

# A Study on Gender Differences on Gratitude, Spirituality and Forgiveness Among School Teachers

Ibadat Khan<sup>1</sup> and Nayanika Singh<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Psychology, Panjab University, Chandigarh, India

<sup>2</sup>Department of Psychology, D.A.V College, Sector- 10, Chandigarh, India

\***Email:** nanikasingh@gmail.com

## Abstract

Gratitude is a sense of thankfulness and joy in response to receiving a gift, whether the gift be a tangible benefit from a specific other or a moment of peaceful bliss evoked by natural beauty. Spirituality has been defined in research literature as the process of seeking personal authenticity, genuineness, and wholeness; transcending one's current locus of centrality. Forgiveness is a suite of pro-social motivational changes that occurs after a person has incurred a transgression. However, no comprehensive review of literature is available on the cumulative effect of gratitude, spirituality and forgiveness and on the role and contribution of gender differences for the same. Therefore, taking this into consideration the present study attempted to investigate gender differences on gratitude, spirituality and forgiveness among 80 school teachers for which t-test was computed. Results indicated that significant gender differences were found among male and female teachers with respect to gratitude (males found to be higher than females), spirituality and forgiveness (females were found to be higher than males on both the dimensions). However, further research is needed to substantiate the same.

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**Keywords:** Gratitude, Spirituality, Forgiveness, Gender Difference.

## Introduction

Gratitude is experienced when people receive something beneficial or felt when somebody does something kind or helpful. It has been defined as "a sense of thankfulness and joy in response to receiving a gift, whether the gift be a tangible benefit from a specific other or a moment of peaceful bliss evoked by natural beauty" (Emmons, 2004). Gratitude is associated with indebtedness and dependency among some people (Solomon, 1995). It is possible that men regard the experience and expression of gratitude as evidence of vulnerability and weakness, which may threaten their masculinity and social standing (Levant & Kopecky, 1995). Consequently, men might adopt an avoidance orientation toward gratitude, showing a preference to conceal rather than express it. This would serve as a type of self-protective mechanism from contact with unwanted negative emotional experiences or adverse social consequences. Ironically, this avoidance orientation may cause even greater disruptions to psychological and social well-being.

Literature indicates that women are generally more emotionally expressive than men and, with the exception of anger, experience emotions more intensely and frequently compared with men (Fujita, Diener, & Sandvik,

1991; Grossman & Wood, 1993; Kring & Gordon, 1998; Naito, Wangwan, & Tani, 2005; Simon & Nath, 2004). Women are more aware of their emotions and report more complex emotional experiences compared with men (Barrett, Lane, Sechrest, & Schwartz, 2000; Ciarrochi, Hynes, & Crittenden, 2005). On average, women also report a greater willingness to express their emotions openly and show stronger tendencies to regulate them to adapt to changing social circumstances compared with men (Timmers *et al.*, 1998). Small to moderately sized differences between men and women in the experience and expression of emotions are contingent on multiple social, emotional, interpersonal, and contextual factors.

Spirituality has been defined in research literature as the process of seeking personal authenticity, genuineness, and wholeness; transcending one's current locus of centrality (i.e., recognizing concerns beyond oneself); developing a greater connectedness to self and others through relationships and community; deriving meaning, purpose, and direction in life; and openness to exploring a relationship with a higher power or powers that transcend human existence and human knowing (Love and Talbot, 1999; see also Hill *et al.* 2000; Love, 2001, Parks, 2000). Ozorak (2003) contended that women and men embrace different relational schemas—or formulated, role-bound ways of interacting in a particular relationship—in describing their relationships with God and experiences within their religious communities. Whereas women focus on the personal connections forged with a loving God and with members of their religious communities, men are more attuned to God's power and judgment and on practicing spiritual discipline (Ozorak 1996).

