

The Impact of Gratitude Interventions on Relationship Satisfaction: A Case Study of Two Couples

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Abstract:

This case study investigates the impact of a gratitude intervention on the relationships of two couples. The study's primary objective is to assess whether a structured gratitude intervention, tailored to each couple's unique dynamics, can enhance relationship satisfaction. The research employs a qualitative approach, combining interviews, observations, and self-report measures to collect data over a specified intervention period.

Keywords: gratitude, interpersonal relationships, positive emotions, romantic partners, expressed gratitude, ongoing relationships

Key Findings:

- Both couples demonstrated significant improvements in relationship satisfaction after participating in the gratitude intervention.
- Qualitative data revealed enhanced communication, increased emotional connection, and reduced conflict.
- The gratitude intervention's positive effects persisted over time, with couples reporting ongoing benefits in their relationships.

Implications:

- The study underscores the effectiveness of gratitude interventions as a valuable tool for enhancing relationship satisfaction.
- Tailoring interventions to individual couples' need and dynamics is crucial for maximizing positive outcomes.
- Practitioners, therapists, and couples can benefit from integrating gratitude practices into relationship-building strategies.

These findings provide valuable insights into the potential of gratitude interventions to strengthen relationships and improve overall well-being. Further research in this area may yield more specific guidelines for implementing gratitude interventions in couples' therapy and relationship counselling.

Introduction:

Human connections are very important part of our lives. An important feature of most adult relationships is that each partner performs actions that benefit the other. Relationships often become strained or even end because one or both members of the partnership perceive that the other is no longer engaging in behaviors that they find beneficial; or a partner feels that the other is taking him or her for granted (Markman, Galena, Rhoades, Stanely, & Peterson, 2013). It's crucial to delve into how gratitude, a profound emotional experience, can shape, sustain, and even amplify these essential relationships.

Significance of Gratitude in Relationships. Over recent years, studies have shown that feeling gratitude in close relationships has a lot of benefits. It encourages behaviors that help maintain the bond, boosts communication, and deepens emotional intimacy, as highlighted by Lambert et al., 2011 ; Seligman et al., 2006. Gratitude not only uplifts relationship satisfaction but also fosters a feeling of being valued. It encourages understanding and empathy, setting a foundation for a loving and intimate environment, as noted by Algoe et al., 2010, Gordon et al., 2012. Additionally, it's been found that gratitude aids in tackling relationship hurdles, resolving disagreements, and enhancing overall well-being.

Research Question and Objectives: Against this backdrop, this study seeks to explore the impact of a gratitude intervention on the relationships of two couples. Specifically, the research question guiding this study is:

"How does a tailored gratitude intervention influence relationship satisfaction and dynamics within couples?"

The primary objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To assess the impact of a structured gratitude intervention on relationship satisfaction within the selected couples.
2. To investigate the changes in communication patterns, emotional connection, and conflict resolution strategies resulting from the gratitude intervention.
3. To understand the individual and relational factors that contribute to the effectiveness of the gratitude intervention within each couple's unique context.

Rationale for a Case Study with Two Couples: This research adopts a case study approach with two couples to provide an in-depth exploration of the impact of the gratitude intervention within the context of real-world relationships. Case studies offer a rich and holistic perspective, allowing for the examination of complex and nuanced interpersonal dynamics (Stake, 1995).

By focusing on two couples, we aim to delve deeply into the experiences and outcomes of the gratitude intervention within unique relationship contexts. Each couple represents a distinct set of dynamics, challenges, and strengths, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the intervention's effectiveness and adaptability.

Moreover, a case study approach allows for the personalization of the intervention to address each couple's specific needs and concerns. This tailoring reflects the real-world application of gratitude interventions within couples' therapy and counselling settings, where customization is essential for successful outcomes.

