

The Mediating Role of Gratitude in the Link Between Parental Warmth and Subjective Well-being in Youth

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to investigate the mediating role of gratitude in the relationship between perceived parental warmth and subjective well-being among adolescents.

Methods and Materials: A descriptive correlational research design was employed, involving 412 adolescents aged 15–18 years from secondary schools across Georgia. Standardized instruments were used to assess parental warmth (Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire – Warmth/Affection subscale), gratitude (Gratitude Questionnaire–Six-Item Form), and subjective well-being (Satisfaction with Life Scale). Data were analyzed using SPSS-27 for descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation, and AMOS-21 for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Assumptions of normality, linearity, and multicollinearity were confirmed prior to analysis.

Findings: Descriptive analysis indicated relatively high mean scores for parental warmth ($M = 67.42$), gratitude ($M = 34.57$), and subjective well-being ($M = 27.68$). Pearson correlation coefficients revealed significant positive associations between all variables: parental warmth and gratitude ($r = .48, p < .001$), parental warmth and subjective well-being ($r = .41, p < .001$), and gratitude and subjective well-being ($r = .56, p < .001$). The structural model showed good fit indices ($\chi^2/df = 2.08$, CFI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.051). SEM results confirmed that gratitude significantly mediated the relationship between parental warmth and subjective well-being. The direct path from parental warmth to well-being was also significant ($\beta = 0.26, p < .001$), as was the indirect path through gratitude ($\beta = 0.25, p < .001$).

Conclusion: The findings support a robust mediation model, demonstrating that gratitude plays a crucial intermediary role in linking parental warmth to adolescents' subjective well-being. These results underscore the importance of fostering both supportive parenting and gratitude practices to enhance psychological well-being in youth.

Keywords: Parental Warmth; Gratitude; Subjective Well-being; Adolescents.

1. Introduction

Subjective well-being (SWB), broadly defined as individuals' cognitive and affective evaluations of their lives, is a critical indicator of psychological functioning, especially during adolescence—a period marked by developmental transitions and emotional vulnerabilities (Dewi et al., 2021; Disabato, 2022). Increasing attention has been paid to understanding the psychological and environmental factors that promote SWB in youth populations, with gratitude and parental warmth emerging as salient contributors (Arora et al., 2023; Buckingham & Buckingham, 2020).

Parental warmth, characterized by expressions of affection, support, and sensitivity to the child's needs, is a crucial dimension of parenting that influences children's emotional and social development. A warm parenting style fosters a sense of security, self-worth, and emotional regulation, all of which contribute to higher levels of well-being (Lu et al., 2024; Majdi, 2025). Adolescents who perceive their parents as warm and supportive tend to develop a positive worldview and are more likely to experience emotional stability, resilience, and life satisfaction (Rahayu et al., 2020; Semya et al., 2024). In contrast, a lack of parental warmth has been linked to increased psychological distress and lower well-being in youth (Sulistyarini et al., 2022; Yoo, 2020). These findings underscore the formative role of family interactions in shaping adolescent psychological outcomes.

Emerging research has further suggested that gratitude—a tendency to recognize and respond with thankfulness to the benevolence of others—may serve as a psychological mechanism that translates the benefits of positive parenting into enhanced well-being (Disabato, 2022; Nourialeagha et al., 2020). Gratitude, as an emotional and cognitive trait, supports positive social functioning, fosters prosocial behavior, and contributes to subjective well-being by promoting positive reinterpretation and buffering negative affect (Bohlmeijer et al., 2022; Mihara & Nishiyama, 2020). Adolescents high in gratitude report greater happiness, life satisfaction, and lower levels of internalizing symptoms such as depression and anxiety (Cui et al., 2023; Kaur, 2020). Notably, gratitude is not merely a personality disposition but is also shaped by environmental influences, including parental behavior.

The association between gratitude and parenting has been examined in various cultural and developmental contexts. Warm and emotionally responsive parenting has been found

to nurture gratitude by modeling prosocial values and fostering emotional attunement (Arora et al., 2023; Lu et al., 2024). Adolescents who receive warmth and validation from caregivers are more likely to develop a grateful disposition, as they learn to appreciate and internalize the positive actions of others (Halleyda & Japar, 2023; Hasanah et al., 2023). These insights align with the broaden-and-build theory, which posits that positive emotions like gratitude broaden individuals' thought-action repertoires and build enduring personal resources, including psychological well-being (Ade et al., 2022; Bohlmeijer et al., 2022).

