

Research Paper

Trait Mindfulness, Cognitive Emotion Regulation and Emotional Reactivity Among Married and Unmarried Indian Adults

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ABSTRACT

The current study's objective was to investigate the connections between trait mindfulness, cognitive emotion regulation, and emotional reactivity in Indian adults who were either single or married. 180 individuals from diverse regions of India were selected using a non-probability convenience sampling method. The Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire-short Version (CERQ-s), the Perth Emotional Reactivity Scale-Short Version (PERS-s), and the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) (Brown, K.W. & Ryan, R.M., 2003) were used to gauge the participants' levels of trait mindfulness, emotional reactivity, and cognitive emotion regulation. Data was collected from 180 participants, 90 unmarried and 90 married Indian adults. Pearson Correlation and Independent sample t-test was used to analyze the relationship and differences in the variables among unmarried and married adults. The results of the study revealed that there is a significant negative low correlation between trait mindfulness and maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation strategies and a low positive correlation between trait mindfulness and adaptive cognitive emotion regulation strategies. Low positive and negative correlations between trait mindfulness and general positive and negative reactivity respectively, were found. Additionally, it was discovered that neither the adaptive nor maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation techniques nor general positive emotional reactivity varied significantly between Indians who are unmarried and those who are married. Implications and limitations of the study are discussed.

Keywords: *Trait Mindfulness, Cognitive Emotion Regulation, Adaptive and Maladaptive Strategies, Emotional Reactivity, Unmarried Indian Adults, Married Indian Adults*

The world today can be described as a fast-paced world where every individual is busy running helter-skelter after almost all aspects of life. Daily stressors have added one atop the other to an individual's life contributing to their poor overall health condition and hence the growing rates of various illnesses. In such a world, many have forgotten to notice the smallest details and the littlest things that are there to appreciate in one's life, let alone one's own self and emotions. The variables chosen for the study are-trait mindfulness, cognitive emotion regulation and emotional reactivity.

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Mindfulness exists as a trait, intervention and state. Mindfulness is being aware and present in the moment. Being mindful involves being fully aware of what goes on inside oneself too and that includes emotions, feelings and thoughts. Trait mindfulness is an individual's predisposition towards present moment attention and awareness in everyday life. It is also known as dispositional mindfulness. Prior research has established an overall positive relationship between trait mindfulness and psychological well-being, suggesting that trait mindfulness could be one of the indicators of psychological health and may be a critical factor contributing to overall psychological health. Trait mindfulness has been linked to enhanced emotional well-being and the use of adaptive emotion regulation strategies. Growing body of research shows, as people become older, they get better at utilising their thoughts and behaviours to prevent or lessen the impact of unpleasant experiences. People gradually develop this skill over the course of a lifetime of events, and they are more driven to control their emotions due to perceptions about the remaining time in their lives (Charles, S. T., & Luong, G., 2013).

Cognitive emotion regulation (CER) is described as the "conscious, mental strategies individuals use to cope with the intake of emotionally arousing information", and it involves four maladaptive and five adaptive strategies. The four maladaptive CER strategies are rumination, self-blame, blaming of others and catastrophizing, and they can lead to psychological and emotional problems such as depression, anxiety or risky behaviours. By contrast, positive refocusing, refocusing on planning, acceptance, putting into perspective and positive reappraisal are the five adaptive strategies that are related to better mental health and well-being. In a study on Daily emotional and physical reactivity to stressors among widowed and married older adults with the aim of examining daily stressor exposure and reactivity in widowed versus married older adults. Participants who had recently been widowed responded to pressures at home more physically and those married reported more stressors (Hanh, E.A., et al., 2014).

Emotional reactivity refers to the processes that determine an individual's nature and strength of emotional responses to various events in life including an individual's excess emotional response to an event. In this study, an individual's positive and negative affectivity are both measured.

There is a dearth of literature exploring mindfulness and emotion regulation flexibility but the current study focuses on examining the associations between trait mindfulness, cognitive emotion regulation and emotional reactivity of individuals. It will provide an understanding of the differences in various aspects of emotional well-being between married and unmarried adults and the role of mindfulness as a trait and help develop interventions that focus on emotional regulation in interpersonal relationships.

METHOD

Sample

The research group consists of 180 Indian adults (90 unmarried and 90 married). The age range of the participants are 20-34 years. Unmarried adults who are currently not in any intimate/romantic relationship and fall in the age group. Married adults who fall in the age group, have been married for at least one year and are currently living with their spouse were included.

