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Research Paper

Environmental Sustainability can be Predicted by Mindfulness: Extensive Study Examining Mindfulness Traits and Pro-Environmental Behavior

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the world, Increased trends indicate that mindfulness traits increase pro-environmental behavior i.e., more responsible behavior for the environment, but there is limited empirical research in the Uttarakhand region of India. Thus, an extensive empirical study was carried out the in Dehradun district of Uttarakhand to investigate the in-depth association between mindfulness traits and pro-environmental behavior (PEB) along with the comparison across gender and age groups. The regression analysis reported that mindfulness predicts PEB. The females reported higher levels of mindfulness and PEB as compared to males. The mindfulness and PEB levels were higher in the 28-32 age group. This research can be beneficial in creating a mindfulness-based intervention based on environmentally sustainable behavior globally and in higher designing mindfulness-based education curricula and school settings that foster sustainability. Limitations, Future Implications, and Ethical considerations have been reported.

Keywords: *Mindfulness Traits, Pro-Environmental Behavior, Mindfulness-Based Intervention, Environmentally Sustainable Behavior, Sustainability*

In recent years, there has been a greater focus on addressing psychological factors associated with environmentally friendly behavior referred to as pro-environmental behavior. In an attempt to define pro-environmental behavior (PEB), Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) explain that PEB is environmentally friendly behavior that reduces negative impacts on the built and natural world, such as reducing waste generation, the use of non-toxic materials, and reduces energy as well as resource consumption. Mindfulness has recently been identified as a potential way to promote pro-environmental behavior. The term "mindfulness" is a translation of the Pali word "sati" (Davids, 1881), the Sanskrit word "smriti," and the philosophical teachings of spiritual masters in Buddhism (Thera, 2001) and Hinduism (Maharaj et al., 2012). Mindfulness is widely defined as bringing one's full attention to the events occurring in the present moment while being accepting and non-judgmental (Baer et al., 2006; Marlatt & Kristeller, 1999; Zinn, 2003). According to Baer et al. (2006), mindfulness includes "nonreactivity to inner experience" which means allowing

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experiences to come and go without reacting to change them, "observing" which means paying attention to our sensory environment, "acting with awareness" which means being warmly aware of our actions as we engage in different activities, "describing" which means adding factual information about what we are observing, "non-judging of inner experience" which is being aware of one's thoughts, feelings, and attitudes but not attaching value judgments to them. Mindfulness regulates healthy behavior (Schuman-Olivier et al., 2020), and consumption habits and thus increases the likelihood of one's engagement in environmentally responsible behavior and aiding sustainable growth which is explained by a conceptual model of 'green mindfulness' (Arslan et al., 2021; Ho et al., 2022). The main purpose of this study is to explore the link between mindfulness traits "Nonreactivity to inner experience, Observing, acting with awareness, Describing, and non-Judging of inner experience" given by Baer et al. (2008) with proenvironmental behavior (PEB) "home water and energy consumption, waste management, travel, and eco-friendly buying" given by Whitmarsh and O'Neill (2010).

CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, a growing body of research has established a link between mindfulness and environmentally friendly practices. Higher Mindfulness levels were linked to higher PEB through higher connectedness to nature (Barbaro & Pickett, 2016; Ray et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2017), higher subjective well-being (Jacob et al., 2008), low social dominance (Panno et al., 2017), anti-consumption behavior (Lin & Park, 2023), ethical beliefs (Khan & Abbas, 2023). According to Panno et al. (2017), individuals who score high on mindfulness tend to exhibit less dominating behavior in both social and environmental settings, demonstrating a greater inclination towards benefiting others and the natural world. Overall, this suggests that mindfulness may play a significant role in fostering prosocial attitudes and behaviors. Mindfulness has also been linked to higher PEB in the workplace (Patel & Holm, 2017) and among those who practice it (Thiermann & Sheate, 2022). Females were high on subjective well-being indicating high pro-environmental behavior and quality of life (Jacob et al., 2008). Mindfulness is a practice that can positively impact various aspects of an individual's life, including their behavior towards others and their decision-making abilities. According to Geiger et al. (2019), practicing mindfulness can help individuals become more compassionate and engage in pro-social behavior, both of which are valuable traits in promoting sustainable and eco-friendly practices. Additionally, mindfulness can assist in making ethical decisions by promoting a heightened sense of awareness and attention to our habits, including unsustainable consumption patterns. The "awareness" component of mindfulness can disrupt automatic thought processes and brings individuals' attention to their unsustainable consumption habits. The value-behavior connection (Schwartz, 1994) mentions that hedonic values include things that resonate with mindfulness components like openness and readiness for new experiences. van Riper et al. (2018) add to this by saying that high hedonic value is linked to high pro-environmental behaviour. Further, Experimental investigations also show that Mindfulness training boosted pro-environmental behavioural intentions (Tang et al., 2017) and belief in climate change (Wang et al., 2017). Although previous studies have suggested a strong association between mindfulness and PEB, more research is needed to determine whether mindfulness can accurately predict PEB. Therefore, the primary aim of this study is to investigate this relationship and determine whether mindfulness can indeed predict PEB. Additionally, due to previous inconsistent findings, this study also aims to explore gender and age-related differences in adult participants and compare the outcomes between these groups. In other words, this study seeks to clarify the relationship between mindfulness and PEB by investigating whether

