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Mindfulness, Emotional Distress And Psychological Wellbeing Among Adolescents And Young Adults

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Abstract

As mental health concern rises among youth, understanding mindfulness's role in mitigating emotional distress and enhancing wellbeing is crucial. This study examines the interplay between mindfulness, emotional distress, and psychological wellbeing in adolescents and young adults. The research investigates the relationship between mindfulness practices and emotional regulation, anxiety, and life satisfaction, assessed via Mindful Attention Awareness Scale, Psychological Wellbeing scale and Kessler Psychological Distress scale. The study's findings indicated that emotional distress was significantly associated with psychological well-being, $\beta = 0.45$, ($p < 0.01$), and further indicates that mindfulness partially mediated the relationship between emotional distress and psychological well-being (measured with K10), $\beta = 0.25$, $p < 0.01$. The study's findings suggest that mindfulness's has a potential therapeutic utility, addressing interventions that foster resilience and promote mental health in this vulnerable population. The study's results may contribute to developing mindfulness-based programs tailored to adolescents and young adults' unique needs. Enhancing mental health outcomes is a key goal.

Keywords: Mindfulness, Emotional Distress, Psychological Wellbeing, Mental Health, Emotional Regulation

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INTRODUCTION

Mindfulness has gained significant attention in past years for its capability to mitigate stress and promote psychological wellbeing globally as it is a practice rooted in ancient Buddhist philosophy This concept of mindfulness requires paying attention to the current moment in an impartial and non-judgmental way, often done through various techniques like that of meditation, yoga and deep breathing (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). By practicing mindfulness, individuals can develop an utmost recognition of their thoughts, feelings, emotions, and bodily sensations which allow them to respond to the adverse situations with more capability (Grossman et al., 2013). Mindfulness defines the awareness of one's internal states and the environment in one's surroundings. It helps people to avoid devastating or automatic habits and responses by learning to observe keenly and notice their thoughts, emotions, and other present-moment experiences without being judgmental or reacting to them. As the mindfulness movement gains motion, the research continues to disclose the insightful advantages of mindfulness practices which includes reduced stress, anxiety, and depression, as well as better quality sleep, self-esteem, and cognitive function (Hofmann et al., 2010). Mindfulness involves paying fixated, non-judgmental attention to the present moment, which can be nurtured through practices like contemplation and mindful breathing exercises. Research indicates that mindfulness boosts and develops self-awareness, emotional regulation, and cognitive flexibility, all of which are fundamental for mental health. A meta-analysis by Keng et al. (2011) showed that mindfulness interventions extensively reduce the indications of anxiety and depression, while also cultivating emotional regulation and overall well-being. These findings recommend that mindfulness can assist as an appreciated tool in promoting mental health among adolescents and young adults.

Stress, a predominant and exhausting condition which affects millions of people all over the world. Chronic stress can lead to a range of unfavorable outcomes, including anxiety, depression, and a declining immune system (McEwen, 2007). Stress which is termed as an omnipresent and understated antagonist, has become an essential part of modern life, affecting millions of people worldwide. The World Health Organization (2019) has recognized stress as a major contributor to mental health disfunctions, including anxiety and depression. As the heaviness to perform, produce, and imitate rises, individuals are left feeling concerned, uneasy, anxious, and overwhelmed. The demands of modern life, including the pressure related to work and daily functioning, financial apprehensions, and social commitments, can contribute to the feelings of overwhelm and exhaustion (Harris et al., 2016). Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has deteriorated the stress levels, with many individuals experiencing increased anxiety, fear, and ambiguity (Sheppard et al., 2020).

Adolescents and young adults experience several stressors which include academic pressures, social challenges, and identity formation. These stressors can lead to the sharp and amplified levels of emotional distress, manifesting as anxiety, depression, and stress. The World Health Organization reports that mental health disorders are the leading cause of disability among individuals aged 10–24 years, highlighting the urgency of addressing these issues.

A study by Richa Nigam and Prof Bhoomika Rastogi Kar (2025) found that emotional experiences and regulation improve with age, especially in the Indian context. The research suggests that older and middle-aged adults experience more positive emotions and demonstrate greater emotional clarity than younger adults, who are more affected by negative feelings. Psychological wellbeing, a condemning aspect of overall health, encircles an individual's emotional, social, and the psychological functioning (Ryff, 2014). It includes

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experiencing positive emotions, satisfying relationships, and a sense of purpose and accomplishment (Seligman, 2011). It is not explained by just the absence of disease but also lifestyle behavior choices that assure health, avoid preventable diseases and conditions, and create a balanced state of body, mind, and spirit Mindfulness practices have been shown to encourage and aid psychological wellbeing by increasing self-awareness, self-acceptance, and self-love and care (Hofmann et al., 2010).

