



GRATITUDE AND SELF-COMPASSION AMONG UNMARRIED ADULTS: A CORRELATIONAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The field of positive psychology has increasingly emphasized the importance of psychological strengths and adaptive emotional processes that contribute to human flourishing, resilience, and well-being. Rather than focusing exclusively on psychological disorders and maladaptive behaviour, contemporary psychological research seeks to identify the factors that enable individuals to lead meaningful, emotionally balanced, and satisfying lives. Within this framework, gratitude and self-compassion have emerged as two significant positive psychological constructs associated with emotional resilience, mental health, interpersonal functioning, and overall life satisfaction. Both variables have received substantial empirical attention because of their ability to buffer psychological distress and promote adaptive coping mechanisms across different populations, particularly among young and emerging adults (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Neff, 2003; D. & Meena, 2025).



KEYWORDS: *positive psychology , psychological disorders and maladaptive behaviour, contemporary psychological.*

INTRODUCTION

Unmarried adulthood represents an important developmental stage characterized by identity exploration, career development, emotional transitions, social comparison, and increasing societal expectations. Although unmarried adults may experience greater autonomy and opportunities for self-development, they may also encounter stressors such as loneliness, uncertainty regarding romantic relationships, social pressure related to marriage, and concerns about future stability (Azizoğlu, C, 2025). In collectivistic societies such as India, unmarried individuals may face additional cultural expectations and societal scrutiny regarding marital status, which can negatively influence self-esteem, emotional well-being, and social adjustment. Consequently, positive psychological resources such as gratitude and self-compassion become especially important in helping unmarried adults maintain emotional balance and psychological resilience.

Recent psychological research suggests that gratitude and self-compassion are strongly associated with emotional well-being and adaptive functioning among young adults and emerging adults (Zeng et al., 2023). Studies conducted in recent years have shown that these constructs significantly contribute to reduced stress, lower anxiety, enhanced resilience, and improved life satisfaction (Soin & Kirmani, 2026; Guan et al., 2025). Despite the increasing body of literature on these variables, limited studies have specifically examined the relationship between gratitude and self-compassion among unmarried adults, thereby indicating the need for further investigation.

Gratitude is commonly defined as a positive emotional disposition characterized by appreciation and thankfulness for benefits, kindness, or positive experiences received from others or life circumstances. Emmons and McCullough (2003) conceptualized gratitude as the recognition and acknowledgment of goodness in one's life along with an appreciation of the external sources responsible for that goodness. Gratitude may exist both as a temporary emotional state and as a stable personality disposition influencing how individuals perceive and respond to their experiences. Individuals with high levels of gratitude tend to focus more on positive experiences, perceive greater social support, and demonstrate higher levels of optimism and psychological well-being. Gratitude enables individuals to shift attention away from negative thoughts and toward positive aspects of life, thereby fostering emotional stability and adaptive coping. Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory proposes that positive emotions such as gratitude broaden cognitive and behavioural repertoires, allowing individuals to build enduring psychological and social resources (Fredrickson, 2004). Consequently, grateful individuals are more likely to experience enhanced emotional regulation, stronger interpersonal relationships, and improved resilience during stressful situations.

Research consistently demonstrates that gratitude is positively associated with happiness, subjective well-being, optimism, emotional intelligence, resilience, and life satisfaction, while negatively associated with anxiety, depression, loneliness, and stress (Wood et al., 2010; Watkins et al., 2015). Recent studies have further strengthened this evidence. Soin and Kirmani (2026) found that gratitude significantly predicted lower anxiety and greater well-being among college students. Similarly, Bock et al. (2025) reported that gratitude interventions improved psychological well-being and reduced emotional distress among emerging adults. Research focusing on young adults has also demonstrated that gratitude contributes to improved emotional balance, reduced stress, and enhanced life satisfaction (International Journal of Indian Psychology, 2025). Gratitude plays a crucial role in interpersonal functioning and social connectedness. Grateful individuals are more likely to express appreciation, empathy, generosity, and prosocial behaviour, which strengthens social relationships and increases perceived social support. Gratitude also facilitates adaptive reinterpretation of stressful experiences by helping individuals focus on available resources rather than perceived deficiencies. Bhattacharjee et al. (2024) observed that regular gratitude practices among young adults enhanced psychological well-being and social connectedness.

Self-compassion, another important construct in positive psychology, was extensively conceptualized by Neff (2003) as treating oneself with kindness, understanding, and acceptance during times of suffering, failure, or inadequacy. Self-compassion involves three major dimensions: self-kindness versus self-judgment, common humanity versus isolation, and mindfulness versus over-identification. Self-kindness refers to responding to oneself with care and understanding rather than harsh criticism. Common humanity involves recognizing that suffering and imperfection are universal human experiences shared by all individuals. Mindfulness refers to maintaining balanced awareness of painful thoughts and emotions without exaggerating or suppressing them. Self-compassion has emerged as a powerful psychological resource that promotes emotional regulation, resilience, and mental health. Unlike self-esteem, which often depends on external achievements and social comparison, self-compassion provides unconditional emotional support during periods of distress and failure. Self-compassionate individuals acknowledge their suffering with acceptance and respond to themselves in a caring and non-judgmental manner. This adaptive emotional orientation reduces maladaptive cognitive processes such as rumination, shame, self-criticism, and emotional avoidance.

