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Empathy, Compassion, and Gratitude in Young Adults

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Abstract: ***Empathy is one's ability to understand thing from another person's perspective. It is the ability to put oneself into another person's shoes. Compassion is when feelings of empathy are accompanied by desire to help others on their sufferings. Gratitude stems from the recognition that something good happened to you, accompanied by an appraisal that someone, whether another individual or an impersonal source, such as nature or a divine entity, was responsible for it. Young adulthood is one such stage which is marked by rapid physical, sexual, cognitive, and emotional changes in one individual's life. In this stage, process of physical maturation becomes apparent and secondary sexual characteristics are fully formed. The present study adopts a correlational design to determine if there is any relation between empathy, compassion, and gratitude in young adults. It adopts a between group design for determining gender differences with respect to empathy, compassion, and gratitude. A non-probability purposive sampling method was used to select sample. During the data collection, 110 young adults were obtained out of which 55 are males and 55 are females. The findings showed positive relation between empathy and compassion, empathy and gratitude, compassion and gratitude in young adults. The findings showed gender difference with respect to empathy, compassion where females scored higher than males in both. The findings suggest that in today's world, if people could spend little time with each other out of their busy schedules, this would help them in understanding one another, their problems, their sufferings and they could help each other in overcoming it by showing love, generosity to each other and they would feel grateful for one another.***

Keywords: empathy, compassion, gratitude, correlational, non probability, between group, love, generosity

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's world, human beings are becoming so self centered due to career aspirations, personal issues, occupational stress that each and every one is getting segregated from one another. Their thrust to be at the top is actually creating distance from one another which is creating communication gap among one another. People are focusing so much on individuality that sense of competition is arising to a greater extent in them. As a result, people are not developing that tendency or ability to listen to another person's problems, issues, understanding things from their perspectives or empathizing with them in another word and in turn cooperating with them to overcome their issues due to lack of time, communication gap. As a result, no one is feeling pity or sorrow for one another, neither they are being compassionate towards one another. Henceforth, no one is showing gratitude or feeling grateful towards each other.

Young adulthood is one such stage which is marked by rapid physical, sexual, cognitive, and emotional changes in one individual's life. In this stage, process of physical maturation becomes apparent and secondary sexual characteristics are fully formed. (1)

As per Erik Erikson, young adulthood is one stage where a person's age is between 18 and 39. It precedes middle adulthood and succeeds adolescence stage. In young adulthood stage, adolescents become more mature and developed. (2)

In this stage, young adults have so many roles to play and responsibilities on their shoulders. They focus on their academics to have a bright and successful career in future followed by holding good positions in their organization with respect to work life. Young adults try to get independent from their parents, make decisions on their own. In this way, they become self- reliant. Also, at this stage of their development, they try to value tangible and intangible objects. (2)

Also, this stage has marked feature in lives of young adults. In this stage, young adults strive for love and compassion. Success in achieving it results in developing intimacy with their partners and failure in achieving it results in developing isolation in lives of individuals. (2)

Results of longitudinal study by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) revealed that some of the brain regions are not fully matured until around 25 years of age like prefrontal cortex, cerebellum, amygdala which play major roles in behaviors, motivation, movements, emotions respectively and prefrontal cortex keeps on developing for the next 10 years. (1)

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Some of the common mental health problems associated with young adults are- they go through schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, major depressive disorder, eating disorders, substance abuse. To help young adults get rid of these problems, different therapies are normally provided to them like cognitive behavioral therapy, behavioral therapy, insight oriented therapy, family therapy, interpersonal therapy, social skills training. (1)

Empathy is one's ability to understand thing from another person's perspective. It is the ability to put oneself into another person's shoes. (3)

Empathy involves active listening, understanding other person's feelings, thought patterns when they tell us about their problems, getting overwhelmed when others go through tragedy followed by helping them. (3)

1) *Types of empathy are: (3)*

- Affective Empathy: It is the ability to understand another person's emotions and accordingly responding to them. This helps in understanding another person's distress and well – being emotionally.
- Somatic Empathy: It is experiencing physical reactions as a response to other person's experience. Like, going through upset stomach on seeing another person in distress.
- Cognitive Empathy: It is the ability to understand another person's mental state, thought process as a response to a situation. Cognitive empathy has a strong connection with theory of mind.

