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## **Short Communication**

# Study of Gratitude and Intolerance of Ambiguity in Environmental Context

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### **Abstract**

Life of the people is multispectacular and full of multitasking. The environmental conditions may prove to be facilitating or inhibiting depending upon the interpersonal and intra-personal factors. Rising level of mental unrest and negative affect owe to many such factors and physical environment is one of these. Shrinking physical space and increasingly crowded situations and noise in the towns and cities affect the people in different ways and determine their cognitions and emotions and vice-versa. A study was conducted on office goers who daily face the traffic jam situation (Group-1) while going to their offices and on the office goers who didn't have to face traffic jams (Group-2). The feeling of gratitude and intolerance of ambiguity was studied of such 130 (N 65 in each group) office goers. Significance of difference between means on the variable of Intolerance of ambiguity was found ( $p < .01$ ) between the two groups. The results also revealed the significant negative relationship between gratitude and intolerance of ambiguity.

Keywords : Gratitude, Intolerance of ambiguity.

### **Introduction**

Gratitude has been defined in social psychology as a "moral" affect or emotion (McCullough *et al.* 2001) that encourages pro-social behavior in both the party giving and the party receiving thanks. The word gratitude originates from the Latin word *gratus*, meaning "thankfulness, appreciation of kindness." Gratitude has been categorized and conceptualized as an attitude, moral virtue, emotion, personality trait, feeling, motive and coping device. A Gratitude, the state or feeling of being thankful, is an almost universal concept among world cultures. In fact, nearly all of the world's spiritual traditions emphasize the importance of giving thanks to benefactors, supernatural or otherwise (Emmons and Crumpler, 2000). Robert Emmons, a leader in the field of gratitude research, defines gratitude as the feeling that occurs when a person attributes a benefit they have received to another (Emmons and McCullough, 2004). Feeling grateful has a number of benefits. Feelings of gratitude are associated

with less frequent negative emotions and more frequent positive emotions such as feeling energized, alert, and enthusiastic (McCullough *et al.*, 2002). Beyond emotions, there is evidence that gratitude is associated with pleasant physical sensations, as well. Algoe and Haidt (2009) found that people experienced pleasant muscle relaxation when recalling situations in which they'd felt grateful. It is apparent that the mere act of giving thanks can have remarkable impact on a person's well-being.

Gratitude is deeply embedded in most religious traditions. Studies show that feelings of gratitude are among the more commonly experienced positive emotions, making us feel happy, contented, and joyful (Bono *et al.*, 2004; Emmons and McCullough *et al.*, 2004). Gratitude can either be expressed in simply polite form like 'thank you' in day to day life or it can be a sense of appreciation and thankfulness for life itself. McCullough *et al.*, (2001) define gratitude as moral affect as both the origins and consequences of gratitude are oriented toward the well being of another person. The findings (Wood *et al.*, 2008) suggest that grateful people interpret events in a unique way, and this interpretation style might account for the benefits extracted from gift giving experiences.

Emmons and McCullough (2003) in their study found that students in the grateful condition reported significantly greater life satisfaction, greater optimism for the upcoming week, fewer physical symptoms, and, perhaps most surprisingly, exercised significantly more than students in either the events condition or the hassles condition. Thus, while being grateful caused students to assess their lives as more satisfying and made them more optimistic about their futures, it didn't change the overall emotional tone of their daily lives.

### **Intolerance of ambiguity**

Intolerance of ambiguity may be regarded as a general personality disposition which makes an individual incapable to tolerate or to cope with ambiguous or unstructured objects or events. It is related to cognitive and motivational functioning of the individual. Milton (1957) reported that intolerance of ambiguity refers to the tendency to respond to inexperienced and unstructured stimuli with a subjectively structured response set. Intolerant individuals dichotomize the world and the things appear before them either all good or bad. They are the people who find it difficult to tolerate ambiguities, inconsistencies and surprises. They are close to new informations which would increase the multiplexity of cognitive system. They are also found to be more conventional, cautious and ordinary rather than unconventional, daring and individualistic (Budner, 1962).

