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**GRATITUDE AS AN INTERPERSONAL RESOURCE:  
EXPERIENCE AND EXPRESSION OF GRATITUDE IN RUSSIA**

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**Abstract**

Previous research has shown that experience and expression of gratitude contributes to psychological wellbeing as well as to interpersonal relations. Research on gratitude in Russia confirms that it is related to higher self-esteem and resilience and lower depression. However, research in Russia has shown that participants experience gratitude mostly for help in difficult life circumstances, which reduces the role of gratitude as an interpersonal resource. The purpose of the recent study was to investigate experience and expression of gratitude among youth in Russia. 90 students (35.6% male, 63.3% female, 1 participant did not indicate his/her sex) of Saint-Petersburg State Transport University aged 17-23 (M=18.9) participated in the study. Participants were asked to describe the situation, when they experienced deep gratitude and respond how did they express it. Results of the study indicated that participants experienced gratitude not only in difficult life circumstances, life choices (46.7%), but also in everyday life, when somebody (mostly close others) did something important for them (34.4%). Experience of deep gratitude was not limited to situations, participants experienced deep gratitude towards close others, mostly parents, for help and support throughout life (32.1%). Participants expressed gratitude verbally (51.1%), by reciprocal help in difficult life circumstances or gift (30%), indirectly by their attachment to the person and their mood (28.9%), by expressing connectiveness nonverbally (18.9%)

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## 1. Introduction

Rapid social changes and a high level of uncertainty are the key characteristics of modern society. Therefore, there is an increasing need in intrapersonal and interpersonal resources. Gratitude is considered by researchers (Algoe et al., 2020; Alkozei et al., 2018; Kaniuka et al., 2021; O'Connell et al., 2018) as a valuable intrapersonal and interpersonal resource, especially in difficult life circumstances. Based on the empirical research review, Alkozei et al. (2018) concludes that gratitude is related to better physical health, psychological wellbeing, and interpersonal relations, contributes to reduction of psychopathology symptoms. Research has shown that gratitude contributes to the experience of positive emotions (Balgui, 2019) and cognitive reappraisal, which reduces symptoms of depression (Lambert et al., 2012). The role of gratitude as intrapersonal resource in Russia is confirmed by research, which was carried out by Nartova-Bochar et al. (2017). Research has shown that gratitude is related to reduce symptoms of depression, higher self-esteem, and personal resilience (Nartova-Bochar & Kislica, 2017). The strongest negative correlation was found between gratitude and the experience of positive emotion, which indicates that gratitude contributes to positive emotions experience in Russia (Nartova-Bochar & Kislica, 2017). Relation between gratitude and resilience explains the role of gratitude as a resource in difficult life circumstances. Gratitude contributed to psychological and social wellbeing of French participant quarantined during COVID-19 pandemic (Pellerin & Raufaste, 2020). Grateful students were less prone to suicide behavior, alcohol, and drug consumption (Kaniuka et al., 2021).

Gratitude is defined by Emmons and McCullough (2003) as a moral feeling, which indicates its role as an interpersonal resource. Oishi et al. (2019) have shown that gratitude contributes to indebtedness. Cultural differences were found: this pattern is stronger in collectivistic South Korean culture context compared to individualistic USA culture context (Oishi et al., 2019). Research has shown that gratitude has positive interpersonal outcomes. Grateful students in USA reported more perceived social support (Kaniuka et al., 2021). A series of studies conducted by Algoe et al. (2020) in Ireland has shown that gratitude contributes to the construction of interpersonal relations within a social group (family, group of friends, work team). Witnessing a member of the group expressed gratitude towards another member of the group leading to more witness's self-disclosure toward grateful persons and more affiliation toward both communicators (Algoe et al., 2020). O'Connell et al. (2018) have shown that keeping a gratitude journal contributed to increased perceived friendship quality immediately after the end of the study and to increased gratitude, life satisfaction and perceived friendship quality and in one month follow-up.

Gratitude in interpersonal communication can be expressed in different ways. Mendonça et al. (2018) conducted a cross-cultural study focused on how 7–14-year-old children and adolescence expressed gratitude for their dream's fulfillment. Children and adolescence in Russia most often expressed connective gratitude (52%), less often verbally (31-39%), and most rarely through concrete action (14%) (Mendonça et al., 2018). Verbal gratitude also can be different. Weiss et al. (2020) have shown that if the gift was unexpected for the giver, he or she expressed gratitude by praising the giver. If the gift made the giver feel happy, he or she expressed gratitude by talking about the benefits, the gift would bring to him or her. Algoe et al. (2016) have shown that expressing gratitude through praising the partner contributed to his or her

experience of happiness and love. Also, a grateful partner is perceived as more responsive (Algoe et al., 2016).

Many studies are focused on experience and expression of gratitude in everyday life (Algoe et al., 2020; O'Connell et al., 2018; Weiss et al., 2020). However, Polyushkevich (2017) has found that experience of gratitude in Russia was related mostly to difficult life circumstances. Many participants responded that they had nothing to be grateful for to their close others. The findings suggest limited capacity for gratitude as an interpersonal resource in Russia. At the same time, a pilot study (Kislica, 2016) has shown that participants experienced gratitude not only in difficult life circumstances, but also gratitude in long-term relations for the presence of close others in their life, gratitude for gifts.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Research has shown that gratitude is an important interpersonal and intrapersonal resource in many cultural contexts (Algoe et al., 2020; Balgiu, 2019; Kaniuka et al., 2021). The role of gratitude as an intrapersonal resource in Russian cultural context is confirmed by research findings (Nartova-Bochaver & Kislica, 2017). Research findings on gratitude as an interpersonal resource are controversial.

