



Mitigating Loneliness of Adult Retiree Teachers: Mediating Role of Engaged Living

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Abstract: *This study was undertaken in a rural setup to study the mediating role of engaged living in mitigating loneliness in adult retiree teachers. The population of the study comprised of adult retired teachers. Only those retiree teachers were selected whose age was more than 60 years. The snowball sampling technique was used for sample selection. A total of 180 male teachers were selected. Data was collected through a standardized questionnaire. Three questionnaires were used for data collection. One questionnaire was for trait gratitude, the second questionnaire was for loneliness and the third questionnaire was used for engaged living. It was found that there was that trait of gratitude was significantly related to loneliness. A significant relationship was found between trait gratitude and engaged living. It was found that Engaged living and loneliness were significantly related. Engaged living significantly mediated the relationship between trait gratitude and loneliness. Four hypotheses were formulated and all were accepted at a 95% confidence level.*

Key Words: Trait Gratitude, Loneliness, Engaged Living, Mediation

Introduction

Aged people are facing many challenges and problems in their lives—such people experiencing a decline in mental and physical health and feeling continuous pain in joints and muscles. Aged people also experience loneliness due to the loss of family members, loss of dear and close friends or some other disruptive stressor (Hill, 2011). Prevailing such a situation enhances aged people's engagement to change circumstances and adapt to a meaningful life (Wong, 2016). Therefore it is essential that old age may be considered not a burden in itself but an opportunity to adjust to the existing situation and take advantage of it (Pavlickove & Nagyova, 2016).

In a research study in European Union, a high ratio of loneliness was found in Netherland and it was placed in the third position in this regard (Eurostat, 2017). Loneliness increases with an increase in age. It was found that 63% of people having 85 years of age and only 41% in middle-aged persons. Psychologists believe that loneliness is the result of two factors. One is the aversive experiences that result in a negative way of behavior like sadness and anxiety (Menec et al., 2019). The second factor is the shortcomings in social relationships. The absence of intimate relationships and social relationships leads to emotional loneliness and social loneliness (Brimelow & Wollin, 2017).

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Many risk factors are responsible for the loneliness of an individual, such as serious health problems, loss of social network, loss of an intimate relationship, betrayal of friends, and bad conduct of family members ([Gan et al. 2015](#)). Sometimes personality factors and genetic disposition are considered major risk factors for loneliness. Empirical evidence shows that loneliness has a negative effect on the mental and physical health of an individual. Continuous loneliness results in depression, mental stress and some other heart-related disease ([Christiansen, Larsen & Lasgaard, 2016](#) & [Kharicha et al., 2017](#)). If loneliness persists for a long time, it may result in suicide ideation ([Huang et al., 2019](#)). Besides these risk factors, some other factors are also responsible for loneliness. According to [Richard et al. \(2017\)](#), unhealthy lifestyle behavior is associated with loneliness. Smoking, obesity, less physical activities, and limited social contact also result in loneliness, mental stress, and behavioral problems ([Hegeman. et al. 2018](#)).

It is of immense importance to explore and discuss relevant resources which are helpful in lessening or mitigating loneliness. Current research is based on the relationship between loneliness and trait gratitude. This study will also focus on the mediating effect of engaged living and psychological flexibility in the relationship between loneliness and trait gratitude in male respondents who were over 60 years of age. This mechanism proved to be useful for decreasing psychological problems and to be beneficial for the mental and physical health of the individuals ([Trompetter et al., 2013](#); [Jans-Beken et al., 2017](#)). The current research study aims to unveil possible ways of mitigating loneliness with the potential and important role of trait gratitude, engaged living and psychological well-being and flexibility.

An important resource is the trait of gratitude which is helpful in preventing or lessening loneliness in old age people or middle age. Trait gratitude may be defined as the tendency to acknowledge anything or to recognize benefits from others with grateful expressions or emotions. Expression of grateful emotion may not only foster personal well-

being but also positively affects others' well-being. In different research studies, a negative relationship was determined between loneliness and trait gratitude ([Caputo, 2015](#)). Positive emotions decrease individual mental stress and motivate persons to be optimistic and broaden their life perspectives. This can increase engagement in meaningful activities which further furnish value-oriented and meaningful life ([Ni et al., 2015](#)).

