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Research Paper

Impact of Mindful Eating on Eating Behavior and General Health: A Cross-sectional study among College Students

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed explores the relationship between mindful eating, eating behaviors, and general well-being among college students. The cross-sectional approach was applied to find out whether mindfulness in eating has an effect on the lifestyle behaviors of students and their physical wellbeing. A total of 200 students underwent validated questionnaires that included the Dutch Eating Behavior Questionnaire, Mindful Eating Questionnaire, and General Health Rating Index designed to appraise students' eating behaviors, levels of mindfulness, and perceived health condition. There was a relationship between mindful eating and eating behavior ($r= 0.32$, $p < 0.001$). Also 9.9% to 10.8% variability in Eating Behavior can be explained through Mindful eating. General health improvement was not the consequence that can be derived from direct effects of mindful eating; instead, it showed the reverse, which means that indeed there was a problem to translate mindful eating into health gains. This research can be used to indicate that an approach of mind eating can help the college students for healthier intake, though more research is required in the longitudinal direction to assess the long-term outcomes of health.

Keywords: *Mindful Eating, Eating Behavior, General Health, College Students*

The relationship between mindful eating, eating behavior, and general health has garnered significant attention, particularly in the context of young adults such as college students. Understanding how mindful eating practices affect eating behavior and health in the particularly vulnerable population of college students will be important to first identify in developing effective interventions (Levin et al., 2018). Research has documented that eating mindfully may decrease these behaviors by developing greater awareness of hunger and fullness cues, which can lead to healthier eating patterns and better overall health outcomes (Caldwell et al., 2017).

Aim

The study will explore associations between mindful eating, eating behavior, and general health in college students. It specifically looks at how the practice of mindful eating influences students' eating behaviors, such as emotional eating and disinhibition, and after

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that affects their general physical and mental health. In this light, this study attempts to contribute to the growing knowledge of how mindfulness may favorably influence eating behavior and health outcomes in a sample of college students through a cross-sectional analysis.

Significance of the study

This study contributes to the upgrowing literature pointing to the importance of psychological variables in dietary interventions by investigating the effect that the practice of mindful eating has on eating behaviors and general health.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Research design

The study aims to study college students who are presently in college and not the students who have passed out or in the idea of joining college. So this study incorporates cross-sectional quantitative research design.

Objectives

The following are the objectives of this present study:

- To find if there is a relationship between Mindful eating, eating behavior and general health.
- To examine the impact of mindful eating on eating behavior and general health.

Hypothesis

The following are the hypotheses of this study:

- **H01:** There is no relationship between mindful eating and general health.
- **H02:** There is no relationship between mindful eating and eating behavior.
- **H03:** There is no relationship between eating behavior and general health.
- **H04:** There is no impact of mindful eating on general health.
- **H05:** There is no impact of mindful eating on eating behavior.
- **H06:** There is no impact of eating behavior on general health.

Sample

Sample size

The sample for the study was a few colleges which consist of both undergraduate and postgraduate psychology students. A total sample of 200(N= 200) was taken.

Sampling technique

As the samples are going to be directly contacted this study will involve convenience sampling technique where the researcher will conveniently select students in the colleges.

Inclusion criteria

- The students should be presently studying in college.
- An undergraduate or postgraduate student.
- Opted programs on regular study basis (i.e. Full time)
- Consent to participate and publish the results/findings.

Exclusion criteria

- Students should not be in any form of dieting.
- Students who study in college on a correspondence basis are not included.

- Passed out or not presently a college student.
- Outside India.
- Undergoing treatment for complicated health related concerns for more than 6 months which disturbs proper 3 times meal intake.