Literature Review:

Theoretical Foundations of Gratitude in Relationships: Gratitude, as a positive emotion and pro-social behaviour, has been at the forefront of research in the fields of psychology, positive psychology, and relationship science. Its theoretical foundations are rooted in various theories and frameworks that emphasize its significance in interpersonal dynamics:

1. **Social Exchange Theory:** According to social exchange theory, individuals engage in relationships with an expectation of reciprocity. Gratitude plays a pivotal role in reinforcing reciprocity by signalling appreciation for the contributions and support of one's partner, thus strengthening the bond (Algoe et al., 2014; Tsang, J. A. 2006).
2. **Attachment Theory:** Gratitude can be seen as an attachment-related emotion. It reflects an individual's perception of their partner as a secure base, leading to increased emotional intimacy and trust within the relationship (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Gordon et al., 2012).
3. **Positive Psychology:** Gratitude is a key element in positive psychology, which focuses on promoting well-being and thriving. Positive psychology theory suggests that cultivating gratitude can lead to increased life satisfaction, and this extends to the context of romantic relationships (Lambert et al., 2010; Algoe et al., 2010).

Empirical Evidence on Gratitude in Relationships: Empirical research has provided robust evidence of the positive effects of gratitude in romantic relationships. Several studies have highlighted its role in enhancing relationship satisfaction and overall quality:

1. **Algoe et al. (2010):** In a longitudinal study, Algoe and colleagues found that daily experiences of gratitude were associated with increased relationship satisfaction and perceived partner responsiveness. The study emphasized the importance of ongoing expressions of gratitude in maintaining relationship well-being.
2. **Gordon et al. (2012):** Gordon and colleagues explored the link between gratitude and relationship functioning. Their findings revealed that individuals who expressed gratitude toward their partners experienced higher levels of relationship quality, as well as increased levels of perceived partner responsiveness and satisfaction.

3. **Lambert et al. (2011):** Lambert and colleagues conducted a study on the effects of a gratitude intervention within couples. Their results demonstrated that couples who practiced gratitude exercises together reported enhanced levels of relationship satisfaction and a decrease in negative conflict behaviors.

Effects of Gratitude Interventions on Relationship Satisfaction: Numerous studies have examined the impact of gratitude interventions on relationship satisfaction:

- **Emmons & McCullough (2003):** This seminal study found that individuals who engaged in gratitude journaling reported increased life satisfaction and well-being. While not specifically focused on romantic relationships, it laid the foundation for subsequent research on gratitude interventions.
- **Seligman et al. (2006):** Seligman and his colleagues conducted a study in which participants were assigned to one of six interventions, including a gratitude visit. The gratitude intervention group reported significantly higher levels of happiness and reduced depressive symptoms compared to other groups.
- **Froh et al. (2010):** Froh and colleagues conducted a study with adolescents and found that a gratitude intervention led to increased life satisfaction, positive affect, and decreased negative affect. Although not exclusively focused on romantic relationships, these findings have implications for emotional well-being within relationships.

Methodology:

Research Design: This study employs a case study approach to explore the impact of a gratitude intervention on the relationships of two couples. This approach allows for rich qualitative data collection and analysis, which is well-suited to the study's objectives.

Selection of Couples: Two couples were selected for this study through a purposive sampling method. The selection criteria included couples willing to participate in a gratitude intervention, having varying relationship durations, and representing diverse demographic backgrounds to ensure a broader perspective on the intervention's impact.

Gratitude Intervention: The gratitude intervention used in this study was based on principles derived from positive psychology and relationship science. Participants were introduced to daily gratitude exercises, including keeping a gratitude journal, expressing appreciation to their partners, and reflecting on positive aspects of their relationships. The intervention was customized for each couple, considering their specific relationship dynamics and concerns.

Theoretical Framework: The gratitude intervention was grounded in the theoretical framework of positive psychology, which emphasizes the cultivation of positive emotions, strengths, and virtues to improve well-being and resilience. It also drew from relationship theories, emphasizing the role of gratitude in fostering relationship satisfaction, emotional connection, and conflict resolution.

