

Scrupulosity, Mindfulness and Emotion Regulation in Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

Scrupulosity is a psychiatric condition that is associated with religious or moral problems that is frequently accompanied by compulsive religious or moral observance. The potential role of mindfulness and emotion control in individuals have been discussed in this research. The concept of emotion regulation deals with how we strengthen and control both positive and negative feelings, which is an important criteria to focus on, when dealing with constant intrusive thoughts. This study aimed to find out the relationship between scrupulosity, mindfulness and emotion regulation among young adults falling within the age range of 18-30. This study's sample size was 225 and comprised of adults from the three religious groups: Christianity, Hinduism and Islam. Purposive sampling had been administered, which is a type of non-probability sampling. Spearman's correlation and Kruskal-Wallis test was also administered to establish a relationship between the three variables. The occurrence of scrupulosity was observed to be highest in Islam and lowest in Hinduism. Scrupulosity and difficulties in emotion regulation showed a very high significant positive correlation in the Christianity sample as well as in the Hinduism sample, however the correlation value was less when compared to the Christianity and Islam sample. Scrupulosity and mindfulness showed a very high significant negative correlation in the Christianity sample as well as in the Islam sample, however the value of correlation is least for it among the three sample religious groups.

Keywords: *Scrupulosity, Mindfulness, Emotion regulation, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam*

The obsessional fear of acting or thinking immorally or going against one's religious values characterises scrupulosity (e.g. Greenberg, 1984; Greenberg and Huppert, 2010; Greenberg and Shefler, 2002). Scrupulosity literally translates to "fearing sin when there is none." Religious obsessions include fears of retribution by a higher force, intrusive blasphemous images, and fears of performing a religious ritual improperly or committing a sin. This is often accompanied by compulsions such as finding reassurance from religious leaders and other members of society, as well as excessively repeating religious rituals. Individuals who are cautious try to avoid objects or circumstances that may cause their compulsions or obsessions, such as bibles and other religious symbols, places of

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worship, immoral or anti-religious content, and so on. Mindfulness is known as a form of consciousness training (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). It's also known as a contemplation exercise or an insight meditation, and it requires a strong perceptual and spiritual emphasis on attending and questioning (Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Pierce, 2003).

Mindfulness has been described as a self-regulatory approach to stress management (Bishop, 2002). In the event that unwanted emotions or thoughts occur, the individual is taught the importance of using mindfulness to concentrate on the breath as an anchor (Bishop, 2002). Acceptance and persistence are both important aspects of mindfulness (Ditton, Eclache & Goldman, 2006). Keltner and Gross (1999) characterised emotion as a regular, short-term, biologically dependent pattern of experience, perception, physiological response, and communication that occurs in response to specific social and physical challenges. Most theories of emotion emphasize emotion control since it describes how people modulate, feel, and organise emotion, as well as how such management affects human behaviour (Elliott et al., 2003). Emotion control is essential for a stable psychological state. Adaptive emotion control, according to Elliott et al., (2003), helps people to increase their tolerance for distressing circumstances by giving their feelings a new sense.

Rationale of the study

Patients, religious leaders, mental health providers, and families all face a daunting and intriguing challenge when it comes to scrupulosity. It does not appear in many psychiatric and psychology textbooks, however, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, fourth edition, text revision, (DSMIV-TR) (American Psychiatric Association 2000) briefly mentions scrupulosity under the context of obsessive-compulsive personality disorder (OCPD). The clinically important degree of statistical prevalence and personal distress associated with scrupulosity make this extraordinary lack of research extremely troubling. Rather than trying to change the strength, frequency, or type of negative thoughts, the philosophy of mindfulness encourages people to allow emotions and thoughts to rise and fall as naturally as possible. This sort of approach towards emotions and thoughts has been found to have many benefits. It has been found that mindfulness was related to positive well-being and reduction in emotional as well as cognitive disturbance. As a result, it was established as a crucial component in self-controlling one's behaviour (K. W. Brown & Ryan, 2003). Scrupulosity, like all forms of OCD, can be treated with Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy. Clients who undergo mindfulness-based cognitive behavioural therapy (MBCT) understand that they are not alone in developing unwanted thoughts. Their fears and obsessions are amplified and increased, and their thoughts are given more credibility and power, when they react to these thoughts with compulsive behaviours. Individuals will discover that unwanted thoughts have little control over them through Mindfulness-Based CBT. As there are few studies that explain the link between levels of mindfulness, emotion regulation and scrupulosity, especially in an Indian setting, this research will help in filling the gap. With the help of this study, we can also find out whether emotion regulation helps in controlling the level of scrupulosity found in an individual.

