

Research Paper

Relationship between mindfulness and stress among degree college women students in North Bengaluru

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ABSTRACT

The current study assessed the Mindfulness relationship with Total Stress and Four Stress components namely: Academic Stress, Interpersonal Relationship Stress, Physical Stress and Environmental Stress, in a sample of degree college women students in North Bengaluru, India. Convenient sampling technique was used to select eighty-two, degree college women students, out of a population of 250 students, from an institution where only female students studied. All participants voluntarily completed a study specific consent form, followed by a demographics form, the Student Stress Inventory (SSI) and Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS). This was a quantitative research and Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to analyze the data. Results indicate a significant negative correlation between dispositional mindfulness and total stress; as well as between mindfulness and physical stress, academic stress, environmental stress and interpersonal stress, respectively. While the correlation between mindfulness and physical stress and academic stress, respectively, was strongly negative. It was moderately negative between mindfulness and environmental stress and the correlation between mindfulness and interpersonal stress was weak.

Keywords: *Mindfulness, Stress, Young adults, Women*

Generalized stress has been defined as a state of psychological arousal which occurs when perceived external demands exceeds or taxes an individual's adaptive abilities (Lazarus, 1966), Regardless of age, from infancy to adulthood, humans face situations that induce anxiety and stress, on an everyday basis. Worries related to relationships, tensions related to health and pressures of meeting expectations at school, college or work, all affect the physical and emotional well-being of a person. Stress was at the heart of the problem of numerous psychological disorders such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, emotional tension, maladaptive behaviors and cognitive impairment.

This study focuses on stress associated with the demands faced by women in college. Entering graduate education brings with it, major change in the life of young adults. While

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higher-level curriculum and starting afresh with a new social group, present opportunities for inter and intra personal growth, they most often are very challenging. Loss of school groups, who previously provided social and emotional care, may impact one's ability to handle outside stressors. This may lead to psychological anguish and negatively impact academic performance.

In addition to poor life skills, like time management and communication skills and academic challenges, like increased assignment load and peer competition, there are other factors that increase the stress level of women who attend college. Problems include difficulty managing finance, poor living conditions, inability to balance personal interests and academic requirements, interpersonal disagreements and environmental stressors. If the environment in the institution consists of crowded classrooms, insufficient resources and facilities, with massive portion to be covered and expectations of learning large quantities by rote, this adds to the stress levels that college student experience. The high expectations and threat of the shame of failure, placed on them by parents and teaching staff, hamper self-esteem & confidence. Poor adherence to good nutrition and self-care habits, and inability to manage stressful situations, make daily struggles worse. When poorly managed, stress results in feelings of loneliness, insomnia and excessive worrying. And when peer relations sour, higher distress levels can be predicated, academic performance and overall well-being suffer.

Incidence of depression is fairly common among college students and inability to manage life stressors often cause the onset of its symptoms. This is to be expected given that college students, especially women, report high levels of stress. The stressors described above, commonly experienced by college students, are known to be independent predictors of suicidal behavior. Suicide Death Rate in India is higher than expected, especially for women. And it is important to understand the nature of causes of both the exiting stress factors and possible sources of resilience, with the aim to quantify and reduce both, the incidence of depression and suicide, as well as measure and increase holistic well-being.

Mindfulness is one such factor that is known to have a positively effect, not only on mental health and psychological well-being, but also on physical health and quality of relationships. Mindfulness is a characteristic of consciousness. It is defined as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, nonjudgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994) Dispositional, or trait mindfulness, describes the mindfulness a person does everyday activities with. State mindfulness, on the other hand is the level obtained by an individual, during or after participating in an activity that requires the exercise of mindfulness.

Studies have shown that activities that develop state mindfulness can improve academic performance, reduce workplace stress and burn out and increase adaptability. Many researchers have linked trait mindfulness with an assortment of positive physical and mental health consequences, decreased symptoms of depression, anxiety, lower intensity of chronic pain. Newer studies are exploring the role mindfulness plays in reducing rumination, which in turn reduces stress, improving emotion regulation, and developing greater awareness. Mindfulness has been observed to lower severity of suicidal ideation among college students.