mindfulness can serve as a predictor of PEB. Furthermore, the study delved deeper and examined potential differences between males and females of different age groups.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

This field-based empirical study was conducted to explore the relationship between mindfulness and pro-environmental behavior in male and female adults aged 18 to 32. The study included 290 participants from Uttarakhand, India, out of which 165 were female and 127 were male. The age range of the participants varied from 18 to 32 years, with 233 participants falling in the 18-22-year age group, 34 in the 23-27-year age group, and 28 in the 28-32-year age group. Participation in the study was voluntary, and the participants were provided with a self-administered questionnaire to assess their level of mindfulness and pro-environmental behavior.

Measures

Mindfulness

This study utilized the 15-item Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ-15) to evaluate the level of mindfulness among the participants (Baer et al., 2008). The validity and reliability of the FFMQ-15, including its factor structure, internal consistency, and Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient, were examined by Gu et al. (2016) who recommended the use of this questionnaire as a concise research tool. The FFMQ-15 encompasses five subscales, each representing a facet of mindfulness, including 'Nonreactivity to inner experience', 'Observing', 'Acting with awareness', 'Describing', and 'non-Judging of inner experience'. By employing the FFMQ-15, researchers could effectively measure the level of mindfulness traits.

Pro-environmental Behavior

The assessment of pro-environmental behavior (PEB) was carried out by utilizing the Pro-Environmental Behavior scale, which was developed by Whitmarsh and O'Neill (2010). This scale specifically measures the behavior of individuals in four domains, which include domestic energy and water consumption, waste behavior, transportation, and eco-friendly buying. There are a total of 24 items on the scale, and it has been found to be reliably accurate with a high alpha measure of 0.92.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The aim of this research was to explore the connection between mindfulness traits and pro-environmental behavior (PEB) among a group of non-clinical adults. The relationship between mindfulness and PEB was analyzed by testing hypotheses based on the literature review. *Hypothesis 1:* There exists no significant relationship between Mindfulness and PEB, *Hypothesis 2:* There exists no relationship between Mindfulness and PEB in males, *Hypothesis 3:* There exists no relationship between Mindfulness and PEB in females, *Hypothesis 4:* There exists no significant difference in Mindfulness levels between age groups (18 -22), (23-27) & (28-32), *Hypothesis 5:* There exists no significant difference In PEB levels among Age groups (18-22), (23-27) & (28-32), *Hypothesis 6:* There exists no significant difference between males and females in Mindfulness levels, *Hypothesis 7:* There exists no significant difference between males and females in levels of PEB, *Hypothesis 8*: There is no impact of between predictor variable ‘mindfulness’ on dependent variable ‘PEB’. The data analysis was performed with IBM SPSS version 20 software.

The findings presented in Table 1 show the probability distribution and Table 2 show the descriptive analysis. The analysis of mindfulness traits indicates a skewness value of .184, less than 1.0, and a kurtosis value of -0.064, greater than -1.0, indicating a symmetrical distribution.

