

Psychology of Personality and Individual Differences: Theory and Applications

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Week 11

Lecture 24: Positive personality trait: Character strengths

I welcome you all to module 11 of this course. Module 11 is about developing positive personality traits. In this module, we will discuss some positive personality traits that contribute to a person's well-being. In this module, we will discuss four such traits. This is the first lecture of this module, and overall, it is lecture number 24. Today, we will discuss character strengths.

Before we begin today's lecture, let us briefly recap the last lecture. In the previous lecture, part of module 10, we discussed various aspects of personality development. We discussed how attachment, particularly early childhood attachment styles in infancy, influences behaviour, especially how they carry over into adult behaviour. We discussed different attachment behavioural systems that motivate us to form attachments with caregivers. We also discussed various phases of separation when a child experiences sudden separation, the reactions a child shows, and individual differences in infant attachment patterns. We covered different attachment styles, Mary Ainsworth's Strange Situation study, and how it identified different attachment styles. We also discussed how childhood attachment styles influence adult behaviour. Finally, we discussed under what conditions attachment styles formed during childhood can change or remain influential in adult behaviour. These are some of the topics we covered in the last lecture. Let us begin today's lecture. In today's lecture, the key concept we will cover is psychological strength.

More specifically, we will be talking about a concept called character strength, and we will discuss its benefits. We will be talking about the VIA classification of strengths and virtues. What are the different classification systems? We will discuss how character strength is associated with human well-being and happiness. Finally, we will talk about how to cultivate these character strengths.

When discussing strengths in the psychological sense, psychological strengths are essentially built-in capacities for specific thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. These capacities, abilities, or strengths can be reflected in one's thought processes, emotions,

behaviour, or actions. Most strengths are built-in capacities typically developed from genetic influences and environmental factors. Specific patterns we create may be reflected as capacities in thought processes, emotions, or actions. These are all built-in capacities, and different people possess different ones. These are called psychological strengths. For example, strengths may include courage, optimism, perseverance, and gratitude etc.

These are examples of psychological strengths. People may show different degrees of these strengths in their behaviour. The study of strengths is a foundational agenda of psychology, particularly a branch called positive psychology. One of the central concepts discussed in positive psychology is character strengths because the focus of positive psychology is to emphasise the positive functioning of human beings.

Psychological strength is one aspect that gives us a glimpse of human strength or the positive side of human behaviour. Now, why do we need to talk about, discuss, or research psychological strengths? What is the need for it? What are the benefits of understanding or exploring psychological strengths within human beings? So, some of the possible or potential benefits of understanding psychological strengths are listed in this slide.

You can see here. Understanding strengths encourages insights and perspectives in life. The moment we know or get some idea about specific strengths that we all have, it will give us a particular direction in life, and we will be able to understand that these are the things I can do. These are the directions in which I can go because I have specific abilities in those areas.

So, strengths give you insights and provide you with perspective in life. Strengths also make one less sensitive to stress. If you have a particular strength, it will protect you from harmful situations. Influences in life so let's say if you have courage or if you have optimism as a strength if you are very optimistic person then obviously hopelessness or dejection or you know because of any loss in life or trauma in life you will be less likely to be influenced by those you will be able to face those difficulties much easily if you have let's say strength of optimism and so on so it will help you to, protect you from certain stressful circumstances of life so strength generates optimism and resilience a lot of strength you know contributes to give you more resilience in life where you will be able to bounce back easily from the problems of life or difficulties of life. It provides a sense of direction in life, as we said. It also helps to develop confidence and self-esteem.

It is because of the strength that people build confidence and healthy self-esteem. When they have specific weaknesses, their self-esteem generally goes down.

Strength generates a sense of vitality and energy in life. When you work on your strength, you do something with your strength. Then you have more energy and positivity in whatever you do using your strength. It stimulates a sense of happiness and fulfilment. When you use your strength and realise your strength, it gives you a lot of joy and satisfaction.

If you can use your strength and potential in a specific direction of your life, it could be the workplace, it could be any other. It helps to achieve one's goal in life. It enables one to be more engaged in work and performance better. So basically, it gives you much higher motivation in whatever you do, so development and following one strength can build resilience and prevent psychological illnesses. This is one of the essential preventive factors. Many times in life, we face various psychological problems or emotional disturbances, like a feeling of sadness or depression.

We can protect ourselves from such negative states by developing certain positive states. As I said, if you work on specific strengths like building resilience, building optimism and so on, depression and sadness probably will not happen in the first place. So this will protect you. So, many psychological illnesses can be prevented if you work on your strengths, develop them, and use them more. For example, as I already said, developing optimism may buffer against depression and so on.