A study by Buchholz, J. L., Abramowitz, J. S., Riemann, B. C., Reuman, L., Blakey, S. M., Leonard, R. C., & Thompson, K. A. (2019) aimed to measure the role of scrupulosity, religious affiliation and symptom presentation in obsessive compulsive disorder. The present study examined the relationship between OCD symptoms and religious affiliation, religious affiliation and scrupulosity, and scrupulosity and OCD symptoms across religious affiliations. Participants included 180 adults with a primary diagnosis of OCD. The study

Scrupulosity, Mindfulness and Emotion Regulation in Young Adults

revealed that scrupulosity differed across various religious affiliations. Individuals who identified as Catholic reported the highest level of scrupulosity.

In a study conducted by Abramowitz, J.S, and Jacoby, R.J.(2015), a cognitive behavioural analysis and implications for treatment of scrupulosity was examined. Scrupulosity involved obsessive religious fears and doubts, reassurance seeking, avoidance, and unwanted intrusive blasphemous thoughts. This article provides an extensive review of the nature of scrupulosity, including a detailed clinical description, cross cultural aspects of scrupulosity, information about how to differentiate scrupulosity from normal everyday religious practice and relationships between scrupulosity and religiosity. The findings of the study show that through a cognitive-behavioural model of scrupulosity, one's religious beliefs and values influence the misinterpretation of normally occurring unwanted thoughts, causing them to be seen as sinful or foreboding of punishment.

The aim of the study conducted by Zad, H.E, Shams, G, Meysami, A.P, and Erfan, A(2017) was to examine the predictive nature of mindfulness, emotion regulation, interpersonal effectiveness and distress tolerance. A total of 240 students of Tehran University of Medical Sciences were selected. This was done using stratified proportional sampling method. The gathered data was analyzed using Pearson correlation and hierarchical regression. The results highlighted the necessity of considering these variables in research and treatment of the symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder. The highest correlation relationship and accounted variance through study variables were in the case of obsessing.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design used in this study is correlational design. The research design used in this study is cross sectional design. A correlational study tries to find out a relationship between two variables, with no manipulation of an independent variable.

Sample and Sampling

The study was conducted among 225 adults who fall within the age range of 18-30 year and those who follow either Christianity, Hinduism or Islam. Convenience sampling method was used for the study to select the sample. Only those who meet the following inclusion-exclusion criteria, are eligible for the study:

Inclusion Criteria:

- Young Adults of age range 18-25 years
- Knowledge of English Language
- Must belong to either one of the following religions: Hinduism, Christianity or Islam.

Exclusion Criteria:

- People who have no knowledge of English
- People belonging to a religion other than Hinduism, Christianity or Islam

Research problem

- Will there be a relation between scrupulosity, mindfulness and emotion regulation?
- Will there be a variance in the occurrence of scrupulosity among the three religious groups Christianity, Hinduism and Islam?

Scrupulosity, Mindfulness and Emotion Regulation in Young Adults

Objectives

- To find out the relation between emotion regulation and the level of scrupulosity.
- To find out the level of mindfulness among scrupulous individuals.
- To find out to what extent scrupulosity varies across three religions: Hinduism, Christianity and Islam.

Hypothesis

- There will be a correlation between emotion regulation and scrupulosity.
- There will be a correlation between mindfulness and scrupulosity.
- Scrupulosity will be more frequently observed in Christianity and Islam when compared to Hinduism.

Procedure

The sample used in this study include 225 young adults, from three religious groups Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. They will be selected on the basis of the inclusion-exclusion criteria. An informed consent was administered and obtained from all the respondents before collecting the data. Ethical consideration was maintained. Details of the subject is kept highly confidential and will only be used for academic purposes. The subjects are informed that they have the liberty to choose to drop out of the study at any given time. The study will include responses from participants living in India. Convenience sampling is administered, which is a type of non-probability sampling that involves the process of drawing the sample from a portion of the population that is most accessible and close at hand. Questionnaires regarding scrupulosity, mindfulness and emotion regulation were distributed to the participants. The scale was administered to the participants through Google Forms. Appropriate statistical tools was used for the examination of the study as well as an analysis of variance between the three religions. The data obtained included responses from 225 young adults falling between the age range of 18-25. The data was processed in Microsoft Excel and the statistical analysis was done using IBM SPSS Statistics 21. Based on this, Spearman's correlation and Kruskal-Wallis test was also administered.

