

Research Paper

Gender Differences on Mindfulness among Special Educators

Sucharita Dutt^{1*}, Thulasikanthan Mugesh²

ABSTRACT

Mindfulness is a mental state characterized by focused attention on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting one's feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations. This indicate entailing in the present moment being non-judgment or distracted. Thus, mindfulness is particularly beneficial for special educators because of the unique challenges they face in their roles. This study examined gender differences in mindfulness among special educators in West Bengal, India. A sample of 100 special educators (50 males and 50 females) from various districts completed the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), which consists of 15 items. The results of a t-test analysis indicated that male and female special educators differed significantly in their scores on mindfulness, with female educators scoring higher than male educators.

Keywords: *Gender, Mindfulness, Special educators*

Mindfulness is often described as a receptive state of mind where attention, guided by a sensitive awareness of the present moment, simply observes what is happening (Brown & Ryan, 2003). It is a quality of awareness and attention that can be cultivated through sincere and conscientious effort. Mindfulness involves purposefully observing or paying attention to the present moment without judgment, allowing experiences to unfold moment by moment. It is synonymous with insight and meditation, indicating a deep and penetrating examination of the mind and the world (Zinn, 2003). In essence, mindfulness is a clear awareness that utilizes all human senses to closely attend to an object, involving the retention of information to comprehend the data provided by the cognitive apparatus. It entails a profound exploration of our consciousness state (Hyland, 2015). Mindfulness is characterized by the interaction of intention, attitude, and attention (Thomas, 2011). The five components of mindfulness include observation (noticing internal emotions, cognitions, and external stimuli), description (expressing emotions and feelings in appropriate terms), acting with awareness (being fully attentive to one task at a time), non-judging (maintaining a non-evaluative stance towards feelings and thoughts), and non-reactivity (refraining from automatic reactions to one's ideas and emotions) (Soamya, 2014). Mindfulness is viewed as a set of interrelated skills, encompassing the observation of one's physical, sensory, and emotional experiences, acting

¹Rehabilitation Psychologist, National Institute for the Empowerment of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (Divyangjan), Regional Center, Kolkata

²Faculty, National Institute for the Empowerment of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (Divyangjan), Regional Center, Kolkata

*Corresponding Author

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with awareness in activities, refraining from reacting impulsively to negative emotions like anger, and maintaining a non-judgmental attitude towards oneself and others (Kadziolka et al., 2016).

Within the context of rehabilitation practice. The profession of special education plays a critical role in promoting mindfulness. Special educators often need to adapt to new environments and navigate various challenges, including managing workloads and personal and social situations. As they provide interventions for individuals with intellectual disabilities, they frequently encounter stress and challenges. In their professional lives, individuals face a multitude of challenges across personal, professional, and social spheres, such as building and maintaining relationships, managing finances independently, individualized educational, vocational and behavioural management, handling the stress of parents and simultaneously coping with one's psychological stress and depression. In light of these challenges, researchers have recommended the integration of mindfulness as a tool to reduce stress, enhance professional success, and promote adaptive coping strategies. Mindfulness serves as an indicator of positive functioning, reducing susceptibility to irrational or pessimistic thoughts. By enhancing focus, awareness, attention, and concentration, mindfulness helps individuals build resilience in facing adversity. It is considered crucial for social and emotional learning, particularly within the realm of rehabilitation practice.

The literature review findings highlight the notable and consistent positive impacts of regular mindfulness practice on educators' well-being. This includes reduced levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, along with improvements in physical health outcomes, emotion regulation, and self-compassion (Sleilaty, 2022). In the realm of special education, Lisa's (2020) research suggests that implementing mindfulness practices among special educators could be a valuable and effective strategy for decreasing stress and improving overall well-being.

