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## Impact of Gratitude Marital Enhancement Programme (GMEP) On Subjective Well-being of Couples with Marital Conflict

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### **Introduction**

Marriage is one of the most lasting relationships between a man and a woman. In empirical research, it is well-documented that intimate dyadic relationships or romantic relationships significantly impact individuals' happiness, psychological health, and well-being (Gordon, Arnette, & Smith, 2011). Thus, it becomes essential and imperative to optimise such relationships by enhancing mechanisms that increase constructive elements (Grant & Gino, 2010; Schueller, 2009), and alleviate destructive elements (Gottman, 2017; Mackey, Diemer, & O'Brien, 2000). Positive psychology and gratitude scholars suggest that habitual awareness, experiences, and expressions of gratitude are vital in developing and maintaining social bonds, romantic and family relationships (Gordon et al., 2011). The current study aims to examine whether the experience and expression of gratitude would enhance the well-being of dyadic relationships by reducing the marital conflict of married couples. This question is examined via an experimental gratitude intervention called Gratitude Marital Enhancement Programme (GMEP).

### **Defining Study Variables**

#### **Gratitude**

Gratitude is a feeling of thankfulness and appreciation that is evoked through the recognition that a personal benefit is obtained through the intentional and benevolent actions of a source external to the self. (Emmons, 2003)

#### **Marital Conflict (MC)**

Conflict is defined as a process that couples partake in when they disagree, or have opposing interests, perspectives, or opinions on an emotional, cognitive, or behavioural level (Cahn, 1992; Bell &

Blankeny, 1977; Gurman, 2008; Mayer, 2000). It is the state of tension or stress, struggle, clash, disagreement or quarrel between marital partners over opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values, or goals (Abelneh & Koye, 2021).

### **Subjective Well-being (SWB)**

Subjective well-being is a broad concept that includes the presence of positive affect, absence of negative affect and life satisfaction (Diener, Lucas & Oishi, 2002; Suh & Oishi, 2002; Watson, Pichler & Wallace, 2010).

### **The Broaden-and-Build Phenomena**

There are many theories which deal with marital conflict. In the current study, the researcher adopts the Broaden-and-Build Phenomenon (Fredrickson, 1998, 2000, 2004) to reduce marital conflict among intimate relationships employing the Gratitude Marital Enhancement Programme (GMEP), a model prepared by the researcher, to nurture the positive emotion of gratitude.

According to Barbara Fredrickson (1998), negative emotions reduce a person's momentary thought-action repertoire which enables an individual to respond automatically to fight or flight mode in stressful or harmful situations. Fredrickson also claims that positive emotions broaden a person's momentary thought-action repertoire. Since positive emotions can alleviate the strain of negative emotions on one's thinking (Fredrickson, 1998) any repeated recalling and reliving of positive resources would build a more positive outlook for one another. Thus, daily expressions of gratitude may help couples build a positive environment and buffer against distress in their marriage. This potential benefit is evident in the research on gratitude in individuals. Previous studies reveal that gratitude facilitates individuals to gain benefits from negative life events (Watkins, Cruz, Holben, & Kolts, 2008).

In this study, this theory implies that positive emotions have inherent value to human growth and development. Therefore, the cultivation of positive emotions like gratitude can enhance married couples' relationship functioning and well-being.

### **Conflict in Dyadic Relationship and the Role of Gratitude Intervention**

Interpersonal conflict is defined as a state of disharmony that develops because of natural differences between partners in roles, communication, needs, expectation, etc. (Mackey et al. 2000). Any persistent interpersonal conflict can obstruct healthy progress in relationships and promote more destructive conflict, chronic defensiveness, dissatisfaction, and estrangement (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Mackey et al., 2000) and at times leading to the breakdown of communication and even separation (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989).

Resolving this issue through third-party interventions, like psychotherapy, can be an option yet some still view them as intrusive and invasive, which would increase attrition (Geraghty, Wood, & Hyland, 2010). Thus, the researcher, in this current study, intends to use an available positive resource, namely, Gratitude Marital Enhancement Programme (GMEP), to effect positive change in marital conflict without third-party mediation.

