



FINDING MEANING AMID UNCERTAINTY: GRATITUDE AND EXISTENTIAL ANXIETY AMONG UNMARRIED ADULTS

Geogy Joseph

PhD Scholar at Arunodaya University, India.

ABSTRACT:

The experience of adulthood is shaped by continuous psychological, social, and existential transitions that influence an individual's sense of identity, purpose, and emotional well-being. In contemporary society, the developmental period of adulthood has become increasingly complex due to changing social norms, evolving interpersonal relationships, economic uncertainty, and shifting expectations regarding marriage and family life. One of the most significant demographic and social changes observed globally is the increasing number of individuals who remain unmarried for longer periods or throughout adulthood. Delayed marriage, voluntary singlehood, career prioritization, financial instability, and changing cultural attitudes toward intimate relationships have contributed to the growth of unmarried adult populations across many societies (Adamczyk, 2023). Although remaining unmarried may offer opportunities for autonomy, self-development, and personal freedom, it may also expose individuals to unique psychological challenges associated with loneliness, uncertainty, social comparison, and existential concerns.



KEYWORDS: continuous psychological, social, and existential transitions, contemporary society.

INTRODUCTION:

Among these psychological challenges, existential anxiety has emerged as an important area of investigation within contemporary psychological research. Existential anxiety refers to the deep-seated apprehension and emotional discomfort arising from awareness of fundamental human realities such as mortality, freedom, meaninglessness, uncertainty, responsibility, and existential isolation. Existential theorists argue that existential anxiety is an inevitable aspect of human existence because individuals are constantly confronted with questions regarding the meaning and purpose of life, the inevitability of death, and the uncertainty of the future. Although existential anxiety is considered a universal human experience, its intensity and manifestation vary depending on individual psychological resources, coping mechanisms, life circumstances, and sociocultural influences (van Bruggen et al., 2024).

The concept of existential anxiety originates from existential philosophy and existential psychology, particularly the works of philosophers and psychologists such as Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, Viktor Frankl, Rollo May, and Irvin Yalom. Contemporary psychological perspectives conceptualize existential anxiety as multidimensional, encompassing fear of death, meaninglessness, isolation, uncertainty, and concerns regarding personal responsibility. Recent research has highlighted that existential anxiety is particularly prominent during periods of transition and identity exploration, especially among emerging and young adults who are attempting to establish stable interpersonal

relationships, career paths, and life goals (Gawda, 2022). During adulthood, individuals are often required to make significant decisions regarding intimate commitment, family formation, occupational identity, and future planning, all of which may intensify existential concerns.

The developmental stage of adulthood is also characterized by increased awareness of social expectations and cultural norms. In many societies, marriage continues to be regarded as a major developmental milestone associated with emotional stability, social acceptance, companionship, and fulfillment. Consequently, unmarried adults may experience explicit or implicit societal pressure regarding their relationship status. Such pressures can contribute to feelings of inadequacy, social exclusion, uncertainty about the future, and fears related to aging alone. Studies examining unmarried adults have shown that concerns regarding long-term companionship, emotional support, and social belongingness are frequently associated with higher levels of anxiety and psychological distress (Kislev, 2023). Furthermore, persistent societal expectations regarding marriage may intensify existential fears related to isolation and life meaning among unmarried individuals.

Recent psychological literature indicates that unmarried adults are vulnerable to experiences of loneliness and existential isolation (Rokach & Berman, 2025). Existential isolation refers to the subjective feeling that one's experiences and inner world cannot be fully understood or shared by others. Unlike social isolation, existential isolation involves a deeper perception of separateness from humanity and meaningful connection. Research has demonstrated that existential isolation is positively associated with anxiety, depression, hopelessness, and reduced life satisfaction (Helm et al., 2023). Unmarried adults who perceive themselves as socially disconnected or excluded from normative life pathways may therefore experience elevated existential anxiety, particularly when faced with uncertainty regarding future relationships and life fulfillment.

The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified existential concerns among adults worldwide. Recent studies conducted after the pandemic have revealed increased levels of uncertainty, fear of mortality, social disconnection, and psychological distress among young and middle-aged adults (Arslan et al., 2023). The pandemic also highlighted the importance of psychological resilience and positive emotional resources in coping with existential threats. Consequently, positive psychology researchers have increasingly focused on identifying protective factors that may reduce existential anxiety and enhance psychological well-being. One such protective factor that has received substantial empirical attention is gratitude.

Gratitude is widely recognized as a positive emotional disposition characterized by appreciation for the beneficial aspects of life, acknowledgment of positive experiences, and recognition of support received from others. Contemporary researchers conceptualize gratitude as both a temporary emotional state and a relatively stable personality trait that influences how individuals interpret and respond to life experiences (Jans-Beken & Wong, 2021). Gratitude extends beyond simple expressions of thankfulness and involves a broader orientation toward appreciating life, relationships, opportunities, and personal growth. Individuals high in gratitude tend to focus on meaningful and positive aspects of existence even during stressful or uncertain circumstances.

