

Mindfulness and Well-Being: A Survey About the Relationship Between Present Awareness in Community College Students and their Physical and Mental Well-Being

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Abstract

Mindfulness is the ability to be aware of the present surroundings while acknowledging one's feelings and state of mind. This study aims towards gaining understanding of the link between practicing mindfulness and how it impacts the mental and physical well-being of community college students. We surveyed 116 participants in the psychology 101 and 201 classes at College of Western Idaho. It was found that there is a positive correlation between mindfulness and the student's self-esteem which would mean that as the level of mindfulness increased, the level of self-esteem increased. A limitation that could be further researched for future studies that we ran into are on different genders and mindfulness attributions and there was a gender split of men, women, prefer not to say and other were not equal, and making the gender population more represented would result in different findings.

Keywords: Mindfulness, college students, well-being, self-esteem

Mindfulness and Well-Being: A Survey About the Relationship Between Present Awareness in Community College Students and their Physical and Mental Well-Being

Mindfulness is defined as the ability of a person to be attentive and aware of their present surroundings and situation and has been shown to have a direct correlation with multiple aspects of an individual's well-being (Brown & Ryan, 2003, Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Not being able to utilize mindfulness can have an impact on stress, anxiety, and lead to struggles in multiple social environments such as school (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Mindfulness is an important building block on a student's social skills and helps prepare them for the challenges of life and stressful situations (Finn, 2006).

Mindfulness practices are accessible and approachable options for community college students who face common stressors associated with college life. Mindfulness techniques focus on awareness by bringing attention to the inner workings of the body and mind through methods such as breathwork, yoga, and non-judgmental acknowledgement of thoughts and emotions (Danoff-Burg & Robert, 2010; Plouffe & O'Neal, 2020; Christopher, 2018). These types of mindful approaches are effective in providing students with mechanisms that support coping with stressful situations, greater resilience in positive affect, and higher senses of overall well-being (Shearer et al., 2016; Rowland et al., 2020; Ko et al., 2018).

This research is investigating whether mindfulness is related to community college students' well-being. It is shown that there are mental and physical benefits to practicing mindfulness techniques (Brown & Ryan, 2003). I hypothesized that mindfulness is related to a college student's happiness. I survey student's gender, student's quality of work, and student's self-esteem all in relation to mindfulness.

The overarching research question is, “Is there a relationship between mindfulness and community college students’ well-being”. More distinct research questions are as follows:

- RQ1: Are men and women different in their mindfulness?
- H1: Mindfulness has different effects in men and women.
- RQ2: Is there a relationship between mindfulness and self-esteem?
- H2: Mindfulness is related to self-esteem.
- RQ3: Is there a relationship between mindfulness and quality of work?
- H3: Mindfulness has a relationship with the quality of an individual’s work.

PSYC 101 will be encouraged by their professors to complete the survey and will receive extra credit for their time. The study’s participants will consist of College of Western Idaho students that are currently enrolled in Psychology 101. The start of the survey will include a copy of the consent form, and it must be filled out completely before answering questions. The surveys will be available electronically through Google Forms. Age and gender will be the only personal identifiers recorded. Collected data will be kept in a database that is password protected and will be destroyed after 5 years.

Method

Participants

There was a total of 116 participants, with 25 participants identifying as “men”, 88 identified as “women”, and three identified as “other”. All participants were students enrolled in the 2020 Spring semester of PSYC 101 at the College of Western Idaho (CWI).

Measures

Sixteen questions were written about mindfulness, meditation, student's psychical and mental well-being, college schoolwork, and the school environment. A Likert Scale was used for fifteen questions. The Likert Scale was used due to the answers showing more solid results with how strongly student's felt about each question. The other question was a fill in the blank about gender. Refer to Appendix A for the sixteen list survey questions.

Procedure

We recruited participants by having PSYC 101 and PSYC 201 faculty share the survey link with their students through the CWI blackboard site. The participants were informed that they must be 18 or older to participate in the survey. The faculty got to decide whether to offer extra credit for filling out the survey. If the faculty made the survey required for class credit, they also had to offer an alternative assignment as well.

