

Research Paper

Effect of Daily Mindful Selfie Observation on Young Adults' Self-esteem, Happiness and Mental Well-being

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to understand the impact of daily selfie observation on promoting self-esteem, happiness and mental well-being among young adults. This study involved 30 participants of age ranging from 19 to 24 years. 15 participants randomly assigned in the experimental group are included in a 21-day selfie observation activity, where they are instructed to click a selfie before sleep and observe the picture mindfully for 10 minutes each day. Rosenberg's self-esteem scale, Oxford happiness questionnaire and Warwick-Edinburgh mental well-being scale was used to collect data along with demographic details. The data was analyzed using SPSS version 26. Paired t-test and independent sample t-test was used to understand the effectiveness. The results revealed that there is significant increase in self-esteem ($p < 0.001$), happiness ($p < 0.01$), and mental well-being ($p < 0.001$) post the intervention. This study contributes to the growing body of research on the intersection of mindfulness, photography and mental health.

Keywords: *Mindfulness, Mental health, Self-esteem, Happiness, Mental well-being*

Young adulthood is considered to be an essential phase of transition in the life of every human, since it involves significant physical, cognitive and social development (Arnett, 2000). Few notable developments include self-discovery, expanded independence, enhanced problem solving, critical thinking and decision-making skills, improved romantic and social connections. Despite of transitions, it is also one of the challenging periods of life, because young adults are prone to undergo social comparisons related to one's academic, job, financial status, body image as well as pressures to conform to external expectations (Erik H. Erikson, 1968). Hence individuals going through this phase are much vulnerable to self-doubts, feeling of inadequacy, low self-esteem and reduced happiness, which can leave a negative impact on one's mental health.

Self-esteem can be described as an individual's overall subjective evaluation of their worth. Researchers have identified that self-esteem greatly impacts a person's psychological health (Shapiro & Schwartz, 2000). High level of self-esteem was found to be correlated with a great number of positive outcomes such as enhanced academic achievement, healthier

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relationships, increased happiness and greater resilience in the face of stress (Baumeister et al., 1993; Kernis et al., 1997; Morris et al., 2017). However low level of self-esteem was associated with depression, anxiety, substance abuse and self-harm (Heatherton & Vohs, 2000; Rosenberg M, 1965). Hence it is essential for all individual to maintain optimum or increased level of self-esteem to experience subjective happiness, which elevates one's mental health. It was also evident from the researches that young adults' self-esteem, happiness and mental well-being can be promoted through practising mindfulness (Singh et al., 2018).

Mindfulness can be defined as the practice of paying attention to the present moment in a non-judgmental way (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Mindfulness can foster self-compassion (Neff, 2003), allows individuals to observe their own emotions and thoughts without getting caught up in them (Keng et al., 2011), creates awareness of self-critical thoughts which is a key component in construction of self-esteem, and promotes a more accepting perspective, which leads to a positive and realistic evaluation of oneself (Creswell, R.D et al., 2007). Handful of studies have described the beneficial effect of mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) on self-esteem in various populations, including adolescents and young adults (Brown, K. W & Ryan, R. M, 2003; Hofmann, S. G et al., 2010; Seppälä et al., 2020). Perhaps, a recent meta-analysis conducted by Wang et al. (2023) (Wang Y et al., 2023) also additionally confirms the escalation of self-compassion and self-esteem in young adults through MBI.

A key component of mindfulness that makes the practice more effective is self-observation. It is the act of directing attention inwards and understanding one's internal experiences such as thoughts, feelings, emotions and bodily sensations unaccompanied by judgement (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). As a consequence of self-observation, young adults can discover one's own style of thoughts and emotions, understand how it affects their behavior, and eventually develop a deeper sense of self-knowledge (Feldman et al., 2007). Although self-observation is an internal process, adding a photograph observation activity brings new perspective to the practice. Looking at oneself in the photograph can enable a more objective perspective, which allows individuals to focus on one's internal as well as external appearance and connect it with their emotions and self-perception.

Though there are numerous researches that highlight the potency of mindfulness-based interventions which majorly includes activities such as meditation, positive affirmation on enhancing the variables under consideration, only limited researches were existing to unleash the specific effect of integration of mindfulness practices with self-observation through a selfie. Hence this study was conducted to address this research gap by investigating the level of positive impact of daily mindful self-observation through a selfie on young adults' self-esteem, happiness and mental well-being. This research was carried out with a vision of adding a newer and easier technique to the growing body of knowledge on mindfulness interventions for young adults. If the intervention is found to provide significant positive effect, it could be easily integrated into daily routines without requiring significant time or resources.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

Pre-test/Post-test control group design was adopted for this study.

Sample

Young adults (23 females & 7 males) of age 19 to 24 years, uses smartphone and has accessibility to WhatsApp, willing to engage in the daily selfie observation activity for the period of 21 days and update their feeling daily to the investigator, free from any other mental health disorders and active substance abuse or dependence, has no prior experience in any similar self-reflection activity and can comprehend English or Tamil are selected for the study. From the total for 30 participants, 15 participants are assigned to experimental and control group through computer generated random sequence method.

