

Mindfulness, Alexithymia, and Social Support in Young Adults Living Away from Family

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ABSTRACT

The present study examines the relationship between mindfulness, alexithymia, and social support in 170 young adults living away from their family. A correlational research design was used with information collected from 162 respondents aged 18-25 years using standardized measures: the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20) and the Interpersonal Support Evaluation List (ISEL-12). Strong negative correlations were found between alexithymia and mindfulness and positive correlations between mindfulness and social support, where social support also was negatively correlated with alexithymia. Social support and mindfulness, when compared to regression analysis, were found to predict lower levels of alexithymia significantly.

Keywords: *Mindfulness, Alexithymia, Social Support, Living away from family*

Mindfulness

Most modern conceptualizations of mindfulness assume that the cultivation of an attitude of acceptance or openness toward one's experience is essential. This accepting and open attitude comprises paying attention to experience with an inquiring, detached, and nonreactive orientation. Notably, however, this accepting attitude toward experience is not passive resignation to existing circumstances but more an inviting-in of experience even when that is challenging (Creswell, 2016). Mindfulness is a worthwhile practice at any phase of life: it has the potential to enhance well-being in young children (Becker & Whitaker, 2018; Esmailian et al., 2018; Li et al., 2019), adolescents (Leavitt et al., 2020; Oppo et al., 2019), and adults (Berk et al., 2018; Pierson et al., 2019; Kunzler, 2022).

Alexithymia

The term alexithymia was derived from the Greek "a" (lacking), "lexis" (word), and "thymos" (feeling) and has the meaning of "without words for feelings." Alexithymia is defined as a personality trait characterized by difficulties in identifying, describing, and expressing emotions (Nemiah et al., 1976, Dwarakanath & R, 2020). Young adults are more susceptible to the effects of alexithymia because often they have emotional and social adjustment issues during this stage. Research suggests that individuals with elevated

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alexithymia scores often report enhanced stress due to their use of avoidance coping styles and perceived absence of social support (Zhao et al., 2023). Such stress has the potential to cause academic challenges, relationship issues, and elevated risks for mental health diseases.

Social Support

Social support is an intricate construct that involves both material and psychological resources offered by an individual's social network in a bid to increase one's ability to cope with stress (Cohen, 2004). It includes emotional support, belongingness, practical help, and information support, all of which improve the physical and mental well-being of an individual (Hsieh & Kramer, 2021). Social support bears the responsibility of influencing considerably the emotional and psychological well-being of young adults, particularly for non-residing young people. It is about feeling and being cared for, supported in some way or other, and belonging to an in-group, thereby becoming an integral component of supportive social support systems.

Objectives

- To examine the relationship between Mindfulness and Social Support among young adults living away from their family.
- To examine the relationship between Mindfulness and Alexithymia among young adults living away from their family.
- To examine the relationship between Social Support and Alexithymia among young adults living away from their family.
- To examine the relationship between Mindfulness, Social Support and Alexithymia among young adults living away from their family.

Dwarakanath and Thangapandian (2020) examined the association between alexithymia—a label-describe approach to emotion-processing challenges—and the psychological well-being of students who are pursuing higher education. The results were extremely strongly negative in correlation between alexithymia and mental health, and they indicated that the greater the alexithymia, the worse the mental health.

Kingery, Bodenlos, and Lathrop (2019) researched how dispositional mindfulness, and the presence of a social support network contributed to the prediction of psychological adaptation in college students. Mindfulness and perceived social support are the ways in which Smith proved that highly mindful students and those who perceive themselves as more supported correlated less with stress and better adjustment, which coincides with findings by Brougham et al. (2009).

People who have alexithymia often say they have no network or poor network support, so this makes stress and health problems worse (Taylor et al. 1997). Social support is one of the most important protective elements in stress health issues, but people with alexithymia usually find it hard to seek and use when they are feeling like that (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Research has found a massive connection between alexithymia and somatic symptoms, meaning that emotional discomfort may be manifested in the body (Porcelli et al., 2003).

Lumley et al. (1996) investigate whether social support is the factor mediating the link between alexithymia and health problems, adding to the study of emotional regulation and interpersonal effects on health (Bagby et al., 1994).