Forgiveness is a suite of prosocial motivational changes that occurs after a person has incurred a transgression. People who are inclined to forgive their transgressors tends to be more agreeable, more emotionally stable and some research suggests, more spiritually or religiously inclined than people who do not forgive their transgressors. Forgiving involving (a) reduction of negative experiences (e.g., emotions, motivations, behavior, and cognition; i.e., Ashton, Paunonen, Helmes, & Jackson, 1998) or (b) both a reduction of negative experience and a resulting positive experience toward the offender (Fincham, Beach, & Davila, 2004). Worthington (2005) observed that when strangers or people in poor or non-valued relationships offend, the focus is on reducing the negative. In valued, continuing relationships, the focus is on both reducing the negative and then (if possible) increasing the positive. Gender may influence forgiveness in each of the different models of forgiveness listed above. For example, reconciliation-based forgiveness models may be affected by gender differences in the way males and females approach, engage, and respond to reconciliation. In evolutionary-based models, gender differences could influence willingness to forgive. For example, Taylor, *et.al.* (2000) identified fighting and flight as traditionally recognized ways of coping, which are often preferred by men. However, most animals are social, and when threat arises, they may also tend-and-befriend (Taylor *et al.*, 2000), which is often preferred by women. Attributional-focused forgiveness models may be affected by gender differences that have been found in responsibility attributions (Elkins, Phillips, & Konopaske, 2002). Furthermore, different attributional patterns have been found in husbands and wives, suggesting that social roles are linked to the way people attribute cause after transgressions (Kachadourian *et al.*, 2005). As a final example, gender differences in stress and coping can affect forgiveness. For instance, gender differences have been found in the ways people experience stressors, appraise stressors as threatening or challenging, react to appraisals, and cope (Lazarus, 1999). To the extent that transgressions are interpersonal stressors, gender differences are hypothesized along the lines studied in the stress-and-coping literature.

The present investigation emphasized on studying gender differences among school teachers on gratitude, spirituality and forgiveness. It is an attempt to find out whether gender has any significant contribution on the dimensions of gratitude, forgiveness and spirituality in people. Teachers have been the focus of research in our investigation as they are the building blocks and futuristic role models in inculcating the needed

value system in the present generation. The C.B.S.E has strongly recommended the assistive role to be played by teachers in helping students to imbibe in them gratitude, forgiveness and the essence of spirituality which are and have always been the cornerstones of the Indian tradition since times immemorial. The present research is a reminder of the same and a leap forward in the same direction.

### Objectives

- To study the effect of gender difference on Gratitude among school teachers.
- To study the effect of gender difference on Spirituality among school teachers.
- To study the effect of gender difference on Forgiveness among school teachers.

### Hypotheses

- There will be significant gender differences on Gratitude among school teachers.
- There will be significant gender differences on Spirituality among school teachers.
- There will be significant gender differences on Forgiveness among school teachers.

### Methodology

#### *Sample*

The sample consisted of 80 school teachers (40 male and 40 females) randomly selected from senior secondary private schools in Himachal Pradesh, age ranging from 30-40 years. There was no clinical history among the selected sample.

#### **Tools**

**Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS; Thompson *et al.*, 2005):** Heartland Forgiveness Scale is an 18-item measure of determining ones dispositional forgiveness. The HFS comprises of three subscales: Forgiveness of Self (e.g., “It is really hard for me to accept myself once I’ve messed up.”), Forgiveness of others (e.g., “When someone disappoints me, I can eventually move past it.”), and Forgiveness of Situations (e.g., “I eventually make peace with bad situations in my life”). The subjects are to provide responses using a 7-point scale; ranging from 1 (almost always not true of me) to 7 (almost always true of me).

**Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6; McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002):** GSQ is a 6-item Gratitude Scale used to measure ones general tendency to feel grateful and thankful towards perceived benefactors. Responses for the said questionnaire are to be provided using a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The GQ-6 demonstrated excellent reliability ( $\alpha < .90$ ) in prior studies (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002).

**The Spiritual Intelligence Self Report Inventory (SISRI; King, 2008):** The Spiritual Intelligence Self-Report Inventory is a 24 item self-report measure that provides a total Spiritual Intelligence score. It consists of four subscales i.e. critical existential thinking, personal meaning production, transcendental awareness, and conscious state expansion, and a theoretical subscale of adaptive application. The Cronbach Alpha for SISRI was found to be .95 for all items, and .88 for Critical Existential Thinking: (CET), .87 for Personal Meaning Production (PMP), .89 for Transcendental Awareness (TA), and .96 for Conscious State Expansion (CSE) respectively.

**Procedure**

The present study attempted to examine the gender differences on gratitude, spirituality and forgiveness among schools teachers. The teachers were given the requisite instructions on the Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6), The Spiritual Intelligence Self Report Inventory (SISRI) and the Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS) one at a time. T-test was computed to find out the gender differences on the dimensions of gratitude, spirituality and forgiveness for both males and females respectively.

