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# LINKING GENERATIVITY TO ENCOURAGEMENT THROUGH POSITIVE SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT AND EMPLOYMENT

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## ABSTRACT

*Preceding research has concluded that generativity is linked with the concerns for intergenerational well-being and encouraging individuals to overcome difficulties and challenges effectively. However, not much has been learned about the fundamental processes of this connection or factors that might augment or deteriorate these mechanisms. The present research inspected a moderated mediation model that consisted of generativity as a predictor, positive social engagement as a mediator, employment status as moderator, and encouragement as the outcome variable, at the same time. 263 Individuals (148 males and 115 females) with age ranging from 40 to 65 years ( $M=46.82$ ,  $SD= 5.69$ ) from National Capital Region Delhi, India and Eastern Uttar Pradesh Region, India, participated in this study. Random sampling was used for data collection. The participants completed the generativity scale, encouragement scale, and positive social engagement scale. The analysis showed that generativity was linked with encouragement (both explicitly and implicitly) through positive social engagement, and the influence of generativity on encouragement was positive for employed than unemployed, while the effect of positive social engagement on encouragement was also positive for employed than unemployed. Findings display the importance of generativity in enhancing one's encouragement behavior.*

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**KEYWORDS:** Generativity, Encouragement, Adlerian Psychology, Positive Social Engagement, Employment.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

For centuries thinkers and scholars across the disciplines have deliberated over the issue of a well-lived meaningful life. In general, there is convergence on the view that individuals may have a meaningful life if they believe in and work for augmenting healthy intergenerational relationships, positive social interactions, shared common spaces, social interest, and social well-being. By the end of the twentieth century, psychology has witnessed the emergence of the subfield of positive psychology. This development facilitated new perceptions and ways to conceptualize and organize human life. It has been empirically shown that pro-social values, virtues, and strengths help mitigate unhealthy antisocial processes the last two decades have increasingly witnessed incidents of violence, ethnic and religious conflicts, terrorist activities, socio-economic upheavals, and political unrest across different regions of the world. For instance, only terrorism became the reason for the death of approximately 26,445 people in 2017. The average number of annual deaths caused by terrorism was 21,000 in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The second decade saw the lowest terrorism toll of 7,827 in 2010 to the highest of 44,490 in 2014 (see Ritchie, Hasell, Appel, & Roser, 2013). More or less for the two decades, the entire world has been in a state of shock and tried to cope with the grim situation. This situation was further complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic which has compelled people to come to terms with the emerging sociocultural realities in newer ways.

The aged people, owing to the increased life expectancy and technological advancements, seem to become the major sufferers in the entire world in the near future. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that the number of adults above the age of 60 years will rise to over two billion people by 2050. This is bound to bring in a variety of socio-cultural challenges. There are indications that modern societies may have a well-lived life if their members intend to practice generativity, encouragement, social interest, compassion, empathy, positive social engagement, etc. in their everyday life (Jenkins, 2019; Stephens, Silbert, & Hasson, 2010; Steptoe, & Fancourt, 2019). However, worthwhile life, encompassing positive virtues and character strengths, depends on one's personal attributes and social participation. The concerns related to the elderly segment of the population could be partly handled positively by providing training to the people to exercise generativity, encouragement,

social interest, compassion, empathy, positive social engagement, etc. This study explores the link of generativity to encouragement through positive social engagement and employment in the Indian context.

Traditionally India, the second-most populous country in the world (1.38 billion population, United Nations, 2020), endorses a socio-centric view of life. However, there are reports that positive social engagement, healthy intergenerational relations, perceived social support, and social welfare are diminishing. The main reason for such a change includes unemployment, and insufficient human and natural resources. Unemployed persons do not participate frequently and enthusiastically in social activities (Kunze & Suppa, 2017), and get little social support from kith, kin, and higher authorities than employed persons (Jackson, 1999). Against this backdrop, the present study attempted to examine the dynamics of generativity, encouragement, positive social engagement, and employment among the middle adult population in an Indian setting.