Hypotheses

- **(H1):** There will be a negative correlation between mindfulness and alexithymia among young adults living away from their family.
- **(H2):** There will be a positive correlation between mindfulness and social support among young adults living away from their family.
- **(H3):** There will be a negative correlation between social support and alexithymia among young adults living away from their family.
- **(H4):** Mindfulness and social support will be the predictors of alexithymia levels in young adults living away from their family, with increased mindfulness and good social support correlating with reduced alexithymia.

METHOD

Sample

A sample of 200(100 male, 100 Female) participants were collected by using purposive sampling method. All participants were from different places of Indian who are staying away from parental home i.e. hostels, PG etc. and currently pursuing their education in different universities of Pune city. Average age of participants was 20 years.

Instruments Used

Following tests were used to measure the variables included in present study.

1. **The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) by Brown and Ryan (2003):** The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) consists of 15-item self-report scale to responded on 6-point rating scale from Almost Always to Almost Never. Cronbach's alpha reliability of the test was reported as .80. also test possess good construct and convergent validity. Higher the score higher will be the mindfulness.
2. **Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20) by Bagby, Parker, and Taylor (1994):** It is a 20-item scale to be responded on five-point rating scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree based on the subject's degree of agreement with the statement. The scale measuring the construct of alexithymia according to three subscales: Difficulty Identifying Feelings, Difficulty Describing Feelings, and Externally Oriented Thinking. Higher the score higher will be the challenges in emotional processing and can be a risk factor for certain mental health issue. As reported in manual test possess good alpha as well as test retest reliability along with criterion validity.
3. **The Interpersonal Support Evaluation List (ISEL-12) by Cohen & Hoberman (1983):** It comprises 12-items measuring perceived social support on three important dimensions: Appraisal Support, Belonging Support, and Tangible Support The measure is a briefer version of the initial ISEL-40, with its psychometric properties preserved but feasibility improved for research and clinical applications (Cohen et al., 1985).

RESULTS

The data was first cleaned and screened for outliers using boxplots through SPSS, after which 162 (80 Males & 82 Females), responses were found valid for further statistical analysis.

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Reliability

Cronbach's alpha was used to test the internal consistency of the data for all tests.

Table 1: Shows the alpha reliability across the variables (N=162)

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of items
Mindfulness	0.864	15
Alexithymia	0.754	20
Social Support	0.829	12

The Table shows the Cronbach's alpha values of three psychological measures, that is, mindfulness ($\alpha = 0.864$), alexithymia ($\alpha = 0.754$), and social support ($\alpha = 0.829$) that indicate high internal consistency.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2: Shows the mean and standard deviation across the variable (N=162)

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation
Mindfulness	56.20	0.92
Alexithymia	59.46	0.61
Social Support	33.99	0.51

The table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for three psychological constructs. Mindfulness had a mean of $M= 56.21$ & $SD = 0.92$), alexithymia $M= 59.46$ & $SD = 0.61$, and the mean of social support was $M=33.99$ & $SD = 0.51$. The relatively low standard deviations suggest that scores are extremely consistent across participants. Alexithymia's greater mean could suggest that it is more common or prominent in the sample than the other factors.

Correlation

Table 3: Shows the correlation between mindfulness, alexithymia and social support among young adults living away from family. (N=162)

Variables	Mindfulness	Alexithymia	Social Support
Mindfulness	1		
Alexithymia	-.319**	1	
Social Support	.223**	-.293**	1

*Significant at 0.05 level, ** Significant at 0.01 level.

The table 3 shows Pearson's correlation coefficients among Mindfulness, Alexithymia and Social Support.

- Mindfulness is negatively correlated with Alexithymia ($r = -.319$, $p < .001$), hence hypothesis no 1 stating that there will be negative correlation between mindfulness and alexithymia among young adults living away from their family is **accepted**.
- Mindfulness is positively correlated with Social support ($r = .223$, $p = .004$), hence hypothesis no. 2 stating that there will be a positive correlation between mindfulness and social support among young adults living away from their family is **accepted**.