Over the past decade, gratitude has emerged as a central construct within positive psychology because of its strong association with psychological well-being, resilience, emotional regulation, optimism, and life satisfaction. Recent empirical studies have consistently shown that gratitude is positively associated with happiness, self-esteem, hope, psychological flexibility, and interpersonal connectedness, while negatively associated with depression, stress, and anxiety (Halder, 2024; Wood et al., 2023). Individuals who regularly experience gratitude are more likely to adopt adaptive coping strategies, maintain positive social relationships, and interpret adverse experiences in constructive ways.

Recent studies have specifically examined the relationship between gratitude and existential dimensions such as death anxiety, meaning in life, and psychological resilience. For example, Al Boukhary et al. (2024) found that gratitude was negatively associated with death anxiety and positively associated with optimism and emotional well-being. Similarly, Kaya et al. (2024) reported that gratitude significantly predicted lower anxiety and higher psychological resilience among young adults.

These findings suggest that gratitude may function as a psychological buffer against existential distress by enhancing emotional stability and fostering adaptive meaning-making processes.

Another emerging concept relevant to the present study is existential gratitude. Existential gratitude refers to appreciation for life itself despite suffering, uncertainty, and impermanence. Unlike ordinary gratitude, existential gratitude acknowledges both positive and negative experiences while maintaining appreciation for existence and opportunities for growth. Wong and Bowers (2022) argued that existential gratitude enables individuals to confront existential realities such as death and uncertainty with greater acceptance and psychological maturity. Recent studies indicate that existential gratitude is associated with higher life satisfaction, meaning in life, and emotional resilience (Parabuac, 2024). Individuals with greater existential gratitude are more likely to perceive adversity as meaningful and transformative rather than purely threatening.

Although gratitude and existential anxiety have independently received growing research attention, relatively few studies have specifically examined the relationship between these variables among unmarried adults. Existing research has primarily focused on general anxiety, depression, stress, life satisfaction, or marital well-being within broader populations. Moreover, most studies examining existential anxiety have focused on clinical populations, older adults, or individuals facing life-threatening conditions, while comparatively less attention has been given to unmarried adults navigating developmental and relational uncertainty.

The study of unmarried adults is particularly important within contemporary society because changing social patterns have altered traditional pathways of adulthood. Increasing numbers of adults are postponing marriage due to educational pursuits, career aspirations, economic challenges, or personal choice. While many unmarried individuals experience autonomy and personal fulfillment, others may encounter emotional distress arising from social stigma, uncertainty regarding future relationships, and concerns about long-term companionship. Investigating factors that may protect unmarried adults from existential distress is therefore essential for promoting psychological well-being within this population.

Furthermore, examining gratitude as a positive psychological resource may contribute to the development of preventive mental health interventions and well-being programs. Gratitude-based interventions such as gratitude journaling, reflective exercises, mindfulness practices, and appreciation-focused therapies have demonstrated effectiveness in improving emotional well-being and reducing anxiety symptoms (Cregg & Cheavens, 2021). Understanding the association between gratitude and existential anxiety among unmarried adults may therefore provide valuable implications for counseling psychology, positive psychology, and mental health promotion.

The present study is thus designed to examine the relationship between gratitude and existential anxiety among unmarried adults using a correlational research design. Specifically, the study seeks to determine whether higher levels of gratitude are associated with lower levels of existential anxiety among unmarried adults. By exploring this relationship, the study aims to contribute to the growing literature on positive psychological factors and existential mental health. The findings may provide important insights into how gratitude functions as a protective emotional resource that supports psychological resilience, meaning-making, and emotional adjustment among unmarried individuals facing existential concerns and uncertainties about the future.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Recent years have witnessed a growing interest in gratitude within the field of positive psychology due to its strong association with emotional well-being and adaptive functioning. Gratitude is commonly conceptualized as a positive emotional orientation characterized by appreciation for life experiences, interpersonal relationships, and meaningful aspects of existence. Contemporary researchers have increasingly emphasized that gratitude is not merely a temporary feeling of thankfulness but also a stable psychological disposition that influences cognitive appraisal, emotional regulation, and interpersonal functioning. Halder (2024) reported that gratitude significantly enhances happiness, optimism, and psychological adjustment among young adults. Individuals with higher

gratitude levels were found to exhibit better emotional stability and greater resilience during stressful life situations. Similarly, Wood et al. (2023) observed that gratitude contributes to positive emotional functioning by encouraging individuals to focus on supportive experiences and meaningful life events rather than on distress and uncertainty.

