Family Economic Status and Sense of Gratitude Among Filipino Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

The literature suggests that socioeconomic conditions may be associated with youth psychological well-being. In this study, we assessed the relative impact of family income on the gratitude of Filipino adolescents. The participants (N =522, 86% females) ages 16–25 completed measures of gratitude and socioeconomic status. Results indicated that family income was inversely related to students' sense of gratitude. Participants from more impoverished families report significantly higher measures of gratitude scores than peers from higher-income families, controlling for age and gender. This finding suggests that family income may shape the gratitude orientation of young Filipinos. The study encourages educators to develop psychological support services tailored for students across socioeconomic spectrums and inform policymakers about crafting youth programs that capitalize on the strengths exhibited by adolescents from varying economic backgrounds. Further research into the psychological effects of economic status suggests other factors may contribute to a sense of gratitude.

Keywords: *Adolescents, gratitude, socioeconomic status*

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INTRODUCTION

Gratitude is a universally valued virtue that serves as the foundation of interpersonal relationships and personal well-being. It is promoted among major monotheistic religions such as Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam; gratitude is seen as a significant source of human strength to make life better for oneself and others (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000). Gratitude is a general tendency for people to appreciate the good things in their lives, including the transient emotion elicited from personal reflection (Layous et al., 2017). Within the field of gratitude research, there is some discordance in the nature of its construct. Some researchers see gratitude in instances where a person recognizes a benefit from another as being costly, valuable, and altruistic. For others, gratitude also includes benefits received from non-person entities, e.g., God, or ordinary situations, e.g., being grateful for a safe journey (Watkins, 2013).

Many studies have mentioned the positive benefits of individuals with a high grateful disposition (Anggraini & Andayani, 2017; Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Grateful mindset has positive views and shows great appreciation for their possessions (Wood et al., 2010). It generates positive emotions negating daily hassles and stress and suggesting fewer feelings of depression (Fredrickson, et al., 2003; Mason, 2019; Rothenberg et al., 2017). Gratitude promotes social connection and solidarity (Algoe, 2012). We assume that students with gratitude are likely to appreciate their family, peers, and teachers. Moreover, a grateful disposition decreases the drive of individual to acquire material possessions, fostering satisfaction in life (Lavy & Littman-Ovadia, 2011).

Despite the increasingly consistent views of gratitude as beneficial for adolescents and adults, the origins of gratitude and how to best cultivate

gratitude over time remain unclear. As a multifaceted emotion driven by a social-cognitive appraisal of the value of a benefit, some studies assert that the experience of gratitude emerges in early adolescence (ages 10–14) (Froh et al., 2011). Parents likely play a role in nurturing gratitude in their children (Froh et L., 2009). Within the family context, socioeconomic factors such as family income, parent education, and occupational status (Ye & Wu, 2012) and parenting reflecting on practices such as warmth and involvement, and controlling and monitoring (Piko & Balázs, 2012) are generally viewed as two fundamental factors influencing children's values and life orientations. Studies found that both parenting and socioeconomic status influence mental illness across the Western and Chinese populations (Amone-P'Olak et al., 2009; Ye & Wu, 2012). However, in this study, we explore the direct link between family income and gratitude. We assumed that higher family income generally means that basic needs such as food, shelter, and healthcare are more easily met. Adolescents from more affluent families may tend to enjoy more comfortable lives and have more mental space to express gratitude for what they have. On the other hand, those from more impoverished families, children exposed to socioeconomic struggles may likely have a lower sense of gratitude.

The existing literature on socio-economic influences on adolescents gratitude reveals gaps that warrant further exploration. While studies have extensively examined the impact of socio-economic status on various aspects of adolescent behavior and health (Madarasova Geckova, et al., 2005; Moor et al., 2019), there is a scarcity of research focusing on how family income influences the expression of gratitude among adolescents. As well as comprehensive studies that directly explore the relationship between socio-economic status and gratitude levels in adolescents.