The strengths approach underlies most successful psychological therapies, such as instilling hope, optimism, courage, and inclining. If you look at most of the psychotherapies or counselling that people do in the field of psychological, where therapies are given for treatment of mental disorders and so on. Most of these approaches will have some instilling of strength because when a person struggles with a particular aspect of their life, they need more strength, or at least if they realise strength, or some of these therapies will try to in some way. In their approach, whatever approach they are taking, they will try to instil specific strength in them to overcome those psychological illnesses or problems that they are facing.

So in that sense, this is one of the essential or foundational aspects in almost all therapies. These are some of the critical reasons why we need to understand strength. We must focus on strengths, study them, and develop understanding and insights about them. So, these are some of the essential reasons why. Now, when we talk about the concept of

strength, there are many approaches we can see in the literature of psychology that look at strength from different perspectives.

So, there are different perspectives to look at strength. So, here I have just listed two. One is the VIA classification we will discuss in this lecture. In this lecture, we will discuss the first one, the VIA classification of strengths and virtues, which discusses character strengths. So, we will discuss those character strengths.

Another approach is called the Gallup StrengthsFinder. This approach was primarily developed in the context of workplace strengths. Strengths related to the workplace. This was developed mainly in the workplace context, and the idea is mostly derived from the concept of talent—that everyone has specific inbuilt talents and how to convert them into strengths. So if someone has, let's say, a talent for communicating with others, how can they use that talent and make it their strength by consistently using and developing it?

So, this Gallup StrengthsFinder approach mainly discusses different talents and strengths primarily applicable in workplaces. We will not be focusing on this aspect in this lecture. We will focus on understanding character strengths because we discuss positive personality traits. So in that context, the VIA classification fits much better because certain aspects of personality are relatively permanent. And which are valued by people.

So, they are morally valued. So, those are called character strengths, and we will focus on this aspect because this comes closer to personality dimensions. So, VIA is a classification of strengths and virtues, which we will discuss here. So, this approach was developed by Peterson and Seligman in 2004. They created a classification system of strengths and virtues, taking a cue from the DSM, called the Values in Action classification.

This whole approach of classification of strengths and virtues came from the DSM classification of psychological disorders. So, there is a DSM classification of psychological disorders that classifies all psychological disorders into different categories. And you know, this is like a manual for all clinical psychologists and psychiatrists to understand psychological disorders, their symptoms, treatment approaches, and so on. Since psychological disorders can be classified, they took a cue - why don't we develop a classification system for strength? If we can create this classification of disorders, we should also develop a classification of human strengths. So, if you are interested in disorders, why not also be interested in classifying different strengths that human beings have? So that was the approach they took. Taking a cue from

the DSM classification of mental disorders, Peterson and Seligman tried to create a very elaborate classification of different strengths—psychological strengths or character strengths—that human beings can commonly display.

That was the main approach they took. So basically, according to them, character strengths are those aspects of personality that are morally valued. We look for good character as a desirable quality in all people, including leaders, teachers, and students. Personality aspects or certain expressions of strengths are related to personality characteristics, and these are morally valued. People in every culture will desire these qualities in human beings.

Let us say something like honesty or something like kindness. These are morally valued character traits that we want. From everybody, every human being should show them; these are morally valued, so these are like the good things that we expect from everybody, including leaders, teachers, and students. For almost everybody, we hope these kinds of morally positive characteristics are what people should display. So those are called character strengths because they reflect certain aspects of your personality, your approach to life, which are morally valued and mostly positive traits. So, they tried to make an elaborate classification of all these, which is called the Values in Action classification, or VIA classification.

Academic skills and abilities, such as critical thinking, help people achieve goals, but without good character, individuals may lack the desire to do the right thing. So, there are particular strengths related to mental abilities, like academic skills, critical thinking, etc. These are important, but mostly they are essential for achieving specific goals in life. But on the other hand, character strengths are also significant because if you do not have or work on character strengths, you may not have the desire to do the right or good thing in your life. You may have a lot of abilities, but your character strengths will decide whether in a positive or negative direction. In that sense, without good character, individuals may not have the desire to do the right or good thing in their lives. We may have a lot of examples where people are knowledgeable, with immense capabilities, but they engage in the wrong things in life and destroy their lives and so on. They have specific skills—mental skills. But they probably lack particular character strengths required for the well-being of one's life, and so on.

So in that sense, they are essential compared to other kinds of strengths required for achieving goals. So, according to Park and Peterson, exercising character strengths has

certain positive aspects—some of these we have already discussed, like preventing undesirable life outcomes. If you have specific positive character strengths, you will go in the right direction, so generally, you will be less likely to go in the wrong direction, where your life turns negative. That possibility will be less, so it will prevent undesirable life outcomes. Specific strengths of character, like hope, kindness, social intelligence, self-control, and perspective in life, buffer against the adverse effects of stress and trauma. All these strengths are significant when facing difficulties and stressful situations in one's life.

