

## Effect of mindfulness and gratitude on exam anxiety and stress among students

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### ABSTRACT

The study was aimed as studying the “Effect of Mindfulness and Gratitude on Exam Anxiety and Stress Faced by the Students”. The sample of 70 (37 boys and 33 girls) who were in class 9th to 12th was taken from a school of Delhi, and standardized tests were done on them to collect the data. Then they were introduced with mindfulness techniques and gratitude journal, and were asked to practice them daily for 4 weeks, before sleeping for 25-30 minutes. They were followed up on telephone after every few days to make sure they were doing it correctly. Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen, Kamarck & Mermelstein, 1983) and Beck’s Anxiety Inventory (Dr. Aaron T. Beck) were used. They were again measured on the same tests and the responses were recorded. After the data was collected, correlation coefficient and t-test were computed. SPSS was used to compute the results. It was concluded that mindfulness and gratitude-based intervention is a useful technique to reduce the stress and anxiety of the students.

**Keywords:** *Mindfulness, Gratitude, Anxiety*

**T**est anxiety is more than feeling a little nervous before a test. For students who struggle with test anxiety, a bit of pre-exam nervousness turns into depleting feelings of worry, dread, tension and fear which can negatively impact performance.

**Examination anxiety affects different students in different ways:**

1. Physical symptoms: insomnia, headache, sweaty palms, upset stomach, dry mouth, increased heart rate, diarrhea, shortness of breath, more frequent urination, etc.
2. Behavioral changes: losing focus of actions, tense movements, less coordinated movements, moving or walking faster than usual, nail biting, escaping behavior, etc.
3. Emotional changes: fear, worry, frustration, anger, panic, discouragement, depression, hopelessness, etc.
4. Cognitive changes: irrational thoughts, scattered attention, self-abusing thought, difficulty in concentration, negative and etc.
5. Social changes: social withdrawal, avoidance of friends and family, etc.

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Some of the major hallmarks of mindfulness are such components as clarity of awareness, flexibility of awareness, continuity of attention, nondiscriminatory awareness, empirical stance towards reality and present-oriented consciousness (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007).

To understand mindfulness completely, one must also understand the distinction between the related concepts of awareness and attention. Both awareness and attention are the features of our consciousness. Awareness is the conscious registration of stimuli, and it involves the participation of our physical senses. Attention during mindfulness is different from the active stimulus-driven attention that we are familiar with; instead, it is mostly referred to as a state of receptivity and meta-awareness (Siegel, 2007). It is the awareness of awareness.

As a virtue, gratitude enhances and protects happiness and well-being. The importance of gratitude in society can be seen in the centrality it is given in many of the world's religions including Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism and Hinduism (Emmons, 2004). Gratitude is an expression of a sincere heart-felt 'Thank You'. It carries the knowledge that whatever one receives in life, however traumatic, will ultimately work out for our own good. Gratitude also carries an inclination to be kind to many others as the heart experiences abundant joy and contentment. Although various experiences of life can elicit gratitude feelings, prototypically gratitude stems from a positive personal outcome perception, not importantly earned or deserved, that is due to another person's actions. Across time spans and cultures, expressions and experiences of gratitude have been treated as basic and desirable both aspects of personality of human and its social life.

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Kang YS, Choi SY, 2009 Studied "The effectiveness of a stress coping program based on mindfulness meditation on the stress, anxiety, and depression experienced by nursing students in Korea." The study investigates the effect of stress coping mechanism which were based on meditation about stress, anxiety and depression that is felt by nursing students of Korea. A pre-post design was used. A sample of 41 students was divided into two groups- experimental and control groups. The experimental group was made to attend 90 min sessions for 8 weeks. And the control group was not given any type of intervention. It was found out that the stress coping program which included meditation was an effective intervention in order to decrease the stress and anxiety.