A different perspective on gratitude has emerged through studies examining its relationship with coping and resilience. Instead of focusing exclusively on subjective well-being, recent scholars have explored gratitude as a protective psychological resource that enables individuals to manage adversity more effectively. For instance, Cregg and Cheavens (2021) demonstrated that gratitude-based interventions such as gratitude journaling and reflective appreciation exercises significantly reduced anxiety and emotional distress. Their findings suggested that gratitude facilitates adaptive coping by promoting positive reinterpretation of stressful experiences. In a similar vein, Toussaint et al. (2022) found that grateful individuals were less likely to engage in rumination and negative cognitive focus during periods of stress. The researchers argued that gratitude strengthens emotional recovery by broadening cognitive flexibility and encouraging constructive meaning-making processes.

Contemporary psychological research has also increasingly focused on existential anxiety, particularly among adults navigating uncertainty and identity-related concerns. Existential anxiety refers to emotional distress arising from awareness of mortality, isolation, uncertainty, freedom, and meaninglessness. Unlike general anxiety, existential anxiety is deeply connected to human awareness of life's impermanence and unpredictability. Gawda (2022) examined existential anxiety among different adulthood generations and found that younger adults experienced heightened concerns regarding future uncertainty, life purpose, and personal responsibility. The study further indicated that lower hope and reduced psychological resilience significantly predicted higher existential anxiety. Similarly, van Bruggen et al. (2024) emphasized that rapid social change, unstable economic conditions, and evolving interpersonal relationships have intensified existential concerns among contemporary adults.

Rather than emerging solely from awareness of death or uncertainty, existential anxiety is increasingly understood as a multidimensional experience shaped by social and interpersonal realities. Research conducted by Helm et al. (2023) highlighted the role of existential isolation in psychological distress. Existential isolation refers to the subjective perception that one's internal experiences cannot be completely understood or shared by others. According to the study, adults who experienced greater existential isolation also reported elevated levels of anxiety, loneliness, and depressive symptoms. The findings suggested that feelings of emotional disconnection and lack of meaningful relationships intensify existential fears and psychological vulnerability. Furthermore, Arslan et al. (2023) observed that the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic contributed significantly to existential distress by increasing mortality awareness, uncertainty, and emotional insecurity among adults.

A growing body of literature has begun to investigate whether gratitude may function as a protective factor against existential and anxiety-related distress. Kaya et al. (2024) explored the relationship between gratitude, resilience, and anxiety among young adults and found a strong negative association between gratitude and anxiety symptoms. Participants with higher gratitude scores demonstrated greater optimism, emotional regulation, and psychological resilience. Likewise, Al Boukhary et al. (2024) examined gratitude in relation to death anxiety and reported that gratitude significantly predicted lower fear of mortality and greater emotional acceptance. Their findings suggested that gratitude may reduce existential fears by strengthening positive future orientation and appreciation for life experiences.

Recent theoretical developments within existential-positive psychology have introduced the concept of existential gratitude, which extends traditional understandings of gratitude beyond appreciation for positive outcomes. Existential gratitude involves appreciation for life itself despite uncertainty, suffering, and impermanence. Wong and Bowers (2022) argued that existential gratitude enables individuals to confront difficult life realities with greater acceptance and emotional maturity. Individuals who possess existential gratitude are more likely to derive meaning from adversity and maintain psychological balance during periods of uncertainty. Supporting this perspective, Parabuac (2024) found that existential gratitude was positively associated with life satisfaction, social

connectedness, and emotional resilience among young adults. The study emphasized that gratitude may help individuals transform distressing experiences into opportunities for growth and meaning-making.

Some recent studies have focused specifically on the mechanisms through which gratitude influences emotional and existential functioning. Jans-Beken et al. (2023) proposed that gratitude enhances psychological well-being by fostering interpersonal connection, self-transcendence, and appreciation for present experiences. Their findings indicated that gratitude promotes existential fulfillment by helping individuals perceive life as valuable and meaningful. Similarly, Mead et al. (2023) reported that gratitude contributes significantly to meaning-centered coping strategies. Individuals who regularly practiced gratitude demonstrated stronger purpose in life, reduced hopelessness, and lower existential distress. These findings reinforce the argument that gratitude may serve as an important psychological resource for managing uncertainty and existential concerns.

The increasing prevalence of delayed marriage and prolonged singlehood has also generated significant scholarly attention toward the psychological experiences of unmarried adults. Contemporary unmarried adults often encounter unique developmental and social challenges related to intimacy, companionship, identity formation, and future planning. Kislev (2023) reported that unmarried individuals frequently experience societal pressure and stigma associated with relationship status, particularly in cultures where marriage is viewed as a normative life milestone. Although many unmarried adults experience autonomy and personal growth, others report emotional distress associated with loneliness, uncertainty regarding future relationships, and reduced social belongingness. The study suggested that social expectations surrounding marriage may intensify existential concerns among unmarried individuals.

