behavior due to their emotional distress. They have also found that most of the time those children are not happy with their life. However, another study found the opposite of this study. It found that community-based children are associated with poor health and well-being compared to those who are institution-based where they had fewer social and emotional difficulties (Whetten, Ostermann, Whetten, Pence, O’Donnell, Messer, & Thielman, 2009).

However, it is believed that high acceptance on one’s life obstacles will create positive vibes on psychological well-being. Being grateful is a feeling of thankfulness and acknowledgement of whatever a person has in his life (Ikeda, 2014) regardless of whether it is material or non-material (Emmons, 2007). Besides that, the feeling of gratitude has also been found to give meaning in life and make people happy (Emmons, 2007).

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According to Hedonic Treadmill theory which also known as “set-point” theory, every person might have his or her own set range or expected value of happiness based on what they had experienced (Sprangers & Schwartz, 2008).

### Results

Table 1  
*Percentage Distribution*

Profile Factors	Particulars	%
Gender	Male	61
	Female	39
Age	7-10 years	6
	11-14 years	72
	15-18 years	22

There were about 61% and 39% of male and female participants respectively. This shows that there are more male respondents than female in the current study. Besides, participant's highest age range was around 11 to 14 years old, which is about 72% as per Table 1.

Table 2  
*Descriptive Statistics*

Variables	Items	Percentage (%)
Gratitude level	High	57
	Moderate	14
	Low	29
Happiness level	High	70
	Low	30

As shown in Table 2 above, the orphans were found to be have higher level of gratitude (57%) and 70% of them were found to have high level of happiness.

Table 3  
*Correlations*

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev	Happiness	Gratitude
Happiness	118.43	13.96	1	.186*
Sig. (2-tailed)				0.018
Gratitude	27.25	4.07	.186*	1
Sig. (2-tailed)			0.018	

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient analysis was done to assess the relationship between gratitude and happiness among orphans as per first research question. There was a significant positive correlation between the two variables,  $r = 0.186$ ,  $n = 160$ ,

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$p = 0.018$ ,  $p < 0.05$  as shown in Table 3 above. Therefore, it can be inferred that when a person is feeling highly grateful towards his life, his happiness increases at the same time.

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare gratitude for male and female orphans in Perak. The result of this test has been illustrated in Table 4 below. It indicated that there was a significant difference in the gratitude observed between the two gender groups,  $t(158) = -2.47$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ,  $d = 0.41$ . These results suggest that female ( $M = 28.22$ ,  $SD = 3.58$ ) tend to feel more grateful than male ( $M = 26.62$ ,  $SD = 4.27$ ).

Table 4  
*Comparison of Gratitude Scores by Gender*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		<i>F</i>	Sig.	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Differences	Std. Error Differences
Gratitude	Equal variances assumed	2.57	.11	-2.47	158	.01	-1.60	.65
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.57	147.94	.01	-1.60	.62

Table 5  
*Comparison of Happiness Scores by Gender*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		<i>F</i>	Sig.	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Happiness	Equal variances assumed	.62	.43	-1.71	158	.09	-3.84	2.25

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare happiness for male and female orphans in Perak. Table 5 shows result of this test which indicated that there is no significant difference in happiness observed between the two gender groups,  $t(158) = -1.71$ ,  $p = 0.09$ ,  $d = 0.28$ . These results suggest that female ( $M = 120.76$ ,  $SD = 14.25$ ) and male ( $M = 116.92$ ,  $SD = 13.63$ ) did not differ significantly on the scores of happiness.

### Discussion

This study was designed to explore the relationship between gratitude and happiness among orphans in Perak region. 160 orphans from the age of 7 to 18 were asked to answer two sets of questionnaires, namely Gratitude Questionnaire-Six Items (GQ-6) to assess the gratitude level and Oxford Happiness Questionnaires (OHQ) to assess their level of happiness.

The results showed that the orphans are feeling grateful and happy with their lives. They are happy and grateful of their lives regardless of life situations and material possession. Most importantly, they are still living a positive life without the support and connection of biological parents. This is contradictory with a research done by Fawzy and Fouad, (2010) which found that orphans are more likely to be anxious, depressed and display anger significantly. However, these findings are consistent with a study that suggested institution-based children had fewer social and emotional difficulties compared to community-based children (Whetten et al., 2009).

Furthermore, 70% of the respondents reported that they are very happy with their lives and 57% of them agreed that they are grateful. Then again, their happiness is still questionable since a study found that unhappiness is not always manifested in outward behaviour (Kirkpatrick, Rojjanasrirat, South, Sindt, & Williams, 2012).

In this study, female reported higher degree of gratitude compared to male. This finding is consistent with the findings of Kashdan, Mishra, Breen, & Froh (2009) where females tend to feel more grateful than males. However, there is no significant difference in happiness score between male and female orphans. This is consistent with the findings of (Umar, Farid, Warraich, & Luqman, 2016), happiness status is not determined by gender. Specifically, the average score for happiness between both gender groups showed a similar pattern as previous findings. Female orphans reported higher score in happiness compared to male. A shared environment contributes or causes change in the level of happiness (Nes, 2010).

Besides, respondents of this study were recruited from two orphanage homes within the same region. Most of the respondents are sharing the same environment such as resources, care from the caregivers as well as the daily life experiences. Therefore, the variation of happiness may not be reflected in this study. On the other hand, gratitude is similar to the sense of appreciation of oneself. It has both trait and state qualities. Hence, some individual tend to be more grateful than others (McCullough et al., 2002). People with a “grateful disposition” are more likely to experience grateful emotions.

In addition, happiness was also found to be associated with self-esteem. A study done by De Witt and Lessing (2010) suggested that orphans’ low self-esteem and lack of happiness were found to be associated with the lack of material possession. In spite of this, the authors of this study implied that material possession is not related to the orphans’ happiness level since they reported a high level of happiness staying in the orphanage homes.

Finally yet importantly, it is assumed that this finding contradicts with many previous researches that found orphans are mostly unhappy and ungrateful with their lives. The reason for such contrast is that some spiritual elements of religion are embedded in everyday life of orphans. All the orphanage homes under study were observed to impart many Islamic teachings in daily activities such as congregational prayers and reciting prayers before eating. Mostly religious teachings encourage humans to be thankful for both good and bad circumstances in life. Staying grateful and learning to be happy is considered as the utmost practice and belief. Therefore, it is hypothesized that spiritual element has some influence on the psychological well-being of orphans. Moreover, this element is not being studied or explored from the Western perspective. It is hoped that future research will explore more on the reasons for the high level of gratitude and happiness of orphans in orphanages in relation to religions aspect. It is also encouraged to identify the influence of these variables on interpersonal and intrapersonal well-being of orphans

### Limitations

The results found as such due to, perhaps certain limitations,

1. The sample were selected only from only the state of Perak
2. The orphanages selected were for Muslim orphans who were spiritually satisfied through religious teachings that may influence the results.

### Recommendation

To overcome those limitations, some recommendations could be taken into consideration for future studies:

1. Participants or respondents can be selected from more than only one state in Malaysia to better generalise the results.
2. Non-Muslims orphans can also be selected to participate in future studies.

### Conclusion

The research aimed at determining the relationship between gratitude and happiness among orphans. The gender difference in the relationship was also examined. Results found that there was a significant relationship between the two variables with no different between genders. These results are at odds with a number of past researches which suggested that orphans were not happy living in orphanages homes. The dispute may result from other elements such as religious teaching and spiritual satisfaction.

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