

Gratitude as a Contributing Factor to Mental Health in Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

This integrative review synthesizes findings from ten empirical studies published between 2015 and 2025 that examine the role of gratitude as a protective factor for adolescents' mental health. Using thematic analysis supported by a structured coding manual and thematic mapping, the review identifies consistent evidence that gratitude reduces stress, anxiety, and depression while enhancing life satisfaction, resilience, and psychological well-being. These cross-cultural findings extend the Broaden-and-Build Theory within collectivist contexts and highlight gratitude as an adaptive emotional resource that strengthens social connectedness and positive psychological functioning. Practically, gratitude-based interventions such as gratitude journaling and structured reflective practices offer a simple, low-cost, and effective preventive strategy to support youth mental health within educational settings.

Keywords : Gratitude, Mental Health, Adolescents, Positive Psychology

INTRODUCTION

A national survey conducted in Indonesia (Mada, 2023) reported that approximately one in three adolescents experienced mental health problems in the past 12 months, affecting around 15.5 million youths. (Akin et al., 2025) showed that disturbances in personality structure are significantly associated with adolescent mental health problems, including impairments in attachment, identity, interpersonal functioning, and self-regulation, with immature defense mechanisms linked to personality pathology and internalizing symptoms. For example, an overly dominant id may trigger impulsive behavior, whereas an excessively rigid superego may generate guilt and anxiety. According to (Beck et al., 2024), mental health is closely related to how individuals interpret and respond to life experiences. Unrealistic negative thoughts can lead to stress, anxiety, or depression. By transforming maladaptive thinking patterns into adaptive ones, individuals can enhance their psychological well-being. This approach emphasizes the interconnectedness of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors as the foundation of mental health.

In Indonesia, (Sarfika et al., 2024) reported that the prevalence of depression among individuals aged 15–24 is approximately 6.1–6.2%. Anxiety disorders also appear at significant levels, as do cases of emotional and social behavioral problems. These issues affect academic performance, social relationships, and long-term risks to quality of life (Sarfika et al., 2025).

One of the protective factors is the presence of gratitude. (Webb et al., 2025) stated that gratitude functions as a psychological strength that moderates the relationship between

stressful life experiences and maladaptive behaviors. Gratitude, as a moral, cognitive, and social emotion, enhances psychological well-being by fostering awareness of life's goodness and strengthening connections with others. A study analyzing 64 randomized clinical trials on gratitude interventions found that such interventions improve mental well-being and reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression (Diniz et al., 2023).

According to (Li et al., 2025), gratitude is not only associated with short-term positive affect but also strengthens social relationships through prosocial behavior and relatedness, both of which are essential for long-term happiness. Gratitude significantly contributes to subjective well-being (SWB) through prosocial behavior and social relationships, providing evidence that social connectedness and expressions of gratitude enhance happiness and psychological well-being during early developmental stages. A study aligned with Seligman's framework examined a gratitude-based positive psychology intervention among university students and found that the intervention significantly increased happiness and optimism (Kalamatianos et al., 2023).

A study showed that gratitude is positively correlated with subjective well-being, life satisfaction, and lower levels of psychological distress. For example, longitudinal research demonstrated that gratitude predicts lower levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, as well as higher satisfaction in social relationships (Kerry et al., 2023).

Although research on gratitude has grown rapidly worldwide, several research gaps remain unaddressed comprehensively. First, integrative reviews on the role of gratitude in adolescent mental health in Indonesia are still very limited, as most studies focus on individual research rather than cross-study synthesis. Second, cross-cultural research that compares or integrates findings from Western and Asian collectivist contexts, including Indonesia, remains scarce. Third, although gratitude-based interventions have been proven effective internationally, their implementation among Indonesian adolescents is still limited and has not been systematically examined. These limitations create the need for an integrative literature review to provide a comprehensive understanding of gratitude as a protective factor for adolescent mental health. This study is grounded in several fundamental arguments that contribute to the advancement of scientific knowledge. The researcher argues that an integrative approach exploring the interaction of gratitude as a protective factor will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms underlying adolescent mental health protection. This study aims to explore and identify the role of gratitude as an internal protective factor for adolescent mental health. The findings of this review are expected to provide a conceptual contribution to the development of positive psychology in Indonesia, particularly by reinforcing the role of gratitude as a preventive mechanism for maintaining adolescent mental health. The novelty of this study lies in its integrative approach, which synthesizes empirical evidence across methods and cultural contexts to explain the mechanisms through which gratitude functions as a protective factor for adolescent mental health.

