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Gratitude in Teens: What Predicts It and Why It Matters

Research from Lifespan Member, Sandra Bosacki, and colleagues, Sepideh Yasiniyan and Victoria Talwar
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Purpose of the study

To understand how feeling overwhelmed by others' struggles and guilt affect teens' gratitude over time.



- 111 adolescents (ages 12 - 15)
- Tracked over 1 year
- Measured emotions at Time 1, then gratitude at Time 2



Time 1 Personal Distress

- Feeling overwhelmed when seeing others struggle
- Tendency to feel responsible or guilty in difficult situations



Time 2 Gratitude

- How much teens feel appreciation for others and life
- Includes both social gratitude and general appreciation

Research Questions

- Does feeling **distressed** by others' struggles **predict** gratitude later on?
- Does **guilt proneness** change this relationship?
- Does **gender** play a role?
- How do **emotional processes** shape teens' ability to **feel gratitude**?

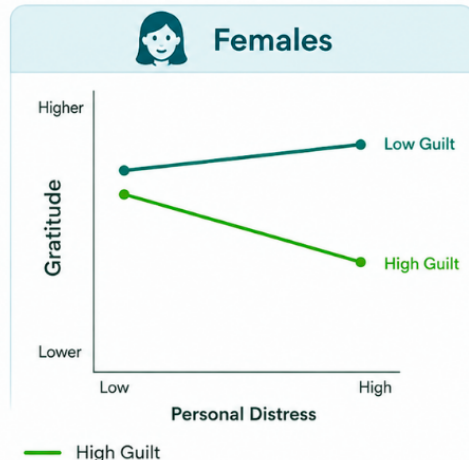
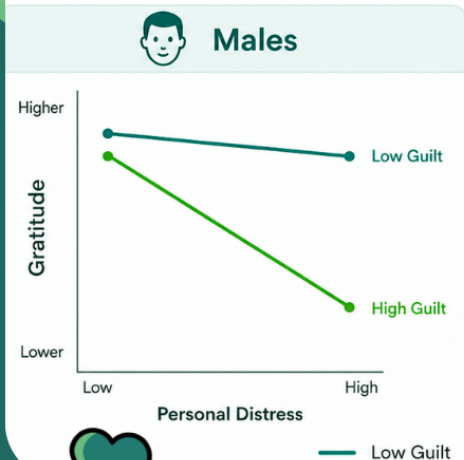
Main Findings

- **Guilt proneness** → higher gratitude overall
- **Personal distress** → slightly lower gratitude

Personal distress reduced gratitude **ONLY** when guilt was moderately high

- **When guilt was low** → distress did not predict gratitude

How Personal Distress Predicts Gratitude



Implications

- **Lower gratitude** ≠ being ungrateful
- **Emotions** like distress + guilt **shape** gratitude
- **High guilt** can turn **gratitude** into **pressure or obligation**
- **Guilt** is important to consider in teen emotional development

Key Takeaways

Gratitude in teens is more than just being thankful

- The key to experiencing gratitude is the ability to regulate emotions of distress and guilt
- For some teens, gratitude can feel like pressure, guilt, emotional overwhelm. Like they *should* be grateful
- Youth development programs should prioritize emotional regulation to encourage prosocial emotions such as gratitude.