Tools

The variables of the present investigation were measured by using the following tools.

1. Social demographic data sheet

It includes the demographic details of a person such as name, age, age of attaining puberty or sexual maturity, and educational qualification.

2. Penn Inventory of Scrupulosity (PIOS) Scale (Abramowitz et al. 2002)

Using this scale, scores can be obtained through the psychometric evaluation of scrupulosity using the Penn Inventory of Scrupulosity (PIOS), a 19-item self-report scale measuring religious obsessive-compulsive symptoms (Abramowitz et al. 2002).

3. Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) (Brown, Ryan, 2003)

The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) is a 15-item questionnaire (1-6 Likert scale) used to assess the core characteristic of mindfulness (Brown, Ryan, 2003).

4. Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS)

It is a 36-item self-report measure of six facets of emotion regulation (items are rated on a scale of 1 to 5). It is a widely used self-report measure of subjective emotion ability, and can be defined by a prominent clinically derived model of emotion regulation (Gratz, Roemer, 2004).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the data analysis that was used to describe the sample and address the research questions and associated hypotheses are presented in this chapter.

Result of hypothesis testing are given below:-

H1: There will be a correlation between emotion regulation and scrupulosity.

Table 1

Table 1.1. Results of Spearman’s correlation between scrupulosity and difficulties in emotion regulation from the Christianity sample

	DIFFICULTIES IN EMOTION REGULATION
SCRUPULOSITY	.64**

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

Table 1.1. shows the results of Spearman’s correlation between Scrupulosity and Difficulties in Emotion Regulation among individuals from the Christianity sample. A high significant positive correlation can be observed between Scrupulosity and Difficulties in Emotion Regulation. This means, as the levels of scrupulosity increases in an individual, the difficulties in emotion regulation experienced by them increases simultaneously as well. Hence, the finding accepts the hypothesis which states that a relationship exists between scrupulosity and difficulties in emotion regulation.

Table 1.2. Results of Spearman’s correlation between scrupulosity and difficulties in emotion regulation from the Hinduism sample

	DIFFICULTIES IN EMOTION REGULATION
SCRUPULOSITY	.39**

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

Table 1.2. shows the results of Spearman’s correlation between Scrupulosity and Difficulties in Emotion Regulation among individuals from the Hinduism sample. A high significant positive correlation can be observed between Scrupulosity and Difficulties in Emotion Regulation. This means, as the levels of scrupulosity increases in an individual, the difficulties in emotion regulation experienced by them increases simultaneously as well. Hence, the finding accepts the hypothesis which states that a relationship exists between scrupulosity and difficulties in emotion regulation.

Table 1.3. Results of Spearman’s correlation between scrupulosity and difficulties in emotion regulation from the Islam sample

	DIFFICULTIES IN EMOTION REGULATION
SCRUPULOSITY	.55**

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

Table 1.3. shows the results of Spearman’s correlation between Scrupulosity and Difficulties in Emotion Regulation among individuals from the Islam sample. A high significant positive correlation can be observed between Scrupulosity and Difficulties in Emotion Regulation. This means, as the levels of scrupulosity increases in an individual, the difficulties in emotion regulation experienced by them increases simultaneously as well. The finding accepts the hypothesis which states that a relationship exists between scrupulosity and difficulties in emotion regulation.

Scrupulosity, Mindfulness and Emotion Regulation in Young Adults

From all the sample group – Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam all the correlation result showed a very highly significant positive correlation between scrupulosity and difficulties in emotion regulation at 0.01 level. Among the three sample groups, Christianity sample showcased the highest correlation between scrupulosity and difficulties in emotion regulation with a correlation value of 0.649. It can be concluded that as an individual experiences increasing levels of scrupulosity, the difficulties they face in regulating their emotions increases simultaneously as well. This finding accepts the hypothesis which states that people with high levels of scrupulosity will have low emotion regulation capabilities. In a study conducted by Alexandra Gilbert on factors related to obsessive compulsive symptoms, moderation analysis was used to test the hypothesis that Emotion Regulation (ER) would moderate the effect of disgust on Obsessive-Compulsive (OC) symptoms. The PROCESS plug-in (Hayes, 2018) was used to center variables for analyses. Findings are included in Figure 1. The overall model with the interaction was significant [$F(3, 147) = 13.03, p < .001, R^2 = .21$], and a significant main effect of disgust on OC symptoms [$b = .16, t(147) = 3.43, p = < .001$] indicated that as disgust levels increase, OC levels increase. There was also a significant main effect of ER on OC symptoms [$b = .17, t(147) = 4.50, p = < .001$] suggesting that as ER difficulties increase, OC levels increase (Gilbert, 2019). This example that focus on the relationship between emotion regulation and obsessive-compulsive symptoms, further supports the finding of the Spearman's correlation conducted in this study between emotion regulation and scrupulosity, as scrupulosity is a subtype of obsessive-compulsive disorder.

