

Research Paper

## Unravelling the Interplay of Social Support, Mindfulness, and Well-being through a Mediation Model

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** This study aims to investigate the relationship between social support and well-being, with a focus on the mediating role of mindfulness. By exploring this relationship, the research seeks to elucidate the pathways through which social support influences well-being. **Design/Methodology/Approach:** A purposive sampling method was employed to recruit 375 participants. They were administered three scales: the Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale Revised, the Interpersonal Support Evaluation List, and the Brief Inventory of Thriving. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient, confirmatory factor analysis, and structural equation modeling (SEM) through AMOS software. **Findings:** The findings demonstrate a positive mediating role of mindfulness between social support and well-being. Both direct and indirect effects were significant, indicating that mindfulness enhances well-being by mediating the relationship between social support and well-being. Partial mediation of mindfulness was observed, highlighting its significance in the association between social support and well-being. **Research Limitations:** Limitations of this study may include the use of self-report measures, potential biases in sampling, and the cross-sectional design. Future research could benefit from longitudinal studies and diverse samples to enhance generalizability. **Implications:** These findings underscore the pivotal role of mindfulness in amplifying the positive effects of social support on individual well-being. By recognizing the significance of mindfulness in this relationship, interventions can be tailored to cultivate mindfulness skills, thereby fostering enhanced overall well-being. Such initiatives not only benefit individuals seeking to enhance their well-being within the context of social support but also contribute to the creation of supportive social ecosystems conducive to collective flourishing. **Originality/Value:** This study contributes to the literature by empirically examining the mediating role of mindfulness in the relationship between social support and well-being. By elucidating this pathway, it provides valuable insights for both researchers and practitioners interested in promoting psychological well-being through mindfulness practices and social support. write more professionally.

**Keywords:** *Social Support, Mindfulness, Wellbeing, Confirmatory Factor Analysis, Mediation Analysis*

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'A problem shared is a problem halved.' This age-old phrase implies the importance of family and friends in one's life. Supportive interactions are at the core of improving health. Epidemiologist John Cassel, physician and epidemiologist Sidney Cobb, and psychiatrist Gerald Caplan were the primary contributors to social support as an important factor in health and well-being. According to Cassel (1976), social support is the protective component that acts as a buffer for the individual from the impact of any stressful condition. Caplan (1974) highlighted three important functions of social support: (1) social support provides an individual with a sense of self-worth; (2) social support acts as a refuge to which a person may return to rest; and (3) social support acts as a pattern of close knitted ties that contributes to a person's physical and psychological integrity. Caplan's key point was to create a coherent community in which help was available for everyone, which he referred to as a "support system."

Cobb (1976) approaches the concept of social support from a communication perspective, categorising three types of information based on their functions: information leading a person to believe that he is loved and cared for (i.e., emotional support); information leading a person to believe that he is valued; and information leading a person to believe that he belongs to or is a part of a community. He emphasised that while individuals go through many transitions throughout their lives, social support plays a protective role in every aspect. As a result, the potential of social support to protect individuals from the harmful consequences of bad events or stress, as well as to promote well-being and positively impact health, is at the core of social support research.

Social support focuses on both the structural and functional components of one's environment. The structural component includes the size, density, and stability of one's family, friends, community, and so on, while the functional component includes an individual's perception of the availability of support and resources.

In today's changing world, where the globe has undergone significant change because of the pandemic, constant stress in terms of physical, psychological, and social aspects of life must be addressed, with social support playing a key role i.e., the support system individual has which may help in focusing much on present. Various social support theories have arisen, focusing on four dimensions of social support: emotional, informational, instrumental, and appraisal support. Offering empathy and affection, as well as the experience of feeling appreciated, constitutes emotional support. Education, advice, and direction are all examples of informational support. Instrumental support entails the provision of tangible goods or services, whereas appraisal support validates individuals and gives them a sense of belonging (Peterson and Bredow, 2014). Over the years, there has been a persistent danger to this sense of belonging from deteriorating familial attachments, strained interpersonal relationships, and the disintegration of societal norms, all of which have an impact on the individual's wellbeing.