### *Generativity and Encouragement: An Overview*

Erik Erikson (1950) in his manuscript *Childhood and Society*, pioneered the notion of generativity while elaborating the eight-stage model of psychosocial development. He defined generativity as "the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation" (Erikson, 1950, p. 267). Generativity was the seventh developmental milestone during the midlife period. Of course, Plato's *Symposium* could be traced back to its predecessor before Erikson's decisive work on generativity (Wakefield, 1998). By the early 1980s, other researchers showed interest in investigating the construct of generativity. Browning (1973) comprehended Erikson's conception and elaborated on the notion of a "generative man". John Kotre (1984) extended the distinction between communal generativity and agentic generativity. McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) have developed a seven-facet model emphasizing generative *concern* i.e., mindful concern for the subsequent generation (see also Hofer, Busch, Chasiotis, Kärtner, & Campos, 2008; Peterson 2006). Studies have demonstrated a significant relationship of generativity with social justice, prosocial behavior, positive attitude towards an inclusive society, social responsibility, volunteering, community concerns, pro-environmental concerns, and attachment feelings linked to community and civic agency (Busch & Hofer, 2011; Cole & Stewart, 1996; de St. Aubin & McAdams, 1995; Marcia 2010; Morselli 2013; Ryff et al. 2007).

Some studies have shown a broader comradeship association, a higher score on social relationships, a greater sense of community, and political efficacy among highly generative individuals (Cole & Stewart, 1996; Hart, McAdams, Hirsch, & Bauer, 2001). It was also found that generative individuals are more vigorously worried about children's socialization (Pratt, Norris, Arnold, & Filyer, 1999), exhibited extremely occupied parenting styles (Peterson, Smirles, & Wentworth, 1997), and higher concerns for parents during later stages of the life (Peterson, 2002). Generative individuals display greater satisfaction with their work, help others in their jobs (Peterson & Klohnen, 1995), show higher concern for society, and evince a greater degree of political engagement (Hart, McAdams, Hirsch, & Bauer, 2001).

An important relationship between personality traits, life satisfaction, and generativity has also been observed (Navarro-Prados, Serrate-González, Muñoz-Rodríguez, & Díaz-Orueta, 2018). Generative individuals show pro-social personality characteristics (Peterson & Klohnen, 1995) and display generosity and altruism, and concern for others (Villar & Celdran, 2012). Generative persons are more likely to exhibit higher levels of physical, cognitive, and social well-being in the later stage of development (Adams, Leibbrandt, & Moon, 2011). A handful of past studies have also found that a volunteering intervention consisting of intergenerational interaction can augment generativity (Gruenewald et al., 2016) and enhance perceived social support (Fried et al., 2004) among the elderly.

Encouragement is one of the primary routes through which individuals state solidarity for one another (Jose & Bellamy, 2012). Adler (1956) was perhaps the first psychologist who thought of encouragement as a central attribute of individual advancement and therapeutic cure. Encouragement has been incorporated within numerous approaches to counseling and guidance (Edwards, 2013). Encouragement is 'an expression of affirmation through language or other symbolic representations to instill courage, perseverance, confidence, inspiration, or hope in a person(s) within the context of addressing a challenging situation or realizing a potential' (Wong (2015, p.182).

Encouragement studies have confirmed the psychosocial paybacks based on the humanistic notion of encouragement. It includes domains as a positive view of oneself and being open to experiences (Evans, Dedrick, & Epstein, 1997). A study showed that children evaluated a teacher's

application of encouragement more optimistically than a teacher's use of praise (Kelly & Daniels, 1997). Girls voted for encouragement more than boys (Pety, Kelly, & Kafafy, 1984). It was found that parental encouragement was significantly associated with children's healthy physical development (Beets, Cardinal, & Alderman, 2010). The role of teacher encouragement in creativity was also found instrumental (Sternberg, 2007). It seems that encouragement might be the preferred type of parental support to attain a positive outcome.

### ***Positive Social Engagement (PSE) Generativity, and Encouragement***

In this study, PSE has been considered as "one's constructive social or community participation for societal cause". Social participation refers to "a process in which individuals take part in decision-making in the institutions, programs, and environments that affect them" (Heller, Price, Reinharz, & Wandersman, 1984, p. 339).

As the most unique idea of Adlerian Psychology, it means a lot for one's overall well-being. Human beings need encouragement like a plant needs water (Dreikurs, 1971). However, few studies have investigated encouragement in the mainstream so far. Li, Lin, Lai, Eckstein, and Mullener (2011) concluded that encouragement has an instrumental effect on teachers, the school environment, and education in general. It resulted in reduced stress, a more positive attitude, higher morale, more effective teaching, and better academic performance in the school setting. Encouragement of health behaviors is related to enhanced quality of life (Nicholls et al., 2014).