Several empirical studies support the proposed mediation model. For example, Li et al. (Li et al., 2023) demonstrated that trait gratitude mediated the relationship between parenting quality and adolescent subjective well-being through pathways involving meaning in life and self-control. Another longitudinal study by Li, Li, and Ding (Li et al., 2025) confirmed that gratitude and prosocial behavior jointly mediated the effect of self-concept on subjective well-being in early adolescence. These findings suggest that gratitude serves as a crucial mechanism linking interpersonal relationships to personal well-being, warranting further exploration across different cultures and populations.

The relevance of this topic becomes even more pronounced when considering the vulnerable subgroups within the youth population. For instance, research has shown that adolescents from fatherless families or orphanages benefit substantially from gratitude-based interventions, as gratitude compensates for the emotional gaps left by absent caregivers (Imaniyah & Kamila, 2022; Loyalia Tisyri Mekar Untung & Ambarwati, 2025). Gratitude-focused training programs have been shown to improve psychological well-being, reduce depressive symptoms, and enhance resilience in such populations (Halleyda & Japar, 2023; Wisnu et al., 2022). These interventions highlight the modifiability of gratitude and its utility as a protective factor in the absence of optimal parenting environments.

Despite these insights, studies specifically examining gratitude as a mediator between parental warmth and subjective well-being in a general youth population remain limited. Most existing research either investigates these variables in isolation or focuses on adult populations (Jovančević & Milićević, 2021; Mihara & Nishiyama, 2020). Moreover, cross-cultural examinations are scarce, particularly in non-Western settings such as Georgia, where cultural values around family, gratitude, and psychological well-being may manifest differently. Understanding these

constructs in a culturally sensitive manner is essential, given that expressions of gratitude and parental warmth are deeply embedded in social norms and expectations (Dewi et al., 2021; Taruna et al., 2022).

Furthermore, subjective well-being itself is a multidimensional construct that incorporates life satisfaction, the presence of positive affect, and the absence of negative affect (Bohlmeijer et al., 2022; Disabato, 2022). It is a vital developmental outcome, influencing academic performance, social integration, and future mental health trajectories (Buckingham & Buckingham, 2020; Cui et al., 2023). While SWB has historically been underexplored in adolescence due to assumptions about developmental instability, contemporary evidence supports the stability and significance of well-being indicators even in early and middle adolescence (Hasanah et al., 2023; Kaur, 2020). This study aims to explore the mediating role of gratitude in the relationship between perceived parental warmth and subjective well-being among adolescents, grounding the investigation in both empirical evidence and theoretical perspectives.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a descriptive correlational design to examine the mediating role of gratitude in the relationship between parental warmth and subjective well-being among youth. The sample consisted of 412 adolescents (aged 15–18 years) selected based on the Morgan and Krejcie sample size determination table for a large population. Participants were recruited from secondary schools across various regions of Georgia through stratified random sampling to ensure representation across gender, age, and socioeconomic background. Inclusion criteria required that participants be enrolled in school and provide informed consent, while exclusion criteria included diagnosed psychiatric disorders and incomplete responses to key instruments.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Subjective Well-Being

Subjective well-being was measured using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin in 1985. This widely used scale comprises 5 items that assess global cognitive judgments of one's life satisfaction, a key component of subjective well-being. Respondents rate each item on a 7-

point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), with total scores ranging from 5 to 35. Higher scores indicate greater life satisfaction. The SWLS has demonstrated strong psychometric properties, with Cronbach's alpha typically exceeding 0.80 across diverse populations. Its validity has been established through significant correlations with other well-being measures, including positive affect and mental health indices in adolescent samples.

2.2.2. Parental Warmth

Parental warmth was assessed using the Warmth/Affection subscale of the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ), originally developed by Rohner, Saavedra, and Granum in 1978. This subscale includes 20 items designed to measure the perceived degree of parental warmth, affection, and love experienced by the child or adolescent. Responses are rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (almost never true) to 4 (almost always true), with higher scores reflecting higher perceived parental warmth. The PARQ has been extensively validated across cultures and age groups, with internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha) for the warmth subscale often exceeding 0.90. Its construct and convergent validity have been confirmed in studies linking parental warmth to emotional adjustment and psychological functioning.

