

## Research Article

### Experiences of People Keeping a Three Good Things Daily

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#### Abstract

The Three Good Things Daily is considered an approach using positive psychology to enhance human happiness. For this study, we conducted an interview survey of seven people to clarify their experiences of using the Three Good Things Daily. The survey results revealed that participants' negative emotional experiences decreased, information processing process was invigorated, and self-understanding deepened based on positive emotional experiences. Accordingly, their actions were activated, which changed their daily life experiences and promoted positive aspects of interpersonal relationships. The Three Good Things Daily is expected to be of help in increasing people's well-being.

#### Introduction

In 1998, Martin Seligman, the president of the American Psychological Association at the time, advocated positive psychology, asserting the need to emphasize positive aspects of human beings. Positive psychology aims at achieving long-lasting human happiness not from the traditional perspectives of human pathology and problem treatment but through devoting attention to the strengths and good aspects that people have [1]. The method, which specifically examines the positive aspects of human beings, has been used in various fields, including economics, pedagogy, psychiatry, and brain science, not limited to psychology. Positive psychology proposes intervention based on strength, gratitude exercises, and the Three Good Things Daily as simple approaches to increase the level of human happiness [2]. The representative approaches include the Three Good Things exercise, for which participants write three good things every day. Doing the exercise every day for a week has effects on increasing happiness levels and decreasing depression. Results show that the effects last for six months [3]. The exercise is world famous because the simple method promises a high level of effectiveness. In Japan, some scattered studies have examined whether diaries to praise oneself or

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record positive experiences influence subjective feelings of happiness and positive emotions [4-6]. Overall, the studies found effects on positive emotions. However, they are all investigations in quantitative research and have elucidated no specific effects related to thoughts, emotions, or life. Clarifying individual qualitative experiences that cannot be measured by numbers is important. This study clarifies what experiences participants have through the use of the Three Good Things Daily.

#### Definition of Terms

The Three Good Things Daily is an exercise done at the end of each day whereby one chooses and writes down three good things (positive experiences) that happened during the day along with the reasons for them.

#### Methods

##### Study design

This study was designed to be qualitative and descriptive, using an interview survey.

##### Participants

We studied seven people who participated in online yoga training delivered via Zoom and who consented to participation in this study.

##### Data collection period

Data were collected during November 2020 through December 2020.

##### Data collection methods

A yoga training program in which a co-investigator in this study serves as an instructor implements a one-week exercise of the Three Good Things Daily. After the yoga training, the co-investigator asked training participants to participate in the study via email. The principal investigator gave an explanation based on the informed consent document only to those who expressed their intention of participation via email. After a two-week consideration period, we asked the principal investigator to make email contact with people only if they consented. The principal investigator arranged the interview schedule with participants who expressed their consent and conducted Zoom interviews on their desired date and time. The interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis in a private room where the privacy of both the principal investigator and the participant were ensured. With the consent of participants, the interviews were recorded using the Zoom Recording function.

##### Investigation items

Participants were asked for their age, gender, occupation, highest level of education completed, and family composition. We conducted semi-structured interviews to explore their experiences with the Three Good Things Daily.

## Data analysis methods

We calculated the descriptive statistics values of participants' basic attributes. The audio data recorded using the Zoom Recording function were converted into text data as a word-for-word record. Researchers conducting the study read the word-for-word record repeatedly, underlined the phrases describing the experiences of the Three Good Things Daily in the description, and extracted phrases that showed the cohesion of meaning. The researchers added their interpretations of what meaning the extracted phrases had. Being careful not to lose the characteristics of the participant's description, we deleted obvious digressions and repetitions. Each extracted phrase was given a code related to the effects of the Three Good Things Daily after being checked against our research questions. Some parts of the participants' descriptions were used as codes. We examined the relations between each code, elucidating patterns and deriving sub-categories. Furthermore, we examined the relations among sub-categories, identifying patterns and generating categories. To ensure the rigour of our results by elucidating whether the authors' interpretations and categorisation were distorted or biased, a discussion was held with three researchers who have conducted qualitative research.

## Ethical Consideration

This study was implemented after obtaining approval from the ethics review committee at the affiliated university (approved number 10322). All participants provided informed consent after receiving the following explanations orally and in writing: participation is on a voluntary basis; there is no disadvantage for not participating in the study or for revoking the consent given; careful consideration is given so that individuals are not identified; and data are managed strictly.

## Results

### Attributes of participants

The seven participants, all women, were of 33.8 years mean age (SD 10.4). The participants comprised four working people, including office workers and self-employed persons, one student, and two people without occupation. Of the participants, two had graduated from high school (one of whom was enrolled in a university), three had graduated from university, and two had graduated from junior college and vocational school as their highest level of education completed. All lived with their respective families.

### Experiences of the three good things Daily

Seven elements were extracted as changes and effects induced by implementation of the Three Good Things Daily: {Experiences of positive emotions}, {Experiences of decreased negative emotions}, {Invigoration of the information processing process}, {Deepening of self-understanding}, {Activation of actions}, {Changes in daily life experiences}, and {Promotion of the positive aspects of interpersonal relationships}. Hereinafter, categories are marked with { } brackets, sub-categories with square [ ] brackets, and codes with angular < > brackets. {Experiences of positive emotions} Participants experienced various positive emotions, including [Feel calm in mind], [Create room in mind], [Increase a sense of happiness], [Develop a sense of gratitude], [Increase a sense of fulfilment], [Feel relieved], and [Become positive].