Extensive research indicates that self-compassion is associated with lower levels of depression, anxiety, stress, perfectionism, and psychological distress, while positively associated with emotional resilience, life satisfaction, optimism, and psychological well-being (Neff & Germer, 2013; Ferrari et al., 2019). Recent evidence further demonstrates that self-compassion plays a protective role during emerging adulthood, a developmental stage often characterized by instability and self-evaluation. Karakasidou (2025) reported that self-compassion significantly contributed to emotional well-being and resilience among emerging adults participating in group counselling interventions. Similarly, Guan et al. (2025) found bidirectional relationships between self-compassion and life satisfaction, suggesting that increases in self-compassion contribute to greater psychological well-being over time. Research

has also shown that self-compassion-based interventions reduce self-criticism, shame, anxiety, and depressive symptoms among young adults with adverse childhood experiences (Sajjadi et al., 2022). Furthermore, self-compassion has been linked to enhanced emotional regulation, adaptive coping strategies, and greater interpersonal warmth and empathy.

Recent mental health literature has increasingly highlighted the role of self-compassion in promoting resilience and emotional adjustment among adolescents and young adults. Preventive mental health interventions focusing on self-compassion have demonstrated positive outcomes in reducing emotional distress and strengthening coping skills among young populations. These findings indicate that self-compassion may function as an important protective factor against the emotional challenges commonly experienced during unmarried adulthood. Although gratitude and self-compassion are conceptually distinct constructs, growing evidence suggests that they are positively interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Both variables involve adaptive emotional processing, positive cognitive appraisal, and constructive interpretations of life experiences. Gratitude enables individuals to appreciate positive aspects of life and acknowledge support from others, whereas self-compassion encourages individuals to respond to personal suffering with kindness and understanding. Together, these constructs contribute to emotional resilience, psychological flexibility, and overall well-being.

The relationship between gratitude and self-compassion may be explained through positive emotion theories and emotion regulation frameworks. Individuals with greater self-compassion are less likely to engage in harsh self-criticism and are therefore more capable of recognizing positive experiences and appreciating sources of support. Similarly, grateful individuals often develop greater empathy, mindfulness, and emotional awareness, which may facilitate compassionate attitudes toward themselves. Thus, gratitude and self-compassion appear to operate synergistically in promoting adaptive psychological functioning.

Empirical evidence increasingly supports the positive association between gratitude and self-compassion. Recent correlational research among university students demonstrated significant positive relationships between gratitude and self-compassion, along with lower anxiety and greater well-being (Soin & Kirmani, 2026). Similarly, research conducted among young adults revealed that gratitude and compassion were significantly positively correlated, indicating that individuals who experience greater appreciation and thankfulness also tend to demonstrate more compassionate and accepting attitudes toward themselves and others (Saha, 2024).

Longitudinal evidence has further strengthened the understanding of this relationship. Li et al. (2025), in a longitudinal study among emerging adults with childhood maltreatment experiences, found stable bidirectional associations between gratitude and self-compassion across multiple time points. Their findings suggested that gratitude and self-compassion mutually reinforce each other over time and collectively contribute to reduced post-traumatic stress symptoms. Additionally, Nguyen (2025) emphasized that fostering both gratitude and self-compassion may significantly improve mental health outcomes among young adults. Researchers have also suggested that gratitude may mediate or strengthen the beneficial effects of self-compassion on psychological health. Self-compassionate individuals may become more grateful because they are more mindful of positive experiences and less consumed by self-critical thinking. Conversely, gratitude may encourage self-compassion by fostering positive emotions and reducing feelings of inadequacy, shame, and self-judgment. These reciprocal processes may create an “upward spiral” of positive emotional functioning that enhances psychological resilience and emotional well-being. Both gratitude and self-compassion are associated with reduced loneliness, emotional dysregulation, anxiety, and depressive symptoms. These variables contribute to healthier coping mechanisms and facilitate adaptive responses to stressors. For unmarried adults, who may experience societal expectations, relationship-related concerns, and uncertainty regarding future roles, gratitude and self-compassion may serve as important emotional resources that promote psychological adjustment and well-being.