If you have these strengths, you will sail through the difficulties of your life much more easily. Character strengths also help people thrive and are associated with desired outcomes such as school success, leadership, tolerance, valuing diversity, the ability to delay gratification, kindness, altruism or helping others, and so on. So it has a lot of positive outcomes associated with it, which are essential to give the right direction or a positive direction in one's life. This has a lot of positive possibilities of outcomes, positive outcomes in one's life with one's work on their character strengths. Now, Peterson and Seligman also use specific criteria to determine which strengths should be considered character strengths. There must be specific criteria to define or decide whether to include a particular psychological quality as a character strength.

So, while developing this classification system, Peterson and Seligman used specific criteria to decide whether a particular psychological strength should be considered a character strength. The requirements are listed here.

Number one: it must be ubiquitous, which means it should be widely recognised across cultures. So, character strengths are primarily valued across all cultures—things like kindness, hopefulness, etc. So, if something should be called a character strength, it should be valued or recognised in different cultures. Globally, it must be an essential thing. Or it should be valued across cultures.

The second criterion they used is that it should be fulfilling in nature. That means it should contribute to individual fulfilment, satisfaction, and happiness. In a broad sense, if this character should contribute something positive, positive contribution to one's quality of life. So, it should contribute to fulfilling life, satisfaction, happiness, and so on.

The third criterion they used is that it has to be morally valued, which means it is valued in its own right and not for tangible outcomes. So, character strengths are valued simply because they are morally appreciated. Whether they lead to positive outcomes in life is

not essential, but they are valued. The presence of qualities is valued. Whether they lead to a specific positive result is not critical. Because many of these character strengths may not be associated with success in one's life, and so on, these are character strengths valued in their own right. So that is another critical criterion.

Another important thing is does not diminish others. It elevates others who witness it, producing admiration, not jealousy. If you show character strengths, it will not reduce other people. So if you are superior in character strength, that does not mean other people will become inferior.

So practising character strength will not diminish or lower other people in terms of, or may not create, jealousy and other things. It will not negatively influence other people. Other people will not be diminished because of this. Your practice will elevate them. Another criterion they have used is a non-felicitous opposite, which means it has obvious antonyms that are negative.

If you have specific character strengths, let us say something like you know something like you know hopefulness, it will have the complete opposite also like hopelessness and so on. So, it will have a negative impact also. So, if you have specific character strengths, there will also be their polar opposites.

Another thing they used as a criterion is that most of these character strengths are trait-like. These are like personality characteristics. That means it is an individual difference with demonstrates generality and stability. So people develop these character strengths because of various factors in their lives. And they are very stable. If you develop particular character strengths, it is not that the next day you will change your character.

These are relatively stable aspects. So it generally remains a relatively permanent aspect of one's life. So that is why these are more like permanent personality characteristics. Another thing they also used was measurable character. They tried to measure every character strength within the individual.

They developed a specific questionnaire to measure them. So has been successfully measured by research as individual differences. So, psychological testing is one of the approaches or main methods psychologists use to measure psychological constructs. Empirically, they want to measure how much this quality has in terms of quantitative terms and so on.

Another thing is that these are distinct characteristics. It is not redundant, conceptually, or empirically, with other character strengths. So there are different character strengths, which are all distinct. Has paragons, which are strikingly embedded in some individuals. So basically, some of these character strengths could be very clearly, distinctly visible in some people's lives more than others. Has prodigies, which are precociously shown by some children or youth.

Some people or children also show some of these character strengths very radically. This person has this character very strongly because they practice it very strongly. Can be selectively absent. It is missing altogether in some individuals.

Some individuals may completely lack some of these character strengths, like kindness. Some people may completely lack kindness. Ruthless people. That is also possible.

Enabling institutions are the deliberate target of societal practices and rituals that try to cultivate them. At the broader societal and institutional levels, these character strengths are embedded to promote these institutions and so on. Because this also helps to build cohesive, harmonious societies and institutions and so on. So these are some of the characteristics—the criteria they used to call a particular psychological quality a character strength.

If they have all these characteristics, they are included in the list. If they do not have these, they are omitted. So, based on these characteristics or criteria, they developed a system of classification of strengths. Peterson and Seligman identified about 24 character strengths organised into six primary virtues. They classified six major virtues and specific character strengths under these.

In total, there are 24 character strengths in this classification system. Virtues are core universal characteristics valued by moral philosophers. So, virtues are broader categories; character strengths are more specific characteristics within those broader categories. So, virtue is a broader category. Character strengths are more particular characteristics within those virtues.