### ***Employment Status, Generativity, and Encouragement***

Employment may enhance the overall health of an individual (Marwaha & Johnson, 2004; Turner & Turner, 2004) and provides social connections; social position; fruitful activity; and the chance to participate in communal endeavors (Jahoda, 1982). On the other hand, generativity may be manifested in teaching, mentoring, volunteer work, charitable activities, religious involvements, and political activities" (McAdams & Logan, 2004, p. 16). Thoughts of generativity appear from the backdrop of concern for family and employment status (Erikson, 1964). The status of employment may determine the types of engagements in social life. Generative behaviors contribute to the well-being of the giver as well as the receiver (Huta & Zuroff, 2007). The high socioeconomic status people may have greater

potential to enjoy the fruits of generativity (Jones & McAdams, 2013).

When people do not show concern for others' welfare then they require encouragement, particularly to engage others (Main & Boughner, 2011). Employment lets people continue a minimum standard of life and regulate one's life based on personal needs and goals. Thus, it is evident that if someone is unemployed and not able to maintain a basic standard of living, s/he probably may not show any interest in helping or encouraging others (Jenkins & Cappellari, 2007).

**The Present Study**

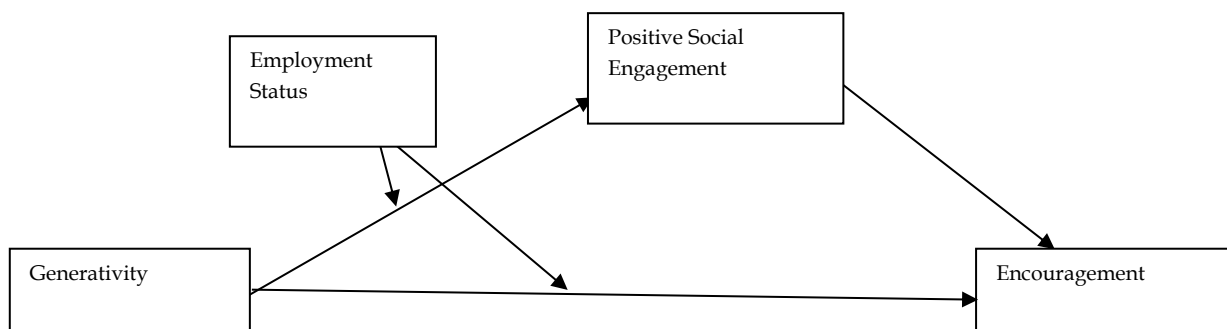
The link between generativity and encouragement has yet to be examined. Not much has been said about the integration of these two psychological processes. In this study, a theoretical model (see Figure 1), in which positive social

engagement mediates the association between generativity and encouragement, was tested, and employment status is expected to moderate these direct and indirect relationships. This study's primary goals were to examine the interrelationships among generativity, encouragement, positive social engagement, and employment status. It sought to investigate a moderated mediation model of the effect of generativity on encouragement mediated by positive social engagement and moderated by employment status. The present study proposed three hypotheses as follows.

*Hypothesis 1.* Generativity would be positively related to encouragement.

*Hypothesis 2.* Positive social engagement would mediate the effect of generativity on encouragement.

*Hypothesis 3.* Employment status would moderate the direct and indirect relationships between generativity and encouragement via positive social engagement.



*Fig.1. Theoretical Framework*

**2. METHOD**

**2.1 Sample and Procedure**

A total of 263 adults ranging from 40 to 65 years ( $M=46.80, SD= 5.65$ ) participated in this study. They were randomly drawn from two eco-cultural settings in India: the eastern Uttar Pradesh (N=120) and the National Capital Region of Delhi (N=143). Participants were from both the categories i.e., employed and unemployed. The sample description has been summarized in Table 1. In the study, three

measures along with a demographic information schedule were completed by the participants. Participants were contacted individually by the researcher, and informed consent was gained for participation. In the case of any difficulty in understanding, the same was simplified. After the collection of the data, the participants were acknowledged for their assistance. The participation was voluntary, and the participants can withdraw their involvement at any point of time in the course of study.