H2: There will be a correlation between mindfulness and scrupulosity.

Table 2

Table 2.1. Results of Spearman's correlation between scrupulosity and Mindfulness from the Christianity sample

	MINDFULNESS
SCRUPULOSITY	-.48**

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

Table 2.1. shows the results of Spearman's correlation between Scrupulosity and Mindfulness among individuals from the Christianity sample. From this it can be inferred that a highly significant negative correlation exists between scrupulosity and mindfulness. This means higher the level of scrupulosity in an individual, lower will be their level of mindfulness. Hence the hypothesis is accepted.

Table 2.2. Results of Spearman's correlation between scrupulosity and Mindfulness from the Hinduism sample

	MINDFULNESS
SCRUPULOSITY	-.52**

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

Table 2.2. shows the results of Spearman's correlation between Scrupulosity and Mindfulness among individuals from the Hinduism sample. From this it can be inferred that a very highly significant negative correlation exists between scrupulosity and mindfulness. This means higher the level of scrupulosity in an individual, lower will be their level of mindfulness. Hence the hypothesis is accepted.

Scrupulosity, Mindfulness and Emotion Regulation in Young Adults

Table 2.3. Results of Spearman's correlation between scrupulosity and Mindfulness from the Islam sample

SCRUPULOSITY	MINDFULNESS
	-.24**

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

Table 2.3. shows the results of Spearman's correlation between Scrupulosity and Mindfulness among individuals from the Islam sample. From this it can be inferred that a highly significant negative correlation exists between scrupulosity and mindfulness. This means higher the level of scrupulosity in an individual, lower will be their level of mindfulness. Hence the hypothesis is accepted.

The second hypothesis states that there will be a correlation between mindfulness and scrupulosity. In the Christianity sample, a highly significant negative correlation is observed between scrupulosity and mindfulness, at 0.01 level of significance. This means higher the level of scrupulosity in an individual, lower will be their level of mindfulness. Similar results can be observed from the Hinduism and Islam sample as well, where in both sample groups, a negative correlation can be observed at 0.01 significance level. Hence the hypothesis is accepted. Out of the three sample groups, Islam sample group shows a comparatively lesser significant correlation between scrupulosity and mindfulness. In a study conducted by Brian, Hayley and Kellie, it was hypothesized that scrupulosity would be negatively associated with the trait mindfulness and positively associated with thought suppression. It was also hypothesized that thought suppression and mindfulness would mediate the association between scrupulosity and symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). As anticipated, mindfulness was significantly associated with scrupulosity, with a particularly strong and negative association.

H3: Scrupulosity will be more frequently observed in Christianity and Islam when compared to Hinduism.

Table 3 Results of Kruskal-Wallis analysis between Christianity, Hinduism and Islam samples for the Scrupulosity, Mindfulness and Difficulties in Emotion Regulation scales Ranks

SCALE	RELIGION	N	MEAN RANK	CHI-SQUARE	ASYM.SIG
SCRUPULOSITY	Christianity	79	123.11	36.91	0
	Hinduism	67	73.44		
	Islam	79	136.44		
	TOTAL	225			
MINDFULNESS	Christianity	79	103.45	2.73	.25
	Hinduism	67	116.19		
	Islam	79	119.84		
	TOTAL	225			
DIFFICULTIES IN EMOTION REGULATION	Christianity	79	118.84	1.41	.49
	Hinduism	67	113.71		
	Islam	79	106.56		
	TOTAL	225			