While many researchers have studied levels of mindfulness following interventions, studies that explore trait mindfulness in non-clinical samples are limited. Understanding the

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baseline values of mindfulness and stress, in a non-clinical population, will help understand protective factors, that exist, if any, and then strategize effective preventive interventions to alleviate stress, before it causes clinical manifestations, especially among degree college women students in India.

Vonderheyde. (2017) explored “The relationship between Mindfulness and Stress among College Students”. Two self-report data collection were also completed by the students who consented to participate and was completely anonymous and voluntary. This study found that student’s overall stress was at moderate level and their mindfulness and stress showed it as negatively correlated. The results of the study implied that participants who had high scores in overall mindfulness has less stress.

Anastasiades et al., (2016) conducted a research study on “Perceived stress, depressive symptoms, and suicidal ideation in undergraduate women with varying levels of mindfulness” The objective of this study was to examine and study the protective function that mindful awareness can play in the psychological well-being of distressed and depressed undergraduate women at risk for suicide. They reported that the students in the low mindfulness group reported higher levels of perceived stress. Further, their results indicated that the correlations between perceived stress and depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation were significantly higher for college women in the low mindfulness group compared to women in the high mindfulness group. The results emphasize the protective function of mindful awareness in the psychological well-being of distressed undergraduate women.

Shinaasa, S., Puri, D. A., & Shukla, P. A. (2016). studied the Effects of Mindfulness and Stress Among Students in a College in the north Indian State of Haryana. The findings of the study revealed that there is a significant negative correlation between mindfulness and stress among the sample of college students. This indicates that as mindfulness increases, stress decreases. The study also found that there was no significant difference in the adjustment of the college students when mindfulness exists and this focused on to study the impact of mindfulness on frustrated college students.

Laurent H, et al., (2014) investigated how “Dispositional Mindfulness Moderates the Effect of a Brief Mindfulness Induction on Physiological Stress Responses”. The study investigated the impact of short mindfulness intervention, on the physiological response to conflict stress and dispositional mindfulness, in partners who were romantically involved. Participation did not affect their mindfulness. However, partners with high mindfulness scores were better able to regulate stress in the mindfulness condition. The men had dynamic reactivity and recovery on the Autonomic Stress response and the women showed quicker neuroendocrine stress response recovery. Indicating that the higher the Mindfulness, improved ability to deal with the stress of interpersonal problems. Gouda et al., (2016) who investigated how “Students and Teachers Benefit from Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction in a School-Embedded Pilot Study” also found that higher the Mindfulness, the lower the interpersonal problems.

Murphy et al., (2012) examined “The Benefits of Dispositional Mindfulness in Physical Health: A Longitudinal Study of Female College Students”. The study was conducted over five academic quarters from fall 2008 to fall 2010. They found that “Higher levels of dispositional mindfulness scores were related to healthier eating practices, better quality of sleep and better physical health. Dispositional mindfulness contributed to better physical

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health even after controlling for traditional health habits". The study also found bidirectional mediational relationships between healthy eating and dispositional mindfulness as well as between sleep quality and dispositional mindfulness when physical health was the outcome variable.

Brausch D. (2011) explored "The Role of Mindfulness in Academic Stress, Self-Efficacy, and Achievement in College Students". The study showed that trait mindfulness was not a significant predictor of academic success. The results of this study revealed significant predictive quality of high school GPA and academic self-efficacy toward undergraduate performance. However, American College Testing exam scores (ACT) scores, academic stress, and mindfulness measures did not appear to be predictive of undergraduate semester Grade Point Average (GPA)s. Further analysis found significant positive correlations between high school GPA and semester GP A; self-efficacy and semester GP A; ACT and semester GPA; ACT and high school GP A; self-efficacy and stress, and mindfulness and stress.

Based on the existing research, the present study aimed to determine the relation between Dispositional mindfulness and four different stressors in a sample of Degree College Women students.