### **Aim of the Study**

The study aims to determine the effectiveness of the Gratitude Marital Enhancement Programme (GMEP) in reducing Marital Conflict and enhancing Gratitude and SWB in the dyadic relationship.

### **Hypotheses of the Study**

HYP 1. The Gratitude Marital Enhancement Programme (GMEP) would reduce the level of MC and enhance the Gratitude and SWB of the experimental group for the Pre, Post and Follow-up test conditions.

HYP 2: The Control Group of Gratitude, MC and SWB will not show any significant difference in pre-test and post-test conditions.

HYP 3: The Experimental Group and Control Group will not show a significant difference in the Pre-test scores regarding study variables Gratitude, MC, and SWB.

### **Tools**

#### **Anugraha-Loyola Gratitude Scale (ALGS-48)**

The ALGS-48, a 7-point Likert scale, consists of 48 items with 6 dimensions designed to measure an individual's level of gratitude (Louie Doss & SoosaiNathan, 2022). The scores vary from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree). The higher the score, the higher will be gratitude and vice-versa. ALGS-48 has  $\alpha = 0.93$ , intrinsic validity 0.96 and test-retest reliability 0.94.

#### **Kansas Marital Conflict Scale (KMCS)**

The Kansas Marital Conflict Scale (KMCS) is a 27-item self-report, 5-point Likert scale with scores ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Almost always), designed to measure marital interactions and conflict of married couples (Eggeman et al., 1985). The higher scores represent higher conflict. The test-retest correlations range from 0.64 to 0.96.

#### **The Subjective Well-being Inventory (SWBI)**

The Subjective Well-Being Inventory developed by Nagpal and Sell (1992) consists of 40 items with 11 dimensions designed to measure an individual's overall feeling about life. A higher score shows

better Subjective Well-being and vice-versa. The test-retest reliability of the inventory is 0.79 and its validity is 0.86.

## Material and Methods

Adopting the purposive sampling technique three hundred and eighty-six married couples were chosen from four villages of Dindigul districts in Tamil Nadu and administered questionnaires. Sixty-eight couples out of three hundred and eighty-six who had high marital conflict mean scores were chosen and assigned equally (N=34) to control and experimental groups randomly. Only the experimental group received GMEP for 45 days of intervention. Soon after the intervention, a post-test was carried out and a follow-up test was done after two months. The collected data was analyzed using SPSS version 22.

## Intervention Module

The below module is based on the *3Ps: 1. Preparative Stage, 2. Processing Stage, and 3. Persevering Stage*

**Table No.1.**

### Module for the Experimental Group

Description of GMEP		
Session	A. PREPARATIVE STAGE	Time
1.	<b>General Orientation</b> <b>Objectives:</b> Getting acquainted with the participants & orienting them to GMEP. <b>Activities:</b> Ice Breaker Party Game, Instructions, Informed Consent <b>Strategies:</b> A brief self-introduction by the researcher and the participants. Conducting Ice-breaking sessions, explaining the nature, purpose, and proceedings of the intervention and informed consent form signed by the participants.	80 Mints
2.	<b>Happiness in Marital life and Gratitude the Positive Path to Happiness</b> <b>Objectives:</b> To make couples aware of what makes them happy and the possibilities of maximising marital happiness through positive emotions of gratitude. <b>Activities:</b> Brainstorming Session, Homework, Group Discussion <b>Strategies:</b> Brainstorming session: Eliciting answers from the participants on what makes them happy in their married life and explaining the components of happiness PERMA and the role of gratitude.	90 Mints
B. PROCESSING STAGE		
3.	<b>Count Your Blessings</b> <b>Objectives:</b> To make the participants aware of their gratitude towards themselves <b>Activities:</b> Sharing, Homework, Rating Gratitude <b>Strategies:</b> Instructed to recall and list out five personal blessings and write in a special sheet or book & read.	60 Mints
4.	<b>Relive the First Encounter with Your Partner</b> <b>Objectives:</b> To relive, & relish pleasant encounters with partner & emotions. <b>Activities:</b> Anchoring, Words of Affirmation, Discussion <b>Strategies:</b> Bring to their mind their long-cherished moments together: exchange of love letters, gifts, photos, conversation, etc.	75 Mints
5.	<b>Cultivating the Behaviour of Benefit Finding, and Not Negative Finding</b> <b>Objectives:</b> Happiness is an inside job and what matters is not what happens to us but how we perceive and interpret events. <b>Activities:</b> Discussion, Homework, Savour the Ordinary <b>Strategies:</b> Cognitive Reconstruction: Help one to shift from fault finder to benefit finder.	90 Mints
6.	<b>Count Three Blessings of Your Partner</b> <b>Objectives:</b> To develop an attitude of gratitude towards the partner. <b>Activities:</b> Count Three Blessings of Your Partner Sheet, List of Services <b>Strategies:</b> Write down in the 'Count Three Blessings of Your Partner Sheet' or on a 'Gratitude Flower'	80 Mints