Another important dimension highlighted within recent literature involves loneliness and social disconnection among unmarried adults. Nielsen et al. (2024) investigated emotional loneliness among young unmarried adults and found significant associations between loneliness, anxiety, and reduced life satisfaction. Individuals who lacked strong interpersonal support networks reported greater emotional insecurity and existential distress. Similarly, Adamczyk (2023) observed that unmarried adults frequently experience concerns regarding aging, companionship, and future emotional security. Such concerns were found to contribute significantly to uncertainty and existential anxiety. These findings suggest that unmarried adults may be particularly vulnerable to existential concerns because they often confront questions related to intimacy, purpose, and long-term life direction independently.

Despite substantial advancements in the literature on gratitude and existential functioning, important gaps remain. Most recent studies have focused either on gratitude and general psychological well-being or on existential anxiety within broader adult populations. Comparatively limited attention has been given to the relationship between gratitude and existential anxiety among unmarried adults specifically. Existing studies rarely examine how gratitude may buffer existential concerns associated with loneliness, uncertainty, and social expectations surrounding unmarried status. Given the increasing number of adults remaining unmarried across contemporary societies, understanding the relationship between gratitude and existential anxiety within this population has become increasingly relevant. Therefore, the present study seeks to examine the association between gratitude and existential anxiety among unmarried adults using a correlational research design, with the aim of contributing to contemporary positive and existential psychological literature.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the relationship between gratitude and existential anxiety among unmarried adults.
2. To assess the level of gratitude among unmarried male and female adults.
3. To assess the level of existential anxiety among unmarried male and female adults.

Hypotheses of the Study

1. There is no significant relationship between gratitude and existential anxiety among unmarried adults.
2. There is no significant gender difference in gratitude among unmarried adults.

3. There is no significant gender difference in existential anxiety among unmarried adults.

METHODOLOGY

The present study adopted a quantitative research approach using a correlational research design to examine the relationship between gratitude and existential anxiety among unmarried adults. The study also aimed to investigate whether significant gender differences existed in gratitude and existential anxiety among unmarried male and female adults. A correlational design was considered appropriate because the study intended to examine the degree and direction of association between two psychological variables without manipulating them experimentally. In addition to correlation analysis, comparative analysis was conducted to identify differences between male and female participants on the selected variables. The study followed a cross-sectional approach in which data were collected from participants at a single point in time through self-report measures.

The sample for the present study consisted of 100 unmarried adults selected using convenience sampling technique. The participants included 50 unmarried males and 50 unmarried females, ensuring equal representation of gender for comparative analysis. The participants had a mean age of 34.87 years with a standard deviation of 4.51, indicating moderate variability in age distribution. Individuals from different educational, occupational, and socio-cultural backgrounds participated in the study. Only unmarried adults who voluntarily agreed to participate were included in the sample. Married, divorced, separated, and widowed individuals were excluded from the study to maintain homogeneity in marital status. Participants who provided incomplete responses or duplicate entries were also excluded during data screening.

The study involved gratitude as the independent variable and existential anxiety as the dependent variable. Gratitude refers to the tendency to experience appreciation, thankfulness, and recognition toward positive experiences and meaningful aspects of life. Existential anxiety refers to emotional distress arising from awareness of existential concerns such as uncertainty, death, isolation, meaninglessness, and personal responsibility. Gender was considered as a grouping variable to compare male and female participants in relation to gratitude and existential anxiety.

TOOLS USED

Socio-Demographic Data Sheet

A self-prepared socio-demographic data sheet was used to collect basic personal information from the participants. The questionnaire included details such as age, gender, marital status, educational qualification, occupation, and other relevant background information. The socio-demographic sheet was used to describe the characteristics of the sample and ensure that the participants met the inclusion criteria of the study.

Gratitude Questionnaire-6 (GQ-6)

Gratitude was measured using the Gratitude Questionnaire-6 (GQ-6) developed by Michael E. McCullough, Robert A. Emmons, and Jo-Ann Tsang (2002). The GQ-6 is a brief self-report measure designed to assess the dispositional tendency to experience gratitude in everyday life. The scale consists of six items that evaluate appreciation, thankfulness, and grateful orientation toward positive experiences and interpersonal relationships. Participants responded to each item using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree"). Two items in the scale are reverse scored in order to minimize response bias. Total scores are obtained by summing the responses after reverse scoring the relevant items, with higher scores indicating higher levels of dispositional gratitude.