METHODOLOGY

Objectives

The major objectives of the present study were to assess the Mindfulness relationship with Total Stress and Four Stress components namely: Academic Stress, Interpersonal Relationship Stress, Physical Stress and Environmental Stress, among Degree College Women students.

Hypotheses

- H₁: There is significant relationship between Mindfulness and Total Stress among Degree college women students.
- H₂: There is a significant relationship between Mindfulness and Academic Stress among Degree college women students
- H₃: There is a significant relationship between Mindfulness and Physical Stress among Degree college women students
- H₄: There is a significant relationship between Mindfulness and Interpersonal Relationship Stress among Degree college women students.
- H₅: There is a significant relationship between Mindfulness and Environmental Stress among Degree college women students.

Participants

82 female College students, aged above 18 years, who participated in the study, were selected from a total of 250 students, studying at Women's Degree College in North Bengaluru. All who participated in the study; have passed 12th standard and are pursuing a Graduate degree. Convenient sampling technique was used to select 96 students out of a population of 250 Degree college women students. The obtained data was scored according to the manual and 14 students were excluded based on incomplete forms. Hence, the final, sample size for the study is 82.

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Materials

Two measures were used in this study,

- 1. Student Stress Inventory (SSI):** The Student Stress Inventory was developed by Mohamed Arip M.A.S. et al. in 2015 and was revised in 2019. SSI measures the level of stress among university students using 40 negative items to measure 4 stress subscales - namely Physical, Interpersonal relationship, Academic and Environmental. Each subscale has 10 items. The SSI was designed with ordinal scale and the value mark given for each choice is 1 for 'Never', 2 for 'Somewhat Frequent', 3 for 'Frequent' and 4 for 'Always'. SSI proposes that a Total score of 122-160 reflects that the individual has severe stress, 81-121 reflects moderate stress and scores of 40-80 reflect mild stress. Further, for each sub-scale (Physical, Interpersonal Relationships, Academic and Environmental) scores of 30-40 indicated severe stress, 19-29 indicated moderate stress and scores 10-18 indicated mild stress.
- 2. Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS):** MAAS was developed by Brown and Ryan in 2003 and measures trait mindfulness. It is a 15-item scale that has demonstrated high test-retest reliability, discriminant and convergent validity, known-groups validity, and criterion validity. It takes about five minutes to answer the MAAS questions. Participants specify the frequency of having the same experience as described in each statement. A 6-point Likert scale from 1 (almost always) to 6 (almost never) is used. The scale is scored based on the average of the scores obtained on all fifteen items. Higher the score, higher the level of dispositional mindfulness of the participant.

Procedure

The Principal was approached by the researchers to get permission to conduct the research study. Among the identified 96 students, 100% of the participants approached and participated voluntarily. The two Scales, namely, Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) and Student Stress Inventory Scale (SSI) was administered along with the study Consent and Demographic forms.

The study and its requirements were explained to participants who were asked for their consent in writing and then asked to fill a demographic form, the MAAS scale and the SSI scale. The students were given clear and precise instructions regarding the Mindfulness and Stress scales and ensured that confidentiality will be maintained. Any doubts raised were clarified.

Research design

Quantitative Research study followed Correlation Research Design.

Ethics

Confidentiality was explained and assured to every student. Students were informed and assured that if they wished to withdraw from the study at any time, they would be free to do so. Students were informed that their individual results would be shared with them on request. A plagiarism check was done on the contents of this article.

Data Analyses

Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to analyze the data. The SPSS 23 version was used to analyze the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, dispositional Mindfulness of participants was measured using the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS). The Student Stress Inventory (SSI) was used to measure stress levels related to four stress sub scales – Physical stress, Interpersonal relationship stress, Academic stress and Environmental stress. The total of the scores of all four subscales, gave a measure of the Total stress the participant was under.

The correlation between Mindfulness and each of sub-scales of stress and well as total stress was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation.