Religious thinkers exalted aspects like wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, and temperance. These are like broad virtues. Under this, there can be specific character strengths. Each is a broad category, and more specific qualities make up those virtues. So, character strengths are the exact psychological processes or mechanisms that define the virtue, such as kindness, love are aspects of the virtue of humanity.

So let us say humanity is a broad virtue. Under these, there may be things like love, there may be things like kindness, like this. These specific characteristics are character strengths. And the broader category is called virtue. This is the classification system they made.

They had six virtues under this specific character strength and 24 character strengths. This is the book they used to publish their findings of this project. Character strengths and virtues is the book's title that explains in detail the processes and so on, which was published in 2004. So, we will be talking very briefly about the six virtues and the character strengths included in them.

The first virtue they found is wisdom and knowledge. Under this, there are specific character strengths which are listed here. Wisdom and knowledge include positive traits related to acquiring and using information in the service of a good life. So basically, it is about seeking knowledge and wisdom, using that information and wisdom in the service of a good life. In psychological language, these are mostly cognitive strengths, strengths related to the ability to acquire knowledge and so on.

But wisdom, in this sense, is in the service of a good life. In that sense, they are used. These are five character strengths under this. Wisdom and knowledge, to increase that, specific character strengths are included under that like creativity, thinking of novel and productive ways to do things.

Curiosity, taking an interest in all ongoing experiences. Open-mindedness, thinking things through and examining them from all sides. Love of learning, mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge. Perspective is about being able to provide wise counsel to others. You can give a particular perspective to people's problems, and so on. These are essential character strengths under wisdom and knowledge.

Second is courage. It involves the virtue of courage. It consists of the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of external or internal opposition. Courage is about how one can accomplish their goals in the face of problems, in the face of oppositions, in the face of obstacles, how one can face them and achieve their goals and go on with whatever they are doing. These obstacles could come from the external world or an internal one in so many ways. So that is the courage. How can one face those problems and difficulties and go on with whatever they are doing to achieve the goals of life?

So that is called courage. Courage may be is you know there are many character strengths under courage, including honesty, speaking the truth, and genuinely presenting oneself. So that is also part of courage. Bravery, not shrinking from threat, challenging difficulties or pain, is the central aspect of courage. You don't shrink because of a specific threat coming. You try to face them, whatever challenging situation you face—persistence, finishing what one starts. If something is essential in one's life, you persistently work towards it and achieve it. So that quality of persistence also gives you courage. The last one is zest. It means approaching life with excitement and energy. So when you have a zest in life, you have more excitement and energy for whatever you do. So then there are higher chances that you will be able to persist and achieve and not be deterred by the problems in between, whatever is coming. These are all character strengths associated with courage, and so this is another category so the second virtue is courage, and it has four character strengths under it.

The third one is humanity - it is mostly about interpersonal strengths, so how do you relate to other people? Interpersonal strengths include things like kindness, doing favours, and good deeds to others, loving, and valuing close relationships with others. Social intelligence means being aware of the motives and feelings of oneself and others. Social intelligence is about understanding yourself and others; you behave and deal intelligently with others in social situations. These are specific character strengths associated with humanity. Your virtue of humility will increase if you show kindness, love and social intelligence.

The fourth virtue is justice. Justice is more about civic strengths. Strengths related to the civic aspect of one's life. It includes things like fairness. Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice so whatever whenever a situation arises you show fairness irrespective of what kind of people they are so you treat everybody equally and whatever is you know fair in the situation you try to do that leadership organising groups activities and seeing what they happen So leadership quality is something significant in the context of justice, how you conduct yourself and manage things related to others' expectations, etc. Teamwork is related to working well as a group or team member. How well you can work in team situations and so on. And be fair in whatever situations where other people are involved. So these are character strengths associated with justice.

The fifth one is temperance. Temperance is about strengths that buff us against excesses. It is the ability to conduct yourself moderately. So, you don't go into the excess of

anything which may be unproductive and destructive for one's life. So, how to kind of control oneself, self-control, self-regulation, so that you don't go to excesses of anything. That is the quality called temperance. Temperance is a character strength associated with forgiving those who did wrong. Sometimes, things related to you know, whenever there are issues and conflicts with someone, people go to extremes of temperance. Hating them or having, you know, conflicts and so on. So, forgiveness as a quality helps you develop temperance so that you know you will forget and forgive people and those things in certain situations. Modesty means letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves. You don't just, you know, start boasting about what you have achieved and so on. That is not the quality of temperance. Modesty means you don't say much, but your actions may reflect your achievements. Prudence is about being careful with one's choices, not saying or doing things that might later be regretted. Be cautious in what you do and choose in life. That quality is called prudence. Making the right choices, mindful choices, and so on. Self-regulation is essential. Regulating what one feels and does. A lot of things that our emotions say, a lot of things that our instinct says, may not be right in many situations. We need to regulate ourselves and say no; that is not right. Control yourself and go in a specific other direction. So that is self-regulation ability that gives you the ability for temperance and so on. This is the fifth virtue and the character strengths associated with it.