### ***Social support and well being***

Wellbeing has always been described from the perspective of self. However, it is more useful to view wellbeing as a social 'thing,' something that goes beyond psychological aspect of being. According to Keyes and Lopez (2002), wellbeing consists of five social dimensions: social acceptance (accepting others as they are); social actualisation (positive comfort and understanding level with the society); social contribution (a sense of responsibility that one has a contribution to make in the society); social coherence (viewing

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the social world as a whole); social integration (person's perception of a sense of belongingness to the society). All these aspects indicate how wellbeing is knitted with social aspects in life. Well-being, according to Seligman (2018), is a psychological construct that includes engaging with life, having meaningful/positive relationships, having a sense of life purpose, feeling positive emotions, and embracing opportunities to feel a sensation of accomplishment.

Steger (2009) did a thorough evaluation of research work on the meaning of life and discovered that "most people have stated relationships with others are the most important source of meaning in their lives. In terms of stressors of daily life, Diener and Seligman (2004) argued that support allows individuals to cope with stressful situations. These studies emphasise on the contribution of social support on enhancing wellbeing of an individual.

### ***Social support and Mindfulness***

Mindfulness is defined as "a relaxed, present, focused state of mind filled with awareness of one's own feelings, emotions, and thoughts without judgement" (Brown and Ryan, 2003). In this state, the individuals concentrate their consciousness and attention on present internal (feelings and thoughts), as well as external (sights and noises) stimuli, and accept these inputs without judgement (Baer et al., 2004). Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, and Freedman (2006) presented a three-component model of mindfulness: intention, attention, and attitude. Intentions are the purpose that reminds from time to time the reasons behind practicing mindfulness. Attention is concerned with becoming fully aware of the moment-to-moment internal experience; attitude describes the quality of the practitioner's attention, which is filled with acceptance, kindness, and curiosity. The primary goal of mindfulness, according to them, is to minimize negative emotion. Mindfulness therefore, has its own positive effects, it is also imperative to consider social support as one of the major contributors towards mindfulness. As a study of college students' sleep quality, researchers discovered that students with high levels of perceived social support also had high levels of mindfulness, and mindfulness acted as a mediator between comprehension of perceived social support and sleep quality (Chen, 2018). A cluster sample survey of doctors by Tan and Tao (2021) confirmed that perceived social support had a beneficial impact on the improvement of their mindfulness level, and mindfulness played a role in the mediation between perceived social support and job burnout, which indicates the important role of social support on mindfulness.

### ***Mindfulness and wellbeing***

The essence of wellbeing is a conscious as well as mindful attitude, which includes perceiving new things, being engaged in the present, being open to new information, being sensitive to different contexts, and being aware of various viewpoints. (Langer and colleagues, 1978). In the quest of finding a tool which may constantly enhance wellbeing, mindfulness may act as a key construct. As reported in self-determination theory, mindfulness promotes wellbeing both directly and indirectly. Mindfulness directly contributes to wellbeing by offering clarity to perceptions, while indirectly it assists individuals in remaining disconnected from habitual thoughts and undesirable behavioural habits. As a result, it contributes significantly to wellbeing enhancement by encouraging self-regulated behavioural management (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

A considerable amount of research based on mindfulness theory shows that people gain better health by changing their mindsets and reorienting their attitudes toward themselves

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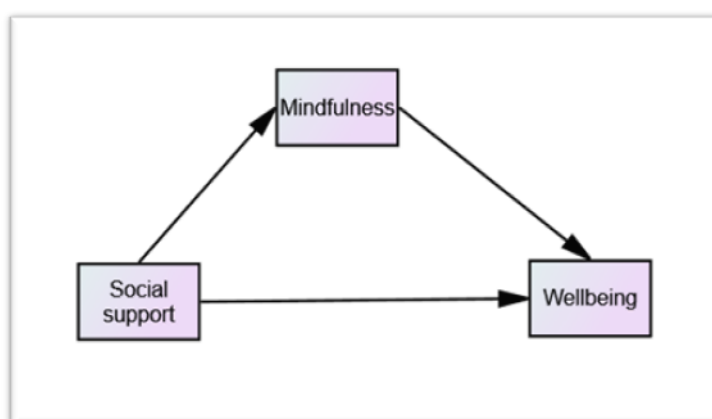
and their surroundings (Levy, Slade, & Gill, 2006; Levy & Leifheit-Limson, 2009). In a review of mindfulness studies, the research suggests that trait mindfulness is positively associated with a variety of wellbeing indicators, including higher levels of self-reported positive affect, life satisfaction, resilience, and adaptive emotion regulation, as well as lower levels of negative affect and psychopathological symptoms (Keng et al., 2011). Mindfulness has clearly beneficial impacts as evidenced in a study which revealed that meditators had significantly greater levels of mindfulness, self-compassion, and a general sense of wellbeing in comparison to nonmeditators (Lykins and Baer,2009).