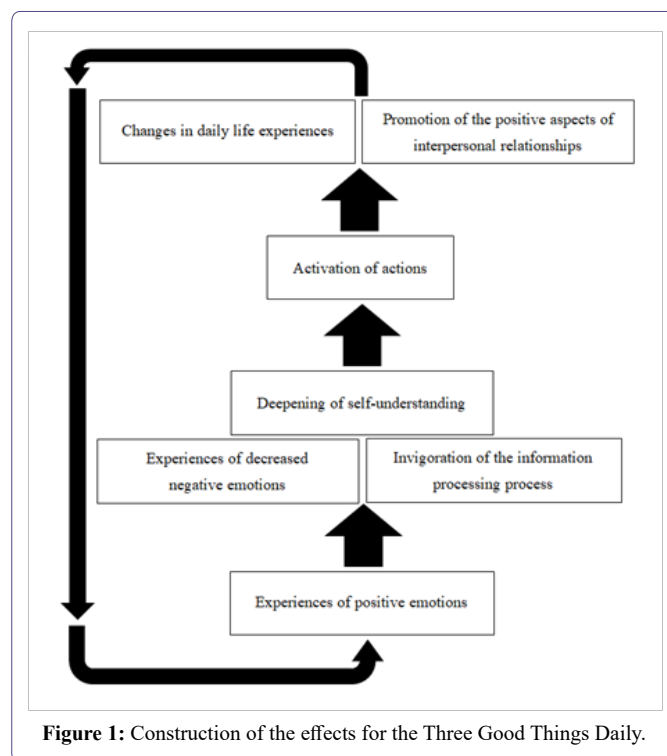
{Experiences of decreased negative emotions} Participants experienced that [Negative emotions decrease], including <Not take negative experiences as seriously as before> and <Negative emotions

decrease naturally>. In addition, their experiences of negative emotions decreased by the fact that [Negative emotions do not last], including <Was able to take a feeling of loneliness in stride> and <Leave no melancholia for tomorrow>. {Invigoration of the information processing process} Participants had experiences of [Expanded attention] such as <My horizons were broadened>. They also had experiences of [Filter out unimportant information], including <Be able to see the next even if failed> and <Not think back to bad things>. Participants had the experience of invigorating the information processing process as follows: [Pay attention to positive information], including <My brain tries to find good things on its own>, <Be able to notice good things that might have flown away> and <Have more time to think about things that I have worked hard at and am glad to have done>; [Process information positively] such as <Be able to think positively during negative experiences>; [Reduce excessive expectations for self] such as <Not set a goal of perfection>; [Increase a sense of expectation] such as <Want to use the given time to link to something>; and [Accept phenomena] including <Think that what has happened cannot be helped>, <Accept the reality calmly> and <Acceptance of stressors>.

{Deepening of self-understanding} [Confrontation with self] such as <Be able to become sensitive to my mind> became possible. Accordingly, [Awareness of own thoughts] such as <Was able to become aware of my thought process> and [Awareness of own emotions] such as <Awareness of myself thinking about negative things> occurred. Participants had the experience of deepening self-understanding. {Activation of actions} Participants found the following activation of actions: [Improve action planning] such as <Be able to act preemptively>, [Increase the speed of action], [Raise the efficacy of action], [Expand the sphere of action] and [Reduce the burden of action]. {Changes in daily life experiences} Participants experienced that their lives had changed positively as follows: [Enjoy daily life] including <No longer let the days pass me by> and <Be able to take a pause on days passing so quickly>; [Have positive experiences] such as <Successful experiences increase>; and [Have a better quality of sleep] including <Be able to sleep comfortably> and <Be able to wake up feeling refreshed in the morning>. {Promotion of the positive aspects of interpersonal relationships} The category comprises the following sub-categories and codes: [A sense of gratitude toward others] such as <Came to have a sense of gratitude toward my family>; [A sense of compassion for others] including <Want to make people happy> and <Want to please people>; [Compassionate actions for others] including <Became gentle to the other person> and <Have a conversation considering the other person>; [Positive changes occur in the relationship] such as <Was able to develop a good relationship>; [Increase of extroversion], including <Be able to move into action voluntarily> and <Make plans for friends>; [Changes in the mode of relating to others], including <Be able to appreciate myself and people around me> and <Not expect others>; and [Care about connections with others] such as <Once again feel important to relate to others>. The positive aspects of interpersonal relationships were promoted by caring feelings and actions (Figure 1).