Research findings regarding gender differences in mindfulness are mixed and limited. While some studies suggest that women tend to have lower levels of dispositional mindfulness compared to men (Marks, Sobanski & Hine, 2010), others have found no significant difference (Mettler, Carsley & Joly, 2017). However, mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) appear to be more beneficial for women. In an intervention for university students, women showed lower levels of stress and higher well-being compared to men after the intervention (De Vibe, Solhaug, Tyssen, Friberg, Rosenvinge, Sørli & Bjørndal, 2013). Similarly, a review of MBIs for substance abuse indicated greater efficacy for women (Katz & Toner, 2012). Female students also exhibit a wider variance in mindfulness dispositions compared to male students (Wang, 2017). Previous research has shown significant gender differences in mindfulness subscales (Fuentes, Oyanadel, Zimbardo & Peñate, 2022).

Specifically, men scored higher than women on the "acting with awareness" subscale, while women scored higher on the "observing" subscale (Alispahic & Anic, 2017). However, a study by Ahmadi et al. (2014) found no relationship between mindfulness levels and age, race, gender, educational background, religion, or family condition. Similarly, no significant gender differences were found in mindfulness among university students. The study also revealed a positive and significant relationship between mindfulness and personal well-being, as university students with high mindfulness scores exhibited higher levels of personal well-being (Singh, 2018). Overall, gender differences in mindfulness remain inconclusive and require further investigation.

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Hence, the study asks the following two research questions:

- **RQ1:** What is the mindfulness disposition of the special educators in rehabilitation practice?
- **RQ2:** Does the mindfulness disposition differ in gender?

Objectives

- To study the mindfulness disposition of the special educators in rehabilitation practice.
- To study the gender difference on mindfulness disposition.

Hypothesis:

There will be no significant gender difference in mindfulness among special educators

METHOD

Design: The descriptive method of research was used for the study. Mean and standard deviation was used to study mindfulness among special educators. The t-test was applied to study the significance of mean difference in total mindfulness.

Sample- 100 adults who are special educators were included in the study. The mean age of the participants was 28(SD=5.31) with minimum age 20 and maximum as 45. 50% were male (n=50) and 50% were female (n=50) belonging to urban area and Socioeconomic status was middle class. Exclusionary criteria were any associated conditions.

Tool:

The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS)-The Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) (Brown & Ryan, 2003) was selected as the measurement for the construct of mindfulness. The MAAS is designed to evaluate mindfulness as "a receptive state of mind in which attention, guided by a sensitive awareness of what is occurring in the present, simply observes what is taking place" (Brown & Ryan, 2003). According to Brown and Ryan (2003), correlational, quasi-experimental, and experimental studies have shown that the trait measured by the MAAS reflects a unique aspect of consciousness that is linked to and predictive of various phenomena related to emotion regulation, behavior regulation, interpersonal relationships, and well-being. The scale is a 15-item unidimensional measure of trait mindfulness. It evaluates how often individuals exhibit open and receptive attention to ongoing events and experiences. Respondents are instructed to base their answers on their actual experiences rather than how they think they should respond, which helps to minimize social desirability bias. Items 2, 6, and 7 are reverse-coded. Higher scores on the MAAS indicate a higher level of mindfulness. The MAAS scale has good internal consistency ($\alpha \geq .82$) and 4-week test-retest reliability (interclass $r = .81$). Additionally, MAAS scores have been found to be significantly correlated with other established measures of mindfulness, including the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory ($r = .31, p < .01$), Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills ($r = .51, p < .01$), Cognitive Affective Mindfulness Scale ($r = .51, p < .01$), and Mindfulness Questionnaire ($r = .38, p < .01$) (Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006).

Procedure

After obtaining consent from the participants, the MAAS scale was administered individually. Before starting the test, participants were asked to fill out an information schedule, providing demographic information and other relevant details. Each participant

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was briefed on the purpose of the study to ensure understanding and informed participation. During the administration of the MAAS scale, participants were instructed to respond based on their actual experiences, rather than how they thought they should respond. This approach aimed to gather genuine and reflective responses from the participants. The responses from the MAAS scale were then scored to determine the level of mindfulness for each participant. Throughout the process, confidentiality and ethical considerations were paramount. Participants were assured that their responses would be kept confidential and used only for research purposes. The study adhered to ethical guidelines to protect the rights and well-being of the participants.