Procedure

All the participants underwent one session of pre-assessment 1 day before starting the mindful selfie observation activity. The participants of experimental group alone have attended an additional session on mindfulness and detailed instructions of how to carry out the selfie observation activity for the next 21 days following the pre-assessment. The control group was not included in the selfie observation activity. The post assessment was carried out after 22 days from the day of pre-assessment.

Intervention

The additional session conducted for the experimental group was a two-hour session, where in the first half, the participants were explained in detail about mindfulness, its importance and benefits. In the second half, the participants were debriefed about the selfie observation activity, rules to be followed and aspects to be focused on while observing the selfie.

The participants were instructed to click a selfie of oneself and mindfully observe it for 10 minutes every night before going to sleep, focusing on particular set of thoughts and classify the overall feeling into any one of the three-given category - Happy and good, normal and better, drained and depleted to the investigator through WhatsApp every night.

The following questions were sent to every participant in order to guide the mindful observation,

- How am I feeling right now? Can I bring smile on my face and focus on something positive for a moment?
- How tense/relax do I appear right now?
- Am I taking care of my physical and mental needs? What is the one thing that I appreciate about my body today?
- Did I accomplish anything today, big/small, that I am proud of?
- Am I showing enough kindness towards myself?
- What am I grateful for in my life right now? (big/small)
- How do I feel overall? Happy and good, normal and better, drained and depleted?

Instruments

The outcomes was assessed using the following standardized measures,

- **Rosenberg's self-esteem scale (RSES):** This scale was developed by Morris Rosenberg in 1965. It is a widely used 10-item tool that measures overall self-esteem

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through four-point Likert scale. The scale is divided into two 5-item facets: self-competence and self-liking and the total score ranges from 0 to 30, with high scores indicating higher self-esteem. The scale has good predictive validity, internal consistency and test-retest reliability and its Cronbach alpha coefficient is 0.81.

- **Oxford happiness questionnaire (OHQ):** This scale was developed by Michael Argyle and Peter Hills in 2002. It is 29 item scale that is used to measure individual's subjective happiness through six-point Likert scale. Scores are calculated by summing the item scores and dividing it by 29, with high scores indicating greater subjective happiness. The scale has good concurrent validity, internal consistency with Cronbach alpha coefficient above 0.70.
- **Warwick-Edinburgh mental well-being scale (WEMWBS):** This scale was developed by Tennant et al in 2002. It is 14 item scale that is used to measure individual's overall mental well-being through five-point Likert scale. Scores are calculated by summing the item scores, with high scores indicating greater positive mental well-being. The scale has good validity and high reliability.

Objectives

The primary objective of the study is,

- To investigate the impact of 10 minute daily mindful selfie observation on young adults' self-esteem, happiness and mental well-being.

The secondary objectives of the study are,

- To determine the effectiveness of mindful selfie observation in improving young adults' self-esteem, happiness and mental well-being.
- To compare the changes in self-esteem, happiness and mental well-being among experimental and control group.

Hypotheses

- **H1:** There will be a significant difference in young adults' self-esteem, happiness and mental well-being before and after engaging in in the daily mindful selfie observation for 21 days.
- **H2:** There will be a significant difference in young adults' self-esteem, happiness and mental well-being between experimental and control group.

Analysis of Data

Data was analyzed using SPSS 26 (Statistical package for social sciences). Paired t-test was used to understand the effectiveness of mindful selfie observation activity. Independent sample 't' test was used to understand the significant difference in self-esteem, happiness and mental well-being between experimental and control group after undergoing mindful selfie observation.

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RESULTS

Table No. 1 Comparison of self-esteem, happiness, mental well-being before and after intervention in experimental group

Paired samples 't-test'							
Variable	N		Mean	SD	Mean Difference	t	p-value
Self esteem	15	Pre	24.20	5.23	2.53	4.750	0.000***
		Post	26.73	4.83			
Happiness	15	Pre	3.67	1.05	0.47	3.500	0.004**
		Post	4.13	0.74			
Mental well-being	15	Pre	42.60	10.78	5.27	6.296	0.000***
		Post	47.87	10.56			

Note: *** - $p < 0.001$ level of significant, ** - $p < 0.01$ level of significant

The results revealed that there is statistically significant increase in self-esteem ($p < 0.001$), happiness ($p < 0.01$), and mental well-being ($p < 0.001$) following the intervention. The average self-esteem score increased from 24.20 to 26.73, happiness score from 3.67 to 4.13 and mental well-being score from 42.60 to 47.87 which suggests that the intervention was effective in increasing all 3 variables.