Tools used for this study

- **Dutch eating behavior questionnaire**: The Dutch Eating Behavior Questionnaire (DEBQ) is a widely used self-report tool designed to assess different aspects of eating behavior, specifically focusing on emotional, external, and restrained eating patterns. It was developed by Van Strien et al. (1986) to explore how individuals' eating behaviors are influenced by emotions, external cues, and conscious restraint.
  The DEBQ uses a 5-point Likert scale for responses, where respondents rate the frequency with which they engage in specific eating behaviors (1 = Never, 2 = Seldom, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, and 5 = Very often). The DEBQ has been shown to have strong reliability and validity. According to Van Strien et al. (1986), the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the subscales are as follows: Emotional Eating: 0.94, External Eating: 0.79, and Restrained Eating: 0.95.
- **Mindful eating questionnaire**: The "Mindful Eating Questionnaire" (MEQ) is a tool designed to assess an individual's level of mindfulness related to their eating habits. The MEQ consists of 28 items or statements that participants respond to using a Likert scale.
  The Likert scale often ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), though variations can exist. This questionnaire has demonstrated good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values typically ranging from 0.70 to 0.90, indicating that the items within the questionnaire reliably measure the same construct.
- **General health**: The Health Perception Questionnaire (HPQ) is a tool designed to assess individuals' perceptions of their own health status. It typically includes items that measure various dimensions of health perception, including physical health, mental well-being, and overall quality of life. The General health rating index (GHRI) in the HPQ includes several items where respondents rate their general health on a Likert scale.
  Commonly used response options range from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent), allowing individuals to express their perception of their health status. The GHRI demonstrates good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values typically ranging from 0.70 to 0.90, indicating that the items are consistently measuring the same underlying construct (Ware & Sherbourne, 1992).

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics

This research embraced a comprehensive data analysis approach, integrating both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics, such as the mean and standard deviation, were adeptly utilized to present a concise summary of the sample's characteristics and the central variables under examination. These descriptive statistics facilitated a clear understanding of the data's central tendencies and variability.

Inferential statistics

In addition, inferential statistics such as correlation, regression analysis, played a pivotal role in this study, enabling the rigorous testing of hypotheses and allowing for valuable insights

and conclusions to be drawn about the broader population from which the sample was drawn.

RESULTS

This study aimed to examine the relationship and influence of mindful eating on eating behavior and general health among college students. The total number of populations was taken as 210 and the questionnaires was distributed to all the participants attached to a Google form. All responses were collected through online mode and out of those 210 participants 200 data was put into an analyzing tool for results.

Table 1 Correlations for study variables

Variables	*N*	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3
1. Mindful eating	200	2.29	0.23	-	-	-
2. Eating behaviour	200	66.4	12.6	0.32***	-	-
3. General health	200	67.1	9.1	-0.06	-0.07	-

Note. ***p < .001

H_{01}: There is no relationship between mindful eating and general health.

On seeing the table one which has the core relations value of all the variables, it was seeing that mindful eating is not directly related to general health and the significance value is greater than 0.05 which means that the null hypothesis is accepted i.e. there is no relationship between mindful eating and General health

H_{02}: There is no relationship between mindful eating and eating behavior.

From the table we can understand that there is some relationship between mindful eating and eating behavior. This can be interpreted by the value r = 0.32 which says that the variables are correlated with the significant value of less than 0.001.

H_{03}: There is no relationship between eating behavior and general health.

On seeing the table one which has the correlations value of all the variables, it was seen that eating behavior is not directly related to general health and the significance value is greater than 0.05 which means that the null hypothesis is accepted i.e. there is no relationship between eating behavior and General health.

Table 2 Regression of mindful eating on eating behavior

Effect	Estimate	SE	95% CI		p
			LL	UL	
Fixed effects Intercept	25.79	8.39	9.25	42.33	0.002
Mindful eating	17.55	3.64	10.37	24.73	< .001

Note. N = 200. CI = confidence interval; *LL* = lower limit; *UL* = upper limit. R = .32. R^2 = .108. Adjusted R^2 = .099. F = 11.9. p < .001.

H_{04}: There is no impact of mindful eating on general health.

After the analysis of the correlation table we can say that there is no impact of mindful eating on General health as there is no relationship between these two variables this can be due to the selection of questionnaires for the topic. There can be plenty of questionnaires for any variables and it can have various interpretations. So according to the results obtained mindful eating has no effect on General health.

H_{05}: There is no impact of mindful eating on eating behavior.
Table 2 gives the regression of mindful eating on eating behavior. As we already know from the table one that there is some relationship between mindful heating and heating behavior. We found that the Earth square value was 0.32. Are quiet value was found to be 0.1 08. When this value is multiplied by 100 it gives the value that how much the independent variable has an effect on the dependent variable that is 10.8 percentage variability can be due to the independent variable.

The Anova value F was found to be 11.9. the amount of effect by the intercept is 25.70 and its significance value is less than 0.005. the amount of effect given by mindful eating is 17.5 and it is very much statistically significant at 0.001 level.

H_{06}: There is no impact of eating behavior on general health.
As we already know there is no relationship between eating behaviour and General health. So, there cannot be any effect of eating behaviour on General health. Hence regression cannot be applied here.