2) *Causes of empathy are: (3)*

- Neuroscientific explanation: In this case, mirror neurons play important role where they help a person gain ability to mirror and mimic emotional responses of other person and help them in gaining capacity to realize emotionally how would they have felt, if they would have been in similar situation.
- Emotional explanation: Here, philosopher Adam Smith proposed empathy helped us to identify feeling of other person that we wouldn't have felt otherwise. Like, trying to feel like real people or fictional characters by understanding their perspectives.
- Prosocial Behavior: Here, sociologist Herbert Spencer proposed empathy aids in adaptive function and survival of species. It benefits social relationships by aiding helping behaviors.

One of the pitfalls of empathy is that it sometimes lead to empathy fatigue where one feels exhausted physically and emotionally, they experience burnout on thinking too much about other person's distress. (3)

3) *Uses of empathy are as follows: (3)*

- Empathy allows us to get socially connected with others: Empathy helps us in responding appropriately in different social situations by understanding what others are thinking and feeling.
- Empathy helps us in regulating emotions: Empathy helps us in managing our emotions at times of stress without getting overwhelmed.
- Empathy aids helping behavior: Through helping behaviors, relationship among people get fostered.

The term compassion has been derived from Latin word which signifies to suffer together. (4)

Empathy is understanding things from another person's perspective. Compassion is when feelings of empathy are accompanied by desire to help others on their sufferings. (4)

4) *Types of compassion: (4)*

- Compassion for others: This involves feeling pain, sad on other's misery and taking actions accordingly to reduce pain, sadness of others and making situations better.
- Self Compassion: This involves understanding one's own misery instead of blaming oneself and turning out compassionate, mindful, kind and accepting towards oneself.

5) *Impact of compassion: (4)*

- Compassion promotes psychological well- being of both givers and receivers.
- One of the studies found compassionate people tend to have more longevity.
- Compassion and kindness fuel one's sense of one's life purpose and meaning.

- Compassion promotes social support and connections by improving relation with others. This promotes one's mental well – being.

One of the pitfalls of compassion is that too much of compassion gives rise to compassion fatigue which in turn makes individual physically and emotionally exhausted from traumatized individual which in turn reduce their compassion levels. (4)

6) Ways to become more compassionate: (4)

- Being empathetic: Trying to understand and analyze things or situations from another person's perspective would help individuals to develop compassion for others.
- Being non judgmental: Accepting people as they are with out criticizing or blaming or judging anyone.
- Practicing mindfulness: This is done by focusing on the present, observing and becoming aware of one's thoughts without judging them.
- Practicing love kindness meditation- This is done by directing love, kindness, compassion towards oneself and others. This is also known as compassion meditation.

Gratitude stems from the recognition that something good happened to you, accompanied by an appraisal that someone, whether another individual or an impersonal source, such as nature or a divine entity, was responsible for it (Luzie Fofonka Cunha, Lucia Campos Pellanda, and Caroline Tozzi Reppold, 2019). (5)

7) Types of gratitude: (5)

- As an affective trait indicating gratitude as general disposition of a person.
- As a mood indicating it fluctuates over time and our moods oscillate between elation at one time to sadness at other time.
- As emotion indicating it as brief feeling we experience in present moment that is hear and now.

8) Practicing Gratitude: (5)

- Observing the moment: Individuals should live in present and analyze whether the gratitude feeling inside them is aroused by any individual or object.
- Writing journal- Here, one should write about things or situations or individuals who is thankful or grateful to.
- Savoring moments- Here, one should allow oneself to get absorbed into good things.
- Creating gratitude rituals- Here, one should practice meditation, yoga, exercise to inspire and increase their sense of gratitude.
- Thanking someone: It involves recognizing and appreciating someone's activity who has become source of joy, happiness in one's life.

9) Usefulness of Gratitude: (5)

- Developing better sleep.
- Immunity getting developed.
- Stress level getting decreased.
- Blood pressure getting higher.
- Developing stronger relation with others.
- Developing high self – esteem.
- Anxiety and depression level getting decreased.
- Optimism level getting increased.