Several studies have highlighted the collectivistic culture of India. This collectivism functions as a stress buffer by providing 'social support.' This social support, in turn, creates a sense of satisfaction of the need to belong, which influences an individual's wellbeing. Several researches have been undertaken on the relationship between social support and wellbeing, social support, and mindfulness as well as mindfulness and wellbeing. However, Indian studies on the mediating effect of mindfulness taking these variables into consideration are limited. Understanding the triumvirate relationship between these psychological constructs is critical for fostering individual wellbeing. Hence, the purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of social support on wellbeing using mindfulness as a mediator.

The following hypothesis were formulated based on the objectives of this study.

- Hypothesis 1(H<sub>1</sub>): Social support will have a significant relationship with mindfulness.
- Hypothesis 2(H<sub>2</sub>): Mindfulness will have a significant relationship with wellbeing.
- Hypothesis 3(H<sub>3</sub>): Social support will have a significant relationship with wellbeing.
- Hypothesis 4(H<sub>4</sub>): Mindfulness will mediate the relationship between social support and wellbeing.

*Fig 1. Hypothetical model*



*Note.* Figure representing a hypothetical model of mediating relationship of mindfulness between social support and wellbeing

## METHOD

### Sample

The study consisted of 375 participants (men = 174 and women = 201). The mean age of the sample was 35.05 years (standard deviation [SD] =12.82), with age ranging between 18 and 60 years.

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### Measures

- **Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale-Revised (CAMS-R)**- developed by Feldman et al. (2022) is a 12-item scale with a four-point rating scale ranging from rarely/not at all (1) to almost always (4). It measures the attention, present-focus, awareness, and acceptance/nonjudgment of thoughts and feelings. Higher score indicates higher level of mindfulness. The internal consistency score is 0.76 (Feldman *et al.*, 2022). For the present sample in this study, Cronbach's alpha value was 0.70.
- **Interpersonal Support Evaluation List (ISEL)**- The 15 items scale is derived from the long form of the ISEL and contains the dimensions of perceived availability of tangible, appraisal, and belonging social support on a two-point scale of 'True' and 'False' (Cohen et al., 1985). The internal reliability of the total scale of ISEL ranges from 0.88 to 0.90 For the present sample in this study, Cronbach's alpha value was 0.62.
- **Brief Inventory of Thriving (BIT)**- The BIT has 10 items measures the psychological well-being dimensions (positive relationships, engagement, mastery, meaning, optimism, and subjective well-being) (Su et al., 2014). The response for each item was in the form of a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). The scale has high internal consistency of 0.90, and test-retest reliability of 0.83. The Cronbach's alpha was .71. in the current study.

### Procedure

The participants for this study were recruited through purposive sampling method. The consent was obtained from participants, and all the above scales with demographic data sheet were administered. Participants were explained about the purpose of the study and were informed that their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw from the study at any time.

### Data Analysis

The Pearson product moment correlation was carried out to find out the degree and direction of relationship between the study variables. The present study analysed the hypothetical model (Figure1) by using Anderson and Gerbing (1988) two step procedures. The first step in the procedure was to develop a measurement model with acceptable model fit using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Maximum-likelihood method in the Amos version 20 was used to test the measurement model. After performing the CFA, the reliability and validity of the constructs were computed. The internal consistency reliability of all the constructs were calculated by using SPSS, Version23. The second step was to analyse the structural model by using the developed measurement models. Model fit indices were tested to check the appropriateness of the model. The significance of indirect effect was tested by using bootstrapping in Amos. The bootstrap approach with bias corrected confidence interval was used to determine the significance of the specific intermediary. Mediation analysis using the structural equation model (SEM) was used to determine the relationships and their significance. The goodness-of-fit index (GFI), the adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI), the comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) were all used in the analysis.