Table 1: Correlation between Mindfulness and Stress Components

| <i>Student Stress Inventory Category</i> | | Total Stress Score | Physical Stress Score | Interpersonal Relationship Stress Score | Academic Stress Score | Environmental Stress Score |
|--|----------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| MAAS Score | Pearson Correlation | -.612** | -.589** | -.306** | -.547** | -.432** |
| | Sig (2-tailed) | .000 | .000 | .005 | .000 | .000 |
| | N | 82 | 82 | 82 | 82 | 82 |

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

Table 1 shows the Pearson Correlation Coefficient and Significance (2-tailed) of the correlation between Mindfulness and Total Stress, Physical stress, Interpersonal relationship stress, Academic stress and Environmental stress, respectively.

Mindfulness and Total Stress

Consistent with the expectation, there is a significant and strong negative correlation between Mindfulness and Total Stress among Degree College Women students ($r = -.612, p < 0.01$). This indicates that students who have high mindfulness experience low stress levels. Students whose awareness and attention are not divided or compromised experience less academic, physical, environment & interpersonal stress. The studies of Palmer & Rodger (2009) and Anastasiades, Kapoor, Wootten & Lamis (2016) support the present study result which show there is a significant negative correlation between mindfulness and stress.

In this study sample, the majority of the participants report mild levels of total stress, this could be due to the protective factor made possible by their high mindfulness. Mindfulness which is characterized by clarity and vividness of current experience and functioning, could be an important factor in controlling automatic negative thoughts, and curbing unhealthy habits and behavior patterns. Thus, it could play a key role in increasing well-being, Ryan & Deci (2000) and reducing stress. In addition, the mild stress could be explained by the fact that most of the participants were in their first year, which is not as stressful as being in final year. This is because, in addition to doing well academically, graduating students are also worried about securing jobs. Many participants were students of Bachelors of Arts, which is less stressful than the Bachelors of Commerce. Majority of the participants stated they had no chronic illness and hence had no illness related stress. Due to these reasons' students are experiencing less stress and hence not preoccupied with worries and are able to be more mindful in their work.

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Two factors could be reasons for the study sample to report both, less stress & enhanced mindfulness. First, the majority of the participants were involved in various extracurricular activity like sports, dance, singing etc. These activities could be both, outlets for their creativity and stress busters. In addition, as these activities required concentration, attention and awareness; and could be the reason behind higher mindfulness levels seen in the sample. Further, majority of the participants reported they had a source of support in their lives. It's possible that in addition to the support they received, being protective in nature; it could also be the reason that they were made to identify and pay attention to their physical, mental and emotional state of being, which in turn enhanced mindfulness.

Mindfulness and Physical Stress

As hypothesized, there is a significant and strong negative correlation between Mindfulness and Physical Stress among Degree College Women students ($r=-.589$, $p<0.01$). The students who have high mindfulness experience low physical stress score levels. A study by Murphy, Mermelstein, Edwards & Gidycz (2012) supports the present study result which show there is a significant negative correlation between mindfulness and physical stress.

In this study sample, the problems reported often were related to headache, backpain and chronic fatigue. However, the participants who stated that they suffered from a Chronic illness and reported taking regular medication to manage their illness were in the minority. This indicates that for the majority, who reported mild physical stress scores, their physical stress due to chronic illness is low. Those who are not distracted by the worries associated with physical symptoms or illness, are more likely to engage in extracurricular activities that may have a positive impact on their mindfulness levels.

Mindfulness and Interpersonal Stress

Consistent with the hypothesis, there is a significant but weak negative correlation between Mindfulness and Interpersonal Stress among Degree College Women students ($r=-.306$, $p<0.05$). The students who have high mindfulness experience low Interpersonal stress levels. The study by Laurent et al (2014) supports the present study result which show there is a significant negative correlation between mindfulness and Interpersonal stress.

Majority of the participants in this study, listed that they did have a source of support in their lives. Almost all stated that a family member or members were their source of support. We postulate that the strong source of support was a protective factor that helped the participants to deal with the stressors of life regardless of their mindfulness. Further, only a quarter reported that they had relationships problems of any kind. In addition, the majority reported that they participated in extracurricular activities. We hypothesis that the exposures gained through these activities, provided ample experience for the participants to work on their interpersonal skills. This helped them be mindful of the dynamics their relationships; which in turn helped them deal with people better with less stress to themselves.