	any three blessings of your partner. Helps recognise & appreciate positive qualities in each other. List services or help to partner.	
7.	<b>Writing Gratitude Letter</b> <b>Objectives:</b> To increase appreciation and life satisfaction in their marriage. <b>Activities:</b> Writing Gratitude Letters, Writing Down 'Quality Time' Spent. <b>Strategies:</b> Letters need to be focused, specific and concrete things the partner had done and how it had positively affected their lives. Read, and reread the letter, and hand over the letter to their partners.	<b>75 Mints</b>
8.	<b>Writing Gratitude Journal / Diary</b> <b>Objectives:</b> Good things in the marital relationship and to feel grateful for. <b>Activities:</b> Writing & Reading Gratitude Journal, Sharing, Homework <b>Strategies:</b> Choose 5 blessings from the sheet & elaborate on why grateful.	<b>70 Mints</b>
9.	<b>Gratitude Meditation</b> <b>Objectives:</b> To cultivate a state of positive emotion among the couples. <b>Activities:</b> Writing in the Gratitude Meditation Paper, Homework <b>Strategies:</b> Conducting step-by-step Guided Meditation	<b>90 Mints</b>
<b>C. PERSEVERING STAGE</b>		
10.	<b>To Hold on to Gratitude in Daily Life</b> <b>Objectives:</b> To be mindful of the goodness and happiness of the partner. <b>Activities:</b> Gratitude Prayer, Wishing Happiness for the Partner. <b>Strategies:</b> <i>Gratitude Prayer for Partner:</i> A model gratitude prayer given to partners & instructed to recite at a given time. <b>Wishing Happiness for The Partner:</b> Instructing the couples to hold hands and thank God for the gift of their partner and recite the following statements aloud or silently in their hearts one by one. <b>Step: 1.</b> I feel happy for you, I am thankful to you, I am lucky to have you, you are a great treasure to me etc. <b>Step: 2.</b> May my --- (partner's name) be safe and protected, may my partner----be peaceful and happy, may my partner ---- be healthy and strong, may my partner ---- be blessed and guarded etc. <b>Homework:</b> Write a pledge and place it on the Gratitude Notice Board or near the feet of God and read it every day.	<b>90 Mints</b>
11.	<b>Evaluation and Termination</b> <b>Objectives:</b> Preparing the participants for the termination of the intervention and continuing for Two Months. <b>Activities:</b> Getting Feedback, Administration of the Post-Test, and Evaluation of the Programme. <b>Strategies:</b> To review the intervention and arrive at conclusions about enhancing gratitude and subjective well-being. Summary of program. brief sharing, administering the post-test, evaluation, and regular practice for two months and follow-up test.	<b>90 Mints</b>

### Ethics Considerations

The subject matter and the aim of the study were clarified, and the consent form got signed by the participants in the first session. The participants were alerted that they could terminate their participation in the study at any time without any prior information.

### Results

Repeated measures of ANOVA were administered (N=34) to find out if the Gratitude Marital Enhancement Programme (GMEP) was effective in reducing the MC and enhancing the Gratitude and SWB of couples with marital conflict from pre-test to follow-up tests.