Froh et al. did a study in 2008 to examine "the effects of counting blessings" in a sample of students of class six and seven. They observed that intervention of gratitude results in happier students in comparison to students who wrote about their hassle. It was also observed that students who used gratitude, displayed increased excitement about life and more satisfaction related to school.

Emmons and McCullough (2003) did experimental studies to investigate "The Effects of Gratitude on Well-Being among College Students." The sample was divided into three groups- gratitude, hassles and events. It was found out that the students who were in the gratitude condition had significantly more life satisfaction, more optimism, less physical symptoms, and had exercised more than the students in the other two conditions.

#### *Objectives*

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To see the effect of relaxation and mindfulness on exam anxiety and stress.

### Hypotheses

The hypotheses of the study are as follows:

1. There will be no difference in the anxiety experienced by the students before and after practicing the mindfulness and gratitude program
2. There will be no difference in the stress experienced by the students before and after practicing the mindfulness and gratitude program

## METHODOLOGY

### Sample

The sample of the study was collected from a school located in Delhi city. The sample size was 70 (both boys and girls) who were in class 9th to 12th. The school was approached and requested to help with data collection. The school allowed and the students were randomly selected from class 9th to 12th. Out of 70, 37 boys and 33 girls were taken as the sample. The sample boys and girls were measured after two weeks time.

### Instruments

Two measures were used in this study,

1. **Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen, Kamarck & Mermelstein, 1983):** This scale assesses the amount of stress in one's life rather than in response to a specific stressor and has been used widely in studies of both mental and physical health. Responses range from "never" to "very often" on a 5-point scale. PSS scores were obtained by reversing the scores on the four positive items (items 4, 5, 7 and 8) and then summing all 10 items.
2. **Beck's Anxiety Inventory:** The Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI), created by Dr. Aaron T. Beck, is a 21-question multiple-choice self-report inventory that is used for measuring the severity of an individual's anxiety. The BAI consists of twenty-one questions about how the subject has been feeling in the last week, expressed as common symptoms of anxiety (such as numbness, hot and cold sweats, or feelings of dread). The final scale consists of 21 items, each describing a common symptom of anxiety. The respondent is asked to rate how much he or she has been bothered by each symptom over the past week on a 4- point scale ranging from 0 (Not At all) to 3(severely - 1 could barely stand it. The items are summed to obtain a total score of 0 to 63.

### Procedure

The sample was taken from a school of Delhi, and standardised tests were done on them to collect the data. Then they were introduced with mindfulness techniques and gratitude journal, and were asked to practice them daily for 4 weeks, before sleeping for 25-30 minutes. They were followed up on telephone after every few days to make sure they were doing it correctly. They were again measured on the same tests and the responses were recorded. After the data was collected, it was computed to find out the results and to see the effect of mindfulness and relaxation on anxiety and stress.

## RESULTS

Table No. 1 Scores of t-test for anxiety before and after the intervention

Sr. No.	Particular	N	Mean	SD	t'
1	Before	70	51.87	3.21	3.18*
2	After	70	35.21	3.11	

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The t-score was computed to be 3.18, which is significant at 0.05 level of confidence. It means that the difference in the scores of anxiety of the students before and after the intervention is statistically significant. The scores of anxiety have significantly fallen after they were given a 4 week intervention of mindfulness and gratitude journal.

**Table No. 2 Scores of t-test for stress before and after the intervention**

Sr. No.	Particular	N	Mean	SD	t'
1	Before	70	30.46	2.75	2.94*
2	After	70	19.93	2.98	

The t-score was computed to be 2.94, which is significant at 0.05 level. It means that there has been a statistically significant fall in the levels of stress of the students, after they were given the 4-week intervention based on mindfulness and gratitude.

### CONCLUSION

Mindfulness and gratitude-based intervention is useful in reducing the exam anxiety faced by the students. Mindfulness and gratitude are interventions that are important and can be used for reducing the stress experienced by the students. It can be concluded that mindfulness and gratitude-based intervention is a useful technique to reduce the stress and anxiety of the students.

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### Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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