One of the pitfalls of gratitude is when one is investing too much of energy into feeling grateful, one might neglect some salient things which actually require criticisms. (5)

10) Ways to improve sense of gratitude: (5)

- Practicing journaling- Mentioning about all those things, persons in a dairy or journal one is grateful to.
- Reframing experiences- Taking a moment and analyzing how life has become better in present than past experiences.
- Focusing on senses- Paying attention to our sense organs - eyes, ears, nose, tongue, skin and realizing what it means to be alive.

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Results of the study conducted by Beefathima & Joy, M. in 2023. to determine relation between empathy and life satisfaction in young adults showed positive relation between empathy and life satisfaction in young adults through the application of Pearson product moment correlation. Also, significant gender differences have been found with respect to empathy through the application of t- test. (6)

Similarly, results of another study conducted by Lasota, Agnieszka in 2018 to determine relation between gratitude, empathy, and resilience among emerging adults of Poland showed correlation between empathy and gratitude and resilience and gratitude in emerging adults of Poland. (7)

Again, results of another study conducted by Booker, J. A., & Dunsmore, J. C. in 2016 to assess profiles of wisdom among emerging adults through its association with empathy, gratitude, and forgiveness in undergraduate students showed dispositional empathy, gratitude, and forgiveness in two sixty three undergraduate students. (8)

Also, results of another study conducted by Neff & McGehee in 2010 to determine relation between self-compassion and psychological resilience among adolescents and young adults showed association between self – compassion and well - being in both adolescents and young adults. (9)

On the contrary, results of another study conducted by Jacob, J. M., & Sarkar, A. in 2018 to explore relation between gratitude expressed in daily life and self - esteem among young adults showed no significant relation between gratitude and self – esteem in young adults. (10)

Results of the study conducted by Volkova, A. A., & Pekar, E. V. to determine relation of empathy in young adults on social and emotional development in 2023 showed empathy is higher in young adults than adolescents and that empathy shares association with care reasoning, social support and polite online communication in them and that affective empathy is higher in case of females than males. (11)

Also, results of another study conducted in 2013 by Gano-Overway, L. A. which focused on knowing how caring sports environment promotes empathy in young people showed that empathy promotes certain qualities in youth like listening, attending emotional cues, understanding other's perspectives, becoming sensitive to other's needs. (12)

Similarly, results of another study conducted by Gaspar, A., & Esteves, F. in 2022 to assess development of emotion from adolescence to adulthood coupled with its consistency across targets showed that levels of empathy in case of both animals and humans increase towards adulthood and in case of humans, females showed more empathy than males. (13)

Again, results of another study conducted by Karnaze et al. in 2022 to assess association of compassion and empathy with prosocial health behaviors and attitudes during pandemic showed empathy fostered compassion by promoting greater understanding as in how to shelter people to hinder spread of Covid 19 among participants. (14)

Moreover, results of another study conducted by Kim, G. Y., Wang, D., & Hill, P. in 2018 which focused on investigating multifaceted relationship between gratitude, empathy, and compassion among undergraduate students showed association between gratitude and compassionate love through empathy. Also, that cognitive empathy mediated relation between gratitude and compassionate love. (15)

Results of the research conducted by Chan, K. K. S et al., in 2022 to examine the impact of compassion from others and self-compassion on psychological distress, flourishing, and meaning in life among university students showed compassion from others shared positive association with self compassion which in turn linked to lower levels of psychological distress and higher levels of flourishing and meaning in life, and greater levels of resilience among university students through the application of serial mediation analyses. (16)

Similarly, results of the study conducted by Mongrain et al. to determine whether practicing compassion increases happiness and self- esteem or not in participants whose age ranges from 17 to 72 years in 2011 showed improvements in happiness and self-esteem due to practicing compassion which also in short run proved to be beneficial for anxious individuals. (17)

Individuals Also, a 5-year longitudinal study conducted by Lee, E. E. et al. on 1090 community-dwelling adults in 2021 to determine role of compassion toward others and self-compassion as predictors of mental and physical well-being across the lifespan; its results showed across adult lifespan compassion toward others and self-compassion shared association with mental well-being and loneliness and physical well- being in young adults. (18)