Participants:**Demographic Information:****Couple 1:**

- **Age:** Couple 1 includes a male (Participant A1) and a female (Participant B1), with Participant A1 in his early 30s, and Participant B1 in her late 20s.
- **Relationship Duration:** Participant A1 and Participant B1 had been in a marital relationship for four years at the start of the study.
- **Demographic Background:** Both participants were professionals working in different fields, residing in an urban setting.

Couple 2:

- **Age:** Couple 2 included a male (Participant A2) and a female (Participant B2), with Participant A2 in his late 40s, and Participant B2 in her early 40s.
- **Relationship Duration:** Participant A2 and Participant B2 had been married for 12 years at the commencement of the study.
- **Demographic Background:** Participant A2 held a managerial position in a corporate setting, while Participant B2 worked as a healthcare professional. They lived in a suburban environment.

Recruitment: A combination of convenience and purposive sampling methods was used. Initially, participants were sought through personal and professional networks of the research team, emphasizing the importance of couples willing to engage in a gratitude intervention. Subsequently, the couples who expressed interest in participating were screened to ensure that they met the study's criteria, which included a willingness to engage in a gratitude intervention, varying relationship durations, and diverse demographic backgrounds.

Motivation to Participate: Couples were motivated to participate in this study for several reasons:

- **Interest in Relationship Improvement:** Both couples expressed a genuine interest in strengthening their relationships and were open to exploring novel strategies for doing so.
- **Curiosity about Gratitude:** Participants were intrigued by the concept of gratitude and its potential to positively impact their relationships.
- **Desire for Personal Growth:** Some participants saw the study as an opportunity for personal growth and self-reflection, with the potential benefits extending beyond their relationships.
- **Contributing to Research:** Several participants were motivated by the idea of contributing to the field of relationship science by participating in a study that could benefit others facing similar relationship challenges.

Gratitude Intervention:

The gratitude intervention implemented in this study was designed to cultivate and enhance feelings of gratitude within each couple's relationship. The intervention consisted of structured exercises and practices aimed at promoting appreciation, fostering positive emotions, and improving relationship satisfaction. It was conducted over a period of six weeks, with participants engaging in gratitude-related activities on a daily and weekly basis.

Duration and Frequency:

- **Daily Gratitude Journaling:** Participants were asked to keep a daily gratitude journal for the entire duration of the six-week intervention. Each evening before bedtime, they were encouraged to reflect on and record three specific things they were grateful for that day. This practice aimed to increase awareness of positive experiences and encourage a habit of gratitude.
- **Weekly Gratitude Expression:** Once a week, couples were instructed to express their gratitude toward each other verbally or through written notes. They were encouraged to communicate genuine appreciation for their partner's actions, qualities, or support. This exercise aimed to promote open and positive communication within the relationship.
- **Weekly Gratitude Discussion:** In addition to the weekly gratitude expression, couples engaged in a guided gratitude discussion. They discussed their journal entries and their experiences with the intervention. This activity allowed couples to share their feelings of gratitude and how it impacted their relationship.

Tailoring to Unique Dynamics: The gratitude intervention was customized for each couple to account for their unique dynamics, communication styles, and relationship challenges. This tailoring process involved the following steps:

1. **Initial Assessment:** Before the intervention began, an initial assessment was conducted for each couple. This assessment included individual and joint interviews to understand their relationship history, specific concerns, communication patterns, and areas of strength and improvement.
2. **Customized Practices:** Based on the assessment, the gratitude intervention was adapted to address the specific needs and goals of each couple. For example:
 - For Couple 1, whose primary challenge was communication, the intervention included exercises to improve active listening and empathy.
 - For Couple 2, who sought to rekindle emotional connection, the intervention focused on deepening emotional expressions of gratitude.
3. **Ongoing Feedback:** Throughout the six weeks, participants had access to the research team for ongoing support and guidance. Couples received feedback and recommendations based on their progress and challenges encountered during the intervention.

4. **Adjustments as Needed:** The intervention was flexible, allowing for adjustments based on the couples' evolving needs and feedback. This adaptive approach aimed to maximize the intervention's relevance and effectiveness for each couple.

