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## The Association Between Survivors' Guilt and Gratitude in the Belongingness of Refugee College Students

Mehwish Safdar  
*Virginia Commonwealth University*

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# The Association Between Survivors' Guilt and Gratitude in the Belongingness of Refugee College Students

Mehwish Safdar, Myriam Kadeba, & Chelsea Williams  
Virginia Commonwealth University

## Background

### Survivor's Guilt

- ❖ Is when survivors of tragic events feel responsible for the negative outcomes of the event (death or injury of others), even if the survivor had no power or influence over the event (Wang et al., 2018)
  - This definition is usually used to frame the experience of refugees, immigrants, asylum-seekers, other survivors
- ❖ Clinical literature defines survivor's guilt as excessively worrying about being in a better position than others which effects their overall well-being (Tate et al., 2013)

### Gratitude and Indebtedness

- ❖ Gratitude is related to indebtedness which is often defined as a state of obligation to repay another (Turjanmaa & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2020)
- ❖ Different cultural contexts places these factors in different ways
  - Perceptions of parental sacrifice leads to the internalized feeling of indebtedness towards the parents (Turjanmaa & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2020)
  - Indebtedness in adolescents promotes filial responsibility with a strong desire for success (Turjanmaa & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2020)
  - Emerging immigrant adults feel obligation to their parents as a debt for parental sacrifices endured for their children (Turjanmaa & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2020)

### Belongingness

- ❖ A basic human need that is vital for maintaining motivation and success in institutions (Gillen-O'Neel, 2021)
- ❖ Higher sense of belonging in college students equals higher academic self-confidence, more academic motivation, improved academic adjustment, and higher achievement (Gillen-O'Neel, 2021)

## Research Questions

### Current Study

- ❖ Although there is research on survivor's guilt, gratitude, belongingness on refugees, there is insufficient research specifically done on refugee college students. The purpose of this study is to fill in this gap.

### Research Questions

- 1) How does survivors' guilt relate to the feeling of belongingness in refugee college students?
- 2) How does gratitude relate to the feeling of belongingness in refugee college students?
- 3) How does indebtedness relate to the feeling of belongingness in refugee college students?
- 4) Is the feeling of gratitude stronger or indebtedness in refugee college students?