The last one is transcendence. It is a virtue of our strengths that connects us to the larger universe. So it is a strength of virtue where you connect yourself to higher meanings of life - transcendental dimensions of life which may include things like spirituality which may consist of things like higher power and whatever it is you know so some higher aspects of life more as towards meaningful of life and so on so that's the virtue called transcendence it may include things like appreciation of beauty and excellence noticing appreciating beauty excellence or and or skilled performance in all domains of life. Transcendence may consist of things like seeing aesthetic aspects of life, beauty, and so on. Excellence, you recognise excellence in specific dimensions of life. So, that could also be related to the transcendence or strength related to character strength related to transcendence. It may include being aware and thankful for the good things that happen.

Gratitude is one of the most essential valued characteristics people generally don't develop too much. You become thankful for whatever life has given you or people have contributed to your life. You remind yourself repeatedly and be grateful for what you have in your life. Generally, the nature of the human mind is to complain about what we

don't have. That is the natural tendency of the mind. So, we don't show much gratitude simply because of our complaining nature. Gratitude is just going opposite of that. Building thankfulness for whatever you have. That gives a lot of satisfaction, and most research shows it is one of the keys to finding happiness. So, that is a significant character strength associated with transcendence.

Hope: expecting the best and working to achieve it. Humour: linking laugh and jokes, bringing a smile to other people. Religiousness or spirituality: having coherent beliefs about life's higher purpose and meaning. All these aspects are associated with transcendence.

So, these are all dimensions, so there are 24 character strengths and six virtues under the six virtues. Hence, these are um this is what classifies their classification is all about. these are important character strengths according to this classification. Human beings may display some of these character strengths and many of these character strengths to some extent, depending on there may be individual differences and so on.

So, this is the VIA classification system we are talking about. Now, there is another term that is sometimes used. Many times synonymously with correct or strengths and talents you know character strengths and talents what are the what is the differences between them when we talk about talent it is more of specific inbuilt specific capacities that people have which you may use or you may not use you have you people may have particular skills or specific abilities in certain directions These are mostly inbuilt and with birth. There may be some genetic aspects to it. When we talk about character strengths, some of these character strengths may have certain inbuilt qualities, but mostly character strengths are less innate.

You have to develop it more and more once you interact with the environment and the people around you. So, it is less innate. Talents are more innate. Character strengths are more voluntarily; you can practice them. Like you voluntarily, you can also develop character strengths if you see their value.

Talents are less voluntary. These are like many of these talents you have or don't have in many cases. Character strengths are morally valued. We have already discussed a lot of these things. These are non-moral things; they have nothing to do with morality. You may have certain talents for speaking, communicating with others, etc. This may not have any moral connotation. Character strengths are more buildable. You can build more of these character strengths.

Talents are less buildable. Many times, these are more innate capacities. Many people have them, and they don't have them. You can convert some of these talents into strengths with practice. But you should have certain aspects of talent; only then can you make it a strength. But when you talk about character strengths, many of these things can be more buildable, more flexible, and more of something you can intervene in to develop. Character strengths have fewer tangible consequences, like forgiveness, kindness, etc. They may contribute to one's quality of life, but may not be directly related to achievement. Someone may be very kind, but that doesn't necessarily make them more successful in life.

So, in that sense, they may not have many tangible outcomes regarding success in life and so on. They may contribute indirectly, but are not directly connected to some tangible outcomes in one's life. Talents are more directly valued for their tangible consequences. You can mainly use specific talents and achieve something in your life if you have them.

For example, you may have artistic talent, you may have leadership talents and so on, and use them to achieve something in one's life. So, in that sense, they are more likely to have more tangible outcomes. So, these are some differences between the constructs of talent and character strengths. Peterson, Seligman and many other researchers have also tried to develop some assessment instruments to evaluate these character strengths.

So, some of these instruments I will be discussing here. One is called the VIA Inventory of Strengths. These are available online. One can go and find out what essential strengths they possess. Out of these 24 character strengths, which are more significant in one's life? Which character strengths do you have more of in terms of your tendencies? One can find out using those questionnaires. The VIA Inventory of Strengths is one such questionnaire. It is designed mainly for adults and has been administered to many people. It is also available online on their site, the VIA project site. It has been implemented in countries with more than a lakh of people.

Have already administered this assessment instrument. So, it is a straightforward questionnaire that assesses how much respondents agree with certain statements representing different character strengths in classification using a 1 to 5 Likert scale. Each strength is represented by 10 items, totalling about 240 items. It is quite a lengthy questionnaire. One must go deeper into oneself and find out what kind of strengths they have.