Besides, despite growing interest in research on gratitude and adolescent development, most studies have examined adolescents from developed countries, such as the United States. Since gratitude, as with other traits, is deeply embedded in a cultural framework, few studies explore gratitude in the Asian context. By addressing these gaps, the present study may contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how socio-economic factors shape adolescents' sense of gratitude and inform targeted interventions to foster gratitude in diverse socio-economic contexts.

HYPOTHESES

Family income and its influence on gratitude are relatively under-researched in the Philippines. We focused on the family's monthly income because they are affecting wellbeing of college students. With the varying family socioeconomic condition, we expect its relations to student sense of gratitude. We aimed to test the following hypotheses:

1. Students from higher socioeconomic groups would have a higher self-report on a sense of gratitude than those from lower socioeconomic groups.

2. Family monthly income is positively associated with a sense of gratitude.

METHODS

DESIGN

This study utilized the cross-sectional design (Spector, 2019). It aims to compare different groups at a specific point in time. It examines the relationship between variables and outcomes as they exist in specific time.

PARTICIPANTS AND SAMPLING

We recruited 552 college students, aged 16 to 25 years old, with an average age of 19.03 years (SD = 1.37) enrolled in selected public and private higher education institutions in Manila to an online survey. Most of the respondents were female ($n = 449$), comprising 86% of the sample size. The distribution of the participants in terms of year level was as follows: first year (n = 83), second year (n = 68), third year (n = 206) and fourth year (n = 165). The combined monthly family income ranged from $282 to $1,940, with an average of $886.1 (SD = $521.7) (Philippine peso 56.14 = 1 US dollar).

MEASUREMENT TOOLS

Demographic Questionnaire. The demographic questionnaire was used to know the respondents' profile, namely, gender, age, combined family monthly income, and academic year level.

Gratitude Questionnaire. The Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6) (Cronbach α = 0.80) 2002) is a short self-report measure of the trait gratitude. Six items measure gratitude (e.g., '*I have so much in life to be thankful for,*' '*If I had to list everything that I felt grateful for, it would be a very long list*'). Each item was rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Higher scores on gratitude show a grateful disposition.

PROCEDURE

This study's ethical soundness followed the guidelines of ethical conduct in research. An online survey questionnaire was prepared, including an electronic version of the consent form and information on the nature and purpose of the study. No monetary reward and freedom to withdraw or choose to participate in the study were clearly articulated in the informed consent. No personal identification information was requested, and privacy was assured.

For the recruitment of respondents, the inclusion criteria were a) fulltime college students, b) coming from various income groups c) psychology majors, and d) willingness to participate in the study by answering an online survey and agreeing to the electronic consent form. We exclude college students who are 2nd-degree takers or graduates of technical or vocational course and non-Manila residence.

DATA ANALYSIS

Frequency and percentage were utilized to describe the profile of the respondents. Mean and the standard deviation were used to describe the gratitude of the respondents. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the differences between income groups (categorical, independent variable) on gratitude (continuous, dependent variable). Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was employed to determine the differences between income groups on gratitude after controlling for age (3rd variable, continuous variable) and gender (3rd variable, categorical variable). A linear regression analysis was calculated to determine the relationships between combined family monthly income (continuous, predictor variable) and gratitude (continuous, outcome variable). All assumptions for ANOVA, ANCOVA using the general linear model (univariate analysis), and linear regression were considered (Field, 2009). SPSS v.21 and GraphPad prism v.5 were utilized in the data analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A descriptive analysis is shown to provide an overview of the gratitude level of participants stratified according to family income. Figure 1A shows the profiles of gratitude, according to the students stratified based on income groups. The student respondents combined monthly family income ranged from US$282 to US$1,940. About 34.1% of the families in our sample earned below the monthly minimum wage, US$314 per month in Metro Manila, Philippines (Rey, 2018), or below the national poverty line (Authority, 2020). Although most of the parents in lower-income brackets work as laborers, some families had both parents employed to augment income for the family. Notably, 3.4% of the families fall in the income bracket of US$1,675-US$1,940, which is considered the middle-class line (Authority, 2020).