Table 1:Probability distribution

Tests of Normality						
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			**Shapiro-Wilk**		
	Statistic	**df**	**Sig.**	**Statistic**	**df**	**Sig.**
Mindfulness	.059	290	.017	.994	290	.344
Pro-Environment Behavior	.073	290	.001	.978	290	.000

PEB shows a skewness value of .106 (< 2.0) but a kurtosis value of 1.224 (< 2.0) predicting normal distribution for both measures as per statistical interpretation suggested by H. Y. (2013). Mindfulness depicts the p-value (0.17) > α value (0.05), predicting its normal distribution however, PEB depicts the p-value (.001) < α value (0.05) not predicting its normal distribution.

Table 2 shows the nonparametric Spearman rho test for the correlation between mindfulness and PEB. The p-value (0.008) < α value (0.05) predicts a significant association. Further, the correlation coefficient (ρ) is .156 depicting a moderate positive correlation hence *Hypothesis 1* is rejected.

Table 2:Correlation between Mindfulness and PEB

Correlations				
			Mindfulness	**Pro-Environment Behavior**
Spearman's rho	Mindfulness	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.156**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.008
		N	290	290
	Pro Environment Behavior	Correlation Coefficient	.156**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.008	.
		N	290	290

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

Thus, a positive correlation between Mindfulness traits and PEB was observed, consistent with the previous results (Ray et al., 2020; Tang et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2017). However, the relationship is not strong enough but significant. This could be an interesting addition to our knowledge of the relationship between traits and behavior and the function of mindfulness traits in pro-environmental behavior. This may be significant when considering individual conduct and when developing environmental policies and measures. Although there is theoretical and empirical support for a link between mindfulness and pro-environmental behaviors, research on how mindfulness can predict PEB is scarce. One of the goals of this study was to fill this knowledge gap. Further shown in Table 4 and Figure 1, the regression analysis for the predictor variable 'mindfulness' and the dependent variable 'PEB' shows that the value of regression coefficient (R^2) is .160 i.e., mindfulness here can predict 16 % of the variance in PEB. Thus we reject *Hypothesis 8*. Earlier literature suggests

that Mindfulness is linked to higher PEB in the workplace too (Patel & Holm, 2017; Thiermann & Sheate, 2022).

Table 3:Regression Analysis

Model Summary[b]				
Model	**R**	**R Square**	**Adjusted R Square**	**Std. Error of the Estimate**
1	.160[a]	.026	.022	9.70020

Tables 5 and 6 show the correlation analysis of mindfulness and PEB for males and females respectively. The correlation coefficient (ρ) is .146, which depicts a positive correlation for males. Thus *Hypothesis 2 is* rejected. The correlation coefficient (ρ) is .196 depicting a significant positive correlation between mindfulness and PEB for females. Thus *Hypothesis 3:* is rejected. When compared between males and females this correlation was higher among the females as reported earlier by Jacob et al., 2008. In this study, it was observed that mindfulness was comparatively a strong predictor of PEB among females than males showing an increased connection between self and climate change awareness among females as the reported mindfulness and PEB levels were higher in females as compared to males The difference in mindfulness and PEB levels among males and females using nonparametric Independent Samples Mann Whitney U Test was analyzed where for mindfulness levels, The p value (0.21) < α value (0.05) depicts there is a significant difference and thus *Hypothesis 6:* is rejected. For PEB levels, The p value(0.32) < α value. (0.05) depicts there is a significant difference, and thus *Hypothesis 7:* is rejected.