For instance, the strength of forgiveness is measured with statements such as, 'I always allow others to leave their mistakes in the past and make a fresh start,' and so on. Each strength has many items, and you can say to what extent this represents your sentiments, mentality, and so on. So you can say it is very much like you or unlike you, and so on. So, like this, you can get a score for different strengths and see which strengths are more in you as compared to others, and so on.

There is also a VIA inventory for youth. So earlier, one was mainly for adults. For youth, there is a separate scale for the age group of 10 to 17. It is a shorter version with about 5 to 9 items per strength, about 198 items. So little shorter than the earlier ones.

The format is, by and large, similar, but the items are a little different, and so on. But it is mainly catered to youths or lower age groups. VIA structure interview is also there is also another interview protocol, which can be used to find out the strengths of people. So, people like Tiffany Swear and others also develop this structured interview to identify signature strengths by asking people specific questions in an interview format.

Some strengths only become apparent when you face certain situations in your life. So when you ask specific questions about problems they face in life, and more detailed understanding of their strength can be gained through an interview format. So, like this, this is an interview format, and it may take about 30 minutes to complete, where specific questions are asked. About character strengths they showed in their life, and they are asked more specific details about those strengths, like situations where they showed, whether they show it in everyday life and so on.

How they level the strength, whether the strengths reflect their core identity, whether friends and family also agree that they show some strength, and so on. So, like this, you know a protocol-specific probing question can be asked to identify what type of strengths or signature strengths people have. A lot of research shows the strength identified through the questionnaire also correlates very strongly with the other questionnaires are in line with the interviews. The only issue with the interview format is that you do not get a specific score to compare which one is higher or lower. But it has its advantages in terms of going deeper into one's life and so on.

So, when we talk about character strength, as we said, this also really contributes to the well-being of one's life. There is much research that shows how character strengths contribute to well-being. It has been linked to various measures of happiness and well-being. Much research shows that identifying and using signature strengths means that out

of 24 character strengths, people may have some signature strengths, let's say 3 or 4 strengths, which are their signature strengths. Means they show it more frequently or more strongly as compared to others.

So those 3 or 4 topmost strengths in scoring will be called their signature strengths. When people use those or identify those signature strengths and use them more and more in their life, it leads to psychological fulfilment in one's life. These are research findings. Particular strengths are more strongly related to well-being and flourishing, such as gratitude, hope, joy, curiosity, and love.

Research consistently shows these are related to life satisfaction. The more of these strengths you show or practice, the more likely you are to be satisfied in your life. Research also indicates the strength of the heart. Particular strengths are related to the heart's quality of emotions, such as love and gratitude. These all help you connect with other people. So these heart strengths are primarily in helping you connect with people. These are more important in enhancing well-being than specific strengths related to your thinking processes or head, such as creativity or critical thinking. In terms of well-being, the strengths of the heart are more important than those of the head.

Therefore, formal education should encourage both types of strengths for holistic development. But unfortunately, in today's education scenario, most of the training is for the strengths of the head, not the strengths of the heart, which are generally neglected. Or they are not given any importance in the education system. This is one of the implications of this finding.

So the character strengths of perseverance, love, gratitude, hope and perspectives have been linked to even academic achievement also lot of these strengths which are strengths of heart also even contribute to you know success of one's life because one becomes more persistence more perseverance hard work and so on this could be related to specific other strengths of heart also strength of bravery and appreciation of beauty is connected with the successful recovery from illnesses so people who show particular strength like strengths of bravery strength or appreciation of beauty This strength seems to be very important for recovery from diseases in terms of psychological sense. So that helps you to recover much faster. Spirituality, religiousness are associated with a life of meaning and purpose.

So, people who pursue spiritual goals or religious goals, that it adds meaning to their life. They have some higher purposes or whatever purposes they believe in. It gives some

sense of meaning in their life. They are doing something that may remain for the longer future aspect of their life. So, at least it gives a sense of meaning in their life, which may enhance their understanding of happiness, fulfilment, etc.

The last, at the end, the most crucial question is, can we cultivate these character strengths? So, can we develop them more and more? Can we develop them if they are part of a like trait, like quality? Every day, everybody has a certain signature strength; every human has certain strengths. Specific signature strengths that what strength they have may be different from everyone. Still, every human being will show specific signature strengths to whatever extent that is displayed.