Table 3 shows the Kruskal-Wallis analysis between Christianity, Hinduism and Islam samples for the Scrupulosity, Mindfulness and Difficulties in Emotion Regulation scales. From this it can be concluded that a significant difference among the three groups can be

observed only under the Scrupulosity scale. The third hypothesis states that Scrupulosity will be more frequently observed in Christianity and Islam when compared to Hinduism. To test this hypothesis, Kruskal-Wallis test was administered and the results showed that the mean ranking of Scrupulosity was highest in the Islam sample group with a value of 136.44, followed by the Christianity sample group with a value of 123.11. The mean rank was observed to be the lowest in the Hinduism sample group with a value of 73.44. It can be concluded that scrupulosity was observed more frequently in Christianity and Islam when compared to Hinduism. Hence, the hypothesis is accepted. In analysis of a study conducted in 2012 by Inozu, Karanci and David revealed that religiosity had a specific relationship with obsessional but not anxious or depressive symptoms in both samples, although the highly religious Muslim students reported more compulsive symptoms than highly religious Christians. These findings indicate that the tendency for highly religious Christians and Muslims to experience greater obsessiveness is related to their heightened sense of personal guilt and beliefs that they are responsible for controlling unwanted, threatening intrusive thoughts.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Scrupulosity, primarily characterized by pathological guilt or obsession, is a psychological disorder that is associated with religious or moral issues, often followed by compulsive religious or moral observance. It is highly maladaptive and distressing. (Abramowitz, Huppert, Cohen, Tolin, & Cahill, 2002; Fallon et al., 1990). Scrupulous individuals tend to get overly concerned that something they might have said, thought or done might be taken into account as a sin or other violation of moral or religious doctrine. In this study, we can find out the possible role the level of mindfulness and emotion regulation has to play among individuals experiencing scrupulosity. Marlatt and Kristeller (1999) explain, “to be fully mindful in the present moment is to be aware of the full range of experiences that exist in the here and now. It is bringing one’s complete attention to the present experience on a moment to moment basis”. Current research explains how the practice of mindfulness as a whole is definitely beneficial (Van Dam, et al., 2017). The concept of emotion regulation deals with how we strengthen and control both positive and negative feelings, which is an important criteria to focus on, when dealing with constant intrusive thoughts.

Findings

- Scrupulosity and difficulties in emotion regulation show a very high significant positive correlation in the Christianity sample.
- Scrupulosity and difficulties in emotion regulation show a high significant positive correlation in the Hinduism sample, however the correlation value is less when compared to the Christianity and Islam sample.
- Scrupulosity and mindfulness show a very high significant negative correlation in the Christianity sample.
- Scrupulosity and mindfulness show a high significant negative correlation in the Islam sample, however the value of correlation is least among the three sample religious groups.
- The occurrence of scrupulosity is observed to be highest in Islam and lowest in Hinduism
- There is a variation in the mindfulness capabilities among the three religious groups.
- There is a variation in the difficulties in emotion regulation experienced among the three religious groups.

Implications of the study

Understanding the importance of the role that mindfulness plays in the context of scrupulosity could lead to the development of more effective treatment methods for scrupulosity and attention can be directed towards the study of the effect of emotion regulation among individuals experiencing scrupulosity can help in coming up with better techniques to deal with scrupulosity. Educating the public on prevalence of scrupulosity among individuals can help in the early treatment and prevention of scrupulosity being developed.

Limitations of the study

Any interpretation or generalization of the present findings should take into consideration some possible limitations of the study. Only age and religion were considered as a part of the socio-demographic sheet so the influence of other factors (such as socio-economic status, etc) on the variables of the study cannot be explained. The study was conducted using purposive sampling from a limited area so it cannot be generalized to the larger population. Social desirability could play a major role in affecting the results as the study uses self-report questionnaires.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the study was to understand the role of mindfulness and emotion regulation among adults experiencing scrupulosity. The study concluded that scrupulosity was most frequently observed among Muslims and least frequently among Hindus. There is a very high significant positive correlation in the Christianity sample between scrupulosity and difficulties in emotion regulation. Scrupulosity and mindfulness show a very high significant negative correlation in the Christianity sample. A high significant negative correlation is shown between scrupulosity and mindfulness in the Islam sample, however its value of correlation is least among the three sample religious groups. There is a variation in the mindfulness capabilities and the difficulties in emotion regulation experienced among the three religious groups. A better understanding of the role of mindfulness and emotion regulation can be of clinical significance in treating scrupulosity.

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Scrupulosity, Mindfulness and Emotion Regulation in Young Adults

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Conflict of Interest

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