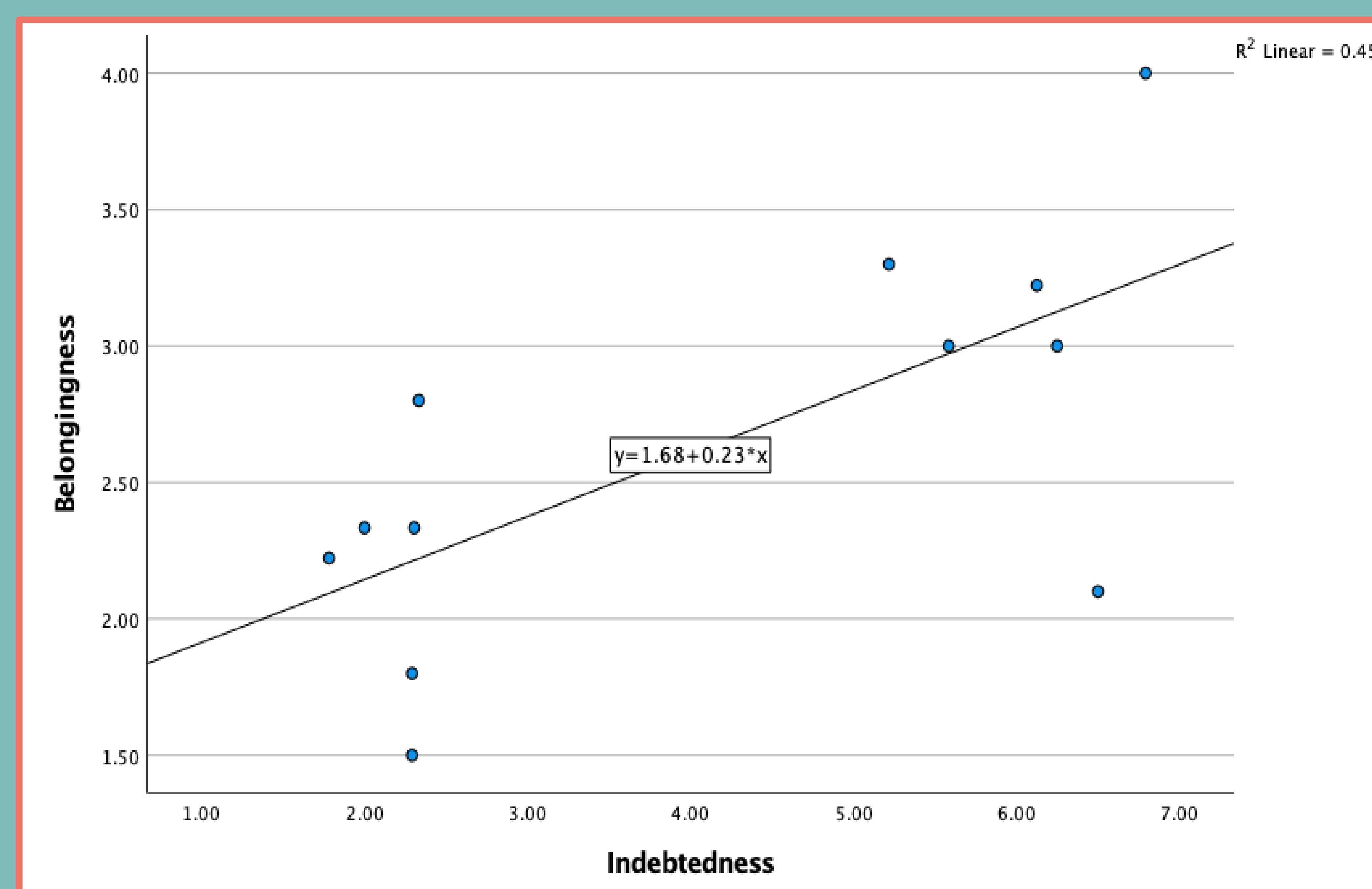
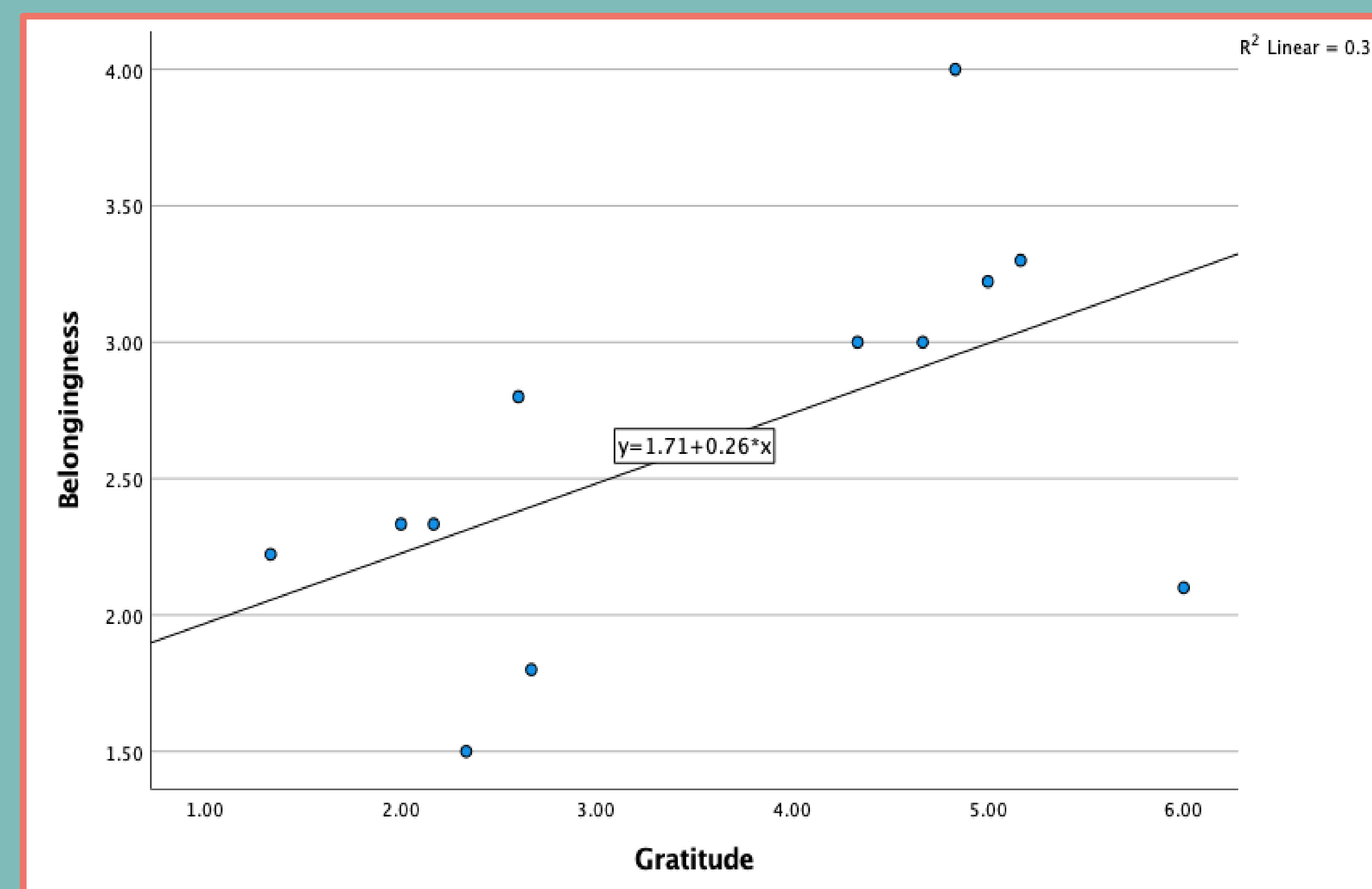