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- Social Support is negatively correlated with Alexithymia ($r = -.293, p < .001$), hence hypothesis no. 3 stating that there will be negative correlation between social support and alexithymia among young adults living away from their family is *accepted*.

Regression Analysis

To test the nature of the relationship and to test if mindfulness and social support separately and significantly predicted participants' alexithymia level ($N=170$) simple regression analysis was utilized.

Table 4: Shows simple regression with mindfulness and social support as predicting variable and alexithymia as predicted variable. ($N=162$)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	1508.170	2	754.085	14.446	.000 ^a
Residual	8300.107	159	52.202		
Total	9808.278	161			

a. Predictors: (Constant), SOCIAL SUPOORT, MINDFULLNESS

b. Dependent Variable: ALEXTHYMIA

Coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	78.914	3.683		21.428	.000
MINDFULLNESS	-.178	.050	-.267	-3.572	.000
SOCIALSUPOORT	-.278	.089	-.233	-3.117	.002

a. Dependent Variable: ALEXTHYMIA

Results demonstrated that Mindfulness emerged as a large negative predictor of alexithymia ($\beta = -.267, t = -3.57, p < .001$), which suggests that greater mindfulness is associated with lower alexithymia. Greater social support was linked with reduced alexithymia ($\beta = -.233, t = -3.12, p = .002$).

Hence hypothesis no. 4 stating that Mindfulness and social support will be the predictors of alexithymia levels in young adults living away from their family, with increased mindfulness and good social support correlating with reduced alexithymia is *accepted*.

DISCUSSION

With the idea of studying the correlation between mindfulness, alexithymia and social support, hypotheses were formed, one of which stated that there will be negative correlation between mindfulness and alexithymia among young adults living away from their family and was accepted. Similar findings were reported by Fang et al. (2019) and Heshmati and Pellerone (2019). This indicated that higher mindfulness levels are connected to lower levels of alexithymia. Mindfulness encourages internal focus, awareness of body sensations and emotional clarity; all of which are directly opposite to the impairments identified in alexithymia. From a neuropsychological perspective, mindfulness strategies have been associated with heightened activity within the anterior cingulate cortex and insula, both of which are implicated in emotional consciousness (Hölzel et al., 2011). On the contrary,

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alexithymia has been linked to hypoactivity in these similar locations. This neurological overlap helps to explain the negative correlation between mindfulness and alexithymia.

The second hypothesis stated that there will be a positive correlation between mindfulness and social support among young adults living away from their family and similarly Lindsay et al. (2019). This positive correlation can be explained through various psychological mechanisms. Mindfulness promotes self-awareness and emotional regulation and this helps an individual to become more open and receptive towards social interactions.

It is also found that there is negative correlation between social support and alexithymia and the findings are similar to Taylor and Bagby's (2004) research, which established a strong inverse correlation between perceived emotional support and alexithymic characteristics. Those with strong social support systems experienced better emotional clarity and responsiveness, while those with weak support networks often exhibited deficits in emotional processing. Staying away from family members can increase psychological tensions such as academic tension, social adaptation issues and economic issues. Similar results were reported by Saikkonen et al. (2018). When young adults are separated from their family who are their main attachment figures, their capacity to understand and regulate emotions can be damaged. Those who have no other strong support systems, like friends or institutional support, can become more isolated and struggle with emotional expression, both of which are characteristics of alexithymia.

Mindfulness and social support significantly impacted the level of alexithymia among young adults living away from families, as evidenced by regression. These results support earlier findings suggesting increased mindfulness and social support as protective variables against alexithymia (Cecchini et al., 2022; Swart et al., 2009). Hence, the results emphasize the psychological and social supports needed to avert alexithymia in young adults living away from their family.

CONCLUSION

1. Mindfulness and Alexithymia are negatively correlated among young adults living away from their family.
2. Mindfulness and Social Support are positively correlated among young adults living away from their family.
3. Social Support and Alexithymia are negatively correlated among young adults living away from their family.
4. Mindfulness and social support are predictors of alexithymia levels in young adults living away from their family, with increased mindfulness and good social support correlating with reduced alexithymia.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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