The GQ-6 is widely used in positive psychology research due to its brevity, simplicity, and strong psychometric properties. The scale takes less than five minutes to complete and has demonstrated good internal reliability, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .82 to .87. Previous studies have shown that gratitude measured through the GQ-6 is positively associated with optimism, hope, life satisfaction, spirituality, empathy, forgiveness, and prosocial behavior, while being negatively associated with depression, anxiety, materialism, and envy. (The key reference for the scale

is: McCullough, M. E., Emmons, R. A., & Tsang, J. (2002). *The grateful disposition: A conceptual and empirical topography*. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 82(1), 112–127).

Existential Anxiety Questionnaire (EAQ)

Existential anxiety was measured using the Existential Anxiety Questionnaire (EAQ) developed by Weems (2024). The EAQ is a self-report instrument designed to assess anxiety arising from existential concerns related to life meaning, death, uncertainty, emptiness, guilt, condemnation, and personal existence. The questionnaire is based on existential and humanistic theoretical traditions emphasizing that concerns regarding meaning, mortality, isolation, and existence are central aspects of the human condition. The final version of the EAQ consists of 13 items. Participants respond to each item using a dichotomous response format of “Yes” or “No.” Scoring is conducted by assigning a score of 1 for “Yes” responses and 0 for “No” responses. Reverse-scored items are scored in the opposite direction. The total possible score ranges from 0 to 13, with higher scores indicating greater existential anxiety. No specific cutoff scores have been established for the scale.

The EAQ assesses multiple dimensions of existential anxiety including anxiety about fate and death, anxiety about emptiness and meaninglessness, and anxiety related to guilt and condemnation. Subscale scores can also be computed based on specific item groupings. The scale was originally validated among a diverse adult sample aged 18 to 44 years. The EAQ has demonstrated adequate psychometric properties. Reliability analysis indicated satisfactory internal consistency with a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of .71 and a two-week test–retest reliability estimate of $r = .72$. Evidence for validity was established through significant associations between existential anxiety and symptoms of anxiety and depression. Previous findings also indicated that higher existential anxiety scores were associated with greater psychological distress and emotional difficulties. (The key reference for the scale is: Weems, C. F., Weems, C. F., Costa, N. M., Dehon, C., & Berman, S. L. (2024). *The Existential Anxiety Questionnaire (EAQ) User Guide?: Original Scale Scoring, Reliability and Validity, Child-Youth Report, Spanish, Chinese, Dutch, Polish, Slovak Translations*. ReSearchGate, no. May).

Data collection was carried out through online mode using Google Forms. The questionnaire package included the informed consent form, socio-demographic data sheet, gratitude scale, and existential anxiety scale. Before responding to the questionnaire, participants were provided with detailed information regarding the purpose and nature of the study. They were informed that participation was voluntary and that all responses would remain confidential and be used solely for academic and research purposes. Participants were also informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences.

The Google Form link was circulated through various social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, Telegram, and email to reach unmarried adults from different backgrounds. Participants were instructed to respond honestly and independently to all items. The online mode of data collection was considered convenient and efficient because it enabled wider accessibility and faster response collection. After obtaining sufficient responses, the data were carefully screened for incomplete entries, random responses, and duplicate submissions. Only valid and complete responses were retained for statistical analysis, resulting in a final sample of 100 participants.

The collected data were coded and analyzed using appropriate statistical methods. Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were calculated to understand the distribution and characteristics of the variables. Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to examine the relationship between gratitude and existential anxiety among unmarried adults. Independent Samples t-test was employed to assess gender differences in gratitude and existential anxiety between unmarried male and female participants. The obtained results were interpreted based on the objectives and hypotheses of the study, and statistical significance was tested at appropriate probability levels.

Ethical principles were strictly maintained throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were ensured, and no personally identifying information was disclosed. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and participants had the freedom to discontinue participation at any

point. The collected information was stored securely and used exclusively for academic and research purposes.

RESULTS

The present study was conducted to examine the relationship between gratitude and existential anxiety among unmarried adults and to explore gender differences in both variables. Data collected from 100 unmarried adults were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics were computed to understand the distribution of scores for gratitude and existential anxiety among the participants. The results indicated that the gratitude scores ranged from 12 to 42, with a mean score of 30.51 and a standard deviation of 9.49. The relatively high mean score suggests that the participants generally reported moderate to high levels of gratitude. The obtained standard deviation indicates moderate variability in gratitude levels among the participants.