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Measures

Data Collection

Data was collected by the researcher through Google Forms which contained an informed consent from the participant before proceeding to fill in the sociodemographic details and the questionnaires used in the study.

Three measures were used in the study:

- 1. Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS):** A unidimensional scale to measure trait mindfulness. There are 15 items, and the range of possible answers is 1 (nearly never) to 6 (almost often). Respondents are advised to answer the MAAS in a way that represents their actual experience rather than how they believe their experience should be in order to adjust for social desirability on a 6-point Likert scale. The scale exhibits robust psychometric qualities and has been validated using samples from colleges, the general population, and cancer patients. Greater scores correspond to dispositional mindfulness at greater levels. It takes no more than 10 minutes to finish the test. The MAAS had a Cronbach's alpha of .92. Test-retest reliability, Cronbach's alpha, and the reliability coefficient for MAAS were 0.76 and 0.69, respectively
- 2. Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire-Short Version (CERQ-s):** This scale measures cognitive coping, one of the many strategies for controlling emotions brought on by stress in daily life. It was created in 2007 by Garnefski, N., and Kraaij, V. In contrast to the evaluation of a single coping strategy, this instrument was created to concentrate on all cognitive coping strategies at once in order to provide a more comprehensive and meaningful measurement. It includes nine conceptual scales with rational foundations that describe what an individual think and actually behaves following a stressful experience. The CERQ-s has nine separate subscales: four for maladaptive strategies (self-blame, rumination, catastrophizing, and blaming others) and five for adaptive methods (acceptance, positive refocusing, refocusing on planning, positive reappraisal, and putting into perspective). On a five-point scale from 1 ("Almost never") to 5 ("Almost always") in terms of frequency of use, two items are used to assess each CER strategy. For the various subscales, the internal consistency ranged from 0.65 to 0.82.
- 3. Perth Emotional Reactivity Scale-Short version (PERS-s):** It assesses the emotional reactivity of traits. It was created in 2018 by Preece, Becerra, and Campitelli. In other words, assess both happy and negative emotions independently, measuring the normal ease of elicitation, intensity, and length of one's emotional responses. The original 30-item scale has been reduced to 18 items in this edition. There are six subscales: positive activation, intensity, and duration; negative activation, intensity, and duration. In addition to the individual subscale results, it offers a composite score, as well as overall positive and general negative reactivity results. All subscales had strong reliability (>.70).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Pearson Correlation Coefficient of Trait Mindfulness and Maladaptive Cognitive Emotion Regulation Strategies

		Self-Blame	Rumination	Catastrophizing	Others Blame	Maladaptive Cognitive Emotion Regulation Strategies
Trait Mindfulness	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	-.275**	-.277**	-.351**	-.113	-.431**
		Acceptance	Positive Refocusing	Putting into Perspective	Refocus on Planning	Adaptive Cognitive Emotion Regulation Strategies
Trait Mindfulness	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	-.009	-.170*	.197**	-.072	.179*

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

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

There is a significant negative low correlation ($r = -.431^{**}$) between Trait Mindfulness and Maladaptive strategies. Trait mindfulness was negatively correlated with maladaptive strategies of self-blame ($r = -.275^{**}$), rumination ($r = -.277^{**}$), catastrophizing ($r = -.351^{**}$) and others' blame ($r = -.113$).

There is a very weak positive correlation between Trait Mindfulness and Adaptive strategies and it is not significant. Trait mindfulness was negatively correlated with adaptive strategies of acceptance ($r = -.009$), positive refocusing ($r = -.170^*$), putting into perspective of how one responds to emotional experiences ($r = -.072$). Trait mindfulness is positively correlated with adaptive strategies of positive reappraisal ($r = .197^{**}$) and refocus on planning of how one responds to emotional experiences ($r = .179^*$).

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Coefficient of Trait Mindfulness, General Positive Emotional Reactivity and General Negative Emotional Reactivity

		General Positive Emotion Reactivity	General Negative Emotion Reactivity
Trait Mindfulness	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	.305**	-.318**

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

There is a low positive correlation ($r = .305$) between Trait Mindfulness and General Positive Emotional Reactivity. There is a low negative correlation ($r = -.318$) between Trait Mindfulness and General Negative Emotional Reactivity.