People showing the trait of gratitude exhibit pro-social conduct in the beginning but after some time, this behavior results in the creation of social relationships due to grateful behavioral expression. Such behavioral expression builds and strengthens intimate friendships ([Algoe & Zhaoyang, 2016](#)). Gratitude means to be focused on the qualities, behaviors, traits and values of other people to build an emotional attachment with others.

Trait gratitude also connects people more closely as a result of feelings, thoughts, emotions and behavior. Different research studies concluded that people who are alone and have no grateful expression feel lonely. Such persons have weak social relations in society, and it results in a lack of trust in others ([Lamster et al., 2017](#)). A lonely person is less involved in a discussion or pays less attention to other people.

According to [Shi et al. \(2016\)](#), alienated people express behavior leading to withdrawal behavior in society. The role of trait gratitude cannot be denied in encouraging older persons to build intimate relations with others ([Caputo, 2015](#)). It also helps the older individual to make strong existing bonds with friends and to find new friends. Trait gratitude is considered a positive and important characteristic that can mitigate feelings of loneliness and build a strong social relationship.

In a research study which was conducted by [Von -Faber et al. \(2001\)](#), it was determined that during the aging process, the absence of feelings of loneliness, feeling of gratefulness and a strong circle of social contact are some important factors fostering well-being and emotional expression in older adults. Psychological flexibility role is of crucial

importance in the sense that gratitude plays a crucial role in loneliness. The concept of Psychological flexibility means the ability of an individual to cope with adverse situations with flexibility. Coping with adverse situations with flexibility promotes meaningful engagement and personally valued activities.

[Boman et al. \(2017\)](#) determined that the psychological flexibility of individual decrease with the passage of time or increase in age. Older adults exhibit a low quality of psychological flexibility as compared to adults. To some extent, adults and middle-aged individuals can strengthen psychological flexibility easily as compared to older and aged persons. There is a gap in the role of psychological flexibility in the relationship between loneliness and trait gratitude. There is no or little evidence of the relationship between psychological flexibility and trait gratitude. According to [Fredrickson \(2004\)](#), an increase in psychological flexibility is directly related to gratitude and well-engaged life. Gratitude is considered a skill that enhances life engagement and results in positive emotions and a feeling of satisfaction. It also enhances and promotes the psychological flexibility of individuals ([Hill, 2011](#)). Some limited research studies concluded that feelings of loneliness decrease with psychological flexibility ([Gardiner et al., 2018](#)).

An individual with engagement in life possesses less feeling of loneliness. Engaged life means recognizing and accepting one's own abilities, characteristics and personal values and sharing them with other people. Engaged living results in committed work, completion of work, personal satisfaction and sharing of personal experience ([Trompetter et al., 2013](#)). An engaged living results in the accomplishment of personal life goals. Individuals who are engaged in life have a sense of purpose in life and utilize time to create opportunities. A sense of purpose doesn't vanish with life-span but it remains in older age. An older-aged individual can contribute positively by providing them with meaningful activities in life. This will sustain a sense of relevance in older adults and will also sustain

their social values. Engaged living directly affects the mental, physical, social and emotional health of older persons ([Irving, 2017](#)).

Some previous research studies declared a negative relationship between loneliness and engaged living. The individual deficit in personal values and characteristics for engaged living faces problems in building a relationship with other individuals and consequently, such individuals feel lonely. Individuals with continuous engagement in meaningful business activities have a high level of positive affect and, on the other hand, the individual deficits in meaningful life engagement experience a low level of negative affect. This results in a reduction of the feelings of loneliness ([Ditcheva et al. 2018](#)). According to [Trindade et al. \(2016\)](#), engaged living results in a decreased level of distress and it is clear in the form of a feeling of loneliness. The older individuals held social values dear and these are rooted more in them (Petkus & Wetherell, 2013).

