

Exploring Mindfulness-Stress Dynamics in Emerging Adulthood: A Correlational Study

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Abstract

Emerging adulthood is a developmental stage typically ranging from 18 to 29 years of age. It is characterized by significant changes in development, increase in responsibilities, and heightened exposure to stressors related to several factors like education, career, relationships, and identity formation. Effective management of stress during this period is important for maintaining psychological well-being. Mindfulness which is defined as the capacity to maintain non-judgmental awareness of present-moment experiences, has been increasingly recognized by researchers as a potential protective factor against stress. The present study is aimed to understand the relationship between mindfulness and perceived stress among young adults. Quantitative correlational research design was employed as research method to examine the association between the variables. Sampling method used is that of convenience sampling. Standardized self-report measures of mindfulness and perceived stress were administered to measure the participants' levels of mindfulness and stress. Analysis of data was carried out using appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, including correlation analysis. The hypothesis was that mindfulness would be negatively associated with perceived stress. The study findings showed a significant negative relationship between mindfulness and perceived stress, indicating that individuals with higher levels of mindfulness tended to report lower levels of perceived stress. These results also support existing literature suggesting that mindfulness could serve as one of the important psychological resources for coping with stress during the developmental period of emerging adulthood. The study also shows the significance of the potential value of mindfulness-based interventions in not only promoting mental health but also enhancing resilience among young adults. Further investigations can focus on causal mechanisms and explore the effectiveness of mindfulness-based programs across diverse populations of emerging adults.

Keywords: Mindfulness, Perceived Stress, Wellbeing

Introduction

Emerging adulthood is a unique developmental phase mainly ranging from 18 to 29 years where individuals often explore their identity, deal with changes in school or work, face uncertainty about their careers, try to deal with it, some rely on others financially while some even experience shifting relationships with others. At this stage even though people gain more

independence they also face greater responsibility making them more prone to psychological stress. Even though stress is a normal reaction to demands around us when it sticks around or feels too intense in emerging adulthood it can mess with how people manage their emotions, also affecting how well they do in school, and raise the chances of anxiety and depression. The World Health Organisation describes stress as a kind of mental strain or worry that comes from facing difficult situations. What really matters is not just the presence of the external stressors but how a person sees and thinks about those stressors. It shapes their mental state. Several Cognitive appraisal theories of stress state that people see and react to their surroundings in differences of stress, anxiety, and psychological distress in different groups of people. Several metant ways, and this shapes how they feel and how their bodies respond to it. Therefore it is important to figure out which psychological factors can help ease or manage stress. One idea that has caught a lot of attention in research and in theory around the same topic is that of mindfulness. Mindfulness means being aware of what's happening right now, paying attention to your experience without judging it, as Brown and Ryan described in 2003. Mindfulness refers to noticing one's thoughts and feelings, including the tough ones without trying ignore them. It involves accepting them as they come. This way of being aware could help slow down automatic reactions in the mind and encourage better control of emotions, which could eventually lead to lower stress levels. There are lot of evidences showing that mindfulness-based interventions can help in reducing stress. Programmes like Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; 2003) have shown moderate success in lowering the lev-analytic findings and also show that mindfulness interventions help to improve psychological well-being and quality of life. Most of the existing literature focuses on intervention-based or experimental designs, focusing mostly at the results of structured mindfulness programs. Less studies are available focusing on how dispositional or trait mindfulness relates to perceived stress among young adults who are not in clinical settings, especially when it comes to the Indian socio-cultural context. With increasing competition in several fields like academics, job uncertainty, and the many changes young adults face in modern Indian society, it makes sense to have a closer look in this relationship now. Cultural factors can also influence a large context on how people view stress and their mindfulness habits. So it's essential to study these things in different regions. The present study looks at how mindful attention awareness relates to perceived stress in young adults between 18 and 26 years old, using standard psychometric tools. This study employs a correlational research design to add to the growing research on mindfulness as a possible protective psychological resource. It explores whether mindful attention awareness lowers perceived stress and back up ideas that mindfulness helps protect against stress. This could also help individuals to shape ways to prevent mental health issues, mainly in schools and early work environments.

The concept of Mindfulness has emerged as one of the important constructs within contemporary psychological science. It is one of the important topics in the branch of Positive psychology. Mindfulness is theorised to facilitate factors like adaptive emotion regulation by reducing the automatic cognitive reactivity. The theoretical underpinnings of mindfulness-based interventions (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; 2003) suggest that developing a non-judgmental awareness in individuals enhances their psychological flexibility, thereby reducing stress responses.