For existential anxiety, the scores ranged from 1 to 13, with a mean score of 6.65 and a standard deviation of 3.67. The mean score indicates a moderate level of existential anxiety among the unmarried adults included in the study. The standard deviation suggests that participants differed moderately in their experience of existential anxiety. The descriptive statistics further indicate that the sample demonstrated variability in both gratitude and existential anxiety, thereby making the data appropriate for correlational analysis. A total of 100 valid responses were included in the final analysis, and no cases were excluded from the dataset.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of gratitude and existential anxiety among unmarried adults.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Gratitude and Existential Anxiety among Unmarried Adults

Variables	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Gratitude	100	12	42	30.51	9.49
Existential Anxiety	100	1	13	6.65	3.67

The findings from the descriptive analysis provide an overview of the psychological characteristics of the participants and indicate that unmarried adults in the present sample experienced varying levels of gratitude and existential anxiety. Further inferential analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between the variables and gender differences among the participants.

To examine the relationship between gratitude and existential anxiety among unmarried adults, Pearson's Product Moment Correlation analysis was performed. The analysis was conducted to determine the direction, strength, and significance of the association between the two psychological variables included in the study. Gratitude was considered as a positive psychological disposition reflecting appreciation, thankfulness, and acknowledgment of meaningful life experiences, whereas existential anxiety referred to anxiety arising from concerns related to uncertainty, isolation, meaninglessness, mortality awareness, and existential insecurity.

The results of the correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant and strong negative relationship between gratitude and existential anxiety among unmarried adults. The obtained Pearson correlation coefficient was $r = -0.938$, with a significance value of $p = .000$, which was significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). The negative direction of the correlation indicates an inverse relationship between the two variables, suggesting that as gratitude increases, existential anxiety decreases among unmarried adults.

The obtained correlation coefficient of -0.938 indicates a very high negative correlation between gratitude and existential anxiety. This finding suggests that unmarried adults who possess higher levels of gratitude are less likely to experience intense existential concerns such as fear of uncertainty, meaninglessness, loneliness, guilt, emptiness, and death-related apprehension. Individuals with greater appreciation for life experiences and stronger positive orientation toward life may possess

better emotional resilience and adaptive coping abilities, which may help them manage existential concerns more effectively.

On the other hand, participants who reported lower levels of gratitude tended to experience higher levels of existential anxiety. Such individuals may be more vulnerable to feelings of purposelessness, uncertainty regarding the future, existential isolation, and psychological distress. The results therefore indicate that gratitude may function as an important protective psychological factor that reduces existential distress among unmarried adults. The findings of the present study are consistent with recent literature in positive psychology and existential psychology, which suggests that gratitude promotes emotional well-being, meaning-making, optimism, and psychological resilience while reducing anxiety and distress. The strong inverse association observed in the present study further supports the view that gratitude helps individuals maintain positive cognitive appraisal and emotional balance even in the presence of existential concerns and life uncertainties.

Based on the obtained findings, the null hypothesis stating that "there is no significant relationship between gratitude and existential anxiety among unmarried adults" was rejected. The alternative hypothesis stating that "there is a significant relationship between gratitude and existential anxiety among unmarried adults" was accepted. Therefore, it can be concluded that gratitude and existential anxiety are significantly related among unmarried adults, with gratitude being negatively associated with existential anxiety.

Table 2
Correlation Between Gratitude and Existential Anxiety Among Unmarried Adults

Variables	Gratitude	Existential Anxiety
Gratitude	1	-0.938**
Existential Anxiety	-0.938**	1

Note. $p < .01$. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A correlation analysis was conducted to examine whether significant gender differences existed in gratitude and existential anxiety among unmarried adults. Independent Samples *t*-test was employed to compare the mean scores of male and female participants on both variables. The results for gratitude indicated that unmarried male participants obtained a mean score of 30.66 with a standard deviation of 8.96, whereas unmarried female participants obtained a mean score of 30.36 with a standard deviation of 10.08. Although male participants reported slightly higher gratitude scores than female participants, the difference between the two groups was found to be statistically non-significant. The obtained *t* value was 0.157 with a significance value of $p = .875$, which was greater than the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the difference in gratitude between unmarried male and female adults was not statistically significant. The findings indicate that both unmarried male and female adults experienced similar levels of gratitude. The very small mean difference suggests that gender did not substantially influence grateful disposition among the participants included in the present study. Thus, the null hypothesis stating that "there is no significant gender difference in gratitude among unmarried adults" was accepted, while the alternative hypothesis was rejected.