Objectives

- To determine the relationship between trait gratitude and loneliness
- To find the relationship between trait gratitude and engaged living
- To explore the relationship between engaged living and loneliness
- To find the mediating effect of engaged living in the relationship between trait gratitude and loneliness

Hypotheses

- H₁: Trait gratitude has a significant relationship with loneliness
- H₂: Trait gratitude has a significant relationship with an engaged living
- H₃: Engaged living has a significant relationship with loneliness
- H₄: Engaged living mediates the relationship between trait gratitude and loneliness

Methodology

A quantitative research design was used for conducting this research study. This research study was conducted in the rural setup of District Karak. After retirement, different people face a loneliness problem. Some people face social loneliness and some face emotional loneliness. This study aimed to study mitigating loneliness in retiree teachers: meditating role of engaged living. The population of the study was comprised of retiree teachers. The Snowball sampling technique was used for sample selection. A total of 180 retired teachers were selected, keeping in view access to the population. Those adult teachers have selected whose age was more than 60 years and only male retired teachers were selected.

Three variables were used in this study. Trait gratitude is used as a dependent variable, loneliness is treated as a dependent variable and engaged living is used as mediating variable. Data was collected through a survey questionnaire. Three questionnaires were used for collecting data from the selected sample size. The first questionnaire was for trait

gratitude. For trait gratitude, Jans-Beken et al (2015) questionnaire was used. It is comprised of 16 items. A five-point Likert scale was used, ranging from (1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree). The second questionnaire was for engaged living. It also comprised of 16 items and a five-point Likert

scale was used, ranging from (1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree). The third questionnaire was used for loneliness and for this purpose, De Jong Gierveld & Tilburg's (1999) questionnaire was used. This research instrument has two dimensions which are emotional loneliness and social loneliness. It is comprised of 11 items. Data was analysed using SPSS.

Results

To analyze data, a regression analysis statistical test was used. Following were the major findings related to hypotheses.

H1: Trait Gratitude has a Significant Relationship with Loneliness Table

Model Summary

Table 1a

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F
1	.466	.217	.215	96.47

Predictors: (Constant), Trait Gratitude (TG)

Coefficient

Table 1b

Model	Unstandardized coefficient	Standardized coefficient	t	Sig.
	B	Beta		
constant	14.34		15.36	.00
TG	.379	.466	9.822	.00

Independent Variable: Trait Gratitude

Dependent Variable: Loneliness

Data in table 1 indicates a significant relationship between an independent variable (trait gratitude) and a dependent variable (loneliness). R-value is .466 and R² value .217 which shows that independent variable (trait

gratitude) explains 21.7% dependent variable. F statistic value is 96.47 which shows model fitness. In the coefficient table, the β value is .466 which determines that a unit change in our independent variable (trait gratitude) will

bring a positive change in the dependent variable (Loneliness). In the table, the t-value is 9.82 and the p-value is .00 which is less than .05. It indicates that the trait gratitude has a significant relationship with loneliness. Hence our hypothesis H₁ which states that there is a significant relationship between trait gratitude and loneliness as accepted at a 95% confidence

level. Hence, the first condition for Mediation is fulfilled which is that there should be a significant relationship between the independent variable and dependent variable.

H₂: Trait gratitude has a significant relationship with engaged living Model Summary

Table 2a

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F
1	.212	.045	.042	16.32

Predictors: (Constant), Trait Gratitude (TG)

Coefficient

Table 2b

Model	unstandardized coefficient	standardized coefficient	t	sig:
1	B	std. error	Beta	
Constant	19.78	.983		.00
TG	.164	.041	.212	4.04 .00

Independent Variable: Trait Gratitude Dependent Variable: Engaged Living

Table 2 describes the relationship between trait gratitude and engaged living. Engaged living is treated as the dependent variable. Data in the model summary table shows that R-value .212 and R² value .045 which indicates that our independent variable explains 4% of the dependent variable (engaged living). F value is 16.32 which shows model fitness. In the coefficient table, the β value is .212 and the t value 4.04. P-value is .00 which is less than .05 (p < .05). This value determines that there is a

significant relationship between trait gratitude and engaged living. It is also clear that the second assumption for mediation is also met which is that there should be a significant relationship between the independent variable and mediating variable. Our hypothesis H₂ which states a significant relationship between trait gratitude and engaged living is accepted at a 95% confidence level.