METHODS

This study employs the Integrative Literature Review (ILR) method. The use of the Integrative Literature Review (ILR) in this study is based on the need to integrate diverse empirical evidence quantitative, qualitative, and meta-analytic to develop a comprehensive

understanding of the mechanisms of gratitude in adolescent mental health. According to (Snyder, 2019), an Integrative Literature Review is a method intended to identify, analyze, and synthesize relevant research findings, whether empirical or theoretical, to generate new insights or theoretical developments. The Integrative Literature Review emphasizes the integration of various types of evidence quantitative, qualitative, and conceptual to construct a more comprehensive conceptual framework for the phenomenon under study.

The literature search was conducted using Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and ResearchGate, employing the keywords “gratitude,” “adolescent mental health,” “psychological well-being,” “positive psychology,” and “youth resilience”. The initial search yielded 184 article. Each article’s title, abstract, and result summary were reviewed to determine its relevance. Duplicate and irrelevant articles were removed through a step-by-step screening process. The duplicate removal stage resulted in 134 remaining articles. The title and abstract screening stage further reduced the number to 48 articles deemed relevant. During the full-text eligibility assessment, 10 articles met the criteria and were included in the final synthesis. This selection procedure ensured that all included articles genuinely supported the objectives of the integrative review. The inclusion criteria consisted of articles published between 2015 and 2025, written in English or Indonesian, examining gratitude as a primary or mediating variable, involving adolescent or university student populations, assessing mental health or psychological well-being, and employing empirical methods (quantitative, qualitative, experimental, or meta-analytic). Articles were excluded if they did not directly measure gratitude, consisted solely of theoretical reviews without empirical data, involved populations outside adolescence, or utilized severe clinical samples that were inconsistent with the preventive context of this review.

The data analysis process was conducted using a Thematic Analysis approach. (Ahmed et al., 2025) provide a comprehensive overview of the six-phase framework of Thematic Analysis. The analysis began with the familiarization phase, which involved thoroughly reading all articles to understand the focus of their findings and the context of each study. The researcher then developed a coding manual containing a list of codes, operational definitions, and sample excerpts to ensure consistency throughout the coding process. All articles were subsequently analyzed through open coding to identify key meaning units, which were then grouped into broader categories through axial coding. Based on these groupings, the researcher constructed a thematic map to visualize the relationships among categories, leading to the development of overarching themes that explain the role of gratitude in adolescent mental health more comprehensively.