## RESULTS

### *Relationship among the measures*

Bivariate correlations were conducted among the study variables, and the results are presented in Table 1. It was observed that there is a significant positive relationship between social support and mindfulness ( $r = .16^{**}$ ,  $p < .01$ ), supporting H1. Additionally, social support exhibited a positive correlation with wellbeing ( $r = .41^{**}$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Mindfulness also demonstrated a significant positive relationship with wellbeing ( $r = .40^{**}$ ,  $p < .01$ ), thus providing support for H2. The means (M) and standard deviations (SD) for each variable are also provided in Table 1.

**Table 1** *Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation between study variables*

Variables	2	3	Mean	SD
1. Social support	.16**	.41**	5.79	1.84
2. Mindfulness		.40**	20.90	2.17
3. Wellbeing			18.81	3.69

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level, SD=Standard deviation

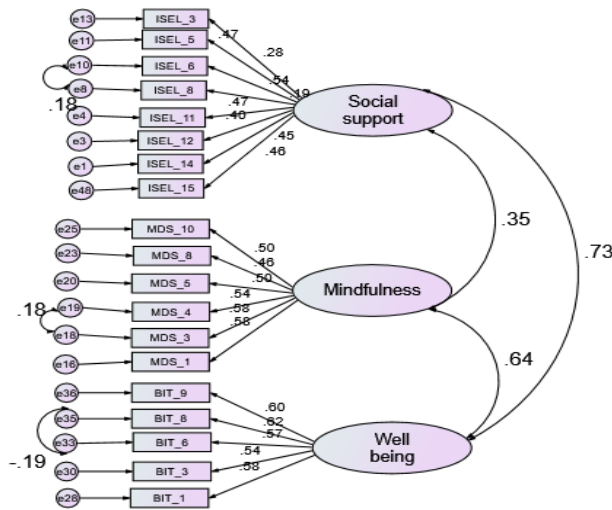
Confirmatory Factor Analysis using AMOS Version 20 was used to check all the three measurement models, viz- mindfulness, social support, and wellbeing. The single factor model of all the constructs were tested to check the model fit.

### *Measurement Model Analysis*

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the fit of the proposed three-factor model comprising social support, mindfulness, and wellbeing, encompassing a total of 37 items. Initially, the model exhibited marginal fit indices (GFI: 0.84, AGFI: 0.82, CFI: 0.80). Subsequently, through the iterative process of eliminating items with low factor loadings and incorporating modifications suggested by modification indices, the model's fit was notably improved. After refining the model, satisfactory fit measures were achieved, with all goodness-of-fit (GOF) indices surpassing the requisite threshold for adequacy. Specifically, the GFI improved to 0.95, indicating a high degree of fit, while the AGFI reached 0.93. The TLI and CFI also demonstrated excellent fit, both exceeding 0.99. Notably, the RMSEA of the refined model was 0.09, indicative of a good fit and appropriateness of the model to the observed data. Overall, these results validate the robustness of the measurement model in accurately capturing the latent constructs of social support, mindfulness, and wellbeing.

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**Figure 2. Measurement model**

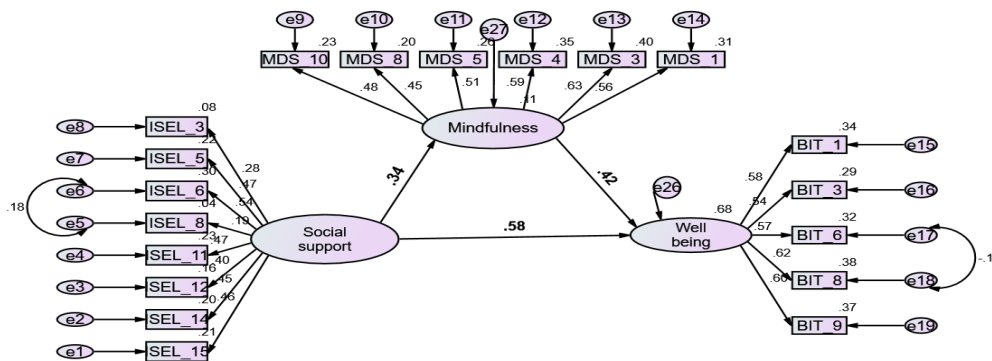


Note. Measurement model depicting the association between indicators and theoretical underlying constructs or factors