*Table 1: Sample Characteristics*

S.No.	Variables		
1	Gender	Male (56.27%)	Female (43.72%)
2	Ecological Settings	Rural (22.43%)	Urban (77.56%)
3	Employment Status	Employed (50.57%)	Unemployed (49.42%)
4	Religion	Hindu (93.91%)	Others (6.09%)
5	Language	Hindi Speaking (92.39%)	English Speaking (6.41%)

**3. MEASURES OF INTEREST**

**3.1 Encouragement Scale**

This scale was designed to assess the overall level

of encouragement of the individuals as well as four specific components of encouragement such as view of self, view of others, view of openness, and view of belongings. It was developed by Dagley and Evans (1991). The measure was adopted from English and

then back translation was used while developing its Hindi version. The scale has 51 items with 5-point rating scales, ranging from "very true" (1) to "very untrue" (5). An example of the items includes "I take time to make friends" and "I am a perfectionist." The coefficient alpha values of the four dimensions ranged from .60 to .78.

### 3.2 Generativity Scale

This scale assesses an individual's concern for and commitment to providing for the next generation. It has 20 items with 5-point rating scales, ranging from "very true" (1) to "very untrue" (5). It was developed by McAdams and de St. Aubin, (1992). An example of the items includes "I try to pass along the knowledge that I have gained through my experience" and "I have important skills I try to teach others." The authors have reported high internal consistency for the scale (alpha value = .83) and adequate test-retest reliability ( $r = .73$ ) over a 3-week period. The scale was adopted from English and then back translation was used while developing its Hindi version.

### 3.3 Positive Social Engagement Scale

The scale developed by the authors evaluates one's level of positive social concerns. The measure consisted of 8 items with 5-point rating scales, ranging from "very true" (1) to "very untrue" (5). The coefficient alpha value of the measure was found to be .78. The measure is aimed at determining the level of one's endeavor for positive social development. An example of the items includes "I try my bit to ensure a crime-free society" "I keep myself ready to help

### Mediating Effects of Positive Social Engagement

the needy". The scale was first developed in English by following the systematic process of scale development including literature review, focus group discussion, the conceptualization of the construct, item development, expert validation, and pilot testing. The scale was back-translated while developing its Hindi version.

### 3.4 Data Processing

SPSS version 21.0 software package for Windows on PC was used to perform the data administration and statistical analyses. As descriptive statistics, means (M), standard deviations (SD), and Pearson's correlations ( $r$ ) were computed. To investigate how positive social engagement mediates the relationship between generativity and encouragement, and how employment status would moderate the direct and indirect relationships between generativity and encouragement via positive social engagement; the PROCESS macro for SPSS developed by Andrew F. Hayes was used.

## 4. RESULTS

### Descriptive Statistics

Means, standard deviations, and Pearson's correlations ( $r$ ) were calculated on all the variables under study (Table 2). Generativity, encouragement, and positive social engagement were found positively correlated. However, employment status revealed a negative correlation with Generativity, encouragement, and positive social engagement. Bivariate correlations for all variables were statistically significant ( $p < 0.01$ ).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and correlations among variables.

S.No.	Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1	Generativity	66.73	7.34	1			
2	Encouragement	177.97	18.33	.53**	1		
3	Positive Social Engagement	29.37	4.80	.42**	.34**	1	
4	Employment Status	1.49	.50	-.157*	-.00	-.26**	1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3: Results of the simple mediation analysis investigating positive social engagement as a mediator between generativity and encouragement.

Normal theory test						
	$\beta$	SE	$t$	$p$	LLCI	ULCI
Effect of generativity on positive social engagement ( $a$ path)	.28	.03	7.67	.00	.20	.35
Effect of positive social engagement on encouragement ( $b$ path)	.52	.21	2.39	.01	.09	.95
Direct effect of generativity on encouragement ( $c$ path)	1.17	.14	8.18	.00	.89	1.46
Bootstrap results for the indirect effect						
	Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI		
Indirect effect of generativity on encouragement through positive social engagement ( $a \times b$ path)	.14	.06	.02	.29		

Note. Coeff.: coefficient; SE: standard error; LLCI: lower level of the 95% confidence interval; ULCI: upper level of the 95% confidence interval.