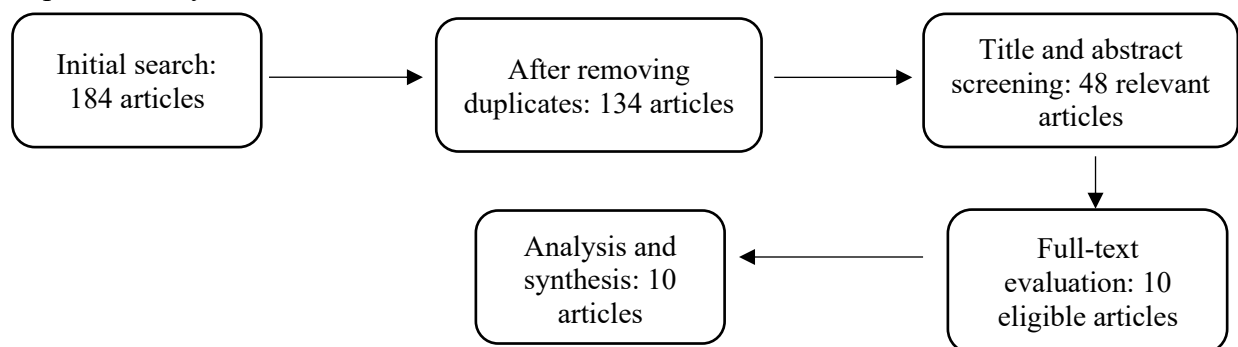


Figure 1. Thematic Map

Table 1. Analysis and Results

No.	Title, Authors, and Year	Population	Research Objective	Method	Research Finding
1	Stressors, resources, and mental health among Latino adolescents: The role of gratitude. Duprey et al., (2020).	Among Latino adolescents, using data from Latino population samples	To examine the role of gratitude as a moderator between stressors and resources in relation to mental health (depressive symptoms and life satisfaction) among Latino adolescents	Quantitative	Gratitude was independently associated with the mental health of Latino adolescents. These findings have implications for prevention and intervention efforts aimed at improving mental health among Latino youth
2	Gratitude and life satisfaction in early adolescence: The mediating role of social support and emotional difficulties. You et al., (2018)	Early adolescents in Korea	To examine the relationship between gratitude and life satisfaction in early adolescents, as well as the mediating role of social support and emotional difficulties.	Quantitative	Early adolescents with higher levels of gratitude reported significantly more positive feelings of life satisfaction.
3	The effects of gratitude interventions: a systematic review and	Children and adolescents, university students and young	To systematically evaluate and quantify the effects of	Quantitative, Meta-analysis	Cultivating feelings of gratitude and engaging in gratitude-

	meta-analysis. Diniz et al., (2023).	adults, general adult populations, clinical populations (individuals with depression, anxiety, or chronic conditions), and older adults	gratitude interventions on various indicators of psychological well-being and mental health, including well-being, depression, life satisfaction, and affect balance.		related actions can serve as a therapeutic complement for addressing anxiety and depression, and can enhance positive emotions and affect among the general population
4	The relationship between gratitude and life satisfaction: The mediating effect of mental well- being. Chauhan et al., (2025).	University students from various academic programs in Central India, aged 19–24 years	To investigate the correlation between gratitude and life satisfaction among university students, and to examine the mediating role of mental well-being in the relationship between gratitude and life satisfaction	Cross- sectional survey	A positive and significant relationship was found between gratitude and life satisfaction. Gratitude functioned as a predictor of mental well- being and contributed to higher life satisfaction
5	Gratitude and Adolescents’ Mental Health and Well- Being: Effects and Gender	High school students participating in a quasi- experimental design in	To evaluate the effects of individual components of a gratitude intervention	Quasi- experimental	Teaching gratitude in a structured manner enhanced the meaningful

	Differences for a Positive Social Media Intervention in High Schools. Bono et al., (2023).	which classes were assigned to intervention conditions	on students' mental health and well-being		experience of gratitude and influenced students' anxiety levels and subjective well-being
6	Hubungan antara Rasa Syukur Terhadap Kesehatan Mental Remaja di SMA Negeri 8 Pekanbaru. Rani Hardianti & Nauli, (2021).	Students of SMA Negeri 8 Pekanbaru	This study aims to examine the relationship between gratitude and the mental health of adolescents at SMA Negeri 8 Pekanbaru	Cross-sectional	A significant positive relationship was found between gratitude and adolescent mental health at SMA Negeri 8 Pekanbaru. Gratitude among adolescents serves as an important factor in maintaining their mental well-being
7	Hubungan Antara Bersyukur dengan Kesehatan Mental pada Mahasiswa. Amaniey & Harahap (2022).	University students from Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta aged 18–25 years	To examine the relationship between gratitude and mental health among university students	Quantitative	A positive relationship was found between gratitude and mental health. The higher the level of gratitude among students at Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta,