### Structural model

The structural equation model (SEM) generated through AMOS was employed to assess the relationships between social support, mindfulness, and wellbeing. Mediation analysis was conducted to quantify the effect of social support on wellbeing, mediated by mindfulness. To evaluate the goodness of fit of the structural model, several fit indices were considered. A model was deemed to have good fit if the value of CMIN/df was less than 5, and if the GFI, TLI, and CFI were greater than 0.90. Additionally, an adequate fitting model was characterized by an RMSEA value between 0.05 and 0.08. The fit indices for the structural model (depicted in Figure 2) indicated an exemplary fit to the data: GFI = 0.96, AGFI = 0.94, CFI = 0.99, TLI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.006, and CMIN/df = 1.01. These values indicate a robust fit of the model to the observed data. The squared multiple correlation ( $R^2$ ) for wellbeing was calculated as 0.68, suggesting that 68% of the variance in wellbeing was explained by the combined influences of social support and mindfulness. The mediation analysis conducted within the SEM framework illustrated the relationships between social support, mindfulness, and wellbeing, utilizing standardized beta weighting. This analysis, depicted in Figure 2, elucidated the mediating role of mindfulness in the pathway between social support and wellbeing.

**Figure 3. The mediation analysis obtained from the structural equation model (SEM)**



Note. Figure representing standardized regression coefficient ( $b$ ) as well as squared multiple correlation ( $R^2$ ) for the relationship between social support and well-being as mediated by mindfulness.

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The study explored how mindfulness mediates the relationship between social support and well-being. To conduct the mediation analysis, 500 bias-corrected bootstrap samples were generated. Effects were deemed statistically significant if the 95% confidence interval (CI) did not include zero. According to the results in Table 2, the direct effect of social support on well-being was significant ( $b = .58, p = .013$ ), with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 1.25 to 3.22. Since this interval did not include zero, it indicates a positive and significant direct effect, thus supporting Hypothesis 3 (H3). Additionally, the indirect effect of social support on wellbeing, when mindfulness was included as a mediator, was also significant ( $b = .14, p = .005$ ), with a 95% confidence interval between .29 and .86. This suggests that mindfulness partially mediates the relationship between social support and wellbeing, thereby supporting Hypothesis 4 (H4). A summary of the mediation analysis is provided in Table 2.

**Table 2 Influence of social support on wellbeing through Mindfulness (Indirect and Direct effects)**

Path	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Confidence interval 95%		P value	Conclusion
			Lower bound	Upper bound		
SS -> WB	.58**		1.25	3.22	.013	<b>Partial mediation</b>
SS -> MD -> WB		.14**	.29	.86	.005	

*Note. The 95% of CI for is obtained by the bias corrected bootstrap with 500 resamples; SS : social support; MD: mindfulness; WB: well- being*

### DISCUSSION

The aim of the study was to assess the mediating role of mindfulness in the relationship between social support and wellbeing. The first objective of the study was to examine the relationship between social support and mindfulness. Based on this, the first hypothesis stated that social support will have a significant positive relationship with mindfulness. This hypothesis was tested using Pearson's product-moment correlation, and the results supported the hypothesis, indicating a significant positive relationship between social support and mindfulness. This finding suggests that as the level of social support increases, the level of mindfulness also tends to increase. As defined by Kabat-Zinn, (1994) mindfulness is paying attention in the present moment in a specific way without being judgemental at the same time social support gives a sense of belongingness that one is cared for by others and has a reliable social network that can be turned to in times of need (Taylor,2011). This sense of support is perceived as a buffer to any unprecedented or stressful situation and allows individual to extend the awareness towards other aspects of life. This awareness includes a person's environment, thoughts, and feelings, without focusing on anything or labelling it as good or bad. Thus, cognitive assessments are regulated, resulting in a more objective evaluation of experiences (Brown and Ryan 2003). Furthermore, social support encourages acceptance and successful coping when confronted with stressors, i.e., obstacles and problems are perceived as manageable and transient (Feeney & Collins, 2014). Instead of being disconnected and ruminating about the past or worrying about the future, social support may help to keep one centred and focused on the present.