Signature strengths can be cultivated as we already possess them and are easier to enhance by exercising them daily. Working on the weaknesses is much more difficult, as people lose interest and become defensive about them. Working with strength is much easier and much more motivating, also simply because whenever we have a particular strength, we are much more motivated to use it because we are good at it, or it gives us certain fulfilment. So, working with your strengths is much easier than working on your weaknesses. Because whenever we realise that we have specific weaknesses, we often don't even accept them, because accepting weakness is difficult for most people, so people become defensive about it. They don't take it. They reject it. So, working on the weakness is much more difficult because people also lose interest. They don't want to accept that they have specific weaknesses. They become defensive, they will not, even unconsciously, they will believe that it is not their weakness. So it kind of, in terms of motivational aspect, complicates things in terms of working with the weaknesses. But with the working of strength, there is a natural inherent, in people, a natural interest in developing themselves because you are good at something.

So naturally, one is more likely to develop or work with the strength, which is much better, more productive, and easier. A study observed that people who used their signature strengths for a week in novel ways increased happiness and decreased depression at a six-month follow-up. As compared to the control group. So, many intervention studies where people were asked to use their signature strengths—after identifying them using questionnaires—in more novel ways, and to use those strengths more frequently in their day-to-day life, showed increased happiness and decreased depression levels. This effect remained even after six months of the intervention.

So, it can have a very long-term impact. Character strengths are relatively stable and trait-like. However, they can also be influenced by environmental factors. So, that is where we can build them, influence them, and develop them. Sometimes, research shows that certain dramatic or very impactful events in one's life can increase specific character strengths.

For example, Character strengths of faith or religiousness, hope, and love increased among US respondents after the 9/11 attacks. When something theatrical happens at a collective level or in an individual's life, people sometimes change positively, sometimes dramatically. So, some of these character strengths increase because of certain events in their life. For example, here it is shown.

Because it was a collective event in a nation after the 9-11 attacks. After that, a lot of US people were there where it happened. They developed the strength of religiousness, faith, hope, and love. All this actually increased among many people when they took data from them, because of the impact of this event.

They understood how fragile human life is, and it kind of connected people. So, there was an increase in the strength of bravery, kindness, and humour after recovery from physical illness. Many people, when they recover from certain terminal illnesses or complicated illnesses, become much braver, stronger, and kinder because of facing those difficult illnesses. Periods that extended for a long time impacted their lives very strongly. It could be things like cancer, and so on.

People develop many positive strengths after facing them because they understand the vulnerability of human life. They become kinder and more empathetic toward other people. They become much stronger in terms of facing difficulties and so on. There was an increase in the character strengths of religiousness, gratitude, kindness, hope, and bravery after exposure to trauma. Traumatic experiences in one's life, you know.

Could also lead to develop of certain character strengths like kindness, gratitude, religiousness and so on. People may develop, and for many people, this thing increases. So, sometimes certain events, which are significant, impactful events, can improve certain character strengths. So these various notions about virtue imply that characters can be cultivated by good parenting, schooling and socialisation. So this is sometimes character strengths develop because of certain events.

So, for those events, obviously, we don't have control over them. Sometimes it happens very accidentally. More in terms of control, respect is a character strength that is influenced by parenting, schooling, and socialisation. These are very important. Whatever kind of person we become, these things play a vital role. What type of parenting do we have, and how have parents influenced you? What kind of role model were they in front of you? What type of teaching did they tell you? What is the school environment? How did school shape you? Social environment around you? How do all these factors lead to what kind of character strengths or qualities we develop or don't grow? Maybe it's because of these factors. So this all also in a highly complex way all this can influence. Positive role models may promote the development of good character. People often develop good character when there are positive role models in front of them.

They show those character strengths when they see other people, their elders or whoever they follow. They will imbibe them within themselves. So, role modelling is very important. If they see many people showing particular character strengths, certain positive qualities, they will automatically imbibe them and likely show them more and more.

So, the role models are very important. People should be taught specific activities of their strengths and encouraged to keep using them in their daily lives. So that is what is connected to role models or people around us. If they are taught from very early on about particular strengths and ask them to use them more often, it is more likely to develop in their later life. An individualised program for cultivating character based on an individual's character strengths profile may also be effective.

So many psychological intervention programs have also been developed to address particular character strengths or how to increase them, and so on. So these are different ways in which character strengths can develop within a human being, or we can kind of structured way also implement it or make interventions to change or increase particular character strengths. Now, one of the things that a lot of these intervention program says is that you have to use more and more of these strengths. They are more likely to increase if you use newer, more novel ways. So, how can we use these character strengths in newer or novel ways?

That is one of the key things. That is the last thing that we will be discussing here. So, people generally possess signature strengths like very similar to personality traits. Some

people have certain traits, very strong traits. Similarly, particular character strengths could be powerful.