DISCUSSION

Correlation
As can be seen from Table 1, correlation analysis portrays relationship between mindful eating, behavior at the table, and global health. In fact, the results indicated a statistical positive correlation that was in line with significance levels $r = 0.32$, $p < .001$. This actually shows that mindful eating facilitates healthy consumption behavior.

This finding is within previous studies, which describe that mindful eating is such a useful intervention in promoting healthy dietary behaviors by raising awareness and lowering tendencies towards emotional eating patterns among clients (Kristeller & Wolever, 2010; Mason et al., 2016).

Interestingly, there is an apparent lack of a significant relation with mindful eating and healthiness, $r = -0.06$, just like there is no link established between eating behavior and general healthiness, $r = -0.07$. There are many reasons explaining a non-significant link-in this case, maybe because it is very subjective when assessing how good one feels or as related to health outcomes.

The fact that there isn't much of a relation between healthy eating and perceived well-being further suggests the need to have better healthy-eating habits but fails to correspond directly to perceptive enhancements in health conditions. Such findings are within recent reports indicating that how an individual exercise, manors the stress, and has proper sleeping patterns all equally correlate towards deciding the overall health implications (Smith et al., 2021). Future studies could then be done to explore such interactions, effects of physical exercise and stress, to better understand dynamics between eating behaviors and health outcomes.

More importantly, the findings indicate that health-related behaviors are indeed complex, and hence it is unrealistic to think that eating mindfully would automatically mean a healthy body. For this reason, a multi-dimensional approach including several dimensions of lifestyle change is advisable (Shapiro et al., 2020). These findings bring out the need for

specific interventions at the level of changing the eating habits in a broader perspective of health promotion.

Regression

Table 2, Regression analysis on the role of mindful eating for predicting eating behavior; in bold, the values are that it is significant. Mindful eating was a good predictor of eating behavior, with an effect estimate of 17.55; $p < .001$. This means that those people who conduct mindful eating will more likely show healthier patterns towards eating. The adjusted R^2 of.099 suggests that when mindful eating is entered, about 9.9% of the eating behaviors' variance can be explained.

Baseline eating behavior is also highly indicated by a high intercept at 25.79, $p = 0.002$, showing that there may be something going on apart from the mindfulness practice per se. This result also supports other research studies showing that the habitual behaviors themselves interact with the intentional intervention (Mason et al., 2016). Even though mindful eating may be an effective intervention, the presence of pre-existing eating patterns might influence such an intervention. This would make long-term changes in eating behavior require the persistent exercise of mindfulness to continue replacing habitual automaticity with conscious decision-making.

The strength of the relationship between mindful eating and eating behavior ($\beta = 17.55$, $p <.001$) is in support of prior findings where mindfulness was said to have inspired self-awareness to reduce impulsive eating and enhance emotional regulation (Daly et al., 2022). However, the moderate R-value of 0.32 suggests that other variables which have not been measured can explain some of the variance in eating behavior; it may be emotional well-being or social support, among others. A combination of mindful eating and psychological interventions could lead to a better change in eating behavior according to Mason et al.'s (2016) study.

These outcomes show an applied meaning to promoting mindful eating as a method that is likely to be employed for the purpose of promoting healthier diet-related behaviors. Embedding mindfulness into intervention policies or individually designed health improvement programs would enhance intervention success in trying to make one improve his eating behavior towards more healthy options. This is because sustained mindful eating will be subjected to follow-up studies regarding the outcomes achieved and if there would be an improvement if added together with other lifestyle-changing practices, including exercise.

Summary

This research explores the association of mindful eating with behavioral and health outcomes among the 200 participants. Due to psychological influences in the behavioral domain, a new wave of unhealthy eating has been linked with chronic diseases such as diabetes and obesity, hence worthy of study. Mindful eating, therefore, involves being present while eating, non-judgmental, and paying attention to triggers such as hunger, taste, and the emotional response. This conscious awareness should further push for healthier food choice alternatives and, in the long term, have positive health impact.

Healthy food habits were moderate positive correlates of mindful eating ($r =.32$, ***$p <. 001$). This tends to indicate that mindful eating participants have a likelihood of engaging

themselves with other healthy dietary behaviors and avoiding overeating behaviors in addition to emotional food ingestion.