The surveys were distributed through Google Forms and began with a page of consent. The participants then had to click "next" to continue to the survey if they are 18 years or older. If they did not agree that they were 18 years of age or older, they could not further participation. Participants then had to take a screenshot of the consent form.

Data is anonymous, which means that only the faculty advisor accessed the data in Google Forms after the survey was collected live. Once the survey was closed, the advisor shared the data by CWI blackboard with the team members to be stored on the CWI blackboard file share. Both Google Forms and the CWI file share are password protected. Surveys will be deleted 5 years from the date they were closed.

Results

We had hypothesized that people who practice mindfulness have a difference in gender, with the gender options being men, women, prefer not to say, and other. Group 1, or men, had 25 participants. Group 2, or women, had 88 participants. Group 3, or prefer not to say, had zero participants. Group 4, or other, had three participants. Participants marked their gender on a scale of 1-4 with the correct gender coded for the correct number. A One-Way ANOVA revealed that there was no significant difference between the groups, $F(2, 113) = .58$, $p = .561$ (see Table 1).

The second hypothesis was that people who practiced mindfulness have no relationship, sometimes a relationship, or have a relationship with self-esteem. Group one had no relationship between mindfulness and self-esteem ($N = 31$), group two sometimes had a relationship between mindfulness and self-esteem ($N = 44$), and group three had a relationship between mindfulness and self-esteem ($N = 41$). For a scale of 1 being no relationship, 2 being some relationship, and 3 being a relationship, there was a mean of 2.09 and a standard deviation of .79. A Bivariate Correlation revealed that there was a significance between mindfulness and self-esteem, $r(114) = .30$, $p = .001$, $r^2 = .09$. As the practice of mindfulness increased, the level of self-esteem increased (see Figure 1).

The third hypothesis was that people who practiced mindfulness have no relationship, sometimes a relationship, or have a relationship with quality of school work. Group one had no relationship between mindfulness and quality of school work ($N = 14$), group two sometimes had a relationship between mindfulness and quality of work ($N = 31$), and group three had a relationship between mindfulness and quality of work ($N = 71$). For a scale of 1 being no relationship, 2 being some relationship, and 3 being a relationship, there was a mean of 2.49 and

a standard deviation of .70. a Bivariate Correlation revealed that there was not a significance between mindfulness and quality of school work, $r(114) = .11, p = .223$.

Discussion

Our hypothesis that there is a difference in mindfulness practice and different genders of men, women, prefer not to say, and other was found to have no significant difference. It was noticeable that there were more women who participated in the study, so it was surprising. Without significant findings it is inconclusive. A previous study ruled a mindfulness link with gender differences as inconclusive as well (Gould et al., 2012). Perhaps with a more equal amount of genders who answered the survey questions of participation in mindfulness, this study could be repeated to find a difference.

The hypothesis that linked a relationship between mindfulness and self-esteem with none, sometimes, and yes showed significance. Those who practice mindfulness do have an increase significance of self-esteem. This is supported from a previous study that linked mindfulness to lower social anxiety and higher self-esteem (Rasmussen & Pidgeon, 2011). This shows that the ability to be aware of the present surroundings while also acknowledging emotions and physical well-being can improve one's self-esteem.

The hypothesis that linked a relationship between mindfulness and quality of school work with none, sometimes, and yes showed no significance. Those who practiced mindfulness did not have a correlation with their quality of school work. Because the p-value was .223, although no significance indicated, was not statistically low or high. Further studies with a higher number of participants and a larger number of questions asking about school work could show different results.

Methodological Limitations

Surveys can be unreliable. Our questions are short and to the point, and they may not represent the whole picture for participants. We asked questions about stress management, eating habits, self-esteem, school work quality, etc., which are questions that may need more elaboration. Student's experience with those variables may feel different about them depending on the time of year, such as the beginning of the semester or the end of the semester. Their outside factors such as employment can affect those variables as well.

Statistical Limitations

A statistical limitation for this study was the inequality between gender replies of the survey. If there was an equal reply between men and women who participated, there could be a difference in the practice of mindfulness. This study is important because it brings awareness for how practicing mindfulness impacts community college students. It is necessary that this type of research continues because our results left us with questions. Further research may benefit with doing an experiment about mindfulness training on students. Our research questions could get more results with an experiment than a survey because the questions could get a deeper dive into what the students are experiencing during the school year while intertwining mindfulness. College students bring bright discoveries for society's future, and ingraining mindfulness could unpack positive benefits to college students.