**Results and Discussion**

Gratitude is associated with indebtedness and dependency among some people (Solomon, 1995). It is possible that men regard the experience and expression of gratitude as evidence of vulnerability and weakness, which may threaten their masculinity and social standing (Levant & Kopecky, 1995). Consequently, men might adopt an avoidance orientation toward gratitude, showing a preference to conceal rather than express it. The present study was an attempt to investigate the gender differences on gratitude, spirituality and forgiveness among 80 teachers for which data was collected from private schools in Himachal Pradesh. In order to test the cited hypothesis t-test was computed to obtain the interpretable value as the result of the investigation.

**Table 1:** Showing the comparison between Male and Female Teachers on Gratitude, Forgiveness & Spirituality.

| Variables    | Males(M + SD)N= 40 | Females(M + SD)N= 40 | t-ratio | Significance            |
|--------------|--------------------|----------------------|---------|-------------------------|
| Gratitude    | 84.35 + 9.195394   | 66.95 + 11.18963     | 3.59    | H <sub>1</sub> accepted |
| Spirituality | 34.3 + 3.404332    | 34.611 + 3.513508    | 4.09    | H <sub>2</sub> accepted |
| Forgiveness  | 84.35 + 9.195394   | 88.25 + 9.569001     | 3.54    | H <sub>3</sub> accepted |

Note: \*t-values are significant at 0.05 level

The present study was conducted to determine whether gender plays a significant role in determining gratitude, forgiveness and spirituality among school teachers. Results in Table no. 1 indicate the statistical findings of the present study which can be understood in the light of the research hypotheses. In the relevance of the above statement, the results reveal there are significant gender differences among school teachers on the dimensions of forgiveness, gratitude and spirituality among school teachers. The obtained t-values indicate that significant gender differences existed among male and female teachers on gratitude (t = 3.59, p>0.05) where male teachers were found to be more grateful in their dealing than their female counterparts. Similarly significant gender differences among male and female teachers was found on the dimension of spirituality (4.09, p>0.05) where females were found to be slightly more spiritual than their male counterparts. Furthermore, results also indicated that significant gender differences existed between male and female teachers on forgiveness (3.54, p>0.05) as well, where female teachers were found to be more forgiving than male teachers respectively. Therefore, results indicate (Table no. 1) that the above stated hypotheses i.e. there will be significant gender difference among male and female teachers on gratitude (H1), forgiveness (H2) and spirituality (H3) stands proved. The research findings indicate that the results could have been influenced by a number of factors contributing teachers' level of spirituality, gratitude and forgiveness while they are performing the tests. These may range from their personal beliefs, traditions, cultural background, life events to the effect of their attitude towards forgiveness, gratitude and spirituality their personality and the environment in which they live and interact.

The research findings also emphasized the importance of ethical virtues and the above mentioned variable because they sometime becomes more vulnerable to transfer their habits and attitude directly or indirectly to their students and further they move in the society with earlier learned ethical conformities and way of expression of their attitudinal values. Gender differences in spirituality and related traits are an assumed reality despite the lack of empirical information that directly compares women and men and relationships can be a cause of great happiness and of great distress in clients' lives. Gratitude may help clients to savor the benefits that they receive from others, thereby extending the emotional benefits that people receive from their positive social interactions with others. On the other hand forgiveness may help to minimize the negative consequences of interpersonal harm for people's health, well-being, and social relationships.

### **Tips to Boost Gratitude & Forgiveness**

- Develop a sense of gratitude and forgiveness for the things you have control over such as your home, material possessions, your health, your job, people you love, your talents and so on.
- Keep a Gratitude/ forgiveness Journal- Begin by writing a few things you are grateful for. Begin this task daily and write at least 3 things.
- Express gratitude/forgiveness directly to someone or something- You might tell that person, write a letter or call them.
- See your surroundings as new all over again by showing a visitor around.

These tips will assist in adding a spiritual flavor into one's life making them healthier, happier and potentially productive and worthwhile human beings. We sincerely hope that cognitive psychotherapists and researchers will take advantage of the benefits these positive psychological constructs and encourage people to incorporate them into the grammar of their lives and relationships.

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