Table No. 2 Comparison of self-esteem, happiness, mental well-being between experimental and control group at post test

Independent sample 't-test'							
Variable	N		Mean	SD	t-value	df	p-value
Self esteem	15	Post - Experimental	26.73	4.83	1.310	28	0.201 NS
		Post - Control	24.40	4.93			
Happiness	15	Post - Experimental	4.13	0.74	1.408	28	0.170 NS
		Post - Control	3.67	1.05			
Mental well-being	15	Post - Experimental	47.87	10.56	2.082	28	0.047*
		Post - Control	39.73	10.83			

Note: * - $p < 0.05$ level of significant, NS – Not significant

From table 2, it is observed that there is no statistically significant difference between the scores of post experimental (M=26.73, SD=4.83) and post control group (M=24.40, SD=4.93) of self-esteem, $t(28) = 1.310$, NS. It also shows that there is no significant difference between the scores of post experimental (M=4.13, SD=0.74) and post control group (M=3.67, SD=1.05) of happiness, $t(28) = 1.408$, NS. But it is evident that there is a significant difference between the scores of post experimental (M=47.87, SD=10.56) and post control group (M=39.73, SD=10.83) of self-esteem, $t(28) = 2.082$, $p < 0.05$.

DISCUSSION

Innumerable studies have conducted to understand the effect of mindfulness on enhancing self-esteem, happiness and mental well-being. With an idea of developing a novel technique, the present study aimed to understand the impact of newly designed mindfulness training method on promoting self-esteem, happiness and mental well-being among young adults. This study utilized 21 day daily mindful selfie observation activity as a key technique to positively enhance the variables under consideration. The effectiveness of the newly designed intervention was evaluated through a control group intervention design.

The findings from the table suggest that the intervention was effective and promotes young adults' self-esteem, happiness and mental well-being. This may be because of combination of various strategies in the intervention such as self-observation, mindfulness and positive self-talk etc. Observing one's own selfie mindfully for 10 minutes could have encouraged the participants to be present with their experience without judgment and become more aware of their thoughts and feelings, without getting caught up in them. The positive psychological outcome of mindfulness and self-esteem are consistent with previous research conducted by Pepping et al. 2013. This inverse relationship between self-esteem and mindfulness was well established through various studies. Previous studies have utilized Mindfulness based stress reduction (MBSR) technique which includes activities like formal meditation skills such as body scan, sitting meditation, informal meditation skills such as incorporation of mindfulness in daily activities and mindfulness attitudes such as acceptance, patience, letting go, non-judgmental, gratitude and compassion (Pal et al., 2022), to improve self-esteem (Pepping et al., 2013), happiness and mental well-being (Pal et al., 2022). However, the effectiveness of the intervention varies across studies with respect to samples. Majority of the studies reveal significant enhancement of self-esteem through MBSR (Roth B & Creaser T, 1997) (Samuelson et al., 2007) (Goldin & Gross, 2010). It is also identified that self-esteem acts as a mediator between mindfulness and well-being (Bajaj & Pande, 2015). Wenzel et al., 2015 (Wenzel et al., 2015), Gallego J., 2014 (Gallego et al., 2015) and Würtzen H et al., 2013 (Würtzen et al., 2013) supports the positive relationship between mindfulness and mental well-being and studies of Coo C 2018 (Coo Calcagni & Salanova, 2018), Campos D 2016 (Campos et al., 2016), Hollis-Walker L 2011 (Hollis-Walker & Colosimo, 2011), Brown KW 2003 (Brown, K. W & Ryan, R. M, 2003) confirms the positive relationship between mindfulness and happiness.

Considering the statistical values of all 3 variables, it is understood that this newly designed intervention has good effect on improving mental well-being rather than the other variables taken into consideration. Though there is an observable positive change in self-esteem and happiness, longer or more intensive interventions may be needed to witness the absolute change. The set of given questions could have directed the flow of thoughts to focus on positive aspects of themselves and their day such as things they accomplished, things they grateful for and acts of self-kindness. This could have helped them to shift their attention away from negative thoughts and feelings and enhance positive self-talk. The regular practice might enable the participants to focus on one's positive side firmly than the negative ones. Though this newly developed intervention seems to be effective to an extent, Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) holds stronger research foundation and significant results on enhancing these variables. Hence the hypothesis 1 (H1): There will be a significant difference in young adults' self-esteem, happiness and mental well-being before and after engaging in in the daily mindful selfie observation for 21 days was accepted.

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From the table it is evident that, though the intervention improves all the considered variables, it is more effective on enhancing young adults' mental well-being rather than self-esteem and happiness. The table shows statistically significant increase in mental well-being ($p < 0.05$) whereas, the average of self-esteem score in the experimental group increased from 24.20 to 26.73 and the average of happiness score increased from 3.67 to 4.13 in the experimental group following the intervention, which proves that the intervention had positive effect on enhancing self-esteem and happiness to a certain extent. Hence the hypothesis 2 (H2): There will be a significant difference in young adults' self-esteem, happiness and mental well-being between experimental and control group was partially accepted. Future research might be conducted for longer duration of time in order to understand the long-term effect. The research can also involve larger sample size which might enhance the generalizability of the findings.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The present study aims to understand the impact of newly designed daily selfie observation on promoting self-esteem, happiness and mental well-being among young adults. The findings highlight the effectiveness of the intervention and provide preliminary evidence. However, further research is needed to confirm the underlying mechanism and long-term effectiveness of this intervention. Nevertheless, the outcomes of this study suggest the incorporation of this novel self-observation technique as a valuable strategy to enhance an individual's psychological well-being.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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