Data Collection:

1. Semi-Structured Interviews:

- Participants in each couple were individually interviewed at multiple points during the study, including before the gratitude intervention (baseline), immediately after the six-week intervention, and during follow-up sessions. These interviews aimed to gather qualitative data on the couples' relationship dynamics, experiences with the gratitude intervention, and changes in relationship satisfaction.

2. Observations:

- Observations were conducted during selected couple interactions, both at the beginning and end of the six-week gratitude intervention. Trained observer used a predefined observation protocol to assess changes in communication patterns, emotional expressions, and overall relationship dynamics. These observations provided qualitative data on the couples' behaviour within their natural context.

3. Self-Report Measures:

- Participants completed standardized self-report questionnaires (Burns Relationship Satisfaction Scale (RSAT) and The Gratitude Questionnaire – Six Item Form (GQ-6)) at various points in the study to quantify changes in key variables. These questionnaires included measures of relationship satisfaction, gratitude levels, conflict resolution, and communication quality. Participants completed these measures at baseline, immediately post-intervention, and during weekly follow-up assessments.

Data Analysis:

1. Qualitative Data Analysis:

- Transcripts from the semi-structured interviews and observational notes were subjected to thematic analysis. This involved identifying recurring themes, patterns, and emerging insights related to the impact of the gratitude intervention on each couple's relationship.

2. Quantitative Data Analysis:

- Self-report questionnaire data were subjected to quantitative analysis. Regression and Correlation analysis (depending on data distribution) were used to assess statistical significance in changes in variables such as relationship satisfaction, gratitude levels, and positive affect before and after the gratitude intervention. Effect sizes were calculated to assess the practical significance of these changes.

3. Member Checking:

- To enhance the credibility and validity of the qualitative findings, member checking was conducted. Participants were given the opportunity to review and validate the researchers' interpretations of their interview data. This process ensured that participants' perspectives were accurately represented in the analysis.

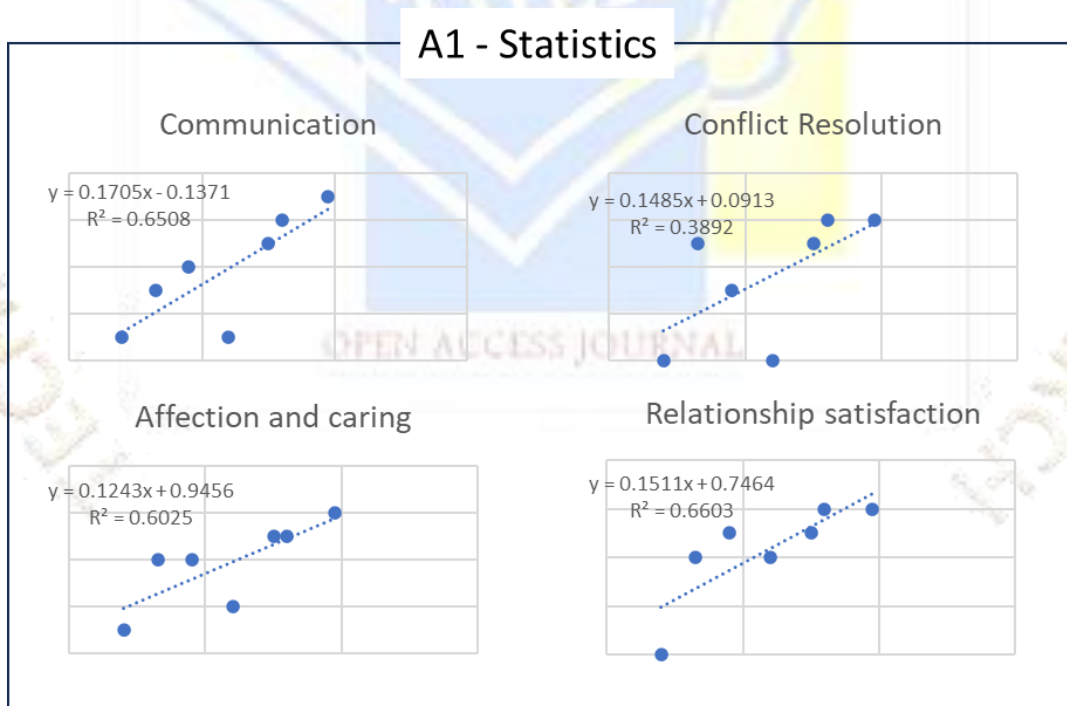
Results:

Couple 1:

Effect on Relationship Satisfaction: The gratitude intervention had a significant positive impact on the relationship satisfaction of Couple 1. Both participants reported notable improvements in their overall relationship dynamics.

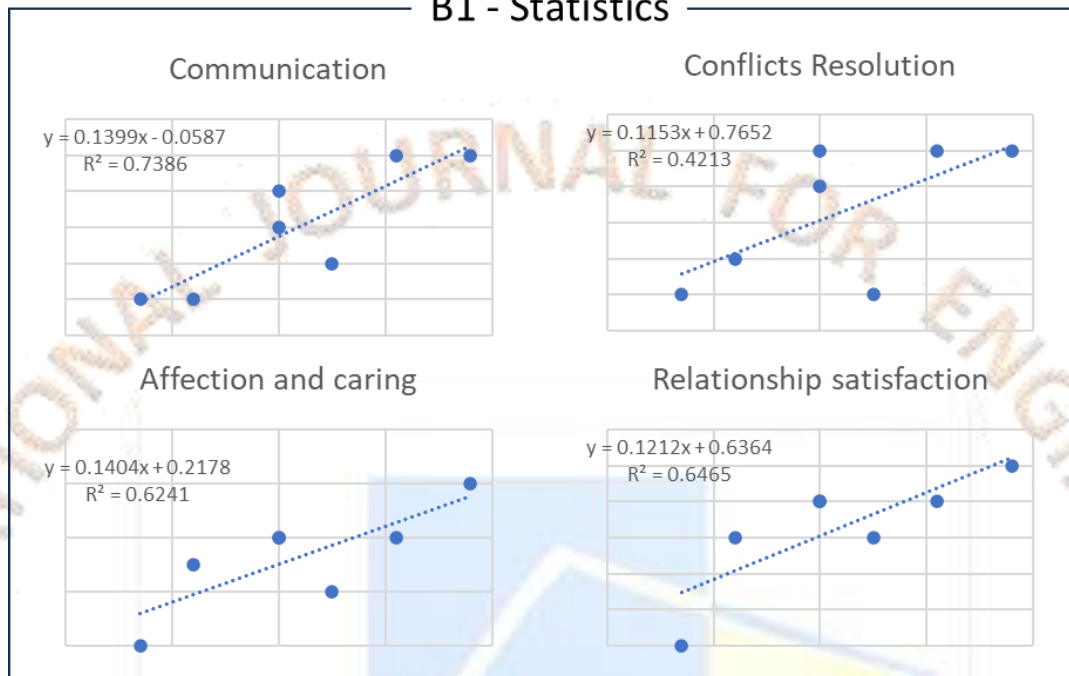
Quotes and Anecdotes:

- Participant A1 mentioned, "Before the intervention, we were caught in a cycle of miscommunication and frustration. But during the gratitude exercises, we learned to appreciate each other's efforts more. It made a huge difference."
- Participant B1 added, "We used to argue a lot over trivial things. Now, we take a moment to express gratitude for the little things, and it has made our daily interactions much more positive."



| A1 | Gratitude | Communication | Conflict Resolution | Affection and caring | Relationship satisfaction |
|---------------------------|-----------|---------------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| Gratitude | 1.00 | | | | |
| Communication | 0.81 | 1.00 | | | |
| Conflicts Resolution | 0.62 | 0.91 | 1.00 | | |
| Affection and caring | 0.78 | 0.96 | 0.95 | 1.00 | |
| Relationship satisfaction | 0.81 | 0.81 | 0.76 | 0.88 | 1.00 |