2.2.3. Gratitude

Gratitude was measured using the Gratitude Questionnaire – Six Item Form (GQ-6), developed by McCullough, Emmons, and Tsang in 2002. This brief yet reliable instrument includes 6 items that assess the tendency to experience gratitude in daily life. Respondents indicate their agreement with each statement on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), with total scores ranging from 6 to 42. Higher scores represent a greater disposition toward gratitude. The GQ-6 has been shown to possess good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha values typically around 0.82) and strong validity, demonstrated through positive associations with psychological well-being, life satisfaction, and prosocial behavior across adolescent and adult populations.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 27 and AMOS version 21. Descriptive statistics (mean,

standard deviation, frequency, and percentage) were used to summarize the demographic variables and key study constructs. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to assess the bivariate relationships between parental warmth, gratitude, and subjective well-being. In addition, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to test the hypothesized mediational model, including direct and indirect paths, with model fit assessed using indices such as the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Chi-square/df ratio. Significance was determined at the 0.05 level.

3. Findings and Results

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Main Variables (N = 412)

Variable	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Parental Warmth	67.42	9.36
Gratitude	34.57	5.14
Subjective Well-being	27.68	4.83

As shown in Table 1, the participants reported relatively high levels of parental warmth ($M = 67.42$, $SD = 9.36$) and gratitude ($M = 34.57$, $SD = 5.14$). The mean score for subjective well-being was also moderately high ($M = 27.68$, $SD = 4.83$). These findings suggest that adolescents perceived strong parental support and reported a generally positive emotional state.

Prior to conducting parametric analyses, assumptions were tested and confirmed. Normality was assessed using skewness and kurtosis values for each variable, all of which fell within the acceptable range of -1 to $+1$ (e.g., gratitude

Among the 412 participants, 222 (53.9%) identified as female and 190 (46.1%) as male. Regarding age, 104 participants (25.2%) were 15 years old, 115 (27.9%) were 16 years old, 99 (24.0%) were 17 years old, and 94 (22.8%) were 18 years old. In terms of socioeconomic status, 139 participants (33.7%) reported low income, 187 (45.4%) reported middle income, and 86 (20.9%) reported high income. Additionally, 236 participants (57.3%) resided in urban areas, while 176 (42.7%) were from rural regions. These demographic distributions reflect the diverse backgrounds of youth sampled from different regions of Georgia.

skewness = -0.32 , kurtosis = 0.47 ; subjective well-being skewness = -0.11 , kurtosis = -0.28). Linearity and homoscedasticity were examined through scatterplots, revealing linear and evenly distributed residuals. Multicollinearity was ruled out, as variance inflation factor (VIF) values were below 2.0 for all predictors. Additionally, the data showed no significant outliers based on Mahalanobis distance at $p < .001$. These results confirmed that the assumptions necessary for Pearson correlation and SEM were adequately met.

Table 2

Pearson Correlations Between Main Variables

Variables	1	2	3
1. Parental Warmth	—		
2. Gratitude	.48** ($p < .001$)	—	
3. Subjective Well-being	.41** ($p < .001$)	.56** ($p < .001$)	—

Table 2 indicates significant positive correlations between all pairs of variables. Parental warmth correlated moderately with gratitude ($r = .48$, $p < .001$) and subjective

well-being ($r = .41$, $p < .001$). Gratitude also showed a strong correlation with subjective well-being ($r = .56$, $p < .001$), supporting the proposed mediating relationship.