An Independent Samples *t*-test was conducted to examine gender differences in existential anxiety among unmarried adults. The results revealed that unmarried male participants had a mean existential anxiety score of 6.72 with a standard deviation of 3.59, whereas unmarried female participants had a mean score of 6.58 with a standard deviation of 3.78. Although males reported slightly higher existential anxiety scores compared to females, the difference was found to be statistically non-significant. The obtained *t* value for existential anxiety was 0.190 with a significance value of $p = .850$, which exceeded the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, no statistically significant gender difference was observed in existential anxiety among unmarried adults. The findings suggest that both male and female unmarried adults experienced comparable levels of existential anxiety related to uncertainty, meaninglessness, isolation, and existential concerns. Accordingly, the null hypothesis stating that "there is no significant gender difference in existential anxiety among unmarried

adults” was accepted, and the alternative hypothesis was rejected. Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances was also examined before interpreting the *t*-test results. For gratitude, Levene’s test yielded a non-significant value ($F = 1.362, p = .246$), indicating homogeneity of variance between male and female participants. Similarly, for existential anxiety, Levene’s test was non-significant ($F = 0.242, p = .624$), suggesting equal variances across gender groups. Therefore, the equal variances assumed values were considered appropriate for interpretation.

Table 3
Group Statistics for Gratitude and Existential Anxiety Based on Gender

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Gratitude	Male	50	30.66	8.96	1.27
	Female	50	30.36	10.08	1.43
Existential Anxiety	Male	50	6.72	3.59	0.51
	Female	50	6.58	3.78	0.54

Table 4
Independent Samples *t*-Test for Gender Differences in Gratitude and Existential Anxiety

Variable	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Gratitude	0.157	98	.875	0.300
Existential Anxiety	0.190	98	.850	0.140

Note. Differences are not statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

DISCUSSION

The present study was conducted to examine the relationship between gratitude and existential anxiety among unmarried adults and to explore whether significant gender differences existed in gratitude and existential anxiety. The findings of the study revealed a strong and statistically significant negative relationship between gratitude and existential anxiety among unmarried adults. However, no significant gender differences were observed in either gratitude or existential anxiety. The findings provide important insights into the role of gratitude as a positive psychological resource associated with reduced existential distress among unmarried adults.

The descriptive analysis revealed that unmarried adults in the present study demonstrated moderate to high levels of gratitude and moderate levels of existential anxiety. The findings suggest that although unmarried adults experience existential concerns related to uncertainty, isolation, meaninglessness, and future insecurity, many individuals also possess adaptive emotional resources such as gratitude that may help them maintain psychological balance. Contemporary adulthood is characterized by changing interpersonal relationships, delayed marriage, career uncertainty, and increasing social expectations, all of which may contribute to existential reflection and emotional distress. At the same time, gratitude may function as an important protective emotional disposition that enables individuals to focus on positive life experiences, interpersonal appreciation, and meaning-centered coping.

One of the major findings of the study was the existence of a strong negative relationship between gratitude and existential anxiety among unmarried adults. The obtained correlation coefficient indicated that higher levels of gratitude were associated with lower levels of existential anxiety. This finding suggests that individuals who possess a grateful disposition are less likely to experience intense existential fears related to mortality, uncertainty, loneliness, emptiness, and meaninglessness. Gratitude may help individuals reinterpret stressful and uncertain life situations more positively, thereby reducing existential distress and promoting emotional resilience.

The findings are consistent with recent developments in positive psychology, which emphasize gratitude as an important determinant of emotional well-being and adaptive psychological functioning. Halder (2024) reported that gratitude significantly enhances optimism, emotional regulation, and

psychological resilience among adults. Individuals with higher gratitude were found to experience greater life satisfaction and reduced emotional distress. Similarly, Jans-Beken and Wong (2021) suggested that gratitude contributes to meaning in life and emotional stability by encouraging appreciation for present experiences and interpersonal relationships. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that gratitude is also closely associated with reduced existential anxiety among unmarried adults.

The strong negative association observed in the present study may also be explained through Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. According to the theory, positive emotions such as gratitude broaden individuals' cognitive and emotional perspectives, enabling them to build enduring psychological resources including resilience, optimism, social connectedness, and adaptive coping (Fredrickson, 2023). Individuals who experience gratitude are therefore more likely to focus on meaningful and positive aspects of life rather than excessively dwelling on uncertainty and existential fears. This broader cognitive orientation may reduce the intensity of existential concerns and enhance emotional adjustment.

The findings of the study are also supported by recent research examining gratitude and anxiety-related outcomes. Kaya et al. (2024) found that gratitude was negatively associated with anxiety symptoms and positively associated with resilience and hope among young adults. Likewise, Al Boukhary et al. (2024) observed that individuals with higher gratitude experienced lower death anxiety and greater emotional acceptance. Their findings suggested that gratitude promotes psychological flexibility and helps individuals cope more effectively with existential realities such as mortality and uncertainty. The present study similarly indicates that gratitude may serve as a protective psychological factor that buffers existential distress among unmarried adults.

Another possible explanation for the negative relationship between gratitude and existential anxiety may be derived from existential-positive psychology perspectives. Wong and Bowers (2022) introduced the concept of existential gratitude, which refers to appreciation for life despite suffering, uncertainty, and impermanence. According to this perspective, grateful individuals are more likely to perceive difficulties and uncertainty as meaningful experiences rather than purely threatening conditions. Gratitude may therefore help unmarried adults accept existential realities more constructively while maintaining emotional stability and psychological well-being.

