

The Efficacy of Gratitude and Forgiveness Training to Increase Happiness

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Abstract: This study aims to test whether there is the influence of gratitude and forgiveness training to increase happiness in adolescents. A total of 30 randomly selected adolescents involved in this research. Randomized pre-post test control group design was used to examine the module intervention. The results of data analysis using t-test showed a significant difference in happiness between the experimental group with the control group ($t = 4.579$, $p = 0.000$). These results demonstrated a positive effect of gratitude and forgiveness training to increase happiness.

Key words: Gratitude, forgiveness, happiness, intervention, randomized, randomly selected

INTRODUCTION

Previous research has found happiness have some positive impact. People who are happy have a positive energy than a person who is not. They also tend to be more energetic, passionate and has high flexibility compared with individuals who are less happy (Csikszentmihalyi and Hunter, 2003; Park and Peterson, 2006; Peterson *et al.*, 2007). Happiness has a positive correlation with increased activity (Csikszentmihalyi and Hunter, 2003). A person who happy associated with increased engagement and social interaction (Csikszentmihalyi and Hunter, 2003; Peterson *et al.*, 2007). Also, individuals who are happy have more mental resources. They are also more creative, attentive and more optimistic, they also show more open minded and open to information (Fredrickson, 2013; Fredrickson and Joiner, 2002). Study on children found, they were happy to demonstrate the ability to refrain longer, compared with children who are less happy (Moore *et al.*, 1976; Schwarz and Pollack, 1977). Other research shows that happy people have higher social support and social engagement (Chan and Lee, 2006; Chan, 2008; Jopp and Rott, 2006; Natvig *et al.*, 2003; North *et al.*, 2008). Happiness also correlates with self-esteem (Baumeister *et al.*, 2003).

The current study focuses on how gratitude and forgiveness have likelihood impact to happiness. Several factors were found to have a significant correlation with happiness. Among these factors are forgiveness and gratitude (Witvliet *et al.*, 2001; Worthington *et al.*, 2007; Froh *et al.*, 2008). Previous research has found forgiveness contributing to the health and psychological wellbeing (Hannon *et al.*, 2012; Lawler *et al.*, 2003; Witvliet *et al.*, 2001; Worthington *et al.*, 2007). Forgiving

behavior can decrease the negative emotions, hatred and desire for revenge against the perpetrator (Worthington, 2006; Worthington *et al.*, 2007). Individuals who were not willing to forgive showed increased sympathetic nervous system and increased the stress response compared with individuals who forgive (Witvliet *et al.*, 2001). In addition, individuals who forgiving have better health and use more coping positively compared with individuals that are difficult to forgive they also have higher life satisfaction (Maltby *et al.*, 2004) and were able to reduce negative effects of treatment pain-induced liver (Lawler *et al.*, 2003, 2005).

Previous research shows a significant correlation between gratitude with happiness. Froh *et al.* (2008) found gratitude has a correlation with positive affect, life satisfaction, optimistic, social support and prosocial behavior. Gratitude also associated with emotional pride, full of hope, excitement and forgiveness. Wood *et al.* (2009) found a positive correlation with the gratitude autonomy, personal growth, environmental mastery, self-acceptance, purpose in life and positive social relationships. This study will produce a model as well as training modules gratitude and forgiveness that can be used to improve adolescent happiness. Past research has shown a significant contribution gratitude and forgiveness with happiness (Wood *et al.*, 2009; Witvliet *et al.*, 2001; Worthington *et al.*, 2007; Froh *et al.*, 2008). Safaria (2014) found gratitude have a positive contribution to happiness. The current study aims to test whether the gratitude and forgiveness training can increase happiness. In the present time, few study that has been examined the gratitude and forgiveness training to increase happiness. Further research is needed to explore whether the gratitude and forgiveness training is helpful to increase happiness in adolescents.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Subject: The subjects of this study have the following characteristics; 30 teenage boys with involved in this research. Randomization was performed to select respondents who will be grouped into two groups: the experimental group and the control group (waiting list). Inform consent was given and all participants have a right to involved or not without coercion.

Questionnaires: Data collection used in this study is a scale that measures about happiness. This scale, before used will be tested for validity and reliability. Content validity and Cronbach alpha reliability was used to examine for validity and reliability of measuring instruments; the aim is to be a tool used in this research is accurate and trustworthy (Creswell, 2003, 2005).

Forgiveness: Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivation Inventory (TRIM) (McCullough *et al.*, 2002) was used to measure state forgiveness and was translated to Indonesian language. TRIM consists of 12 items, answered on a 1-5 Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Forward-backward translation method was used to validate the items of TRIM. The example of the items are "I will make him/her pay", "I keep as much distance between us as possible", "I am going to get even". The Cronbach alpha was 0.924.