In this study, the gratitude levels of study participants were: a) group 2, a low-income group, is categorized as 'very high', b) group 1, is found to be relatively 'high' and c) group 3 to group 7 classified as 'above average.' The observed gratitude of study respondents may be explained by Filipino cultural factors affecting the appreciation of people, events, and situations that have been part of their lives (Reyes, 2015).

Table 1 demonstrates the ANCOVA results. There is a statistically significant effect of the income group on levels of gratitude, with the income group alone explaining approximately 30.8% of the variance in gratitude scores. This is evident from the type III sum of squares for the income group being 169.380 with an associated F-value of 37.98, which is significant at $p< 0.001$. The overall model, including age and gender as covariates, also shows significance with $\eta_p^2 = 0.31$, indicating that about 30.9% of the total variance in gratitude is accounted for by the model. However, age and gender do not

have significant effects on gratitude, as their F-values of 0.47 and 0.10, are not statistically significant. The total variability in gratitude scores, as indicated by the corrected total sum of squares, is 552.063. This analysis underscores that, while age and gender may not play a significant role, income group is a key predictor of gratitude levels among adolescents.

Table I. *ANCOVA results on gratitude and family monthly income.*

	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	*F-value*	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	170.730[a]	8	21.341	28.71**	0.309
Intercept	63.481	1	63.481	85.40**	0.143
Age	0.350	1	0.350	.471	0.001
Gender	0.072	1	0.072	.097	0.000
income group	169.380	6	28.230	37.98**	0.308
Error	381.333	513	0.743		
Total	13868.610	522			
Corrected Total	552.063	521			

** $p<0.001$

Post hoc analyses using Bonferroni adjusted alpha levels of 0.012 were conducted to determine the differences between income groups on gratitude.

Table 2. *Effects of monthly family income (US$) with gratitude*

Income Group (US$)		MD	SE	95% CI
282 to 314	493 to 688	1.17	0.12**	0.78 to 1.55
	1,084 to 1,281	0.93	0.12**	0.58 to 1.28
	1,282 to 1,477	1.18	0.10**	0.88 to 1.47
	1,675 to 1,940	0.78	0.21*	0.12 to 1.43
315 to 492	493 to 688	1.67	0.21**	1.02 to 2.31
	1,084 to 1,281	1.43	0.21**	0.80 to 2.06
	1,282 to 1,477	1.68	0.20**	1.07 to 2.28
	1,675 to 1,940	1.28	0.28**	0.44 to 2.21
493 to 688	282 to 314	-1.17	0.12*	-1.55 to -0.78
	315 to 492	-1.67	0.21*	-2.31 to -1.02
	689 to 886	-0.9	0.27*	-1.73 to -0.07
689 to 886	1,282 to 1,477	0.91	0.26*	0.12 to 1.70
1,084 to 1,281	282 to 314	-0.93	0.12**	-1.28 to -0.58
	US$315 to 492	-1.43	0.21**	-2.06 to -0.80
1,282 to 1,477	282 to 314	-1.18	0.1**	-1.47 to -0.88
	315 to 492	-1.68	0.2**	-1.70 to -0.12
	689 to 886	-0.92	0.26*	-1.71 to -0.13
1,675 to 1,940	282 to 314	-0.78	0.21*	-1.43 to -0.12
	315 to 492	-1.28	0.28**	-2.12 to -0.44

* $p<0.01$; ** $p<0.001$; *Note: Model is adjusted for sex and gender*

Table 2 shows the effects of monthly family income (US$) with gratitude. Higher gratitude scores were seen in the lower-income groups, indicating statistical significance, these gratitude effects sustained, after controlling for age, $F_{(6,515)} = 0.47$, $p>0.05$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$ and gender, $F_{(6,515)} = 0.10$, $p>0.05$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.00$. This suggests that an individual's financial situation could have a direct impact on their sense of gratitude, beyond any effects explained by their demographics (age and gender) as this may be associated with coping mechanisms against adversity (Fredrickson et al., 2003; Greenfield & Marks, 2004; Toepfer, Cichy, & Peters, 2012). Financial hardships may develop a sense of gratitude for non-material aspects of life, such as family, community support, or personal relationships.