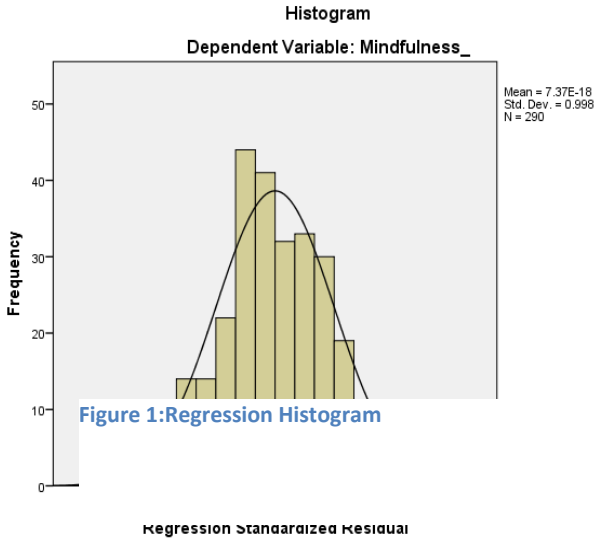

Figure 1:Regression Histogram

Table 4:Males mindfulness and PEB

Correlations				
			Males_ Mindfulness	**Males_ Pro-environmental behavior**
Spearman's rho	Males_ Mindfulness	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.146
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.102
		N	127	127
	Males_ Proenvironmental behavior	Correlation Coefficient	.146	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.102	.
		N	127	127

Table 5:Females mindfulness and PEB

Correlations				
			Females_ Mindfulness	**Females_ Pro-environmental behavior**
Spearman's rho	Females_ Mindfulness	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.196*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.012
		N	165	165
	Females_ Pro-environmental behavior	Correlation Coefficient	.196*	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.012	.
		N	165	165

Figure 2 shows the non-parametric Kruskal Wallis Test results for mindfulness levels among age groups (18 -22), (23-27) & (28-32). The p value (.155) > α value (.05) depicts no significant difference and hence *Hypothesis 4:* is accepted. The variation in Mindfulness levels with age has beeninconsistently reported in previous studies globally (Boekel & Hsieh, 2018) and in India (Kumar et al., 2021). When compared to different age groups, the mindfulness, and PEB levels across the 28-32 age group were higher than other age groups, following the 18-22 age group, which can be traced by the order of mindfulness levels within these age groups: (28-32) age group > (18 -22) age group > (23-27) age group. Further, the Kruskal Wallis Test results for PEB levels among age groups (18 -22), (23-27) & (28-32) report: the p-value (.000) < α value (0.05) depicts there is a significant difference among the groups and hence *Hypothesis 5:* is rejected. Global research across countries suggests that the elderly population is more environmentally active and there exists a positive relationship between aging and Pro-environmental behavior (Wang et al., 2021). Those who appreciate the environment may be more likely to engage in pro-environmental activity, and by increasing their awareness of their thoughts, decisions, and actions at the moment, they may feel more in charge of their future. More studies are warranted in order to see the moderators and mediators in the relationship between mindfulness and pro-environmental Behavior.

Hypothesis Test Summary

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The distribution of Mindfulness_ is the same across categories of Group_.	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.021	Reject the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

Figure 2:Mindfulness across groups

Hypothesis Test Summary

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The distribution of Proenvbeh_ is the same across categories of Group_.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

Figure 3:PEB across groups

CONCLUSION

Mindfulness traits have a strong connection with environmentally sustainable behavior. The Comparative analysis states, the females showed higher Pro-environmental behavior (PEB) and mindfulness traits but age has no correlation with PEB and mindfulness traits. Not merely an association, but mindfulness can predict PEB too. This study can be utilized in developing mindfulness-based curricula and intervention programs for non-clinical Indian adults including school and university students.

Limitations

The possible limitation of this study is generalizability across countries as this was comprised of a sample purely based in India. However, further cross-cultural studies can bridge this gap. Also, the measures used were self-reported measures of mindfulness and pro-environmental behavior as self-reported measures are designed to study people's beliefs that may however they may differ from people's actions. The study didn't report the causation between mindfulness and pro-environmental behavior as it analyzed the correlation, regression, and comparative analysis between the same.

Future Implications

The study can be beneficial in understanding the role mindfulness plays in environmentally sustainable behavior globally. Mindfulness-based intervention for inducing pro-environmental behavior in people can be developed. Further moderation and mediation analysis of the possible psychological factors between mindfulness and pro-environmental behavior is necessary. Such studies can be beneficial for policy-making relevant to the environment and psychology.

Ethical Considerations

Permission from the author was obtained to use the PEB tool and the Mindfulness tool was available for Open access. Useful Citations have been made for the same. All of the participants who took part gave their written permission and were told they could leave the study at any time. They did not receive any financial compensation. The anonymity of the participants' responses was guaranteed. The ethical clearance was provided by the Department of Psychology, Doon University.

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Conflict of Interest

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