Moreover, results of the study conducted by Sajjadi et al to determine impact of mindful self-compassion intervention among young adults with a history of childhood maltreatment for reducing psychopathological symptoms, shame, and self-criticism in 2022; its results showed that depression, anxiety, self-criticism, internal shame decreased and self compassion increased in young adults with history of childhood maltreatment due to implementation of mindful self – compassion intervention. (19)

Again in another study conducted by Nathani A; to determine relation between self-compassion and life satisfaction among young adults in 2022, its results showed positive relation between self compassion and life satisfaction in young adults. (20)
Results of the study conducted by Singh, Khan, & Osmany to determine role of gratitude and health among young adults in 2014 showed that gratitude promotes mental health by being a positive emotion among them. (21)
Again in another study conducted by Fritz, M.M., to determine whether gratitude facilitates healthy eating behavior in adolescents and young adults or no in 2018; its results showed that gratitude promoted healthier eating behavior over time among young adults who were undergraduate students and adolescents who were 9th and 10th grade students. (22)
Also, an online pilot experimental study which was conducted to determine the effects of gratitude and kindness on life satisfaction, positive emotions, negative emotions, and COVID-19 anxiety by Datu et al., in 2022; its results showed emotional benefits gained on promoting gratitude and kindness during the COVID-19 pandemic among young adults. (23)
Moreover, another study conducted by Thurackal, Corveleyn, & Dezutter to examine impact of spiritual development and gratitude among Indian emerging adults in 2016; its results showed that grateful emerging adults showed more awareness of God's presence. (24)
Similarly, another study conducted by Shi & Du to determine associations that emotional intelligence and gratitude share with empathy in medical students in 2020; its results showed that emotional intelligence and gratitude have become vital psychological constructs by playing positive roles to understand empathy in medical students. (25)

A. Research Questions

- Is there any relationship between empathy and compassion in young adults?
- Is there any relationship between empathy and gratitude in young adults?
- Is there any relationship between compassion and gratitude in young adults?
- Is there any gender difference with respect to empathy?
- Is there any gender difference with respect to compassion?
- Is there any gender difference with respect to gratitude?

B. Research Objectives

- To determine whether there is a relationship between empathy and compassion in young adults.
- To determine whether there is a relationship between empathy and gratitude in young adults.
- To determine whether there is a relationship between compassion and gratitude in young adults.
- To determine whether there is any gender difference with respect to empathy.
- To determine whether there is any gender difference with respect to compassion.
- To determine whether there is any gender difference with respect to gratitude.

C. Research Hypothesis

- H1: There is a relationship between empathy and compassion in young adults.
- H2: There is a relationship between empathy and gratitude in young adults.
- H3: There is a relationship between compassion and gratitude in young adults.
- H4: There is gender difference with respect to empathy.
- H5: There is gender difference with respect to compassion.
- H6: There is gender difference with respect to gratitude.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

The present study adopts a correlational design to determine if there is any relation between empathy, compassion, and gratitude in young adults. It adopts a between group design for determining gender differences with respect to empathy, compassion, and gratitude.

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B. Sample

A non-probability purposive sampling method was used to select sample. During the data collection, 110 young adults were obtained out of which 55 are males and 55 are females.