The findings may be particularly relevant in the context of unmarried adulthood. Contemporary unmarried adults often face concerns related to relationship uncertainty, future companionship, social pressure, aging, and emotional security. In many cultures, marriage continues to be viewed as an important developmental milestone associated with stability and fulfillment. Consequently, unmarried adults may experience existential concerns regarding belongingness, meaning, and future life direction. Research conducted by Kislev (2023) suggested that unmarried individuals frequently encounter social stigma and emotional loneliness associated with delayed marriage and prolonged singlehood. Similarly, Adamczyk (2023) found that unmarried adults often experience uncertainty regarding future relationships and emotional support systems. Within such contexts, gratitude may function as an adaptive coping resource that enhances emotional resilience and reduces existential insecurity.

The present study also revealed that there were no significant gender differences in gratitude among unmarried adults. Although male participants reported slightly higher gratitude scores compared to female participants, the difference was statistically non-significant. This finding suggests that gratitude may function as a relatively universal psychological disposition that is not strongly influenced by gender within unmarried adult populations. Both male and female participants appeared to possess comparable levels of appreciation, thankfulness, and positive orientation toward life experiences.

The absence of significant gender differences in gratitude is consistent with several recent studies indicating that gratitude is influenced more by personality characteristics, coping styles, and life experiences than by gender alone. Wood et al. (2023) reported that gratitude contributes similarly to emotional well-being across male and female participants. Likewise, Cregg and Cheavens (2021) observed that gratitude interventions improved emotional functioning among individuals irrespective

of gender differences. The findings of the present study therefore suggest that gratitude may represent a broadly shared positive psychological resource among unmarried adults. Similarly, no significant gender differences were observed in existential anxiety among unmarried adults. Although male participants reported slightly higher existential anxiety scores compared to female participants, the difference was statistically non-significant. This finding suggests that existential concerns related to uncertainty, isolation, mortality awareness, and meaninglessness may be experienced similarly by both unmarried men and women. The shared developmental challenges associated with unmarried adulthood, including concerns regarding future security, social expectations, interpersonal relationships, and life purpose, may contribute to comparable levels of existential anxiety across genders.

The lack of gender differences in existential anxiety may also reflect changing social roles and evolving societal expectations in contemporary adulthood. Modern men and women increasingly encounter similar occupational pressures, economic uncertainty, relationship instability, and concerns regarding long-term emotional fulfillment. As a result, existential concerns may no longer be strongly differentiated by traditional gender roles. Recent research by van Bruggen et al. (2024) emphasized that existential anxiety has become increasingly prevalent across adult populations due to social uncertainty and rapid cultural change. Similarly, Arslan et al. (2023) reported that existential distress following the COVID-19 pandemic affected adults across genders due to shared experiences of uncertainty, isolation, and insecurity.

The findings of the present study have important theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to positive psychology and existential psychology literature by highlighting the role of gratitude in reducing existential anxiety among unmarried adults. The findings support the growing view that positive emotional dispositions such as gratitude can function as psychological resources that promote resilience, meaning-making, and emotional well-being in the presence of existential concerns. From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that gratitude-based interventions may be beneficial for unmarried adults experiencing existential distress. Psychological interventions such as gratitude journaling, reflective appreciation exercises, mindfulness practices, and meaning-centered counseling may help individuals develop greater emotional resilience and reduce existential anxiety. Mental health professionals and counselors working with unmarried adults may therefore incorporate gratitude-focused therapeutic approaches to promote psychological well-being and adaptive coping.

CONCLUSION

The present study was conducted to examine the relationship between gratitude and existential anxiety among unmarried adults and to investigate whether significant gender differences existed in these variables. The findings of the study revealed a strong and statistically significant negative relationship between gratitude and existential anxiety among unmarried adults. Individuals with higher levels of gratitude were found to experience lower levels of existential anxiety, whereas individuals with lower gratitude reported higher existential distress. This finding highlights the important role of gratitude as a positive psychological resource that may help unmarried adults cope more effectively with existential concerns related to uncertainty, meaninglessness, isolation, mortality awareness, and future insecurity. The study further revealed that there were no significant gender differences in gratitude or existential anxiety among unmarried adults. Both male and female participants demonstrated relatively similar levels of gratitude and existential anxiety, suggesting that existential concerns and grateful disposition may be experienced similarly across genders within unmarried adult populations. The findings indicate that the psychological experiences associated with unmarried adulthood, including concerns regarding life direction, emotional security, social belongingness, and future uncertainty, may influence men and women in comparable ways.

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