Table 3*Model Fit Indices for the Structural Equation Model*

Fit Index	Value	Recommended Threshold
χ^2	126.74	—
df	61	—
χ^2/df	2.08	< 3.00
GFI	0.96	≥ 0.90
AGFI	0.94	≥ 0.90
CFI	0.97	≥ 0.95
TLI	0.96	≥ 0.95
RMSEA	0.051	≤ 0.08

As presented in Table 3, the structural equation model demonstrated a good fit to the data. The chi-square/df ratio was acceptable ($\chi^2/\text{df} = 2.08$), and all other fit indices exceeded the recommended thresholds (GFI = 0.96, CFI =

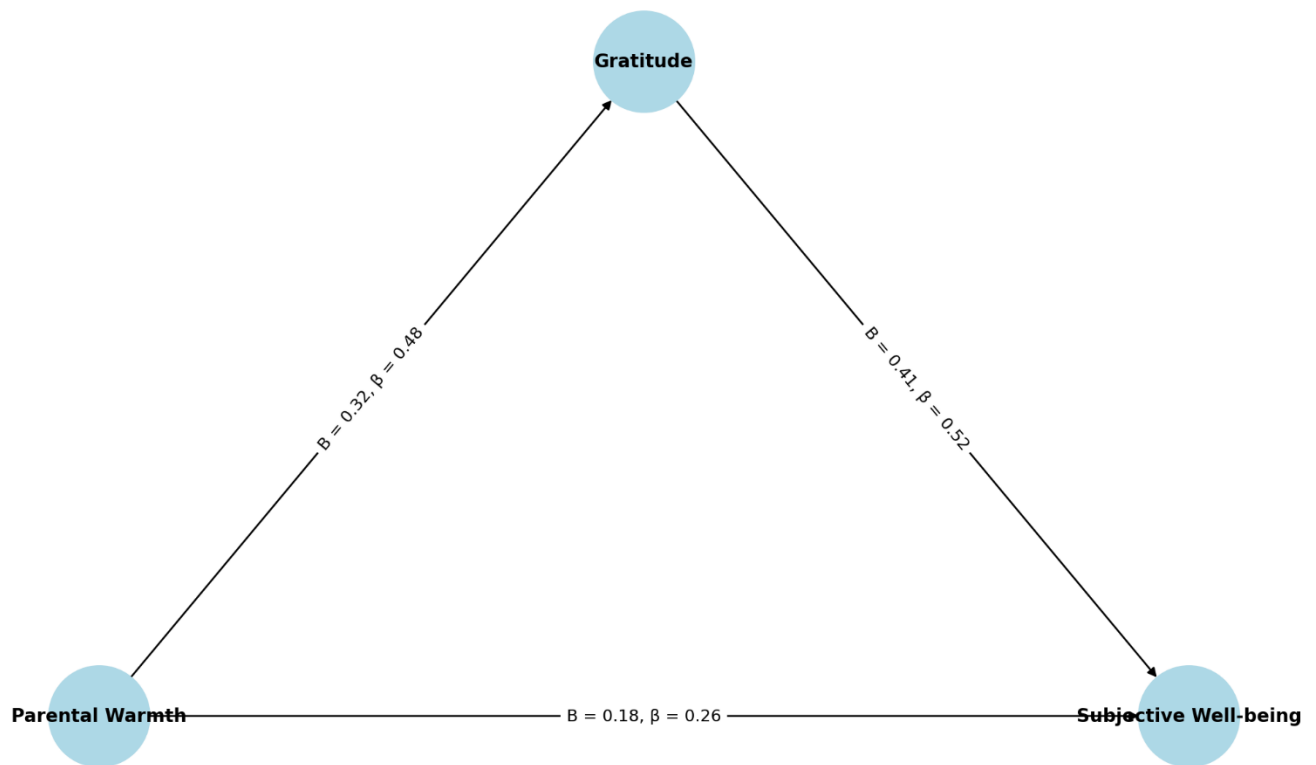
0.97, TLI = 0.96). The RMSEA value of 0.051 further supports the adequacy of model fit, indicating a well-fitting mediational model.

Table 4*Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects Between Variables in the Structural Model*

Path	B	S.E.	β	p
Parental Warmth → Gratitude	0.32	0.04	0.48	< .001
Gratitude → Subjective Well-being	0.41	0.05	0.52	< .001
Parental Warmth → Subjective Well-being (Direct)	0.18	0.05	0.26	< .001
Parental Warmth → Subjective Well-being (Indirect via Gratitude)	0.13	0.03	0.25	< .001
Parental Warmth → Subjective Well-being (Total)	0.31	—	0.51	< .001

As displayed in Table 4, the direct path from parental warmth to gratitude was significant ($\beta = 0.48$, $p < .001$), as was the path from gratitude to subjective well-being ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < .001$). Parental warmth also had a direct effect on subjective well-being ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < .001$). The indirect effect

through gratitude ($\beta = 0.25$, $p < .001$) was significant, and the total effect ($\beta = 0.51$, $p < .001$) confirmed the strength of the overall relationship. These results support the hypothesized mediating role of gratitude.