Psychological well-being encompasses aspects such as self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, and autonomy. Ryff's model of psychological well-being emphasizes the importance of these dimensions in achieving overall mental health. Enhancing psychological well-being is essential, as it not only progresses quality of life but also acts as a barrier against mental health disorders. Research specifies that individuals with higher levels of psychological well-being experience better physical health as well as greater life satisfaction, and improved flexibility and resilience to stress. Therefore, interventions are designed in a such a way, heightening well-being are essential for promoting long-term mental health.

METHOD

Sample

Students (n= 200) from various educational institutions which includes high schools, colleges, and universities, participated in this study. The participants, aged 12-26 years, were screened using systematized questionnaires to assess mindfulness, emotional distress, and psychological wellbeing. Written informed consent was taken from participants aged 18 and above, while written parental consent and participant assent were taken for those aged 12-17. Ethical approval was attained from the Departmental Ethics Committee (Board of Advance Studies and Research, BASR).

Demographic data which includes age, socio-economic status, and educational level, were collected through interviews. Moreover, clinical data on personal and family psychiatric history, suicidal acts, and ideations were gathered through collateral history and self-reported measures. The questionnaires assessing Mindfulness, Emotional Distress and Psychological Wellbeing administered are as follows:

INSTRUMENTS

Mindfulness Scale

The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) was developed by Brown and Ryan in 2003. It consists of 15 items that assess mindfulness and attention awareness in daily life and how frequently people are receptive to and aware of their immediate experiences, rather than being caught up in meditation, contemplation or other mental distractions. Each item is measured on a 6-point Likert scale which ranges from "almost always" to "almost never". A revised Urdu version of the MAAS was used in the present study. The reliability for the scale was as follows: α=0.83 (total score). The MAAS has demonstrated strong internal steadiness, with a Cronbach's α of 0.85 in earlier studies. As according to the research conducted earlier, the MAAS has strong validity and reliability, with Cronbach's α varying from 0.80 to 0.87 (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

Emotional Distress Scale

The Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) was proposed by Professors Ron Kessler and Dan Mroczek in 1992. It is used to measure the non-specific psychological distress particularly the indications of anxiety and depression. It consists of 10 items which calculate non-specific psychological distress experienced in the previous 30 days. Each of the item is computed on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "none of the time" to "all of the time". A revised Urdu translation of the K10 was used in the current study. α=0.88 (total score) was the reliability of

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the study. Previous studies have exhibit good reliability and validity for the K10, with Cronbach's α that ranges from 0.85 to 0.93 (Kessler and Mroczek, 1992).

Psychological Well-Being Scale

The Psychological Well-being Scale (PWBS) was established by the Psychologist Carol Ryff in 1989. Its purpose was to measure six dimensions of psychological well-being which includes; autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. It consists of 42 items assessing six dimensions of psychological well-being (Carol Ryff, 1989). Each item is measured on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. A revised Urdu translation of the PWBS was used in the present study. The reliability for each scale was as follows: α=0.85 (total score), α=0.70 (autonomy), α=0.78 (environmental mastery), α=0.80 (personal growth), α=0.75 (positive relations with others), α=0.78 (purpose in life), and α=0.82 (self-acceptance). Previous studies have demonstrated good reliability and validity for the PWBS, with Cronbach's α ranging from 0.70 to 0.90 for the subscales (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

RESULTS

Adolescents and young adults (N= 200) mean age 18.1, (SD= 4.2) participated in the study. Male (50%) and female (50%) were screened from different educational institutions via Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWBS) and Kessler's Psychological Distress Scale (K10).

Table 1: ***Demographics of the Participants***

S. No	***Variable***	***F***	**%**
1.	**Participants**	200	
2.	**Gender**	-	-
a	Male	100	50
b	Female	*100*	50
3.	**Educational attainment**		
a	Bachelors	140	70
b	Masters	60	30
		Mean (M)	***SD***
4	Age	18.1	4.2
5	MAAS,	9.4	3.5
6	PWBS	6.7	2.9
7	K10	8.6	4.9

Table 2: ***Pearson Correlation Matrix of Key Variables (N = 200)***

Variables	**MAAS**	**PWBS**	**K10**
1. MAAS	1	**.52*****	**–.46*****
2. PWBS		1	**–.55*****
3. K10			1

Table 2 demonstrated the correlation matrix and indicates that Mindfulness is positively correlated with Psychological Wellbeing, *r*= 0.52 and Psychological Distress is negatively correlated with both Mindfulness *r*= -0.46 and Psychological Wellbeing *r*= -0.55.