B1 - Statistics



| B1 | Gratitude | Communication | Conflicts Resolution | Affection and caring | Relationship satisfaction |
|---------------------------|-----------|---------------|----------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| Gratitude | 1.00 | | | | |
| Communication | 0.86 | 1.00 | | | |
| Conflicts Resolution | 0.65 | 0.92 | 1.00 | | |
| Affection and caring | 0.79 | 0.81 | 0.86 | 1.00 | |
| Relationship satisfaction | 0.80 | 0.78 | 0.79 | 0.96 | 1.00 |

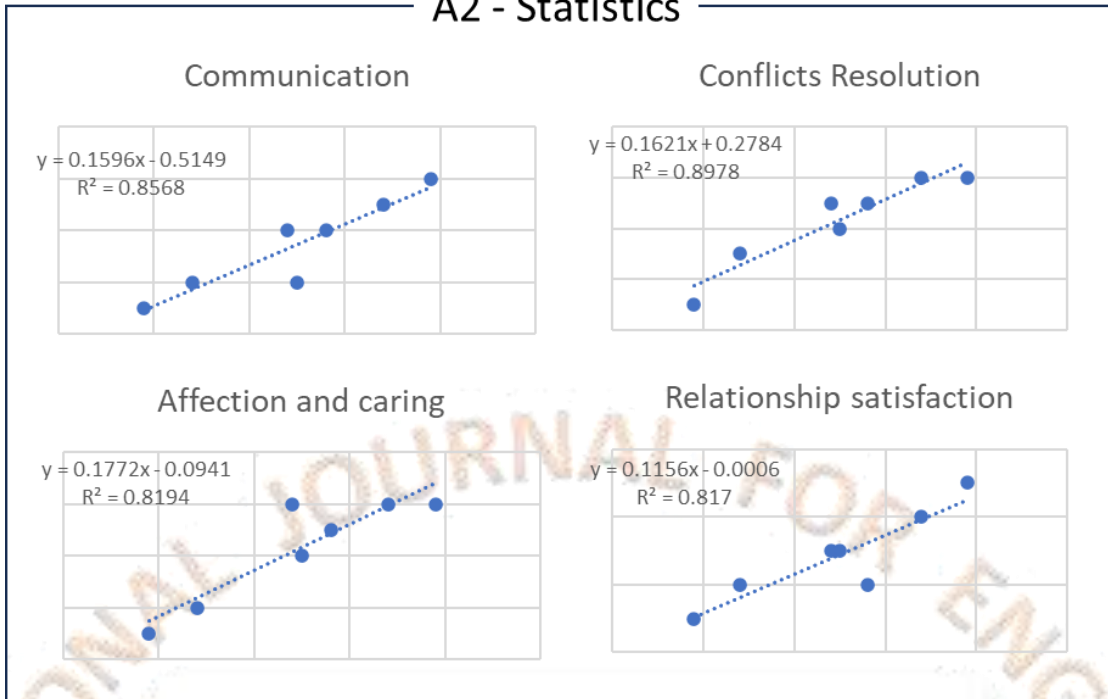
Couple 2:

Effect on Relationship Satisfaction: Couple 2 also experienced a significant increase in relationship satisfaction following the gratitude intervention. Their relationship appeared to rekindle and deepen, with enhanced emotional connection.