Figure 1*Structural Model of The Study*

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The primary aim of this study was to examine the mediating role of gratitude in the relationship between parental warmth and subjective well-being among adolescents. The results from Pearson correlation analysis revealed that all three variables—parental warmth, gratitude, and subjective well-being—were significantly and positively correlated. Furthermore, the structural equation modeling (SEM) results confirmed that gratitude significantly mediates the effect of parental warmth on subjective well-being. These findings suggest that parental warmth not only has a direct impact on adolescents' well-being but also operates indirectly through fostering gratitude.

The significant direct effect of parental warmth on subjective well-being is consistent with a wide body of literature emphasizing the role of supportive and affectionate parenting in promoting psychological wellness among youth. Adolescents who perceive their parents as warm and caring tend to report greater emotional security, self-esteem, and life satisfaction (Lu et al., 2024; Majdi, 2025). Warmth in parenting fosters an environment in which adolescents

feel valued, safe, and emotionally regulated, which in turn contributes to the development of well-being. This finding corroborates the results of prior research showing that parental warmth is a critical antecedent of both positive emotional outcomes and psychological resilience in adolescents (Semya et al., 2024; Sulistyarini et al., 2022).

Moreover, the findings highlight gratitude as a key mediating variable. The model showed that parental warmth positively influences gratitude, which subsequently enhances subjective well-being. This supports existing theoretical models, such as the broaden-and-build theory, which suggests that positive interpersonal experiences can build lasting emotional resources like gratitude, which then enhance well-being (Bohlmeijer et al., 2022; Buckingham & Buckingham, 2020). In this context, gratitude serves as a psychological bridge between external emotional support (from parents) and internal emotional benefits (such as happiness and life satisfaction). Similar conclusions were drawn by Li et al., who found that trait gratitude played a serial mediating role between parenting and adolescent well-being through self-control and meaning in life (Li et al., 2023).

The significant path from parental warmth to gratitude also aligns with studies suggesting that emotionally responsive parenting nurtures gratitude by modeling prosocial values and emotional attunement. For instance, Cui et al. showed that parental support, alongside internal locus of control, led to greater gratitude, which in turn promoted academic and emotional engagement (Cui et al., 2023). Likewise, the findings of Halleyda and Japar indicated that gratitude-based training programs for adolescents with single parents improved their emotional well-being, highlighting the influence of parental figures on gratitude development (Halleyda & Japar, 2023). Thus, the present results reinforce the notion that gratitude is not merely a personal trait but is shaped and nurtured by early relational experiences.

The final component of the model—gratitude's predictive role in subjective well-being—further confirms the robust relationship established in prior studies. Adolescents with higher levels of gratitude tend to exhibit more positive affect, fewer depressive symptoms, and a greater sense of meaning in life (Ade et al., 2022; Arora et al., 2023). For example, Jovančević and Miličević found that gratitude significantly predicted subjective well-being in adolescents, even after controlling for loneliness, suggesting its independent contribution to psychological health (Jovančević & Miličević, 2021). These findings are echoed in studies that explored gratitude in vulnerable populations. For instance, Imaniyah and Kamila observed that even adolescents in orphanages experienced increases in well-being when gratitude journaling was introduced as an intervention (Imaniyah & Kamila, 2022). Collectively, the current findings confirm that gratitude is a reliable pathway through which adolescents can enhance their emotional and psychological states.

Importantly, this study expands the literature by examining this mediation model in a non-Western cultural context, specifically among adolescents in Georgia. While most existing models of gratitude and well-being are based on Western samples, the current findings validate the universality of these constructs and their interrelations. Adolescents from collectivist cultures, where family bonds and respect for elders are emphasized, may particularly benefit from parental warmth in fostering gratitude (Dewi et al., 2021; Taruna et al., 2022). Moreover, as highlighted by Yoo, gratitude among Korean adolescents was strongly associated with emotional well-being, indicating that this construct transcends cultural boundaries in its impact on youth mental health (Yoo, 2020).