## Discussion

We conducted interviews with seven participants about their experience of keeping the Three Good Things Daily. The interview results revealed effects on personal emotions, such as increased positive emotions and decreased levels of depression, which have been evident as effects of the implementation of the Three Good Things Daily. Additionally, it was revealed that the implementation had effects on



widely various matters, from cognition and action to interpersonal relationships and daily life. Negativity bias exists as a phenomenon associated with our information processing. It is a function to keep negative information in memory for a long time by paying more attention to and valuing it than positive information. [7] The human brain has developed to be sensitive to matters that put us at risk and to remember those matters for long periods to avoid danger. Negativity bias is a function that is necessary for self-protection. However, retaining memories of negative information selectively for a long time increases the ratio of negative emotions. Some researchers report that negative emotions activate the autonomic nervous system and maintain that such a state has adverse effects on mental and physical health [8]. This study showed that participants' positive emotional experiences significantly increased by keeping a Three Good Things Daily. The exercise, for which participants write down three good things from the events that happened during the day, enabled them to reduce negativity bias by devoting attention to positive information consciously and to re-experience positive emotions that occur along with good events. It has been pointed out that negative emotions narrow attention and enhance local cognition whereas positive emotions broaden the scope of attention and improve overall cognition and processing [9]. Moreover, in this study, participants' information processing process was invigorated because of the increased experiences of positive emotions. For example, participants expanded attention, filtered out unimportant information, and processed information positively. Our findings support those of the earlier study. In the area of social cognition research, some researchers have pointed out the mood-congruent judgment effect [10]. It is an effect by which positive and favourable evaluations are more likely to be given when people are in positive moods. Negative and unfavourable evaluations are given in negative moods. In this study, participants processed information not only quickly and efficiently but also processed positively. It is inferred that the implementation of the Three Good Things Daily caused positive, favourable evaluations based on the experience of positive emotions.

The Three Good Things Daily is not an ordinary Daily in which people can write whatever they like. Rather, participants must write down three good events and why they occurred. To write the Daily, people must confront and interpret the situation and the self at that time. Participants experienced having an awareness of their own thoughts and emotions by writing the Three Good Things Daily, which deepened their self-understanding. [11] points out that, whereas negative emotions limit people's repertoires of thoughts and actions, positive emotions have the effect of broadening them. In addition, positive emotions improve efficiency [12,13] generate an expansion of choices, and broaden selectable behavioural options [14] Researchers point out positive emotions as a phenomenon of the expansion of thought-action repertoires. This study revealed the activation of actions by positive emotional experiences. Participants improved planning, increased the speed and efficiency of actions, and expanded the sphere of action.

Participants' actions were activated based on positive emotions, which brought positive effects on their daily life experiences and interpersonal relationships. Although it might be inferred that activation of actions increased positive experiences themselves, the information processing process that interprets experiences positively might affect daily life experiences and interpersonal relationships. The more positive emotions one experiences, the greater is one's increased sense of trust for others [15]. Accordingly, some researchers point out that the opportunity to develop diverse ties increases, which increases the opportunity to foster mutual dependence [16] positive emotions, can be characterized as effective to improve interpersonal relationships. The implementation of the Three Good Things Daily in this study brought to light that it had effects not only on positive emotions but also on widely various areas, from the information processing process and the activation of actions to daily life and interpersonal relationships. The Three Good Things Daily is a simple exercise that anyone can do before going to bed, simply by writing three good things and why they happened. The act of recalling positive events reduces negativity bias and forms the habit of turning attention to positive events. The experience of positive emotions increases by turning attention to positive events. Participants' negative emotional experiences decreased, information processing process was invigorated, and self-understanding

Category	Sub-category
Experiences of positive emotions	Feel calm in mind
	Create room in mind
	Increase a sense of happiness
	Develop a sense of gratitude
	Increase a sense of fulfilment
	Feel relieved
	Become positive
Experiences of decreased negative emotions	Negative emotions do not last.
	Negative emotions decrease.
Invigoration of the information processing process	Expand attention
	Filter out unimportant information
	Devote attention to positive information
	Process information positively
	Reduce excessive expectations for self
	Increase a sense of expectation
	Accept phenomena

Deepening of self-understanding	Awareness of own thoughts
	Awareness of own emotions
	Confrontation with self
Activation of actions	Improve action planning
	Increase the speed of action
	Raise the efficacy of action
	Expand the sphere of action
	Reduce burdens of action
Changes in daily life experiences	Have positive experiences
	Enjoy daily life
	Have better quality of sleep
Promotion of the positive aspects of interpersonal relationships	A sense of gratitude towards others
	A sense of compassion for others
	Compassionate actions for others
	Positive changes occur in the relationship.
	Increase of extroversion
	Changes in the way of relating to others
	Care about connections with others

**Table 1:** Effects of the Three Good Things Daily.

deepened based on positive emotional experiences. Accordingly, their actions were activated, which changed their daily life experiences and which promoted the positive aspects of interpersonal relationships. We think that changes in daily life experiences and good interpersonal relationships further increase positive emotions and create a positive cycle (Table 1).

The Three Good Things Daily will be of help in increasing people's well-being. This study, a summary of the experiences of seven participants, was limited to persons with no disease or physical or medical condition. Future studies must be conducted with persons who have various disorders and backgrounds, in addition to persons like those examined in the present study, to examine the presence or absence and differences of effects arising from implementation the Three Good Things Daily.

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