In the final analysis, Figure 1B shows the regression analysis of family income with gratitude. Family income negatively predicted gratitude, $\beta = -0.45$, $t = -11.64$, $p < 0.01$, adjusted $r^2 = 0.21$, $F_{(1, 520)}$ 135.36, $p <0.01$. The regression line is described as an inverse relationship between family income and gratitude. Adolescents from lower income families may develop a higher sense of gratitude because resources are scarcer. Value theory suggests that scarcity may heighten the value placed by individual on certain goods, services, and experiences, leading to a greater sense of gratitude when they are received (Schwartz, 2012). Perhaps, adolescents from low income family might place more value on the support and care they receive from others, leading to higher levels of gratitude for these relationships (Deci & Ryan, 2012).

Overall, the study posits that socioeconomic challenges may not be solely detrimental, as they could foster positive traits like gratitude, which is essential for the psychological development and overall well-being of young individuals.
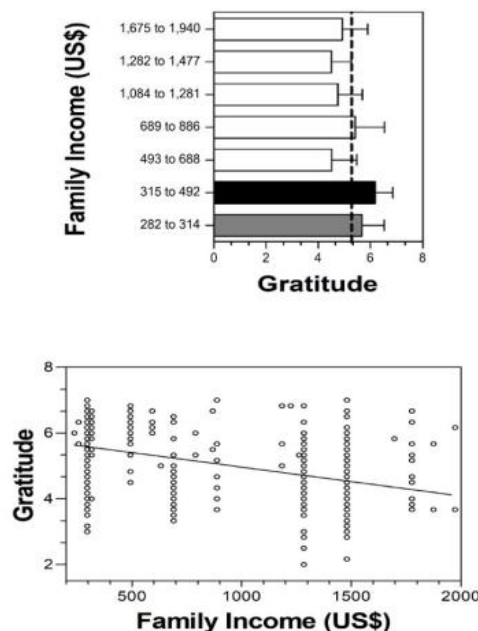

Figure 1. Relationship of family income and gratitude. **(A)** Profiles of gratitude according to the students stratified according to income groups. The income groups are divided into seven: Group 1 (US$282 to 314); Group 2 (US$315 to 492); Group 3 (US$493 to 688), Group 4 (US$689 to 886); Group 5 (US$1,084 to 1,281); Group 6 (US$1,282 to 1,477); Group 7 (US$1,675 to 1,940). Bars are shaded according to income groups having very high (black), high (gray) and above average (open) levels of gratitude. **(B)** Regression analysis on family income with gratitude.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that there is a notable inverse relationship between family income and the gratitude levels of adolescents, indicating that those from less affluent backgrounds may place higher value on non-material aspects of life. However, limitations of the study include its reliance on self-reported data, which may introduce bias, the potential oversimplification of economic status, and a lack of consideration for cultural influences and other unmeasured variables that could impact gratitude. The results are also limited by the by the cross-sectional design, which prohibits causal inferences, and may not be generalizable across different adolescent populations. It is recommended that future research employ longitudinal studies to trace the development of gratitude over time, incorporate qualitative methods for a more nuanced understanding and examine additional influencing factors. Comparative cultural studies could illuminate the influence of social and familial norms of gratitude. Interventions designed to cultivate gratitude in youths should emphasize intrinsic values, and policymakers should consider the broader psychological effects of economic conditions on adolescents well-being.

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