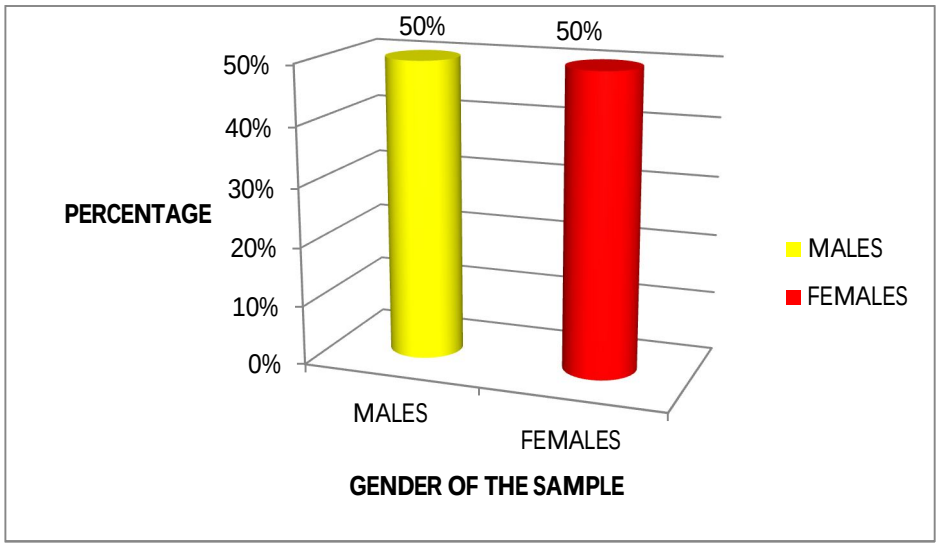


Figure 1: Bar graph showing percentage of sample belonging to different genders. From the graph it could be seen that 50% of sample are males and 50 % of sample are females.

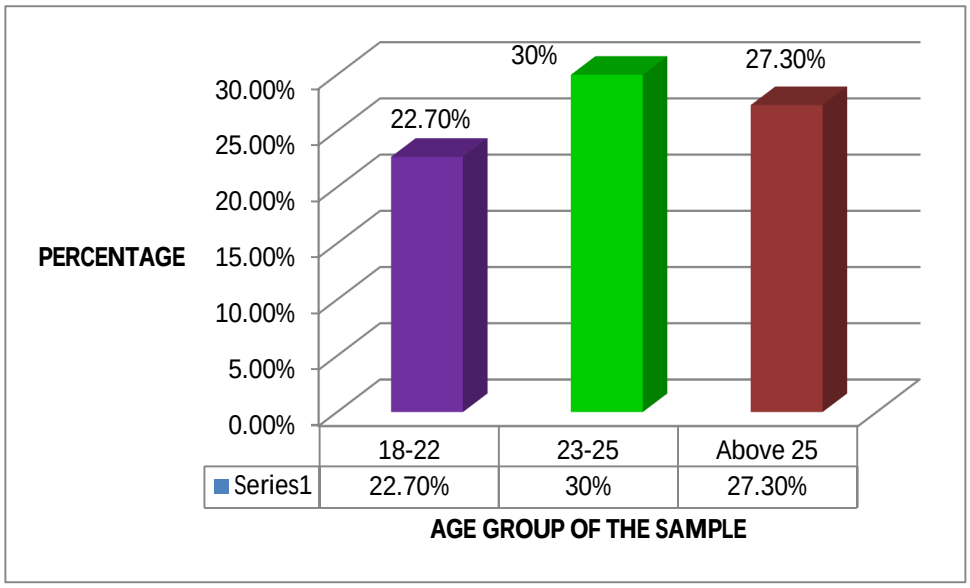


Figure 2: Bar graph showing percentage of sample belonging to different age groups. From the graph it could be seen that 22.7% of sample are within the age group of 18-22, 30% of sample are within the age group of 23-25, 27.3% of sample belong to that age group where ages are more than 25.

Inclusion Criteria

- Individuals whose age is between 18-35 years.
- Individuals who are well versed with English. .

Exclusion Criteria

- Individuals whose age is outside 18- 35 years.
- Individuals who are not well versed with English.

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C. Tools Applied

Following tools have been used for data collection:

Empathy Developed by Dr. Marri Chenna Reddy Human Resource Development Institute of Telangana , the 20 item empathy scale has been used to assess an individual's ability to understand things from another person's perspectives. The responses are rated on a four-point scale ranging from Never to Always. (26)

Compassion: Developed by Gu, J et al., the 20 item Sussex-Oxford Compassion for Others Scale has been used to determine how one could understand other's sufferings by relating to them. The responses are rated on a five point scale ranging from not at all true to always true. (27)

Gratitude: Developed by McCullough, M. E., Emmons, R. A., & Tsang, J in 2002, the six item gratitude scale was designed to assess individual differences with respect to proneness to experience gratitude in daily life. (28)