Extensive empirical research, including meta-analyses (Khouri et al., 2015; Grossman et al., 2004), has demonstrated that interventions based on mindfulness have moderate efficiency in reducing stress and psychological distress in individuals. Also several intervention studies among adolescents and college students have reported reductions in depression, anxiety, and perceived stress following mindfulness-based stress reduction programs. It should also be understood that much of the existing literature emphasises experimental or intervention-based designs rather than just examining the dispositional relationship between trait mindfulness and perceived stress within naturalistic contexts.

A negative correlation between mindfulness and stress is reported by several international studies. Also, limited research is found specifically examining this relationship within the Indian context with a sample of emerging adult populations. Several other factors like cultural, educational, and socio-economic contexts may also influence both stress perception and mindfulness tendencies in the young adults.

The present study addresses this gap in research by using a correlational design to find the association between mindfulness and perceived stress among young adults between age group of 18 to 26 years, mainly belonging to the state of Maharashtra. By utilizing standardized and psychometrically validated instruments like the Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al., 1983) and the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (Brown & Ryan, 2003) this study tries to provide empirical evidence regarding the strength and direction of this relationship.

Establishing a significant inverse correlation between the variables would not only reinforce the theoretical models of mindfulness as a stress-buffering construct but it will also provide foundational evidence supporting the inclusion of mindfulness-based psychoeducational interventions in several settings like academic, early occupational settings, etc. In doing so, the study contributes to the broader literature on positive psychological resources in emerging adulthood and offers contextually relevant data within the Indian psychological research landscape.

Review of Literature

In the research by Xinli Chi, Ai Bo, Tingting Liu, Peichao Zhang, Iris Chi (Frontiers in psychology 9, 361432, 2018) it was seen at posttest scores that the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction lead to moderate effects in reducing the level of depression in young adults.

The research on mindfulness based stress reduction done on young and dolder adolescents with poorly controlled type 1 diabetes. The research was conducted by Deborah A Ellis, April Carcone, Richard Slatcher, Erica Sibinga (Health psychology and behavioral medicine 6 (1), 1-14, 2018). Based on both the quantitative and qualitative data it was seen that the satisfaction with Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction was high. Even preliminary evidence was obtained to suggest that the MBSR reduced the level of stress and improved blood glucose levels.

In the research done by Elizabeth Marie Vonderheyde inverse correlation between mindfulness and stress was seen in college students. The high scores of students in Overall Mindfulness and in the aspects of Describing and Acting with Awareness were found to be related to the low scores in the ICSRLE, with size of effect ranging from medium to large. It was also seen in the results that the college students rated themselves lower in Acting with Awareness and Non-

Judging facets of mindfulness while they rated themselves higher in Observing and Describing facets and. On an average, the students' stress was seen to be at a moderate level.

The research on 'The relationship between mindfulness and stress among college students' was done by Elizabeth M von der Heyde (Rowan University, 2017). The students' ratings for mindfulness and stress were found to be negatively correlated. The hypothesis of the research that mindfulness and stress are inversely correlated was accepted in the study.

The research on similar topic was carried out by Srinidhi Vasudevan, Jayasankara K Reddy (The International Journal of Indian Psychology 7 (1), 109-129, 2019) . It was seen through the research that mindfulness has a negative influence on the perceived stress of the individuals. It is suggested that to reduce stress it will significantly helpful to use the mindfulness practice which helps the person become more aware and confident in describing their experiences.

The related research was carried out on Mindfulness Based stress reduction in adults. It was carried out by Sam Lake, Rosemary MacHale (British Journal of Learning Disabilities 50 (3), 412-421, 2022). It was found that mindfulness could be a beneficial therapeutic option for managing the stress in young adults with mild intellectual disabilities.

The research was done by by Komal Rani (International Journal of Interdisciplinary Approaches in Psychology 1 (4), 36-88, 2023) on A Study on mindfulness and anxiety among young adults. The outcomes of the study revealed that there is significant negative correlation between anxiety and mindfulness. No significant gender differences were seen among the variables in the outcome.

The research on 'Mindfulness-based stress reduction reduces psychological distress in college students' was conducted by Joshua C Felver, Melissa L Morton, Adam J Clawson (College Student Journal 52 (3), 291-298, 2018). It was found that in postsecondary students the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction can reduce psychological distress.