Even though the growing literature on gratitude and self-compassion, relatively few studies have specifically focused on unmarried adults. Much of the existing research has concentrated on adolescents, college students, clinical populations, or married individuals. Consequently, there remains

a significant gap in understanding how gratitude and self-compassion interact among unmarried adults, particularly within socio-cultural contexts where marital expectations strongly influence individual identity and social evaluation. Understanding the relationship between gratitude and self-compassion has important practical implications for mental health promotion and psychological intervention. Positive psychology interventions such as gratitude journaling, mindfulness practices, compassion-focused therapy, and self-compassion training programmes have demonstrated effectiveness in enhancing emotional well-being and reducing psychological distress (Neff & Germer, 2013; Bock et al., 2025). Investigating the association between gratitude and self-compassion among unmarried adults may therefore contribute to the development of targeted interventions aimed at fostering resilience, emotional stability, and positive functioning in this population. Therefore, the present study seeks to examine the relationship between gratitude and self-compassion among unmarried adults using a correlational research design. By exploring how these positive psychological constructs interact, the study aims to contribute to the growing body of literature on positive mental health and provide a deeper understanding of the psychological resources that support emotional well-being during unmarried adulthood.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The growing emphasis on positive psychology has led researchers to increasingly investigate psychological strengths that promote emotional well-being, resilience, and adaptive functioning. Among these strengths, gratitude and self-compassion have emerged as important constructs associated with psychological health, emotional regulation, stress reduction, and life satisfaction. Recent literature indicates that these variables are particularly relevant among young and emerging adults who frequently encounter developmental, interpersonal, and emotional challenges. The following review presents recent studies thematically under major domains related to gratitude, self-compassion, psychological well-being, stress management, and the relationship between gratitude and self-compassion.

Recent studies have consistently demonstrated that gratitude is positively associated with psychological well-being, emotional balance, and adaptive coping among young adults. Gratitude enables individuals to focus on positive experiences, appreciate social support, and reinterpret stressful situations more constructively. As a result, grateful individuals tend to report greater life satisfaction, optimism, resilience, and emotional stability. Bhattacharjee et al. (2024) examined the role of gratitude practices among young adults through the development of a gratitude-focused mobile application. The study revealed that regular gratitude practice enhanced psychological well-being, social connectedness, and positive emotional experiences among participants. The findings suggested that gratitude interventions can significantly improve emotional functioning and interpersonal relationships among young adults. Similarly, a recent study by Soin and Kirmani (2026) reported that gratitude was significantly associated with lower anxiety levels and higher subjective well-being among university students. The researchers found that individuals with higher gratitude demonstrated greater emotional resilience and more positive perceptions of life circumstances. The study highlighted gratitude as an important protective psychological factor among emerging adults.

Research by Educatia 21 (2026) further emphasized the contribution of gratitude to emotional adjustment and life satisfaction in emergent adults. The study found that gratitude promoted positive affect, interpersonal trust, and emotional well-being by encouraging individuals to focus on positive life experiences rather than stressful events. Gratitude was also associated with increased psychological flexibility and improved social interactions among young adults. Another recent investigation conducted among students found that higher levels of gratitude were associated with reduced stress, greater emotional balance, and enhanced life satisfaction (International Journal of Indian Psychology, 2025). The study suggested that gratitude serves as an important emotional resource that helps individuals cope effectively with academic and personal stressors. Collectively, these studies indicate that gratitude plays a significant role in promoting positive mental health, emotional resilience, and interpersonal functioning among young and emerging adults.

Self-compassion has emerged as another major area of interest within positive psychology because of its strong association with emotional regulation, resilience, and psychological well-being. Recent literature indicates that self-compassion functions as an adaptive emotional mechanism that enables individuals to respond to personal failures, distress, and inadequacies with kindness and understanding rather than harsh self-criticism. Karakasidou (2025) conducted a randomized controlled intervention study among emerging adults to evaluate the effectiveness of self-compassion-focused group counselling. The findings revealed that participants who underwent self-compassion interventions demonstrated significant reductions in depression, anxiety, and stress, along with improvements in self-esteem and emotional well-being. The study highlighted self-compassion as an effective psychological resource for promoting mental health during emerging adulthood.

Similarly, Guan et al. (2025) investigated the longitudinal relationship between self-compassion and life satisfaction using both longitudinal and daily diary methods. The findings indicated that self-compassion significantly predicted increases in life satisfaction over time. The study further demonstrated that daily increases in self-compassion contributed to greater emotional well-being and psychological adjustment among participants. Nayak (2025), in a study examining the impact of self-compassion on well-being among emerging adults, reported that self-compassion was positively associated with positive affect, life satisfaction, and self-acceptance, while negatively associated with self-criticism and emotional distress. The study emphasized that self-compassion enables individuals to maintain emotional balance and adaptive coping during stressful experiences.