Using regression analysis, it determined that mindful eating was strongly associated with the eating behavior B = 17.55, ***p <.001 and explained about 10.8% of variation. Mindful eating however did not have independent relation to health in general and could mean longer or additive periods of behavioral change are needed before their effect translates to health improvement.

These findings may indicate that mindfulness plays a significant role in the formation of healthier eating patterns; however, further research would be required to understand the actual impact on health outcomes. Future studies would benefit from whether longer periods of sustained mindfulness predict changes in major health indicators such as BMI, physical activity, or stress.

Implications of Research

- **Changing Behavior through Mindful Eating Programs**: This paper enlightens the practical design of intervention for betterment in eating behavior. Mindful eating interventions will enable the individuals to listen to their hunger and fullness signals, which would consequently lead them to lesser emotional and binge-eating. Combining mindfulness techniques with weight management can also result in long-term healthy eating.
- **Mindfulness in Public Health Interventions**: Mindfulness programs, in public health policies, can be helpful in reducing obesity and other chronic diseases. Other populations with predisposing factors to bad dietary patterns, such as the consumption of much junk or processed foods, should incorporate mindful eating as preventive steps toward the risk reduction of developing cardiovascular diseases.
- **Implementation into Health and Clinical Care Management**: Other advantages of mindful eating interventions would include being in addition to the nutritional therapy of patients who have disorders of eating or metabolism. The use of mindful eating can increase the improvement of treatment programs among healthcare practitioners. Further research may be conducted on whether the introduction of mindfulness into conventional diet therapy increases compliance and outcome for patients. While the study concentrated on the food-eating behavior, mindfulness has an enormous role to play in the emotional regulation of the human mind. The therapists who would be working with the individuals who are emotionally eating can find mindful eating useful in dealing with the triggers that might be associated with anxiety or stress. Future researches can further explore how mindful eating indirectly improves mental health through reduced emotional dysregulation.
- **Longitudinal and Experimental Research Needs**: This study further pushes longitudinal or experimental research to the establishment of cause-effect relations. Questions into how mindfulness is related to eating behaviors longitudinally may help illuminate whether the reported intervention might actually be feasible towards bringing about long-term alterations in behavior and health. Researchers should finally investigate the implications of mindfulness interventions-if kept-up-on physical and mental well-being.

Limitations of the Study

- **Limitations of Cross-Sectional Design**: This cross-sectional design can't deliver causal relations. And it is also unknown whether healthier eating behavior is an effect of mindful eating or if healthier behaviors just naturally are more mindful. Longitudinal may be a better tool to further solidify these relationships further into the timeline.
- **Sample Size and Generalizability**: As the sample size is 200, generalization to populations cannot be done. It may not extend to children, aged people, and to people who are of different cultural backgrounds. In future research, a large sample with diversity is desirable to understand the role that mindfulness plays along with demographic factors.
- **Over-reliance on Self-Reported Data**: The self-report measures that were taken along brought participant self-reported biases in socially desirable manners of forgetting their eating habituation. Future findings would come under more reliable criteria only in case objective methods as offered by food diaries, or biometric assessment took places.
- **Extensional Health Measures**: Given this, the general health study cannot separate the specific health effects through mindful eating. Future studies would need to expand the measurements for example into the physical fitness evaluation, mental health assessment, or laboratory tests that would explain better how mindfulness practice impacts health.

The present study controlled for gender but did not show how mindful eating would affect various genders or cultural groups. Given the cultural and psychological factors often influencing food-related behaviors, more research should be done to establish exactly how mindful eating may influence such variations.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms the positive relationship between mindful eating and healthy eating but it reported that the connection lacked general health improvement. The validity that research evidence gives concerning demonstrating possibilities which mindfulness practice may create in the quest of promoting healthy eating encompasses worth for resources of facilitating public health projects and intervention efforts at the level of the clinic targeting disorders in the consumption of food and also creating lifelong habits of behavior.

Failure to establish the effects on sustained health may mean that the effects of mindful eating take a little longer to materialize or occur with a different broader habit change, such as exercise and dealing with the response to stress. Having longitudinal studies related to health and other variables in life may be essential in order to test the accumulation of effects from mindfulness practices.

Mindful eating can improve the practice of eating, but much more is needed to understand the long-term effects on wellbeing. Mindfulness-based interventions have great potential in overcoming the challenges that modern diets pose in sustaining people's efforts to form healthier relationships with food. They are also helpful tools for public health and chronic disease management in clinical practice as well as sustainable lifestyle change.

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Conflict of Interest

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