The total effects of generativity on encouragement were statistically significant ( $\beta = 1.17$ ,  $SE = 0.14$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that the respondents with higher generativity had a higher level of encouragement, which supported Hypothesis 1. It is evident from Table 3 that after including positive social engagement as the mediator, the direct positive association of generativity with encouragement became more significant ( $\beta = 1.17$ , bootstrap 95% confidence interval limits did not overlap with zero; lower limit = 0.89, upper limit = 1.46), while the generativity-encouragement relationship via positive social engagement was significant ( $\beta = 0.14$ , bootstrap 95% confidence interval limits did not overlap with zero; lower limit = 0.01, upper limit = 0.29). Thus, positive social engagement fully mediated the positive association between

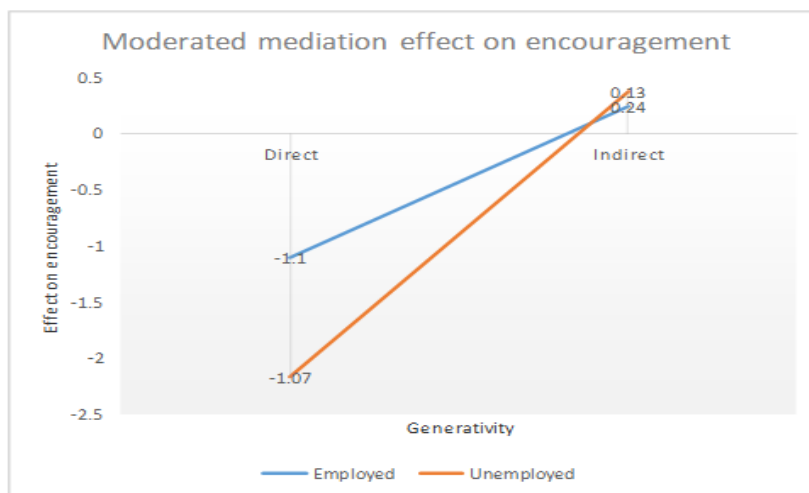
generativity and encouragement. Thus, the results supported hypothesis 2.

**Moderated Mediation Results**

The moderated mediation analysis investigating employment status as a moderator of the direct effect of generativity on encouragement and as a moderator of the indirect effect of generativity on encouragement through positive social engagement were examined using Hayes's PROCESS (model 8). Table 4 indicates that there was a significant positive direct influence of generativity on positive social engagement; however, its direct effect on encouragement was not statistically significant. A significant moderating effect of employment status on the direct effect of generativity on encouragement was found (Table 4).

**Table 4: Results of the moderated mediation analysis investigating employment status as a moderator of the direct effect of generativity on encouragement and as a moderator of the indirect effect of generativity on encouragement through positive social engagement.**

Antecedent	Consequent									
	Positive social engagement (Mediator)					Encouragement (Outcome)				
	$\beta$	SE	t	LL	UL	$\beta$	SE	t	LL	UL
Generativity (Predictor)	.56	.12	4.56	.32	.80	-.04	.34	-.13	-.72	.62
Employment Status (Moderator)	10.73	4.95	2.16	.99	20.48	-31.77	14.05	-2.26	-59.38	-4.16
Generativity*Employment Status	-.18	.07	-2.56	-.33	-.04	.52	.21	2.47	.10	.94
Positive Social Engagement (Mediator)	-	-	-	-	-	.52	.21	2.39	.09	.95
R <sup>2</sup>	.24					.29				
Conditional direct effect of generativity on encouragement										
Employed	.37	.05	6.54	.26	.48					
Unemployed	.18	.04	4.06	.09	.27					
Conditional indirect effect of generativity on encouragement										
	$\beta$	SE	LL	UL						
Employed	.24	.08	.02	.37						
Unemployed	.11	.05	.01	.22						
Index of moderated mediation										
Employment Status	Index	Boot SE	LL	UL						
	-0.12	0.06	-0.25	-0.01						



**Fig.2 Employment status as a moderator of the relationship between generativity and encouragement.**

Encouragement was predicted by generativity separately for employed and unemployed conditions (Figure 2). Simple slope tests exhibited employment status as the significant moderator of the relationship between generativity and encouragement. Moderated mediation analysis shows a negative relationship between the indirect effect and the moderator. Although the effect of generativity on encouragement through positive social engagement diminishes in both employment and unemployment condition, the slope analysis reveals a greater negative relationship in the case of unemployment conditions.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The current research investigated whether and how generativity shapes the process of encouragement. Generativity was directly associated with encouragement and this association was mediated by positive social engagement (PSE). Furthermore, employment status was found as a significant moderator of the relationship between generativity and encouragement. A negative relationship was also observed between the indirect effect and the moderator. Even though the effect of generativity on encouragement through PSE diminishes in both employment and unemployment conditions. However, it reveals a greater negative relationship in the case of unemployment conditions.