RESULTS

The data analysis are shown below to help answer the two research questions.

- **RQ1.** What is the mindfulness disposition for special educators ?

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of Mindfulness Disposition (N=100)

Variables	items	Mean	Sd	Min	Max	Skewness	kurtosis
Mindfulness	15	4.04	0.36	3.57	4.98	1.07	1.95

Table 1 shows that the average mindfulness score of 4.04 shows that the surveyed subjects have a relatively good dispositional mindfulness – it fall right in between 4- “somewhat infrequently” and 5 – “very infrequently” non-mindful behavior. Even the minimum score of mindfulness (3.57 out of 6) fall in the middle of 3 – “somewhat frequent” and 4 – “somewhat infrequently” non-mindful behavior. And the maximum score of mindfulness (4.98 out of 6) is very close to the full mark of 6. These results show that the mindfulness dispositions among 100 special educators are overall satisfying. One such item of mindfulness is,” I snack without being aware that I'm eating” respondents mean score is 4.98 indicating that respondent are somewhat infrequent experience such behaviour.

- **RQ2:** Does the mindfulness disposition differ in gender?

Table 2 showing mean, SD and t-value of special educators on mindfulness (N=100)

Variable	Male (N=50)		Female (N=50)		t-value (df=98)	P value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Mindfulness	50.50	19.87	69.86	12.84	-5.72	0.0001

The t-test was applied to find out the significance of gender differences in mindfulness of special educators. The table 3 indicates that the t-value for total mindfulness among male and female students is -5.79, indicating that there is a gender difference in mindfulness of special educators. Thus, the null hypothesis stating that there will be no significant gender difference in mindfulness of special educator is rejected. The male score is 50.50 and female score is 69.86. However, there are some differences in the variances by gender. The standard deviation among male subjects is 19.87 whereas the standard deviation among female subjects is 12.84. This suggests that there is a considerable variability in mindfulness scores among male participants.

DISCUSSION

The aim of the present study was to study mindfulness disposition for special educators. The special educators have a satisfying mindfulness disposition based on the measure of MAAS

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scale. The current finding is consistent with Sleilaty (2022). Lisa's (2020) research also match with the current finding indicating implementing mindfulness practices among special educators could be a valuable and effective strategy for decreasing stress and improving overall well-being.

Regarding gender, significant differences were found among female special educators exhibiting more mindful behaviour than male. The studies of Sturgess (2012) and Bluth et al. (2017) found that male and female students differ significantly on overall mindfulness, Female student showed greater increase in mindfulness and decrease in negative affect as compared to male student (Rojiani et al., 2017). Current study is consistent with wang (2017) who found wider variance in mindfulness dispositions among female students. This may be due to societal norms and expectations leading to differences in how males and females are socialized to express and cope with their emotions. Females may be encouraged to be more introspective and emotionally aware, which are aspects of mindfulness. Females may be more likely to use mindfulness as a coping strategy for dealing with stress and challenges, leading to higher levels of mindfulness. Also the difference could be accounted for the differences in brain structure and function between males and females that could influence mindfulness.

Thus, the findings on mindfulness among special educators have significant practical implications for balancing work challenges and psychological well-being. By understanding the gender differences in mindfulness and the benefits it offers, educators implement mindfulness practices to manage stress, improve emotional well-being, and enhance their overall mental health. This lead to a more balanced approach to work, allowing educators to navigate challenges more effectively while maintaining their psychological well-being. Incorporating mindfulness into their daily routines help special educators cultivate a greater sense of calm, resilience, and compassion, ultimately benefiting both themselves and their students.

CONCLUSION

The study's findings suggest that there are significant gender differences in mindfulness among special educators, with female educators demonstrating higher levels of mindfulness compared to male educators. This highlights the importance of considering gender differences in mindfulness training and support programs for special educators to enhance their well-being and effectiveness in their roles.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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