The research was carried out by Dessa Bergen-Cico, Kyle Possemato, Sanghyeon Cheon (Journal of American College Health 61 (6), 348-360, 2013) on the efficacy of brief mindfulness based stress reduction program on the aspects of psychological health. Brief Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction programs were observed to improve psychological health; however, in order to improve the psychological distress, such as trait anxiety the longer MBSR programs could be needed. The research was carried out on 'Mindfulness-based stress reduction for healthy individuals: A meta-analysis' by Bassam Khoury, Manoj Sharma, Sarah E Rush, Claude Fournier (Journal of psychosomatic research 78 (6), 519-528, 2015). The Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction was found to be moderately effective in reducing the variables of stress, depression, anxiety and distress and in enhancing the quality of life of healthy individuals.

Objectives

To examine the relationship between stress level and mindfulness in young adults

Hypothesis

There will be significant negative relationship between mindfulness and perceived stress level among young adults

Methodology

The correlational method of research is used in the study. The method used for data collection is survey method. The correlational study method is research conducted to assess the relationship between two or more variables. In this study the aim is to find the correlation between stress-level and mindfulness. Because we have to find the relation between the two variables the correlational method is useful in this study. The subjects of the study are from the age group of 18 years to 26 years. There are no restrictions regarding the gender of the respondents. There are no specific geographical limitations but the subjects are mainly from Maharashtra state.

The research instruments used are as follows -

The Perceived Stress Scale -

The more accurate measure of personal stress level can be understood through several instruments that have been specifically designed to help to measure individual stress levels. One of such instruments is called the Perceived Stress Scale.

The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) is one of the classic and important stress assessment instruments. Even though it was originally developed in the year 1983, it is a popular choice even today for helping us to understand how different situations influence our feelings and our perceived stress level. In this scale the respondents are asked questions about their feelings and thoughts during the earlier month. In each case, the respondents are asked to state how often they felt or thought in a certain way. Some of the questions can be found to be somewhat similar, there are some differences between them and each question should be treated as a completely separate question. It is recommended to answer the questions quickly. The respondents should not try to count the number of times they felt in a specific way; but, indicate the alternative that feels like a reasonable estimate.

The Perceived Stress Scale is interesting because more than the situations, the perception of the respondents of what is happening in their life is most important in it. Though we consider the idea that two individuals could have the exactly same events and experiences in their lives for the past month based on their perception towards the experiences the total score on their tests could put both the individuals in different categories on stress. In this scale it can be seen that the perception of the experiences is considered to be important.

The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale -

The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale is a standardized 15-item scale which is constructed to measure a core characteristic of mindfulness. It assesses the receptive state of mind in which attention, informed by a sensitive awareness of what is occurring in the present, simply observes what is taking place in the individual. The scale includes the group of several statements about the respondent's everyday experiences. The scale uses 1-6 rating scale where the respondents have to indicate how frequently or infrequently they currently experience each experience as stated in the test items. Respondents are expected to answer the questions according to what really matches their experience rather than what they think their experience should be. It is important to treat every item separately from every other item. Google form based survey was used to gather the data.

Results -

Pearson's Correlations							
						Pearson's r	p
PSS Total			-	MAAS Scale		-0.466***	< .001
* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001							

The data is seen to be normal as per Shapiro-Wilk's test. The p value is seen to be significant and the findings are in the direction of the hypothesis.

Discussion

The present study examines how mindful attention awareness relates to perceived stress in young adults between 18 and 26 years old. The results showed a clear negative correlation between scores on the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) and the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), with a correlation of $r = -0.466$, $p < .001$. This indicates that people who are more aware and mindful tend to feel less stressed in the sample that was studied. As a moderate negative correlation is seen between the two variables, it points to a real connection instead of something minor. It can be seen through the results that mindfulness and perceived stress are linked in a way that when one goes up, the other tends to go down among the sample of young adults. These findings line up with what earlier studies have shown. Vonderheyde (2017) found that mindfulness and stress were negatively linked in college students, and Vasudevan and Reddy (2019) also noticed that mindfulness seemed to lower how much stress people felt. These results match those findings and offer more real evidence that the two things are linked in opposite ways. Besides correlational studies, research involving actual interventions has shown that the mindfulness-based stress reduction programs help lower psychological distress and stress (Chi et al.).2018; Felver et al.Studies that combine data from multiple sources show that mindfulness-based interventions can help lower stress and improve mental well-being to a fair degree (Khouri et al.).Grossman and others mentioned this in 2015. This study didn't use an intervention approach, but the negative link we found at the dispositional level supports earlier results and suggests that having a natural sense of mindful awareness might be tied to experiencing less stress. The study consisted of participants between the age group of 18 and 26 years old, a time in life when individuals usually deal with school, work, and personal responsibilities. The clear link we found in this study sample shows how paying mindful attention matters when it is related to dealing with stress in young adulthood. Real data is added through the study to what we already know about mindfulness and stress by using standardized common tools like PSS and MAAS. It is seen through the findings that when people pay more mindful attention, they tend to feel less stressed. Based on a correlation study these results add to the research showing that mindfulness helps lower stress, especially among the population of young adults. Through the findings of this study it is seen that the hypothesis that mindful attention awareness is negatively correlated with perceived stress is