### **Materials and Method**

The study was conducted on a sample of 130 office goers of age ranging between 32 to 50 years. Group-1 (N=65) consisted of those office goers who faced the hassles of traffic jams daily on their way to office and the Group-2 (N=65) consisted of those office goers who did not have to face such vehicular jam conditions due to the fact that either they were residing near their office locations or in the institutional campuses. The sample was selected from cities of Haryana.

Tools applied for present study are The Gratitude Questionnaire (McCullough *et al.*, 2001) and Intolerance of ambiguity scale (Sarin, 1985).

Procedure: The study was conducted on office goers facing two different types of environmental conditions in their routine life. The subjects showed their interest to cooperate in this study. The gratitude scale and intolerance of ambiguity scale were administered on the subjects of both the groups. The scores were analyzed by applying t-test and Pearson product movement method of correlation.

**Results and Discussion**

The results shown in Table 1 depict that there are significant ( $p < 0.01$ ) difference in gratitude between the subjects of Group 1 and Group 2. Subjects exposed to routine traffic jam situation were comparatively less grateful than the Group 2 subjects who did not have to face that hassle in their daily routine. A noisy environment has been reported to lead to greater arrest rate, a decreased likelihood of caring for the surroundings and to increased truancy for a group of apartment dwellers (Damon,1977); and it has led to less informal interaction among neighbors (Appleyard and Lintell,1972). Siegel and Steele (1979) and Siegel (1980) reported that noise often leads to premature and more extreme responses (*i.e* to a judgment with narrowed focus and extreme results) and leads to dislike.

On the variable of Intolerance of ambiguity too the difference between the two groups has been found to be significant at .01 level. It can be inferred that daily hassles of traffic jams cause disturbance and hamper the cognitive-emotional efficiency by virtue of stress caused by noise and crowding in traffic jam. Ward and Suedfeld (1973) reported that noisy environments lead to more tension and uncertainty and to talking faster.

Table-1 :Significance of difference between means on Gratitude and Intolerance of ambiguity

Variables	Groups	N	Mean	SD	t
Gratitude	1	65	24.12	8.28	*2.74
	2	65	28.08	8.18	
Intolerance of ambiguity	1	65	78.84	16.17	*12.81
	2	65	42.12	16.49	

\* Significant at 0.01 level

Results of correlation indicate the negative relationship ( $r = -0.16$ ; here positive correlation implies negative relationship due to different scoring pattern of two scales)) between gratitude and intolerance of ambiguity which is significant at .05 level. Findings of the study report that higher feeling of gratitude is associated with lesser level of intolerance of ambiguity *i.e* higher level of tolerance of ambiguity. It can be inferred that people with higher feeling of gratitude tend to see the good side of life and thus become less stressful resulting into more relaxed state of mind, clarity, unambiguity and alertness. Findings by McCullough *et al.*, ( 2002) also report that feelings of gratitude are associated with less frequent negative emotions and more frequent positive emotions such as feeling energized, alert, and enthusiastic (McCullough *et al.*, 2002). Beyond emotions, there is evidence that gratitude is

associated with pleasant physical sensations, as well. Algoe and Haidt (2009) found that people experienced pleasant muscle relaxation when recalling situations in which they'd felt grateful. It is apparent that the mere act of giving thanks can have remarkable impact on a person's well-being.

## Conclusion

It can be concluded on the basis of the results that traffic jam situations cause noise and crowding which is a form of unpleasant environment. Unpleasant physical environment create feeling of irritation, aggression and negative affectivity resulting into confusions and deficient problem solving and decision making ability . In the state of negative emotions and blurred cognitions people are less likely to be appreciative and thankful and feel the difficulty to face any ambiguous situation by displaying decreased level of tolerance.

*Authors' contributions: Dr Jyotsana, (Associate Professor and Chairperson) contributed in experiment design, performance, editing and also corresponding authors of the manuscript.*

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