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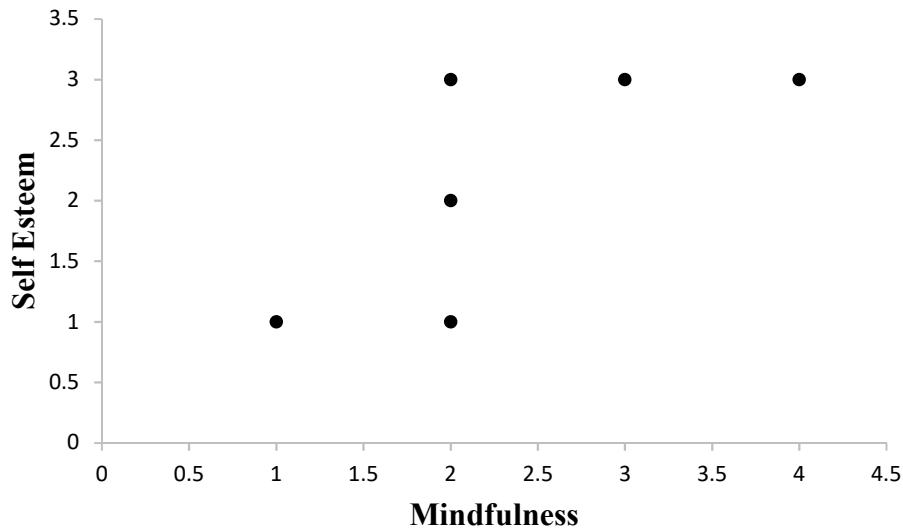
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Table 1*Different Genders and Their Relationship to Mindfulness*

Gender	<i>n</i>	%
Men	25	21.55
Women	88	75.86
Prefer not to say	0	0
Other	3	2.59

Note. A One-Way ANOVA found no significant difference between the four groups ($p = .561$).

Each gender replied to the survey a question about their relationship to mindfulness.

Figure 1*The Correlation Between Mindfulness and Self-Esteem*

Note. As the level of mindfulness practice increased, the level of self-esteem increased. ($p = .001$)

Appendix A

Survey Questions

1: Have you practiced mindfulness before?

Never [] Sometimes [] A lot [] Every day []

2: Practicing mindfulness has decreased your stress levels.

Never [] Sometimes [] A lot [] Every day []

3: The pandemic has disrupted your practice of mindfulness.

Not at all [] Sometimes [] Yes []

4: The practice of meditation improves your awareness.

Never [] Sometimes [] Yes

5: Practicing mindfulness lowers your heart rate.

Never [] Sometimes [] Every time []

6: Practicing mindfulness helps you focus more on homework and in class.

Never [] Sometimes [] Yes []

7: Practicing mindfulness helps your public speaking anxiety.

No [] Sometimes [] Yes [] Every time []

8: Does your self-esteem improve when you only focus on the present moment?

No [] Sometimes [] Yes []

9: Do you feel like your quality of schoolwork is better when you focus on the present moment?

No [] Sometimes [] Yes []

10: I am more aware of my surroundings after exercise.

Strongly Disagree [] Disagree [] Agree [] Strongly Agree []

11: I am more likely to eat unhealthily when I am emotionally exhausted.

Strongly Disagree [] Disagree [] Agree [] Strongly Agree []

12: I perform better on exams after taking a moment to clear my head.

Strongly Disagree [] Disagree [] Agree [] Strongly Agree []

13: Practicing mindfulness provides me with a stronger sense of confidence in tasks I undertake.

Strongly Disagree [] Disagree [] Agree [] Strongly Agree []

14: Emotionally stimulating circumstances are more manageable when I meditate.

Strongly Disagree [] Disagree [] Agree [] Strongly Agree []

15: Practicing mindfulness endows me with a better sense of my emotions, thoughts, and surrounding circumstances.

Strongly Disagree [] Disagree [] Agree [] Strongly Agree []

16: What is your gender?

Male [] Female [] Prefer not to say [] Other []