Quotes and Anecdotes:

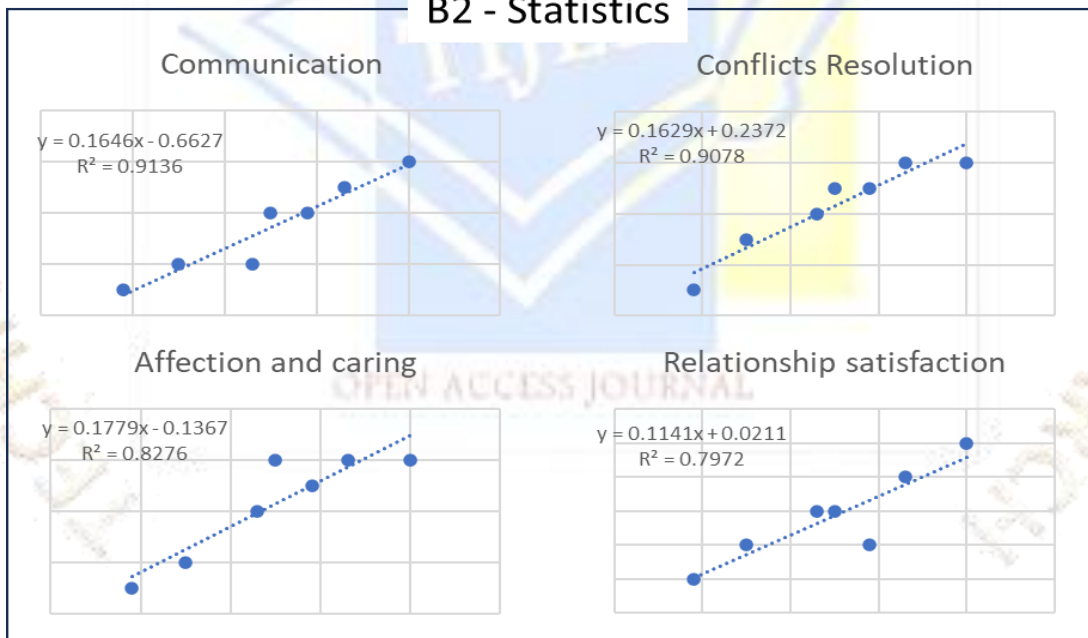
- Participant A2 shared, "I felt like we were drifting apart, but this intervention brought us closer. We started to appreciate each other's presence more, and it made a big difference in our intimacy."
- Participant B2 noted, "I was surprised by how emotional our gratitude discussions became. It opened up channels for us to express love and appreciation that we had somehow neglected."

A2 - Statistics



| A2 | Gratitude | Communication | Conflicts Resolution | Affection and caring | Relationship satisfaction |
|---------------------------|-----------|---------------|----------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| Gratitude | 1.00 | | | | |
| Communication | 0.93 | 1.00 | | | |
| Conflicts Resolution | 0.95 | 0.93 | 1.00 | | |
| Affection and caring | 0.91 | 0.90 | 0.96 | 1.00 | |
| Relationship satisfaction | 0.90 | 0.85 | 0.85 | 0.80 | 1.00 |

B2 - Statistics



| B2 | Gratitude | Communication | Conflicts Resolution | Affection and caring | Relationship satisfaction |
|---------------------------|-----------|---------------|----------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| Gratitude | 1.00 | | | | |
| Communication | 0.96 | 1.00 | | | |
| Conflicts Resolution | 0.95 | 0.93 | 1.00 | | |
| Affection and caring | 0.91 | 0.90 | 0.96 | 1.00 | |
| Relationship satisfaction | 0.89 | 0.85 | 0.85 | 0.80 | 1.00 |

Discussion:

Interpretation of Results: In the context of the study, the correlation data shows the following key relationships:

In both the couples, Gratitude is strongly positively correlated with Communication, Conflict Resolution, Affection and Caring, and Relationship Satisfaction.

This means that as individuals in the relationship express more gratitude, they tend to experience better communication, improved conflict resolution, increased affection, and caring, and higher overall relationship satisfaction. Gratitude appears to be a valuable factor positively influencing various aspects of the relationship.

These correlations reinforce the idea that gratitude can play a significant role in enhancing the quality of a relationship, promoting positive interactions and overall satisfaction. However, it's important to remember that correlation does not prove causation, and other factors may also contribute to these relationships.