**Table No.2.**

Groups	Gratitude			Marital Conflict			Subjective Well-being			
		Pre-test	Post-test	Follow-up	Pre-test	Post-test	Follow-up	Pre-test	Post-test	Follow-up
<b>Experiment</b>	M	37.91	55.40	58.53	66.59	41.44	37.79	42.54	56.68	61.71
	SD	2.906	2.338	2.699	3.799	4.322	3.820	2.350	2.682	3.966

<b>Control</b>	M	37.60	38.12	38.25	67.12	67.68	67.03	42.87	43.29	43.06	<i>Descriptive Results</i>
	SD	2.367	2.428	1.630	4.036	3.607	3.841	2.083	2.697	1.821	

*of Gratitude, MC and SWB of Control and Experimental Groups in Pre, Post and Follow-Up Tests*  
Table 2 presents participants' descriptive statistics (Mean and SD) based on the phase of study and group for Gratitude, MC and SWB variables.

**A. Results on repeated measures of ANOVA for Gratitude, MC and SWB (Exp. Group)**

**Table No.3.**

**Within Subject Contrasts from Pre-test to follow-up test on Gratitude, MC and SWB**

Measure	Time	df1	df2	F	Sig.	$\eta_p^2$
<b>Gratitude</b>	Pre-test to Post-test	1	33	1111.07	.000	.97
	Post-test to Follow-up	1	33	25.59	.000	.44
<b>MC</b>	Pre-test to Post-test	1	33	726.77	.000	.96
	Post-test to Follow-up	1	33	18.25	.000	.36
<b>SWB</b>	Pre-test to Post-test	1	33	755.39	.000	.96
	Post-test to Follow-up	1	33	29.17	.000	.47

It is evident from the above table that the contrasts at each level were statistically significant from the pre-test to the follow-up test. Further Bonferroni Corrected Pairwise Comparison of mean values is presented in the following table:

**Table No.4.**

**Bonferroni Corrected Pairwise Comparison on Gratitude, MC and SWB**

Measure	(I) time	(J) time	Mean Difference (I-J)	Significance
<b>Gratitude</b>	Pre-test	Pre-test to Post-test	-17.485*	.000
		Pre-test to Follow-up test	-20.618*	.000
	Post-test	Post-test to Pre-test	17.485*	.000
		Post-test to Follow-up test	-3.132*	.000
	Follow-up test	Follow-up to pre-test	20.618*	.000
		Follow-up to Post-test	3.132*	.000
<b>MC</b>	Pre-test	Pre-test to Post-test	25.147*	.000
		Pre-test to Follow-up test	28.794*	.000
	Post-test	Post-test to Pre-test	-25.147*	.000
		Post-test to Follow-up test	3.647*	.000
	Follow-up test	Follow-up to pre-test	-28.794*	.000
		Follow-up to Post-test	-3.647*	.000
<b>SWB</b>	Pre-test	Pre-test to Post-test	-14.132*	.000
		Pre-test to Follow-up test	-19.162*	.000
	Post-test	Post-test to Pre-test	14.132*	.000
		Post-test to Follow-up test	-5.029*	.000
	Follow-up test	Follow-up to pre-test	19.162*	.000
		Follow-up to Post-test	5.029*	.000

\*. *The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.*

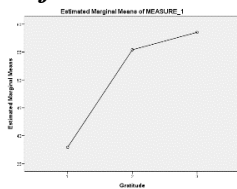
There were significant statistical mean differences at each stage while comparing the mean values of other levels. The partial eta squared values showed that there was an overall high effect size



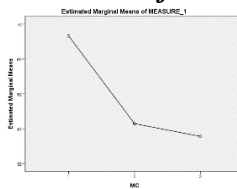
for the study variable. In addition, within-subject contrast has underscored the effect sizes at each stage, further showing high effect sizes.

It has been found that sphericity was met as indicated by Mauchly's test for Gratitude  $\chi^2(2) = 1.99, p = > .05$ , for MC  $\chi^2(2) = 2.21, p = > .05$  and SWB  $\chi^2(2) = 13.81, p = > .05$ . The univariate test results showed that there was a significant relationship regarding Gratitude  $F(2,66) = 684.55, p = < .01$  and there was a huge effect  $\eta_p^2 = .95$  and for MC  $F(2,66) = 686.15, p = < .01$ , and there was a huge effect  $\eta_p^2 = .95$  and for SWB  $F(2,66) = 330.24, p = < .01$ , and there was a huge effect  $\eta_p^2 = .91$ . The graphs below further explain the results of the three study variables.