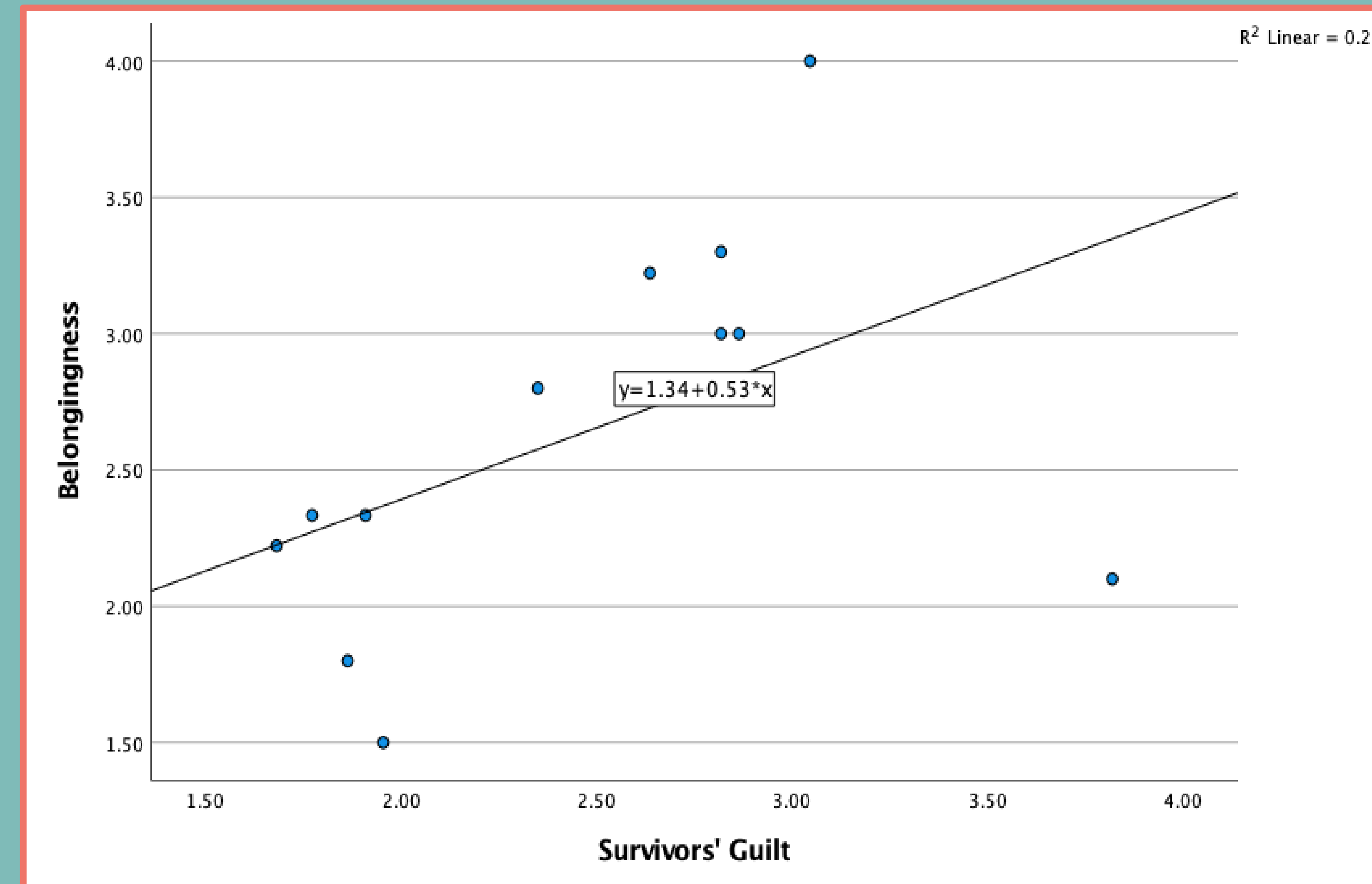
## Methodology