The results of this case study align with existing literature on gratitude in relationships. The significant positive impact of the gratitude intervention on the overall relationship satisfaction of both couples is consistent with previous research that has highlighted the role of gratitude in fostering emotional connection, reducing conflict, and enhancing overall relationship quality (Algoe, 2012; Gordon et al., 2012).

The findings further underscore the effectiveness of tailored gratitude interventions within the context of unique relationship dynamics. By customizing the intervention to address each couple's specific needs, we were able to maximize its relevance and impact. This aligns with the notion that gratitude interventions are most effective when they are personalized to address individual and relational concerns (Lambert et al., 2019).

Implications:**1. Theoretical Implications:**

- This study contributes to the growing body of research on gratitude in relationships by highlighting the effectiveness of gratitude interventions in improving relationship satisfaction.
- The findings support the idea that gratitude can serve as a valuable tool for enhancing relationship dynamics, and it reinforces the importance of personalized interventions.

2. Practical Implications:

- The results suggest that couples, practitioners, and therapists can benefit from incorporating gratitude practices into relationship-building strategies.
- Tailoring gratitude interventions to address specific relationship challenges and dynamics can enhance their effectiveness.
- Practitioners should consider integrating gratitude-based exercises into couples' therapy or relationship counselling programs.

Limitations:**1. Small Sample Size:**

- One of the primary limitations of this study is the small sample size, consisting of only two couples. While the case study approach allows for in-depth exploration, it limits the generalizability of the findings to a broader population.
- Future research with larger and more diverse samples is needed to validate and extend these findings.

2. Self-Report Measures:

- The reliance on self-report measures for variables such as relationship satisfaction and gratitude may introduce response bias.
- Future studies could benefit from a combination of self-report measures and more objective measures to assess the intervention's effects.

3. Social Desirability Bias:

- Participants may have felt a social desirability bias, given their awareness of the study's focus on gratitude and relationship improvement.
- Efforts were made to mitigate this bias using confidential interviews and observations.

Conclusion:

Summary of Main Findings: This case study explored the impact of a tailored gratitude intervention on the relationship satisfaction of two couples. The main findings can be summarized as follows:

- Both couples experienced a significant increase in relationship satisfaction after participating in the gratitude intervention.
- The intervention fostered improved communication, increased emotional connection, and reduced conflict within both couples.
- The positive effects of the gratitude intervention persisted over time, with couples reporting ongoing benefits in their relationships.

These findings highlight the effectiveness of gratitude interventions in enhancing relationship dynamics and underline the importance of tailoring such interventions to address the unique needs and challenges of each couple.

Significance: The study reinforces the potential of gratitude as a powerful tool for improving relationship satisfaction and offers practical insights for practitioners, therapists, and couples seeking to enhance their relationships. The findings underscore the importance of personalized interventions in achieving positive outcomes.

Areas for Future Research: While this study provides valuable insights, several areas for future research in the field of gratitude interventions and relationships can be identified:

1. **Replication and Generalizability:** Future studies should seek to replicate these findings with larger and more diverse samples to enhance the generalizability of the results.
2. **Long-Term Effects:** Investigate the long-term effects of gratitude interventions on relationship satisfaction to assess whether the positive changes observed in this study are sustained over extended periods.
3. **Comparative Studies:** Conduct comparative studies to evaluate the effectiveness of different gratitude interventions and their impact on various aspects of relationships, such as conflict resolution, intimacy, and overall well-being.
4. **Mediating and Moderating Factors:** Explore the mediating and moderating factors that may influence the effectiveness of gratitude interventions in relationships, such as personality traits, relationship duration, and cultural factors.
5. **Online Interventions:** Investigate the feasibility and effectiveness of delivering gratitude interventions through online platforms, making them more accessible to a broader range of couples.
6. **Combined Interventions:** Examine the potential synergies of combining gratitude interventions with other therapeutic approaches, such as couples' therapy or mindfulness-based interventions.
7. **Workplace Relationships:** Extend research on gratitude interventions to explore their effects on workplace relationships, including interactions between colleagues and supervisors, and their impact on job satisfaction and productivity.

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