The study investigated the relationship between mindfulness and wellbeing. The results revealed a significant positive relationship between these variables, thereby supporting the second hypothesis. One key component of wellbeing is positive emotions. Mindfulness

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fundamentally enhances wellbeing by boosting both the intensity and frequency of positive emotions (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Meditation also contributes to mindfulness as meditation tends to result in large increases in left-sided activation in the anterior cortical area of the brain, which relates to positive affect and noticed in people who have greater dispositional positive affect (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). It is important to be mindfully aware of any positive or negative event, experience it and then let it go and mindfully engage in the next experience in one's life (Germer, 2009). Buddhism describes mindfulness as a way of being in the world that relieves suffering through knowing, shaping, and liberating the mind (Gethin, R. 2015). Optimal physical functioning is not only the aim of wellbeing but psychological and social dimensions are also important part of wellbeing. This collaboration of physical, psychological, and social dimensions of wellbeing increases the likelihood of better coping with psychosocial and environmental problems. One more aspect of wellbeing exists i.e., a subjective component manifested as a sense of accomplishment in realising one's potential (Davidson et al., 2003). Mindfulness theory research shows that changing people's mindsets and attitudes toward themselves and their environment improves their health and well-being (Cohen et al., 2003; Levy et al., 2009). Mindfulness-related characteristics diminish negative emotions and stress while also encouraging creativity, quality of life, and overall well-being (Creswell et al., 2007).

The results also confirmed the third hypothesis, demonstrating a positive relationship between social support and wellbeing. Social support, encompassing both intrinsic and extrinsic elements, influences various aspects of life. The extrinsic aspect refers to support from close relationships, while the intrinsic aspect involves how individuals value this support based on their needs. Social support not only improves wellbeing but also alleviates stress and other factors that could negatively impact it. According to Charney (2005), social support enhances wellbeing by moderating and cushioning the effects of life events and stressors. Given the established link between social support and wellbeing, it was important to investigate the mechanisms behind this relationship. It was hypothesized that mindfulness might mediate this relationship, potentially enhancing the psychological processes involved. The results supported this hypothesis, showing a connection among social support, mindfulness, and wellbeing.

Furthermore, a significant direct as well as indirect effect of social support on wellbeing was documented; the indirect effect was documented using mindfulness as a mediating variable, indicating that people with more social support scored higher in mindfulness, which accounted for the association between social support and wellbeing. These findings are consistent with a study by Wilson et al. (2020), which involved 1,024 adults and demonstrated that higher perceived social support was indirectly associated with improved psychological wellbeing through mindfulness. Additionally, Feeney and Collins (2014) proposed a model outlining how social support contributes to wellbeing by enhancing emotion regulation, positive affect, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and meaningful evaluations of experiences. Since the current study examined mindfulness, which is a key component of these pathways, the results align with Feeney and Collins' theoretical framework. This provides empirical support for their integrative pathway model, illustrating how perceived social support can foster greater wellbeing through mindfulness.

### CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings support the idea that mindfulness acts as a mediator between social support and wellbeing. The current study has multiple implications because developing social support

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can have a variety of multifaceted implications, the first of which is identifying and acknowledging different sources of support. There may be implications for mindful living, which will have an impact on wellness. Second, in the Indian context, where there is a cohesive and collectivistic society, there is a greater likelihood of receiving social support in many forms. As a result, this study contributes to a culture-based approach to wellbeing, in which a coherent society may influence wellbeing. Finally, because mindfulness is a fundamental concept in the study, improving mindfulness-based skills is critical for increasing well-being and living a meaningful life. This study relied on quantitative measures for data collection and analysis; however, this limitation may be overcome by merging components of qualitative with quantitative research; thus, methodological triangulation may contribute to more robust results. Further cross-cultural and age-specific studies on perceived social support may provide more insight into the concept's understanding.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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