They are called as a signature strength. These are like core aspects of one's identity and character, qualities that individuals recognise, take pride in, and often utilise. Research shows that nearly everyone can easily identify few key strengths, typically between 2 to 5, which are distinctly their own character strengths. 2 to 5 numbers of strengths, anybody can identify them, which are very distinctly with their characters. Some of the possible criteria for signature strengths are how you recognise that you have certain signature strengths. Some of the criteria or some of the things one can notice within their behaviour to identify that. One is a sense of ownership and authenticity. When you use them, you say this is the real me vis-à-vis the strengths. It will feel like it is your own identity.

You feel like this is the real me when you exercise them—a feeling of excitement while displaying it, particularly at first. So, when you feel a lot of excitement and happiness when you use them, so that means it is a necessary character strength or signature strength that you have because it is promoting your happiness and so on.

It is inbuilt in you because the more you express something hidden within you, the more you feel fulfilled. So that is another kind of symptom you can see. Rapid learning curve as the themes are attached to the strengths and practice. If you have certain strengths, you can learn around them, whatever the content around those strengths, very quickly. So it can be like you know, if you are good at certain subjects, you can learn them quickly. So, in a very short span of time, you can learn a lot of things. If you have strength in certain subjects and are good at math, you can probably learn a lot of math quickly. So, rapid learning is key, as similar things also apply to character strengths.

So, whatever activities or things we do around those strengths, if somebody has a strength related to spirituality, let us say, they will very easily understand many of these concepts and teachings, and could imbibe those things very easily. Rapid learning will be one of the things. So, continuous learning of new ways to enact those strengths.

People will try to continuously learn, with a sense of yearning to act according to their strengths. So, there will be a sense of yearning within yourself that you want to behave in this way or do those actions and activities. Underscored, there will be some inside-out motivation. A feeling of inevitability to using this strength, as if one cannot be stopped or dissuaded from its display.

Discovery of the strength as owned is an epiphany. Sometimes you discover something that you are very good at or something that gives you a lot of fulfilment—invigorations rather than exhaustion when using the strengths. You feel stronger and more energetic, rather than exhausted, when you use your strength to create and pursue fundamental projects that revolve around your strengths.

You are more likely to pursue things associated with those strengths. Intrinsic motivation to use these strengths. You are more internally motivated to pursue those strengths. These symptoms can occur whenever you use certain strengths; if you see some of these aspects, it is probably your signature strengths. Using signature strengths in new ways has a long-term positive effect.

A lot of research shows that in terms of happiness, in terms of well-being and so on. Some of the recommendations, for example, are how to use our strengths in newer ways. Tayyab Rashid and their colleague developed some examples and a list in one of the research papers. I will show some of these things, such as honesty. How can we use, let's say, if you have a strength of honesty, how to use it in newer ways or novel ways daily?

So, for example, some of the things they just listed, like refraining from telling white lies to friends, you know, to increase honesty. Think about your most essential values and do something every day that is consistent with them. So, if you have a certain value, your actions should align with that. You should not have a certain internal value and do something opposite. That will decrease your authenticity or honesty.

When explaining your motives to someone, do so genuinely and honestly. Do not try to fake or lie about something. Try to be honest in daily activities, like dealing with friends and others. So, like this, certain suggestions are given for others, like bravery. Speak up for an unpopular idea in a group.

Let us say you are part of a group or friend circle that does not like certain ideas. If you like something others do not like, speak up for it. That will increase your sense of bravery if a certain situation arises like that. Protest to the appropriate authorities about a clear injustice that you observe. If you have the courage to protest something, if you see some injustice has been done, do something that you ordinarily would not do because of fear or something.

So push your boundaries, leave your comfort zone, and do something. In that sense, bravery could also increase or use your strength of bravery in day-to-day activities and so

on. Forgiveness—you know, some of the activities like, you know, holding a grudge every day. Every day. So, remove your grudges about some people, you know.

Try to forgive them more and more. There is a practice. When you feel annoyed, even with justification, take the high road and do not tell anyone how you feel. Even if you feel bad about some things, many times you don't have to jump and, you know, start shouting at other people. You can just be calm and, you know, digest it on your own. Write a forgiveness letter, do not send it, but read it daily for a week. Even if you write and read a letter, your mind will slowly accept it. So, like this, you know, these are some of the strategies mentioned, and there can be many strategies in individual ways. Everyone can develop their own strategies. Gratitude—keep track of how many times you say thank you during the day and increase the number as much as possible at the end of every day. Write down three things that you are grateful for on a particular day.

You can also send a gratitude letter to others you are grateful for, who have contributed positively to your life, and so on. So, like this, many exercises can be done in new ways, and those strengths can be refined more and more. This research shows that the more we use them, the more fulfilment we achieve, the more happiness we experience, and the more well-being increases in our lives. So, this is about character strength. This is one of the positive personality traits and how it improves your quality of life. So, this is about one trait, and we will discuss the next personality trait in the next class. With this, I stop here.