## **3. Research Questions**

Is experience of gratitude in Russia limited to difficult life circumstances or participants experience gratitude in long-term relations, in everyday life? How do the youth express gratitude?

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to investigate experience and expression of deep gratitude in youth in Russia.

## **5. Research Methods**

### **5.1. Method**

Participants were asked to recall and describe a situation when they experienced deep gratitude. Participants' answers were coded as gratitude in difficult life circumstances and life choices, everyday life gratitude, gratitude in long term relations. After describing the situation participants answered the question "Did you expressed gratitude? If so, how?" Participants' answers were coded as verbal gratitude, nonverbal connective gratitude, indirect gratitude through affiliation and participants' mood, reciprocal gratitude (help in difficult life circumstances or a gift).

### **5.2. Participants**

90 full time students of Emperor Alexander I Saint-Petersburg State Transport University, Saint-Petersburg, Russia (63.3% female, 35.6% male, 1 participant did not indicate his/her sex) aged from 17 to 23 (M=18.9) participated in the study.

## 6. Findings

Results of coding participants' descriptions of deep gratitude experience are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Experience of deep gratitude

	% participants' answers
Difficult life circumstances and life choice	46.7%
Gratitude in long term relations	32.1%
Everyday gratitude for help and attention	34.4%

Difficult life circumstances were related to participants' health and life threat ("my mother was with me 24/7, when I was in a serious car accident") as well as to social psychological and psychological difficulties. Participants were grateful for help and support in situations which were important for them, when they felt anxious, nervous (exams, university entrance) ("my friend helped me to cope with my emotions caused by exams and life as a whole"). This happened in situations of social rejection and perceived hopelessness, experiencing loss ("I am grateful to my brother, who helped me find a way out of a situation where there seemed to be no way out"). Participants were grateful for active support as well as for emotional support. Participants reported that they experience gratitude for help and support in a life choice situation (profession and university choice). Some students are grateful to their parents because they had supported their choice and other students are grateful for their parents because they helped them to make this choice and gave money, that allowed them to receive education in their chosen field of study.

Everyday life gratitude is related to participants' wishes fulfilment, help in everyday life, attention to the participant (informal and sincere birthday wishes). Participants experienced gratitude in everyday life for help or support, that was important for them, especially if it was unexpected or due to hardship or inconvenience for the giver. ("My granny taught me to ride a bike. I was incredibly grateful to my granny"; "I needed a computer for work. My father helped me at my request on the same day"; "My friend came with me to the dentist, contrary to her plans, as I am scared alone"). Participants experience deep gratitude towards close others for their involvement in their lives, help, support, understanding, patience, forgiveness throughout life ("I am grateful for my parents: they do for me the most important things, that others will not do"; "I feel deep gratitude to my parents because they care of my future, they give me opportunity to receive an education"; "I am grateful to my friends for support throughout life"; "I am grateful to my parents for understanding and care"; "I am grateful to my mother for forgiving my antics").

The frequency of coded forms of gratitude expression (% of participants) is described in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Expression of deep gratitude

Gratitude expression	% of participants' answers
Verbal gratitude.	51.1%
Nonverbal connective gratitude.	18.9%
Indirect gratitude though affiliation and participants' mood.	28.9%
Reciprocal gratitude (help or gift).	30%

Reciprocal gratitude may be expressed as a gift in short-term relations or help in difficult life circumstances or throughout life and taking care in long-term relations (“I try to be for these people a good, reliable friend who will help them in any situation”; “I cook for them”). Verbal gratitude may include expression of affiliation toward close other (“Thank you very much! I love you”). Nonverbal gratitude is expression of affiliation through kisses, hugs. Indirect gratitude means absence of direct gratitude (verbal as well as non-verbal gratitude expression). Indirect gratitude is expressed by participants’ mood, their affiliation towards close others. Indirect gratitude is related by participants to understanding without words (“I was very much grateful to her. But I do not remember thanking her very much. She already knew how important her presence was to me”).

## 7. Conclusion

Results have shown that difficult life circumstances are the most often described situations when participants experience deep gratitude. However, experience of gratitude among youth is not limited to difficult life circumstances. Even though participants were asked about situations when they had experienced deep gratitude, roughly a third percent of participants wrote about their gratitude towards close others for their involvement in their lives, support, help, acceptance, coping jointly with difficult periods in participants’ life. The recipients of gratitude in long-term relations were almost exclusively parents as close others with whom the relationship lasted a lifetime and were the most stable and the deepest. Also, participants experienced gratitude in everyday life for help, gifts and attention to them, which indicates that gratitude is an important interpersonal resource not only in difficult life circumstances, but also in everyday life.

Participants experienced gratitude mostly to their close others, especially to their parents. While gratitude towards friends was more situation-related. Gratitude towards parents was related not only to current situations, but also to lifetime involvement in their life, their help and support at various stages of life.

The most frequent form of gratitude expression was verbal. Sometimes verbal gratitude included also expressing affiliation towards close others. Non-verbal gratitude was connective gratitude, expression of affiliation toward close others by non-verbal behaviour. Absence of direct gratitude was related by some participants to emotional intimacy, understanding without words. Some participants responded that they were uncomfortable to express gratitude, they preferred to do something good in return. Reciprocal gratitude in short-term relations was expressed as a gift. Reciprocal gratitude in long-term relations often was deferred, related to difficult situational in close-others life.

The study has shown that gratitude is a valuable interpersonal resource in long-term relations with close others, especially in relationship with parents. Participants experience gratitude not only in difficult life circumstances, but also in everyday life and long-term relations.

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