					the higher their mental health levels
8	Hubungan antara Gratitude dengan Kesejahteraan Psikologis Remaja yang Tinggal di Panti Asuhan. Hayuningputri & Arbi (2022).	Adolescents living in orphanages in Mojokerto City	To examine the relationship between gratitude and the psychological well-being of adolescents living in orphanages	Quantitative	Gratitude was found to be significantly and positively correlated with personal growth, positive relationships with others, purpose in life, and self- acceptance four core components of psychological well-being
9	Analisa Hubungan Antara Rasa Syukur Terhadap Kesehatan Mental Remaja di Banjarbaru. Rahma & Cahyani (2023).	Adolescents residing in Banjarbaru City, South Kalimantan	Aimed to investigate the relationship between gratitude and adolescent mental health in Banjarbaru, as well as to explore its practical implications in the local context	Quantitative	Adolescents with higher levels of gratitude tended to exhibit greater happiness, lower stress, and better emotional regulation. Gratitude was identified as a key component of psychological well-being and contributed to happiness,

					resilience, and emotional processing among adolescents
10	Peran Kebersyukuran sebagai Prediktor Psychological Well-Being pada Mahasiswa Psikologi Tahun Pertama Universitas Negeri Padang. Rodatul Jannah et al., (2025).	First-year university students at Universitas Negeri Padang	To determine the role of gratitude as a predictor of psychological well-being among these university students	Quantitative	A substantial portion of the psychological well-being of first-year Psychology students at Universitas Negeri Padang was influenced by their level of gratitude

The analysis of ten articles revealed four major themes that illustrate the role of gratitude in adolescent mental health. The first theme, gratitude as an emotional protective factor, is supported by findings from (Bono et al., 2023; Diniz et al., 2023; Duprey et al., 2020; Hayuningputri & Arbi, 2022; Rahma & Cahyani, 2023). These studies consistently demonstrate that gratitude contributes to reductions in depression, anxiety, and stress, as well as improvements in emotion regulation and adaptive coping.

The second theme, the strengthening of social relationships, is demonstrated by studies conducted by (Bono et al., 2023; Hayuningputri & Arbi, 2022; Rahma & Cahyani, 2023; You et al., 2018), which found that gratitude enhances the quality of relationships with peers and family, increases social support, and strengthens social connectedness, particularly through social media-based interventions.

The third theme, the enhancement of psychological well-being, is supported by studies from (Bono et al., 2023; Chauhan et al., 2025; Diniz et al., 2023; Hayuningputri & Arbi, 2022; Rodatul Jannah et al., 2025; You et al., 2018). These studies affirm that gratitude enhances life satisfaction, psychological well-being, subjective well-being, optimism, and sense of meaning in life.

The fourth theme, gratitude as a positive psychology intervention, is demonstrated by studies from (Amaniey & Harahap, 2022; Bono et al., 2023; Diniz et al., 2023; Rahma & Cahyani, 2023; Rodatul Jannah et al., 2025). Their findings indicate that gratitude interventions—such as gratitude journaling and the “three good things” exercise—enhance resilience, adaptive

coping, positive engagement, and psychological well-being, while also serving as strong predictors of adolescent mental health.

Collectively, these themes indicate that gratitude exerts its influence through emotional, social, and eudaimonic mechanisms, and constitutes an evidence-based intervention with strong feasibility for promoting adolescent mental health.

DISCUSSION

Based on the review of ten selected studies, the findings indicate that gratitude has a significant influence on mental health and psychological well-being among adolescents and university students. (Duprey et al., 2020) found that gratitude functions as a moderator between stressors and resources in predicting mental health, whereby individuals with higher levels of gratitude tend to report lower depressive symptoms and greater life satisfaction. This finding is reinforced by (You et al., 2018), who identified that gratitude enhances life satisfaction through the mediating roles of increased social support and reduced emotional difficulties. From an intervention standpoint, the meta-analysis by (Diniz et al., 2023) further supports these conclusions by demonstrating that gratitude-based interventions effectively reduce depression and anxiety while enhancing life satisfaction across diverse age groups and cultural contexts. Collectively, these studies underscore that gratitude is not merely a transient positive emotion but a protective emotional mechanism that reduces stress and depressive symptoms by fostering more positive interpretations of life experiences.