Procedure: After selecting measures for the study, the researcher conducted the study by taking permission. Responses of the participants have been taken manually. Rapport was established with the participants by visiting their places as per their convenience. They were made aware that their participation in the study was purely voluntary and whatever doubts raised by the participants were all cleared by the researcher. They were assured of maintaining confidentiality through-out the study and were asked to sign the informed consent form. Next, the information schedule was administered. The researcher had put the instructions in the questionnaires itself. Participants took average of 10 minutes to fill the information schedule and the questionnaires. The data collected was then coded, entered in SPSS and statistically analysed.

Statistical Analysis Of Data: After completion of data collection, the responses were scored. Then the statistical treatments of the scores were done using the data analysis software IBM SPSS version 22. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was computed to determine the relationship between empathy, compassion, and gratitude in young adults. This was followed by computing T test for comparing gender difference with respect to empathy, compassion, and gratitude.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The aim of this study was to find relation between empathy, compassion, and gratitude in young adults and to compare genders with respect to empathy, compassion, and gratitude.

Categories were discovered in three main areas - empathy, compassion, and gratitude.

The obtained data of this study were analysed through Mean, Standard Deviation, Pearson product moment correlation, t test using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0. Pearson product moment correlation was used to determine the relationship between empathy, compassion, and gratitude in young adults. Also, t test has been used to compare gender with respect to empathy, compassion, and gratitude.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Males and Females with respect to Empathy, Compassion, and Gratitude

VARIABLES	Males (N=55)		Females (N=55)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Empathy	64.0182	15.27585	70.6545	11.89650
Compassion	83.4182	16.02277	89.2364	12.30622
Gratitude	31.1455	5.81320	33.7818	3.64992

From Table 1, it could be seen that the mean values of males are 64.0182, 83.4182, and 31.1455 respectively with respect to empathy, compassion, and gratitude. The mean values of females are 70.6545, 89.2364, and 33.7818 respectively with respect to empathy, compassion, and gratitude.

From Table 1, it could be seen that the standard deviation values of males are 15.27585, 16.02277, 5.81320 respectively with respect to empathy, compassion, and gratitude. The standard deviation values of females are 11.89650, 12.30622, and 3.64992 respectively with respect to empathy, compassion, and gratitude.

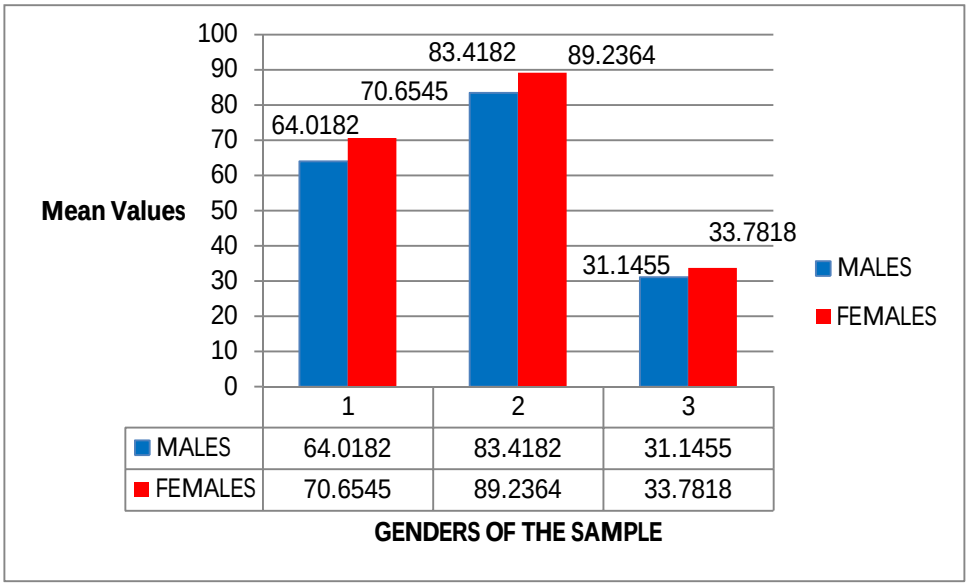


Figure 3: Bar graph showing mean values of males and females with respect to empathy, compassion, and gratitude. From the bar graph it could be seen that the mean values of males and females with respect to empathy are 64.0182 and 70.6545 respectively. Mean values of males and females with respect to compassion are 83.4182 and 89.2364 respectively. Mean values of males and females with respect to gratitude are 31.1455 and 33.7818 respectively.