H₃: Engaged living has a Significant Relationship with Loneliness

Model Summary

Table 3a

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F
1	.328	.108	.105	42.08

Predictors: (Constant), Engaged Living (EL)

Coefficients

Table 3b

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
1	B	Std. Error	Beta	
Constant	15.27	1.26		12.07 .00

Model	Unstandardized	Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
EL	.345	.053	.328	6.48	.00

Independent Variable: Engaged Living Dependent Variable: Loneliness

Table 3 describes the regression analysis result of engaged living and loneliness. Engaged living is treated as an independent variable and loneliness is treated as a dependent variable in this regression analysis model. R-value is .328 and R^2 value is .108. This R^2 value indicates that our independent variable (engaged living) 10.8% explains the dependent variable (loneliness). F value is 42.08 which shows model fitness. β value is .328 and the t value is 6.48. P-value is .00 which is less than .05. It is clear from these values that there is a significant relationship between engaged living

and loneliness. The third assumption for mediation is also fulfilled, which states that there should be a significant relationship between mediating variable and the dependent variable. Hypothesis H_3 which describes that there is a significant relationship between engaged living and loneliness is accepted at a 95% confidence level.

H4: Engaged Living Mediates Relationship between Trait Gratitude and Loneliness

Model Summary

Table 4a

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F
1	.466	.217	.215	96.47
2	.522	.272	.268	64.94

Coefficient

Table 4b

Model	Unstandardized	Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
1	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	14.34	.934		15.36	.00
TG	.379	0.39	.0466	9.822	.00
2(constant)	9.34	1.32		7.04	.00
TG	.337	.038	.415	5.13	.00
EL	.253	.049	.241	5.13	.00
Independent Variable:	Trait Gratitude (TG)				
Dependent Variable:	Loneliness				
Mediating Variable:	Engaged Living (EL)				

Table 4 indicates the result of mediating effect in the relationship between trait gratitude and loneliness. The result of the model table summary shows a significant difference in data after entering the effect of mediating variable. Before entering mediating variable, the R-value is .466 and the R^2 value is .217. F value is 96.47. When a mediating variable is treated in the model, all these values change. After entering mediating variable, the R-value

changed into .522, R^2 value also changed and the new value was .272. F value changed to 64.94. Changes in these values indicate that mediating variable (engaged living) was significantly mediated. The result of the coefficient table also presents changes in values after entering mediating variable. After entering mediating variable (engaged living), the β value changed to .241 and the t value also changed. P-value is .00 which indicates

that engaged living has a significantly mediated relationship between trait gratitude and loneliness. Our hypothesis H₄ which states that engaged living significantly mediates the relationship between trait gratitude and loneliness of the aged people.

Discussion

This current study examined mediating effect of engaged living in the relationship between trait gratitude and engaged living. A positive and significant relationship was found between trait gratitude (independent variable) and loneliness (dependent variable). This finding was not consistent with the result of the previous study. People who feel less gratitude in everyday life face loneliness (Feng, 2011). Gratitude plays a significant role in increasing happiness, social desirability and life satisfaction. Gratitude works as social benefits for promoting and enhancing social bonds which lead to less loneliness among individuals.

In previous research studies (Bracklin, 2002), gender differences were found to be related to loneliness. It was found that females are more vulnerable to loneliness as compared to males. The reason may be that female easily develops a way of thinking which is connected and depends on the sense of being with others. Loneliness role is of immense importance in the formation and maintenance of social relationships. Loneliness is an unpleasant

emotional experience that result in not having what one's wants. Loneliness is considered as a feeling of unwanted solitude, isolation and emptiness.

This positive association between trait gratitude (independent variable) and loneliness of adult people (dependent variable) endorsed Broaden and Build theory of positive emotion. According to this theory, trait gratitude enhances communication among people and as a result, people come close together (Algoe, 2012). Increased gratitude results in the helpfulness of others and it promotes social relationships among individuals. Hence it is assumed that the trait of gratitude is an important potential psychological resource that works as a catalyst in lessening loneliness in adults.

It was found that there engaged living, fully mediated relationship between trait gratitude (independent variable) and loneliness (dependent variable). This suggests that when adult persons are engaged, they experience less loneliness. Engagement may be social engagement, emotional engagement and peer engagement, all of these work for mitigating the loneliness of adult people. If adult people receive social support and emotional support from family members from social circles, then they can live a happy and prosperous life and they will experience less loneliness.

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