Gratitude: Gratitude Questionnaire 6 (GQ-6) was used to measure the gratitude adjectives (grateful, thankful and appreciative) among participants. GQ-6 used a 9-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (inaccurate) to 9 (accurate). Forward-backward translation method was used to validate the items in Indonesian language. The example of items are "I have so much in life to be thankful for", "I am grateful to a wide variety of people" when I look at the world, "I don't see much to be grateful for". The Cronbach alpha was 0.803.

Data analysis: To test the hypothesis proposed in this study used data analysis techniques that are quantitatively using t-test and ANOVA which aims to see the difference in average scores between groups. The data is processed using the Statistical Program SPSS 16.

Module: Gratitude and forgiveness training modules were developed based on McCullough *et al.* (2002) and Witvliet *et al.* (2001) theory of gratitude and forgiveness. Before the training module was used, the module will be tested through in two phases: first, used professional

judgment that expert to this fields to evaluate the module. Second, the module was tested with limited sample to obtain feedback about the weakness of the modules.

RESULTS

The results of this study indicate writing things that are grateful (counting blessings) and forgive the past adverse event increase happiness in the experimental group. The results of this study support previous research. Marti *et al.* (2010) on a sample of Spain psychology students found a significant difference in the positive affect between experimental groups (counting blessings) with the control group (counting hassles). Froh *et al.* (2009a, b)'s study found teens who write grateful events indicates an increase in positive affect compared to teenagers who were given the task of writing down the events of every day ticks (daily hassles). The study also found a positive effect on the subject after two months later. Another study by Emmons and McCullough (2003) found blessing counting group showed an increase in well-being, compared with the control group. Their results showed that positive affect is a condition that is most strongly felt by the group counting blessings and activities that focus on positive events (benefits) had a positive impact on emotions and interpersonal. Froh *et al.* (2008) involving 221 early teens find activities counting blessings associated with increased gratitude (self-reported gratitude) optimism, life satisfaction and decreased negative affect. Table 1 presents the descriptive data statistical study showed the mean difference between pre-test, post-test and follow-up in the experimental group while the mean difference in pre-test, post-test and follow-up does not occur in the control group.

Table 2 presents the results of data analysis using t-test which showed highly significant differences happiness in the experimental group with the control group ($t = 3.6, p = 0.001$) and a significant differences of happiness in the experimental group with the control group ($t = 3.7, p = 0.001$).

DISCUSSION

Several previous studies showed that gratitude plays a role in increasing the happiness (Froh *et al.*, 2008; Wood *et al.*, 2009). A person who is grateful experiences more life satisfaction, optimism, vigor and decreased depression and also shows a high level of agreeableness, extraversion, openness and low on neuroticism levels on big five personality measures (McCullough *et al.*, 2002). Individuals who are grateful also showed an increase in prosocial behavior. They are also more willing to help, supportive, willing to forgive and more empathy for others (McCullough *et al.*, 2002).

Tabel 1: Statistic descriptive

Kelompok	N	Mean	SD
Eksperimen (pre-tes)	15	29.6667	3.95811
Kontrol (pre-tes)	15	29.3333	3.69685
Eksperimen (post-tes)	15	33.8000	2.59670
Kontrol (post-tes)	15	29.9333	3.26161
Eksperimen	15	34.8667	2.61498
Follow-up	15	30.6000	3.62137

Tabel 2: Result of statistic analysis independent t-test

Variables	t-values	Mean	df	Sig. (2- tailed)
Pretes	0.238	0.333	28	0.813
Postest	3.600	4.900	28	0.001
Follow-up	3.700	4.300	28	0.001

The previous study also found that gratitude has a positive relationship with psychological health and positive social function (McCullough *et al.*, 2002; Watkins *et al.*, 2003). Watkins *et al.* (2003) found that grateful people tend to experience more frequent positive emotions like feeling satisfied, happy, happy and full of hope as compared to negative emotions. Watkins *et al.* (2003) describe the mechanism of why the behavior grateful affects happiness and positive affect. First when a person feels gratitude to special events it will increase feelings of happiness. Secondly, gratitude itself encourages a sense of satisfaction within the individual. Third, the grateful behavior can serve as an active coping strategy when facing problems in everyday life. Fourth, the behavior will improve the accessibility and grateful recollections of positive memories. Lastly, the grateful behavior will decrease the likelihood of depressed mood.

CONCLUSION

The study showed that happiness increased when the person the counting of positive life and forgiveness of past negative events. The current study shows that counting blessing has promising results as an intervention to increase happiness in adolescents. An often teenager more focused on what he does not have and forget a lot of things that he has. This refocusing process leads teens to restructure their past experiences with a positive angle, take positive notes and recall the positive things that they have. The realization that he has a lot of positive things in life, then bring to an understanding that many things in life should be grateful and be forgiven.

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