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Table 3: Descriptive Statistics, t-value and p-value of Unmarried and Married Adults on Trait Mindfulness

		N	M	SD	t-value	p-value
Trait Mindfulness	Unmarried Adults	90	56.32	14.28	1.051	.168
	Married Adults	90	54.22	12.48		
Maladaptive Cognitive Emotion Regulation Strategy	Unmarried Adults	90	24.10	4.74	21.115	.167
	Married Adults	90	23.38	3.92		
Adaptive Cognitive Emotion Regulation Strategy	Unmarried Adults	90	36.46	6.73	4.420	.058
	Married Adults	90	32.42	5.44		
General Negative Emotional Reactivity	Unmarried Adults	90	29.84	8.180	2.894	.009
	Married Adults	90	34.72	7.309		
General Positive Emotional Reactivity	Unmarried Adults	90	26.70	6.272	3.726	.730
	Married Adults	90	30.73	7.052		

Note: M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation

Independent sample t-test revealed that there exists no significant difference ($t=1.051$, $p=.168 > 0.05$) between unmarried and married Indian adults in trait mindfulness.

An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the Maladaptive strategies and Marital Status and revealed that there exists no significant difference ($t=21.115$, $p=.167 > 0.05$) between unmarried and married Indian adults in their maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation strategies. There exists no significant difference ($t=4.420$, $p=.058 > 0.05$) between unmarried and married Indian adults in their adaptive cognitive emotion regulation strategies.

An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the General negative emotional reactivity and Marital Status and revealed that there exists a significant difference ($t=2.894$, $p=.009 < 0.05$) between unmarried and married Indian adults in their general negative emotional reactivity. There exists no significant difference ($t=3.726$, $p=.730 > 0.05$) between unmarried and married Indian adults in their general positive emotional reactivity.

DISCUSSION

A study by Lau and colleagues (2015) found that trait mindfulness was negatively correlated with emotional dysregulation and maladaptive coping behaviours. Findings of a study among university students showed that they reported higher levels of mindfulness was associated with greater use of adaptive coping (Keng, S.L., et al., 2018).

While there is some evidence indicating a positive association between trait mindfulness and adaptive methods, correlations have not consistently been statistically significant across research. This implies that there may be a complex relationship between mindfulness and adaptive strategies, one that depends on a number of variables, including the setting in which mindfulness is practiced or the particular adaptive strategies being measured.

A study by Garland and colleagues (2010) examined the relationship between trait mindfulness and affective responses to a laboratory stressor in a sample of 65 adults (mean age=37 years, 69% females). The study found that individuals with higher levels of trait mindfulness exhibited a greater increase in positive emotions in response to the stressor, indicating a positive emotional reactivity and exhibited lower levels of negative affect in response to pain-related stimuli. The authors suggest that this may be because mindfulness promotes the ability to savour and appreciate positive experiences and may help individuals to regulate negative emotions in response to pain, leading to reduced emotional reactivity.

In a study by Sharma & Gupta (2018) that surveyed 1,293 adults, it was found that there was no significant difference in mindfulness scores between single and married adults. This suggests that relationship status may not be a significant factor in the development of mindfulness skills.

Findings of a study by Chatterjee and Chakraborty (2019) in investigating the differences in cognitive emotion regulation strategies revealed that there exists no significant difference between married and unmarried Indian adults in adaptive and maladaptive strategies. This finding suggests that marital status may not be a significant predictor of how individuals handle their emotions and stress.

The results of the study by Pandey and Pathak (2020) indicated that there was a significant difference in emotional reactivity between married and unmarried Indian adults. Specifically, unmarried adults reported experiencing more intense and frequent negative emotions than married adults. This finding suggests that marital status may be a significant predictor of an individual's emotional reactivity.

The findings of the study reveal the need to better study and understand the variables in different settings. The findings can help develop interventions to improve the cognitive emotion regulation strategies individuals employ and their emotional reactivity to emotional experiences. The insignificant correlations imply that there may be a complex relationship between mindfulness and adaptive strategies, one that depends on a number of variables, including the setting in which mindfulness is practiced on the particular adaptive strategies being measured. The conditions in the context of the population factors can also be looked into in further research.

The present study does not explore the variables in terms of relationship context and factors influencing these variables. Population specific studies can be done to enrich the information

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on the variables of interest in terms of relationship context. Future research can focus on larger sample sizes and even implementing different research designs to get more accurate details and identify detailed information from different perspectives on the topic of concern.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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