supported. This relationship suggests that people with higher levels of mindful attention awareness tend to experience lower levels of stress. Overall, it can be seen that the results are consistent with previous research indicating that mindfulness practices are associated with reduced stress and improved well-being. The negative correlation found between mindfulness and perceived stress provides preliminary evidence for the potential benefits of mindfulness interventions in reducing stress especially in young adults.

Implications

The application of the study findings is possible across diverse settings including educational, clinical, organizational, community settings, etc. The utilization of mindfulness-based programs can be done by educational institutes to help students manage their academic stress, enhance concentration, and improve not only emotional but overall well-being.

Several mindfulness techniques and exercises can be incorporated by mental health professionals into counselling and therapeutic interventions aimed at reducing stress levels among young adults.

Implementation of mindfulness training can be considered as a part of employee wellness initiatives in organizations employing young adults to promote resilience, work-productivity, and work-life balance. This would also be useful to enhance work efficacy.

Several mental health programs can be developed based on the findings in colleges, universities, and community centres. This evidence could also be used by policymakers and health practitioners to advocate for the integration of mindfulness-based practices into youth mental health promotion strategies. Through research, a foundation is also obtained for designing targeted interventions enhancing coping skills and thereby supporting psychological well-being during the developmental stage of emerging adulthood.

Limitations

Some limitations also need to be recognized despite the strong findings of the study. The study does not

use regression but correlation, so it can't be used for prediction. Therefore, although there is a clear link between mindfulness and how much stress people felt, we can't say for sure that one causes the other. As self-report measures like PSS and MAAS were used it can sometimes be influenced by socially desirable responses given by people. This is because what people think and how they report things can affect the scores they get.

Another limitation is that of the sample. The sample involved young adults between 18 and 26 years old. So, the results might not be applicable to people in other age groups. Also, the moderate sample size influences the findings. Also, as most of the sample belongs to Maharashtra, generalisation could be limited for individuals in other states.

Further Recommendations

Further studies on the same topic could aim to replicate and extend the findings using more larger and more diverse samples. It could include participants from varied cultural, socio-economic and educational backgrounds from the same age-group. It would enhance the generalizability of results and also provide a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

In this domain, the use of longitudinal research designs would be more valuable. Tracking individuals over time with respect to the variables of mindfulness and stress-level, prolonged experience of mindfulness influencing stress-level or vice-versa can be studied by researchers. Such designs would also help in clarifying the causal relationships between the variables. Future research could also examine whether certain patterns of stress or certain stress types influence mindfulness under specific conditions thereby getting specific outcomes.

Sometimes cultural norms regarding perception and expression of stress could influence the observed relationships. Therefore, cross-cultural studies would also be valuable in such a context. Further, comparing the findings across different cultural contexts could provide richer theoretical insights in the topic.

Through an applied perspective, future research could be done on the development of educational and psychological interventions aimed at enhancing mindfulness, thereby leading to psychological well-being based on the findings.

Also, integrating qualitative approaches such as interview analysis or narrative analysis could provide more deeper and meaningful insight into individuals' lived experiences of stressful situations, leading to a more detailed understanding beyond just quantitative measures.

Conclusion

The relationship between Mindfulness and Perceived Stress among young adults aged from 18 to 26 years was explored in the present study. The findings showed a statistically significant moderate negative correlation between the variables of Mindful Attention Awareness and PSS scores ($r = -0.466$, $p < .001$), which indicates that the higher levels of mindful attention awareness are associated with lower perceived stress levels.

With reference to the literature review, these findings are found to be consistent which demonstrates the presence of an inverse relationship between the variables of mindfulness and stress. By providing the empirical evidence of this association the study contributes to the existing literature within a sample of young adult population using standardized measures and a correlational research design. The findings reinforce the relevance of mindful attention awareness as a psychological variable associated with stress perception during young adulthood.

Overall, the results support the proposed hypothesis and strengthen the existing research indicating that mindfulness is significantly related to lower perceived stress levels. The findings support the potential benefits of mindfulness practices in reducing stress and highlight the need for further research in this area.

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