Another recent study focusing on young adults from single-parent families found that self-compassion significantly enhanced psychological well-being and emotional resilience (Journal of Health Studies, 2025). The researchers suggested that self-compassion functions as a protective factor that supports emotional adjustment and adaptive coping among vulnerable young populations. Research conducted by Nguyen (2025) further highlighted the importance of self-compassion in reducing depressive symptoms and promoting emotional health among young adults. The findings suggested that individuals high in self-compassion experienced lower levels of emotional distress because they were more accepting and less judgmental toward themselves during difficult situations.

A growing body of literature has examined how gratitude and self-compassion function together in reducing stress and improving emotional well-being. Researchers increasingly recognize that these constructs share common emotional and cognitive mechanisms that promote adaptive coping and resilience. A recent study published in *SAGE Open* (2026) examined mindfulness, gratitude disposition, and self-compassion as mediators between life stress and mental well-being among nursing students. The findings revealed that gratitude and self-compassion significantly mediated the relationship between life stress and psychological well-being. Higher gratitude and self-compassion were associated with lower stress responses and better emotional functioning. The study also found that mindfulness positively influenced both gratitude and self-compassion, suggesting interconnected relationships among these positive psychological traits.

The International Journal of Indian Psychology (2025) reported that gratitude and self-compassion together contributed to reduced stress, enhanced emotional balance, and improved life satisfaction among students. The findings indicated that individuals possessing both gratitude and self-compassion were better able to regulate emotions and cope with stressors effectively. Karakasidou (2025) also observed that self-compassion-based interventions reduced emotional distress and enhanced resilience among emerging adults. The study suggested that self-compassion encourages adaptive emotional processing, thereby reducing the harmful psychological effects of stress and self-criticism.

Li et al. (2025) conducted a longitudinal study examining relationships among gratitude, self-compassion, and post-traumatic stress symptoms among emerging adults with childhood maltreatment experiences. Using a four-wave longitudinal design, the researchers found stable bidirectional associations between gratitude and self-compassion over time. The findings indicated that increases in gratitude contributed to higher self-compassion, while greater self-compassion also enhanced gratitude levels. The study emphasized that gratitude and self-compassion together play an important role in reducing psychological distress and promoting resilience among emerging adults. Sooin and Kirmani

(2026) found significant positive correlations between gratitude and self-compassion among university students. Individuals with higher gratitude demonstrated greater self-kindness, emotional acceptance, and adaptive coping abilities. The study suggested that gratitude and self-compassion function synergistically to improve emotional well-being and reduce anxiety.

Research by Nguyen (2025) also highlighted that fostering gratitude and self-compassion simultaneously may improve mental health outcomes among young adults. The study emphasized that self-compassionate individuals are more capable of recognizing positive experiences and expressing gratitude because they are less dominated by self-critical thinking and negative self-evaluation. The studies examining stress and emotional regulation have shown that gratitude and self-compassion share common mechanisms such as mindfulness, positive cognitive appraisal, emotional regulation, and resilience. The positive association between these variables suggests that they may collectively contribute to healthier psychological functioning and emotional adjustment among emerging adults.

METHODOLOGY

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the level of gratitude among unmarried adults.
2. To assess the level of self-compassion among unmarried adults.
3. To examine the relationship between gratitude and self-compassion among unmarried adults.

Hypothesis of the Study

H01: There will be no significant relationship between gratitude and self-compassion among unmarried adults.

Research Design

The present study adopted a quantitative correlational research design to examine the relationship between gratitude and self-compassion among unmarried adults. A correlational design was considered appropriate for the study because the primary objective was to determine the nature and direction of association between the two psychological variables without manipulating any independent variable or establishing causal relationships. The design enabled the researcher to investigate whether variations in gratitude are associated with variations in self-compassion among unmarried adults. Since the study focused on naturally existing psychological characteristics within the participants, the correlational approach was suitable for understanding the relationship between the variables in a systematic and scientific manner.

Participants

The sample for the present study consisted of 100 unmarried adults selected through convenience sampling. Among the participants, 63 were males and 37 were females. The mean age of the participants was 34.56 years, with a standard deviation of 3.72. Participants belonged to diverse educational and occupational backgrounds, thereby providing variability within the sample. The participants represented adults who had not entered into marriage and were willing to voluntarily participate in the study. The selection of unmarried adults as the target population was based on the increasing importance of understanding positive psychological strengths and emotional well-being within this group, particularly considering the social and emotional challenges often associated with unmarried adulthood. Individuals were included in the study if they were unmarried adults, belonged to the adulthood age range, were willing to participate voluntarily, and were able to understand and respond to the questionnaires. Married individuals, individuals below adulthood age, participants unwilling to provide informed consent, and those with incomplete questionnaire responses were excluded from the study.