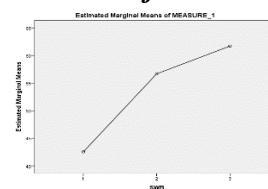
**Figure: 1**  
**Increase of Gratitude**



**Figure:2**  
**Reduction of MC**



**Figure: 3**  
**Increase of SWB**



Thus, hypothesis 1 that the Gratitude Marital Enhancement Programme (GMEP) would reduce the level of MC and enhance the Gratitude and SWB of the experimental group from the pre-test to the follow-up test is accepted.

**B. Results Comparing the Pre and Post-Test of Control Groups Gratitude, MC & SWB**  
**Table No.5.**

S.No.	Variables	Control (N=34)				t (33)	P	Cohen's d
		Pre-test		Post-test				
		M	SD	M	SD			
1.	Gratitude	37.60	2.37	38.12	2.43	-.87	.39 <sup>NS</sup>	.22
2.	MC	67.12	4.04	67.68	3.61	-.82	.42 <sup>NS</sup>	.15
3.	SWB	42.87	2.08	43.29	2.70	-.72	.48 <sup>NS</sup>	.17

*NS – p = > .05*

Paired samples t-test results revealed that there was no significant difference.

**C. Results Comparing the Experimental & Control Groups at the Pre-test Phase for the Study Variables - Gratitude, MC, and SWB**

**Table No.6.**

S. No.	Group	Variables	Pre-test Scores				t (33)	p	Cohen's d
			Control		Experiment				
			M	SD	M	SD			
1.	Gratitude Marital Enhancement Programme (GMEP)	Gratitude	37.60	2.37	37.91	2.91	-.48	.63 <sup>NS</sup>	.12
		MC	67.12	4.04	66.59	3.80	.56	.58 <sup>NS</sup>	.14
		SWB	42.87	2.08	42.54	2.35	.60	.55 <sup>NS</sup>	.15

*NS – p = > .05*

Independent samples t-test results showed that there was no significant difference.

## **Discussion**

It was hypothesized that practicing mindful experiences and expressions of gratitude intervention would reduce marital conflict and enhance the subjective well-being of dyadic relationships. This hypothesis was tested through an experimental model called Gratitude Marital Enhancement Programme (GMEP). When couples experienced a grateful state, they were more likely to express gratitude to their partner. Previous research has observed that those who have experienced gratitude from others are more likely to engage in prosocial behaviours later in life (McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001) and are more willing to help others (McCullough et al., 2001). Earlier studies have shown that gratitude is a mechanism for enhancing an individual's subjective well-being, elevating levels of happiness, and increasing a positive outlook for the future (Watkins et al., 2003) as is found in the present study. The broaden-and-build framework states that a single positive experience can extend and intensify the positive emotions and positive actions circle and build onto one another, thus creating upward spirals (Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008; Fredrickson, 2001). Mindful Practice of GMEP intervention helped the participants not only to remember positive things but also broaden their views to have positive thoughts amidst a negative situation and learn a lesson from it too. The findings suggest that GMEP intensified and enhanced positive emotions, reduced negative emotions, and created positive resources which are elements and outcomes of the broaden-and-build phenomenon (Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson et al., 2008).

## **Scope for Future Research**

A longitudinal study with larger samples needs to be conducted. Future research may consider comparing the prevalence of gratitude and the relationship between MC and SWB among early, mid, and late married couples to find out and define whether different marital stages of couples influence the level of gratitude or not. The GMEP model can be incorporated into the premarital preparation programme.

## **Conclusion**

The current study confirms that participation in a Gratitude Marital Enhancement Programme (GMEP) can significantly reduce marital conflict and enhance subjective well-being in intimate dyadic relationships. It also reveals that habitual awareness, experience, and expression of positive emotions of gratitude can trigger an upward spiral in well-being by buffering against negative emotions. GMEP is a positive, novel, and non-invasive approach to amplifying positivity in a dyadic relationship. Thus,



generating an attitude of gratitude among married couples would certainly create a grateful, happy, and healthy family and society.

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