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Table 3: ***Regression Analysis Results Predicting Psychological Wellbeing***

Predictor	*Outcome Variable*	*β*	*p*
MAAS	PWBS	0.45	< 0.01
K10	PWBS	−0.38	< 0.01

Table 3 indicated the results of the regression analysis revealed a significant relationship between mindfulness and psychological well-being among adolescents and young adults. Specifically, Mindfulness positively predicts psychological wellbeing, β = 0.45, p < 0.01, while psychological distress (K10) negatively predicts psychological wellbeing, β = -0.38, p < 0.01.

Table 4: ***Mediation Analysis Using Psychological Distress as a Mediator***

Path	**B**	**β**	**SE**	**p**
Mindfulness → Distress	−0.42	−0.46	0.07	< 0.001
Distress → Wellbeing	−0.50	−0.55	0.08	< 0.001
Mindfulness → Wellbeing (total effect)	0.52	0.58	0.06	< 0.001
Mindfulness → Wellbeing (direct effect)	0.31	0.34	0.07	< 0.01
Indirect Effect (a × b)	0.21			< 0.01

Table 4 indicated the mediation analysis using ordinary least square path analysis revealed that mindfulness partially mediated the relationship between emotional distress and psychological well-being (measured with K10), β = 0.21, p < 0.01. The indirect effect of mindfulness on psychological well-being through emotional distress was significant, with a bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval of 0.12 to 0.33.

DISCUSSION

The present study investigated the utmost significance of mindfulness in promoting psychological well-being among adolescents and the young adults. previous studies were consistent, suggesting that individuals who show higher levels of mindfulness tend to experience better psychological well-being, including greater autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. The study's finding revealed that mindfulness plays a significant role in the relationship between emotional distress and psychological well-being. Particularly the findings indicate that mindfulness reduces emotional distress as a result of which psychological well-being enhances and flourishes. This is compatible with researches conducted previously showing that mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) can mitigate the symptoms of anxiety and depression and intensify overall mental health (Kabat-Zinn, 2003) effectively.

Furthermore, the results of the present study support the idea that mindfulness might serve as a protective factor against the detrimental impacts of emotional distress on psychological health. According to earlier research, mindfulness can assist people in cultivating a nonjudgmental awareness of their thoughts and feelings, which enables them to react to difficult circumstances in a more adaptive manner (Hofmann et al., 2010). Additionally, mindfulness can help with emotional regulation, which is a crucial aspect of psychological well-being, according to the study's findings (Gross & Thompson, 2007). People are more susceptible to emotional discomfort and mental health problems during the teenage and young adult developmental stages, which can have long-term effects on their mental health and overall well-being (Patel et al., 2007). The outcomes of this report propose that the mindfulness-based interventions, in this population, MBIs can be an efficient way to encourage psychological well-being and lessen the emotional distress. This is consistent with

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previous research that has revealed that MBIs can be advantageous for the adolescents and young adults (Zenner et al., 2014).

Furthermore, the results of the study underline the significance of integrating mindfulness-based therapies into treatment programs for young adults and adolescents with mental health issues. This can include mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT), mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) programs, and other mindfulness-based therapies. These treatments can be given in a number of places, such as mental health clinics, universities, and schools. These therapies have the potential to improve the psychological well-being and general quality of life of adolescents and young adults by encouraging mindfulness and lowering emotional discomfort. To sum up, this study offers more proof of the value of mindfulness in fostering young adults' and adolescents' psychological health. According to the results, mindfulness-based therapies may be a useful means of enhancing mental health in this group and may be crucial in lowering emotional distress and fostering psychological well-being. Future studies should focus on creating more accessible and successful mindfulness-based programs for adolescents and young adults, as well as on the advantages of mindfulness-based therapies for this demographic.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Both the male and female participants (*n= 200*) were the part of this study. The participants were screened from the city, Peshawar, the region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Additionally, the findings demonstrate that future studies with the mindfulness-based interventions may be a productive way to promote psychological well-being among adolescents and young adults. By reducing emotional distress and enhancing mindfulness, individuals can unfold way better coping techniques and strategies improving their overall mental health. In general, this study adds to our understanding of the complicated interplay between mindfulness, emotional distress, and psychological well-being among adolescents and young adults. The findings have significant implications for the development of interventions which aim to promote mental health and well-being in this population.

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