### Measures

- ❖ We utilized the Interpersonal Guilt Questionnaire (O'Conner et al., 1997), the Gratitude Questionnaire (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002), the Preliminary Sense of Indebtedness Towards Parents Scale (Kang & Larson, 2014), Indebtedness vs. Gratitude, and the Belongingness Scale (Leibowitz et al., 2020).

### Participants & Data Analysis Procedure

- ❖ We received a total of 16 completed survey respondents.
- ❖ We analyzed our data using correlation analyses



## Results

- ❖ The surveys were analyzed using Spearman's correlations.
- ❖ The correlation between survivors' guilt and belongingness was 0.504, presenting a strong relationship with positive strength. Results indicated that  $p = .094$ , and there is no sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis or to find an association between survivors' guilt and belongingness.
- ❖ The correlation between gratitude and belongingness was 0.477, presenting a moderate relationship with positive strength. Results indicated that  $p = .0117$ , and we fail to reject the null hypothesis, since there was no sufficient evidence to find an association between gratitude and belongingness.
- ❖ The correlation between indebtedness and belongingness was 0.598, presenting a strong relationship with positive strength. Results indicated that  $p = .040$ , and there is a significant relationship between indebtedness and belongingness.
- ❖ We also found that to the question "do you feel more gratitude or indebtedness in response to what your parent(s) have contributed financially to your college education" six participants responded with more gratitude than indebtedness and two participants responded with more indebtedness than gratitude.

## Discussion

- ❖ The results did not find a significant relationship between belongingness and survivor guilt and belongingness and gratitude.
- ❖ However, there was a significant relationship between belongingness and indebtedness, that an increase in indebtedness indicated an increase in belongingness.
- ❖ The findings support the hypothesis that refugee college students feel obligated to stay in school due to the feeling of gratitude than indebtedness.
- ❖ Immigrant adults who were separated from their elderly parents also reported feeling guilty, which motivated them to stay in touch with their parents (Baldassar, 2014).
- ❖ High levels of survivor guilt can also produce strong feelings of gratitude (Wang et al., 2018).
- ❖ It may be that those who experience survivor guilt and gratitude might use it as motivation to find a sense of belonging in their environment.
- ❖ Indebtedness that is felt during academic achievement and is an internalized feeling, can become a motivator to work harder to exceed academic performance (Fwu et al., 2018).
- ❖ In a study exploring indebtedness and academic achievement in Taiwanese students, failure was attributed to lack of effort, leading to a sense of indebtedness towards their parents and sense of indebtedness to themselves, and ultimately motivating the students to work harder (Fwu et al., 2018).
- ❖ According to Fwu et al. (2018), when facing failure, individuals who believe effort is their obligation are less likely to feel indebted to their parents and more likely to overcome difficulties.