Sampling Technique

The study employed a convenience sampling technique for selecting participants. Individuals who fulfilled the inclusion criteria and were easily accessible to the researcher were included in the

study. Convenience sampling was considered appropriate because it facilitated efficient data collection within the available time and resources. The sampling method also enabled the researcher to obtain participants from varied educational and occupational backgrounds. Although convenience sampling limits the generalizability of findings to a wider population, it is frequently used in correlational psychological research where the primary purpose is to examine relationships between variables rather than establish population-level estimates.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

Gratitude

Gratitude refers to a positive emotional disposition characterized by appreciation, thankfulness, and recognition of positive experiences, benefits, or support received from others and life circumstances.

Self-Compassion

Self-compassion refers to an individual's ability to treat oneself with kindness, understanding, and acceptance during times of suffering, failure, or distress rather than engaging in harsh self-criticism.

TOOLS USED FOR DATA COLLECTION

1. Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6)

Gratitude was assessed using the Gratitude Questionnaire-Six Item Form (GQ-6) developed by Michael E. McCullough, Robert A. Emmons, and Jo-Ann Tsang. The GQ-6 is a standardized self-report instrument designed to measure an individual's dispositional tendency to experience gratitude in daily life. The scale consists of six items rated on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree"). Two items in the questionnaire are reverse-scored to minimize response bias. The scale measures appreciation, thankfulness, and acknowledgment of positive aspects of life and interpersonal experiences. The GQ-6 has demonstrated good psychometric properties across different populations. Previous studies have reported Cronbach's alpha values ranging from .82 to .87, indicating good internal consistency and reliability. In Indian settings, the scale has demonstrated satisfactory reliability with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.84. Research evidence suggests that the GQ-6 is positively associated with optimism, life satisfaction, empathy, hope, spirituality, and prosocial behaviour, while negatively associated with depression, anxiety, envy, and materialism. The questionnaire requires less than five minutes to complete and is widely used in positive psychology research.

2. Self-Compassion Scale (SCS)

Self-compassion was assessed using the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) developed by Kristin Neff (2003). The scale is a standardized self-report instrument consisting of 26 items designed to measure the various dimensions of self-compassion. Responses are recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("almost never") to 5 ("almost always"). The scale measures six components of self-compassion, namely self-kindness, self-judgment, common humanity, isolation, mindfulness, and over-identification. The negative subscales, namely self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification, are reverse scored before computing the total self-compassion score. The final total score is calculated by averaging the six subscale means. Higher scores indicate greater levels of self-compassion. The Self-Compassion Scale has demonstrated excellent psychometric properties across diverse cultural populations. Neff (2003) reported high internal consistency for the total scale with a Cronbach's alpha of .92, while the subscales demonstrated reliability coefficients ranging from .75 to .81. The scale also showed good test-retest reliability over a three-week interval. Further validation studies by Neff et al. (2019) using bifactor exploratory structural equation modeling across 20 international samples supported the presence of one general self-compassion factor along with six specific subscale factors. The factor structure of the scale has also been found to be culturally invariant across multiple international populations. The Self-Compassion Scale is widely used in psychological research because of its strong reliability, validity, and comprehensive assessment of compassionate self-responding.

Procedure

Prior to the commencement of data collection, necessary permission was obtained from the concerned authorities wherever required. Participants who met the inclusion criteria were approached individually and informed about the nature, purpose, and objectives of the study. The participants were clearly informed that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences. After obtaining informed consent, the questionnaires were administered either in person or through online forms depending on the convenience and accessibility of the participants. Clear instructions regarding how to respond to the questionnaires were provided before administration. Participants were encouraged to answer all items honestly and independently. Adequate time was provided to complete the questionnaires, and the researcher clarified doubts whenever necessary. The completed questionnaires were collected and carefully screened for completeness. Incomplete or inconsistent responses were excluded from the final analysis to ensure accuracy and reliability of the data.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly maintained throughout the research process. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants before the administration of the questionnaires. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that the information collected would be used solely for academic and research purposes. Confidentiality and anonymity of participant responses were strictly maintained throughout the study. No personal identifying information was disclosed at any stage of the research process. Participants were also informed about their right to withdraw from the study at any point without any obligation or penalty.

Statistical Analysis

The collected data were systematically coded and analyzed using SPSS (version 25) software. Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used to describe the demographic characteristics and major study variables. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was employed to examine the relationship between gratitude and self-compassion among unmarried adults. The correlational analysis helped determine the direction and strength of association between the variables. Statistical significance was tested at the 0.05 level.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to examine the levels of gratitude and self-compassion among unmarried adults. Measures such as minimum score, maximum score, mean, and standard deviation were calculated to understand the distribution and variability of the study variables within the sample. The results revealed that the mean score for gratitude among unmarried adults was 29.79 ($SD = 8.37$), with scores ranging from 6 to 42. The obtained mean score suggests that the participants generally demonstrated moderate to high levels of gratitude. The standard deviation value indicates moderate variability in gratitude levels among the participants, suggesting that although many participants reported relatively higher gratitude, individual differences in gratitude experiences were also present within the sample.