Table 2: Correlation matrix with respect to empathy, compassion, and gratitude in young adults

VARIABLES	Empathy	Compassion	Gratitude
Empathy	1	.775**	.626**
Compassion	.775**	1	.655**
Gratitude	.626**	.655**	1

p**<0.01 level of significance

From Table 2 it could be seen that empathy and compassion share positive correlation (r=.775, p< 0.01). Thus, null hypothesis is rejected and hypothesis H1 is accepted.

Results of the study conducted by Tran et al. in 2022 to examine the relation between self – compassion and empathy among Vietnamese university students by investigating mediating effects of self – esteem on them, its results showed positive relation between self – compassion and empathy and self- esteem mediated their relation among university students of Vietnam. (29)

From Table 2 it could be seen that empathy and gratitude share positive correlation (r=.626, p< 0.01). Thus, null hypothesis is rejected and hypothesis H2 is accepted.

Results of the study conducted in 2018 by Lasota A. to examine the relation between gratitude, empathy, and resilience among emerging adults in Poland in showed strong relation between empathy and gratitude and gratitude and resilience in emerging adults. (30)

From Table 2 it could be seen that compassion and gratitude share positive correlation (r=.655, p< 0.01). Thus, null hypothesis is rejected and hypothesis H3 is accepted.

Results of the correlational study conducted by Kohli, H. et al. in 2022 which focused on knowing association between self compassion and demographics of university students where gratitude was set to play adjusting role showed direct and positive relation between the self compassion and gratitude in participants where increased gratitude resulted in increased self compassion. (31)

Table 3: t values of genders of young adults with respect to empathy, compassion, and gratitude

VARIABLES	Males	Females		
	Mean	Mean	t value	Sig value
Empathy	54.0182	70.6545	2.542*	.085
Compassion	83.4182	89.2364	2.136*	.140
Gratitude	31.1455	33.7818	2.848	.001

p*<0.05 level of significance

From Table 3 it could be seen that significant gender differences exist with respect to empathy ($t=2.542$, $p<0.05$) Thus, null hypothesis is rejected and hypothesis H4 is accepted. It could be seen from the mean values that females scored higher than males with respect to empathy. (70.6545>54.0182).

Results of the study conducted by Toussaint and Webb's in 2005 to determine differences in gender in relation between empathy and forgiveness showed gender differences in empathy where females scored higher than males in it which wasn't found in forgiveness. (32)

From Table 3 it could be seen that significant gender differences exist with respect to compassion ($t=2.136$ $p<0.05$) Thus, null hypothesis is rejected and hypothesis H5 is accepted. It could be seen from the mean values that females scored higher than males with respect to empathy. (89.2364>83.4182).

Results of the study conducted by McDonald, B., & Kanske, P. in 2023 to determine gender differences with respect to empathy, compassion, and prosocial donation where theory of mind was not focused in naturalistic social task showed gender differences with respect to compassion and females scored higher in it than males. Also, interaction between gender and video emotionality was found through this study. (33)

It could be seen from Table 3 that no significant gender differences exist with respect to gratitude ($t= 2.848$, $p>0.05$). Thus, null hypothesis is accepted and hypothesis H6 is rejected. It could be seen from the mean values that females scored higher than males with respect to gratitude (33.7818> 31.1455).

The quantitative findings of the study suggest that devoting certain amount of time to each other out of busy life schedules help everyone in understanding each other's problems, sufferings, lending support to one another by showing love, care. This would make everyone feel grateful for one another which in turn would flourish their interpersonal relations with others.

Limitation of the study is too much of anyone is not good like less of anything. In this case, if any person is committing any wrong act or exhibiting any maladaptive behaviors then empathizing with them or showing compassion to them is absolutely not correct. Properly analysing any situation and accordingly empathizing with them or showing compassion to them is the actual way of dealing with any situation or person.