(Chauhan et al., 2025) demonstrated that gratitude has a significant positive relationship with life satisfaction, with mental well-being serving as a key mediating variable in this association. In the educational context, (Bono et al., 2023) showed that social media-based gratitude interventions can reduce anxiety and enhance subjective well-being among high school students. (Amaniey & Harahap, 2022; Rani Hardianti & Nauli, 2021) likewise found that gratitude is significantly and positively associated with the mental health of both students and university undergraduates. These findings reinforce the Broaden-and-Build Theory, which posits that positive emotions such as gratitude broaden individuals' cognitive capacities, build enduring psychological resources, and enhance adaptive responses to stress (Fredrickson, 2001).

The quasi-experimental study conducted by (Bono et al., 2023) on high school adolescents, using a curriculum-based gratitude intervention combined with the "Thanks" application, demonstrated increases in well-being and reductions in anxiety. This aligns with findings showing that adolescents with higher levels of gratitude report greater happiness and lower stress, highlighting the protective role of gratitude against emotional distress (Rahma & Cahyani, 2023).

Furthermore, (Hayuningputri & Arbi, 2022) highlighted that gratitude among adolescents living in orphanages is correlated with psychological well-being, particularly in the domains of self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, and personal growth. This finding supports the perspective of (Halleyda & Japar, 2023) who argue that adolescents who incorporate gratitude into their daily activities experience enhanced psychological well-being. Meanwhile, gratitude serves as a strong predictor of psychological well-being among first-year

university students navigating academic transitions, underscoring its role in fostering psychological resilience during periods of adaptation (Rodatul Jannah et al., 2025).

The integrative findings from the ten reviewed articles indicate that gratitude functions as a multidimensional psychological mechanism, operating through processes of emotion regulation, the strengthening of social relationships, and the enhancement of psychological well-being. In addition to being grounded in classical positive psychology theories, the findings of this review are also aligned with modern theoretical frameworks such as Emotion Regulation Theory, which explains that individuals employ cognitive and affective mechanisms to regulate the intensity, duration, and expression of their emotions.

In this context, gratitude can be understood as a form of positive emotion regulation strategy that enables adolescents to shift their focus from negative experiences toward an appreciation of the positive aspects of life. This is evident in various quantitative studies (Diniz et al., 2023; Duprey et al., 2020), which demonstrate that gratitude enhances cognitive reframing abilities and reduces anxiety and depression through more adaptive emotion regulation. This strengthening of emotional processes is also aligned with modern interpersonal theories that position positive emotions as the foundation of social connectedness and interpersonal support. The cross-method integration in this review which includes quantitative studies, qualitative studies, and meta-analyses enriches the understanding of the role of gratitude in adolescents. Quantitative studies indicate that gratitude interventions consistently enhance life satisfaction and reduce emotional distress. Qualitative approaches extend this understanding by illustrating how adolescents interpret gratitude as an emotional experience that strengthens social relationships. Meanwhile, international meta-analytic findings show that gratitude interventions yield small to moderate effects on psychological well-being, reinforcing the consistency of their benefits across various contexts and research designs.

Overall, this cross-method synthesis affirms that gratitude is not merely a positive emotion, but a modern emotion regulation strategy that supports adolescents' adaptive functioning. Future research is recommended to employ mixed methods or longitudinal designs to evaluate its long-term robustness and to examine more complex mediation mechanisms.

CONCLUSION

This review demonstrates that gratitude plays a significant role in enhancing adolescents' mental health through strengthened emotion regulation, improved social relationships, and increased psychological well-being. Gratitude-based interventions have also been consistently shown to be effective across various contexts, positioning gratitude as a relevant emotion regulation strategy within adolescent development. This review has methodological limitations typical of an integrative literature review, including reliance on the quality of available studies, variations in design and instruments across articles, potential researcher bias in thematic interpretation, and the absence of effect-size quantification as found in meta-analyses. Limited access to certain articles may also constrain the breadth of the synthesis. Future research is encouraged to employ mixed-methods or longitudinal designs and to examine potential mediators or moderators—such as spirituality, resilience, and social support to better understand the mechanisms and conditions that strengthen the influence of gratitude on adolescents' mental health.

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