The mediating role of gratitude may also explain why some adolescents demonstrate high well-being despite challenging circumstances. Research by Loyalia Tisyri Mekar Untung and Ambarwati on fatherless youth revealed that gratitude interventions helped restore emotional balance and improved subjective well-being (Loyalia Tisyri Mekar Untung & Ambarwati, 2025). Similarly, Rahayu et al. demonstrated that gratitude and hope significantly influenced well-being among fishermen living in economically unstable conditions (Rahayu et al., 2020). These findings, together with the present results, suggest that gratitude acts as a form of emotional resilience, enabling youth to maintain a sense of well-being even in less favorable environments.

In terms of developmental significance, adolescence is a crucial period for emotional growth, identity formation, and the establishment of long-term mental health patterns. Given the emotional volatility of this age, the presence of stable interpersonal supports and internal strengths becomes vital. Kaur's work on gratitude in adolescents indicated that those who regularly practice gratitude not only reported higher life satisfaction but also demonstrated improved interpersonal relationships and academic outcomes (Kaur, 2020). Furthermore, Mihara and Nishiyama found that gratitude and resilience collectively predicted subjective well-being, indicating a synergistic effect between emotional traits in promoting adolescent health (Mihara & Nishiyama, 2020). These developmental trajectories are important, as they may predict future adult outcomes such as job satisfaction, relationship quality, and psychological resilience.

The broader implications of this study lie in the potential for educational and counseling interventions that leverage gratitude as a mechanism for enhancing adolescent well-being. Arora et al. emphasized that cultivating gratitude and optimism through school-based programs led to significant improvements in students' mental health and emotional regulation (Arora et al., 2023). Similarly, Sulistyarini et al. found that programs integrating religiosity, optimism, and gratitude improved well-being among young adults with chronic health conditions (Sulistyarini et al., 2022). These interventions show promise for application in broader youth populations, including those in general school settings and at-risk groups.

Taken together, the results of this study confirm that parental warmth significantly contributes to adolescent subjective well-being both directly and indirectly through gratitude. These findings provide a strong empirical foundation for integrating gratitude-promoting strategies

into parenting programs, school curricula, and therapeutic interventions aimed at enhancing adolescent mental health. The use of gratitude as a mediating construct offers a practical and scalable approach to mental health promotion in diverse sociocultural contexts.

5. Limitations & Suggestions

Despite its valuable contributions, this study is not without limitations. First, the cross-sectional design limits causal inferences. While the mediation model suggests a directional relationship from parental warmth to gratitude and then to subjective well-being, the temporal order cannot be definitively established. Longitudinal studies are necessary to confirm the stability and causality of these associations. Second, all variables were measured through self-report instruments, which may introduce biases such as social desirability or subjective interpretation of items. Future research should consider using multi-informant approaches, including parental or teacher reports, to triangulate findings. Third, the cultural specificity of the Georgian context, although valuable for addressing research gaps, may limit the generalizability of results to other cultural or socioeconomic groups.

Future research should prioritize longitudinal and experimental designs to examine the developmental progression of gratitude and its long-term effects on well-being. Studies could also explore potential moderators of the mediation model, such as gender, socioeconomic status, or cultural values related to family roles and emotional expression. Furthermore, intervention studies that aim to foster gratitude through school curricula, digital applications, or counseling sessions could provide practical evidence on how to enhance well-being at scale. Investigating the interplay of gratitude with other psychological constructs—such as resilience, hope, or self-compassion—could offer more comprehensive insights into youth emotional development.

The findings underscore the need for parenting workshops and psychoeducational programs that encourage warm and responsive parenting styles. Schools and counseling centers should integrate gratitude-focused practices, such as gratitude journaling, reflection exercises, or community appreciation projects, into their mental health programs. Educators and counselors are also encouraged to model gratitude in interactions with students, creating a culture that values appreciation and emotional connection. In contexts where parental warmth may be lacking due to

familial stressors, alternative sources of emotional support—such as mentors or peer programs—should be emphasized to maintain the development of gratitude and overall well-being.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this article.

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