A. Acknowledgement

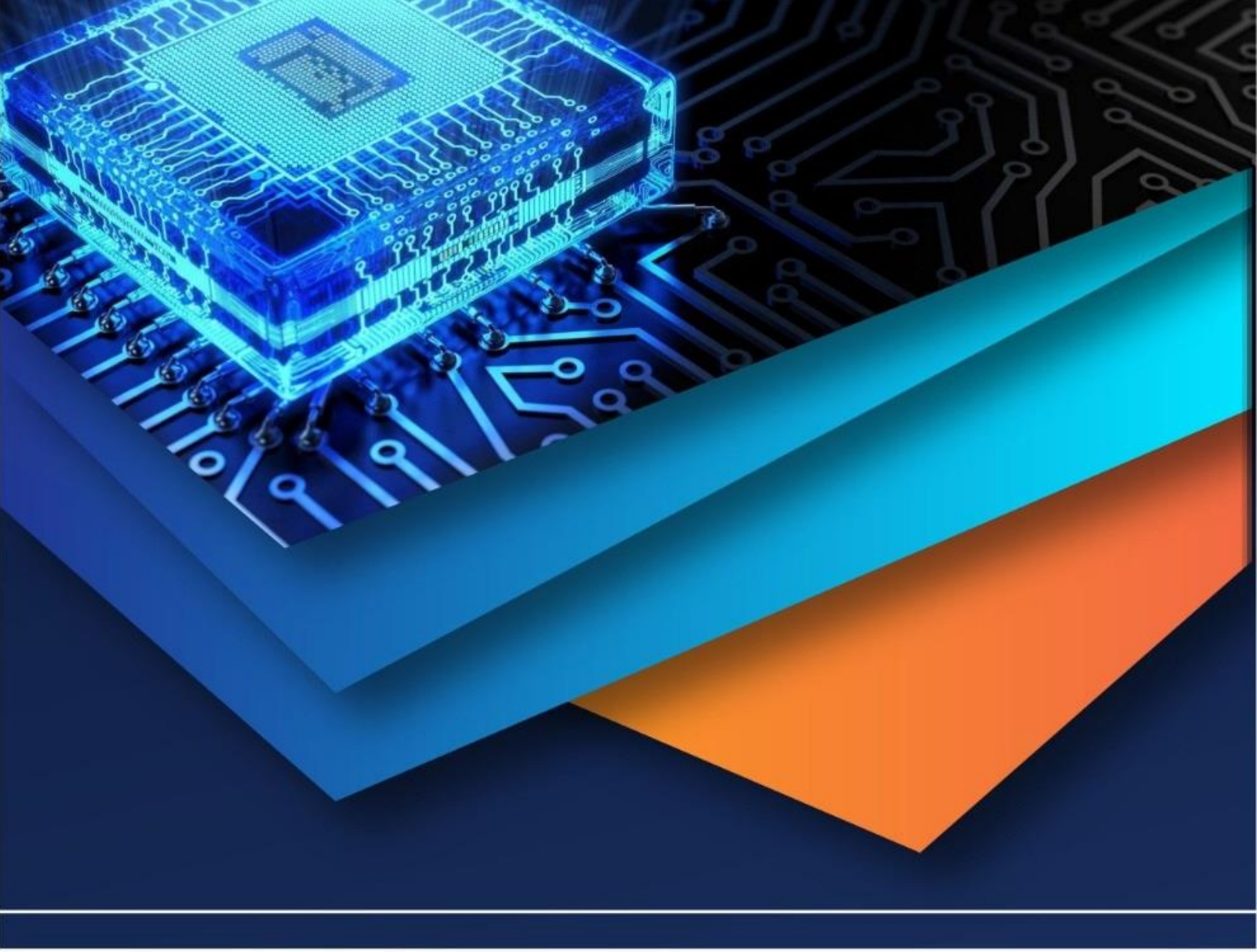
Thanksgiving by the author goes to all those who participated in the study and helped in completing the research process.

B. Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interests.

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