The descriptive analysis for self-compassion indicated a mean score of 89.58 ($SD = 14.23$), with scores ranging from 26 to 129. The findings suggest that the participants generally possessed moderate to relatively high levels of self-compassion. The comparatively higher standard deviation value for self-compassion indicates noticeable variation in participants' self-compassion levels, implying that some individuals demonstrated considerably greater self-kindness, mindfulness, and emotional acceptance than others. The obtained descriptive findings indicate that unmarried adults in the present sample generally reported positive psychological functioning in terms of both gratitude and self-compassion. The moderate to high mean scores on both variables suggest that the participants were capable of appreciating positive aspects of life and responding to themselves with understanding and compassion.

during difficult experiences. A total of 100 valid participant responses were included in the statistical analysis. The descriptive statistics of gratitude and self-compassion are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Gratitude and Self-Compassion Among Unmarried Adults

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Gratitude	100	6	42	29.79	8.37
Self-Compassion	100	26	129	89.58	14.23



Figure 1: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of Gratitude and Self-compassion

Correlation Analysis

Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between gratitude and self-compassion among unmarried adults. Pearson’s correlation coefficient (r) was used to determine both the direction and strength of the relationship between the two variables. The results revealed a statistically significant strong positive correlation between gratitude and self-compassion, $r(98) = .762, p < .001$. The positive direction of the correlation indicates that participants with higher levels of gratitude also tended to report higher levels of self-compassion. In other words, individuals who frequently experienced appreciation, thankfulness, and acknowledgment of positive aspects of life were also more likely to demonstrate kindness, understanding, mindfulness, and acceptance toward themselves.

The obtained correlation coefficient of .762 indicates a strong relationship between the two variables. According to conventional interpretations of Pearson’s correlation coefficients, values above .70 represent a strong positive association. Therefore, the findings suggest that gratitude and self-compassion are closely related psychological constructs among unmarried adults. The significance value obtained ($p < .001$) indicates that the probability of obtaining the observed relationship by chance is extremely low. Thus, the relationship between gratitude and self-compassion can be considered statistically significant. The findings imply that gratitude and self-compassion may function together as positive psychological resources that contribute to emotional well-being and adaptive functioning among unmarried adults. The results further suggest that unmarried adults who maintain a grateful outlook toward life may also possess greater emotional acceptance and reduced self-critical tendencies. Similarly, individuals with greater self-compassion may be more capable of appreciating positive experiences and expressing gratitude because of their balanced emotional awareness and adaptive coping abilities. The correlation matrix for gratitude and self-compassion is presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Pearson Correlation Between Gratitude and Self-Compassion Among Unmarried Adults

Variables	Gratitude	Self-Compassion
Gratitude	1	.762**
Self-Compassion	.762**	1

Note. $N = 100$. $p < .01$.

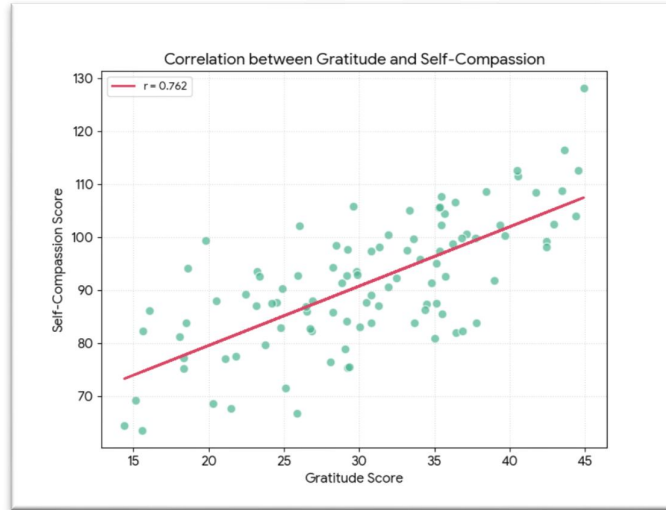


Figure 2: Scatter Plot Illustrating the Correlation between Gratitude and Self-compassion

Hypothesis Testing

The null hypothesis formulated for the present study stated that there would be no significant relationship between gratitude and self-compassion among unmarried adults. To test the hypothesis, Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation analysis was performed between gratitude and self-compassion scores. The results indicated a statistically significant strong positive correlation between gratitude and self-compassion, $r(98) = .762$, $p < .001$. Since the obtained probability value was lower than the predetermined significance level of .01, the null hypothesis (H01) was rejected. Therefore, the study concluded that a significant positive relationship exists between gratitude and self-compassion among unmarried adults. The findings indicate that unmarried adults with higher gratitude levels are more likely to exhibit higher self-compassion. Participants who reported greater appreciation, thankfulness, and recognition of positive life experiences also tended to demonstrate greater self-kindness, mindfulness, emotional balance, and acceptance toward themselves during difficult situations. The strong positive relationship identified in the present study highlights the interconnected nature of gratitude and self-compassion as positive psychological strengths. The findings support existing positive psychology literature suggesting that gratitude and self-compassion may mutually reinforce one another and collectively contribute to emotional resilience, adaptive coping, and psychological well-being.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the relationship between gratitude and self-compassion among unmarried adults using a correlational research design. The findings revealed that unmarried adults demonstrated moderate to high levels of gratitude and self-compassion. More importantly, the results indicated a statistically significant strong positive relationship between gratitude and self-compassion, suggesting that individuals with higher levels of gratitude also tended to exhibit greater self-compassion. These findings contribute to the growing body of positive psychology literature emphasizing the role of adaptive emotional strengths in promoting psychological well-being, resilience, and emotional adjustment among adults.