Mindfulness and Academic Stress

In line with the hypothesis, there is a significant and strong negative correlation between Mindfulness and Academic among Degree College Women students ($r=-.547$, $p<0.01$). The results show that students who have high mindfulness experience low Academic stress levels. The study by Yamada & Victor (2012) supports the present study result which show there is a significant negative correlation between mindfulness and academic stress.

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However, a study by Brausch (2011) found a contradictory result and attributed it to eustress.

In this study sample, majority of the participants reported that they did not attend tuitions. This could partly be due to the support received from college teaching staff and partly due to their inability to afford it. It was reported that the majority have had to be given fee concessions to attend the college as they came from Low to Lower Middle-Income class families. Half of the sample reported financial problems with academics and being offered concession could be reason for reduced stress.

A significant number of the students are being exposed to English Medium teaching and instruction for the first time. They come from homes in which their mother tongue is the medium of communication and have completed schooling in the language of the state they studied in. While this does impact the stress of dealing with difficult subjects, the fact that they have to pay attention to the language of instruction and be aware of the meaning they associate it with, could contribute to higher levels of mindfulness.

One of the researchers, was the college counsellor, for the year the study was conducted and reports that many students reported being nervous about delivering presentations in class. Students also shared being stressed about submission deadlines and suffering from exam fear. A few students reported difficulty with some subjects like Accounting. These observations are in line with the findings of this study. The research member, treated a few students with Systematic Desensitization, to help them overcome their fear of presenting on stage. This resulted in them overcoming their fear and increasing their self-confidence. Positive asset inventory search was done with many, to boost their self-esteem, become aware of and focus more on their positive assets than on the not so positive ones. Counselling has played some role in increasing mindfulness and lowering academic stress.

Mindfulness and Environmental Stress

As expected, there is a significant and moderately strong, negative correlation between Mindfulness and Environmental Stress among Degree College Women students ($r=-.432$, $p<0.01$). The students who have high mindfulness experience low Environmental stress levels.

The research member, who was the college counsellor for the year the study was conducted; reports that many students share the difficulties they face with their living conditions – their families live in small, single rooms. Sometimes, all the children are huddled in one room. In addition to being cramped, this means that there is disturbance from siblings, which interferes with their concentration and studies.

They also report that the pollution level in their neighborhoods' is high, be it environmental (inefficient sewage and management) or noise related. They struggle with poor means to deal with bad weather conditions (heat, rain etc.). Transport to and from college, places dual challenges of multiple bus changes and if they do not travel in a group, fear of personal safety. These reports match the findings of this study. Hence, those with high environmental stress have a lot of distractors that affect their ability to pay attention.

CONCLUSION

All the hypotheses are accepted. The study concludes that among Degree College Women Students in this sample, there is a strong, significant, negative correlation between mindfulness and total stress, between mindfulness and academic stress and between mindfulness and physical stress, respectively. Students who have high mindfulness experience lower levels of stress. Those whose attention is not divided or compromised experience less academic stress. And students who are not distracted by the worries associated with physical symptoms or illness, are more likely to engage in extracurricular activities that may have a positive impact on their mindfulness levels.

Between interpersonal relationship stress and mindfulness, there is a weak, significant, negative correlation seen in this sample of Degree College Women Students. And there is a moderate significant negative correlation between environmental stress and mindfulness among Degree College Women Students. Hence, it can be concluded that increased awareness helped students be mindful of the dynamics their relationships; which in turn helped them deal with people better with less stress to themselves. And that high environmental stress poses a source of distracting that prevent students from paying attention.

The limitation of the study includes, that the sample size was small, was done only in one college and hence undergraduate students from only two streams were studied. In addition, the distribution of students from each of the two streams, and each of the three years, was not equal. Future researchers could expand the scope to multiple colleges from multiple streams and students of postgraduate studies as well.

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Conflict of Interest

Authors declared no conflict of interest.

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