The result related to the direct effect of generativity on encouragement is in similar line with the findings of some previous studies (Villar & Celdran, 2012; Hart, McAdams, Hirsch, & Bauer, 2002). These studies exhibited significant relations of generativity with concerns for society, altruism, and a positive view of adolescent development. Middle adults who display a greater level of generativity may participate more in the encouragement process (Wong, 2015).

There was a significant mediating effect of positive social engagement in the association between generativity and encouragement, indicating that generativity may be a critical contributory factor in the enhancement of one's positive social engagement, which further facilitates individuals to express their solidarity with others by using the process of encouragement. Generativity is intimately interrelated to future-related notions, for instance, social responsibility (Morselli 2013). When people engage themselves in generative actions, they will believe that one's belongingness or relatedness to others is the very basis of planet Earth's existence.

Interestingly, there was a significant positive direct influence of generativity on positive social

engagement; however, its direct effect on encouragement was not statistically significant. A significant moderating effect of employment status on the direct effect of generativity on encouragement was found. The possible reason is that generativity may not be always manifested in the engagement related to the encouragement process. In general, most of the studies show small to medium associations between social well-being/prosocial behavior and generativity (Cox, Wilt, Olson, & McAdams, 2010; Gruenewald et al., 2016), whereas few studies showed a negative relationship (especially within contexts involving a strong sense of obligation and concerns for others) (Keyes & Ryff, 1998). It means if a desire to help others or concern for others' welfare is not voluntary or self-determined then the byproduct of generativity would not be always an encouraging act.

The likely explanation for the significant moderating effect of employment status on the direct effect of generativity on encouragement depends on the psycho-social consequences of employed and unemployed status. View of generativity approaches from the foundation of concern for family and employment status (Erikson, 1950). Furthermore, employment status has the prospect to decide the nature of human engagement in various sociocultural contexts (Jones & McAdams, 2013).

This moderation effect is likely to be related to the psycho-social correlates of employment such as health, well-being, personality, life satisfaction, social support, social justice, education, socioeconomic status, etc. (Main & Boughner, 2011; Jenkins & Cappellari, 2007). It was observed that the unemployed participated in social activities less often (Kunze and Suppa, 2017), and displayed less social support from close relatives and authorities compared to employed persons (Jackson, 1999). Employment is related to a greater degree of perceived social integration than unemployment (Gundert & Hohendanner, 2014).

The present findings suggest that generativity may influence encouragement directly and through the mediating effect of positive social engagement, raising important implications for adults who are keen to have healthy intergenerational relations and want to work for the continuance and furtherance of society. Generativity can facilitate the encouragement process in the individual and motivate people to engage themselves in positive social actions. However, employment status may moderate the relationship between generativity, encouragement, and positive social engagement. Thus, employed individuals may have naturally

relative certain privileges of exposure to social support, social justice, self-esteem, and social well-being than their unemployed counterparts.

In summary, this study investigated the underlying mechanism of generativity on encouragement. The results suggest some valuable conclusions: (1) generativity can influence encouragement directly and through the mediating effect of positive social engagement; (2) generativity has a stronger impact on unemployed persons' encouragement level compared to employed individuals' encouragement level, whereas positive social engagement has a stronger impact on employed compared to unemployed encouragement.

### Limitations and Future Implications

Some limitations were evident in the present research. Firstly, this study was conducted in a very selective sample mainly from two representative

ecologies of rural and urban India. Future studies should examine these associations in more representative samples. Secondly, data collection depended on an individual's self-perceived report. Thus, social desirability may be a greater influence on expressing themselves as more generative, encouraging, and positively socially engaged.

### Ethical Statements

*Compliance with Ethical Standards:* The authors followed ethical standards while doing this research.

*Disclosure of potential conflicts of interest:* The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

*Informed consent:* Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

*Data availability statement:* The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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