The descriptive findings of the study indicated that participants generally reported moderate to relatively high levels of gratitude. This suggests that the unmarried adults in the present sample were able to recognize positive experiences, appreciate supportive relationships, and maintain a thankful outlook toward life. Gratitude has consistently been identified as an important psychological strength associated with emotional well-being, optimism, resilience, and life satisfaction. Recent literature suggests that gratitude enables individuals to shift attention away from stress and negative experiences toward positive aspects of life, thereby facilitating emotional stability and adaptive coping (Bhattacharjee et al., 2024; Bock et al., 2025). Studies conducted among young and emerging adults have shown that grateful individuals are more likely to experience positive affect, interpersonal satisfaction, and psychological adjustment (Soin & Kirmani, 2026).

Recent research also indicates that gratitude contributes significantly to emotional regulation and stress management. For example, Bhattacharjee et al. (2024) found that gratitude-based practices improved social connectedness, emotional positivity, and well-being among young adults. Similarly, Educatia 21 (2026) reported that gratitude promotes psychological flexibility and emotional adjustment by encouraging individuals to focus on meaningful and positive life experiences. These findings support the present results, which suggest that unmarried adults with higher gratitude levels may possess stronger emotional resources that enable them to cope more effectively with personal and interpersonal stressors.

The descriptive analysis further revealed that participants demonstrated moderate to high levels of self-compassion. This finding suggests that many participants were capable of responding to themselves with understanding, emotional balance, and kindness during difficult situations. Self-compassion has increasingly been recognized as an important factor contributing to emotional resilience and mental health. Recent studies indicate that self-compassion is associated with lower levels of anxiety, depression, stress, and self-criticism, while positively associated with life satisfaction, emotional regulation, and psychological well-being (Guan et al., 2025; Karakasidou, 2025).

Karakasidou (2025), in a randomized controlled intervention study, found that self-compassion training significantly improved emotional well-being and reduced psychological distress among emerging adults. Likewise, Guan et al. (2025) demonstrated that self-compassion positively predicted life satisfaction across time and contributed to healthier emotional functioning in daily life. Nayak (2025) further observed that self-compassion was associated with greater self-acceptance, emotional stability, and adaptive coping among young adults. These findings support the present study, which suggests that unmarried adults with higher self-compassion may possess healthier emotional coping mechanisms that help them manage stress and interpersonal difficulties effectively.

The most significant finding of the present study was the strong positive relationship between gratitude and self-compassion among unmarried adults. The obtained correlation coefficient indicated that individuals who reported greater gratitude also tended to exhibit greater self-compassion. This finding suggests that gratitude and self-compassion may function as interconnected positive psychological strengths that mutually reinforce one another. Individuals who appreciate positive experiences and acknowledge support from others may also be more likely to treat themselves with kindness and understanding during times of suffering or failure.

The present findings are highly consistent with recent empirical literature (D. & Meena, 2025). Li et al. (2025), in a longitudinal study examining gratitude, self-compassion, and post-traumatic stress symptoms among emerging adults, found stable bidirectional relationships between gratitude and self-compassion over time. Their findings suggested that increases in gratitude contributed to increases in self-compassion, while greater self-compassion also facilitated the development of gratitude. Similarly, Soin and Kirmani (2026) reported a significant positive relationship between gratitude and self-compassion among university students and concluded that both constructs jointly contributed to emotional well-being and reduced anxiety.

Research by Nguyen (2025) further highlighted that gratitude and self-compassion are closely interconnected emotional strengths that collectively enhance resilience and mental health among young adults. Likewise, Saha (2024) observed that gratitude, compassion, and empathy were significantly positively related among emerging adults, indicating that individuals who appreciate

positive experiences are also more likely to demonstrate understanding and kindness toward themselves and others. These findings strongly support the results of the present study.

The positive association between gratitude and self-compassion may be understood through several theoretical perspectives. From the perspective of positive psychology, both gratitude and self-compassion involve adaptive emotional regulation and constructive cognitive appraisal. Gratitude encourages individuals to recognize positive aspects of life and focus on available emotional and social resources, while self-compassion enables individuals to respond to personal suffering with understanding rather than self-criticism. Both constructs therefore promote emotional balance, resilience, and psychological flexibility.

Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory also provides an explanation for the present findings (Fredrickson, 2004). According to this theory, positive emotions broaden individuals' cognitive and emotional capacities, thereby helping them build enduring personal resources such as resilience, optimism, and social connectedness. Gratitude, as a positive emotional state, may facilitate self-compassion by encouraging individuals to focus on acceptance, appreciation, and emotional understanding. Similarly, self-compassion may reduce self-judgment and emotional distress, thereby allowing individuals to recognize positive experiences more effectively and experience gratitude more frequently.

Another possible explanation for the observed relationship is that both gratitude and self-compassion share common emotional processes such as mindfulness, emotional awareness, and adaptive coping. Individuals high in gratitude tend to reinterpret stressful experiences positively and appreciate sources of support, whereas self-compassionate individuals approach personal difficulties with emotional balance and kindness. Recent studies have demonstrated that mindfulness significantly predicts both gratitude and self-compassion, suggesting overlapping emotional mechanisms between these variables (SAGE Open, 2026).

The findings of the present study are particularly relevant in the context of unmarried adulthood. Unmarried adults may experience emotional and social challenges such as loneliness, relationship uncertainty, societal expectations regarding marriage, and concerns about future stability. In collectivistic cultures such as India, marriage often holds substantial social significance, and unmarried individuals may experience subtle societal pressure or feelings of inadequacy. Under such circumstances, gratitude and self-compassion may function as important protective psychological resources.

Gratitude may help unmarried adults focus on supportive relationships, meaningful experiences, and personal strengths rather than perceived social deficiencies. Self-compassion, on the other hand, may help individuals cope with self-criticism, emotional distress, and feelings of isolation by promoting self-kindness and emotional acceptance. Therefore, the strong positive relationship identified in the present study suggests that these constructs may together contribute to healthier psychological adjustment among unmarried adults.

The rejection of the null hypothesis further confirms that gratitude and self-compassion are significantly related among unmarried adults. The findings indicate that unmarried adults who are more appreciative and thankful are also more likely to demonstrate kindness, mindfulness, and emotional understanding toward themselves. This result supports recent positive psychology literature suggesting that gratitude and self-compassion mutually reinforce one another and collectively contribute to emotional resilience and well-being (D. & Meena, 2025; Li et al., 2025; Nguyen, 2025; Soin & Kirmani, 2026). The findings also have important practical implications for mental health promotion and psychological intervention. Since gratitude and self-compassion are strongly associated, interventions designed to enhance one construct may positively influence the other. Positive psychology interventions such as gratitude journaling, mindfulness practices, compassion-focused therapy, and self-compassion training programmes may therefore be effective in improving emotional well-being among unmarried adults. Recent studies have shown that interventions focusing on gratitude and self-compassion significantly reduce stress, anxiety, and emotional distress while enhancing resilience and psychological adjustment (Karakasidou, 2025; Bock et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

The present study examined the relationship between gratitude and self-compassion among unmarried adults using a correlational research design. The findings revealed that unmarried adults demonstrated moderate to high levels of both gratitude and self-compassion. More importantly, the study identified a statistically significant strong positive relationship between gratitude and self-compassion, indicating that individuals with higher levels of gratitude also tended to exhibit higher levels of self-compassion. Thus, the null hypothesis stating that there would be no significant relationship between gratitude and self-compassion among unmarried adults was rejected. The findings suggest that gratitude and self-compassion are closely interconnected positive psychological strengths that contribute to emotional well-being and adaptive functioning. Individuals who appreciate positive experiences and maintain a thankful outlook toward life may also be more likely to respond to themselves with kindness, understanding, and emotional acceptance during difficult situations. Similarly, self-compassionate individuals may possess greater emotional balance and mindfulness, enabling them to recognize and appreciate positive aspects of life more effectively.

The study highlights the importance of positive psychological resources in promoting resilience, emotional regulation, and mental well-being among unmarried adults. In the context of increasing psychological stress, social expectations, loneliness, and interpersonal challenges experienced during unmarried adulthood, gratitude and self-compassion may function as important protective factors that support healthy emotional adjustment and coping. The present study also contributes to the growing literature in positive psychology by providing empirical evidence regarding the relationship between gratitude and self-compassion among unmarried adults, particularly within the Indian context where limited research has been conducted on these variables together. The findings emphasize the need for greater attention toward strength-based psychological approaches that focus on enhancing positive emotional capacities rather than merely addressing psychological distress. Furthermore, the study has practical implications for counselling, psychotherapy, and mental health promotion. Interventions aimed at enhancing gratitude and self-compassion, such as gratitude journaling, mindfulness practices, compassion-focused therapy, and positive psychology interventions, may help improve emotional well-being and resilience among unmarried adults.

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