

A Study of Anxiety among University Students in Relation to Mindfulness

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Abstract

Students are the building blocks of any society. Therefore, it is the priority of all institutions to take responsibility of their academics as also health. Academic performance is one of the major reasons behind student's anxiety. This age group is highly vulnerable to exhibit anxiety because of various psychological as well as physical changes occurring at this span of life. The present study was aimed to explore the relationship between mindfulness and anxiety among university students. In the present research study anxiety along with mindfulness were studied on a sample of 200 students (N=200). The measures used were: State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI, Spielberger, et al., 1983) and Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS, trait version, Brown & Ryan, 2007). Results from the present study revealed significant negative correlation ($r = -.468 < .01$) between anxiety and the trait of mindfulness.

Key words: Anxiety, Mindfulness.

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Introduction

Adolescence is known as the “age of opportunities”. In India, major cause of anxiety among adolescents is parental expectations for higher educational qualifications and pressure for academic merits (Deb, 2001). In order to fulfil the expectations adolescents remain under constant pressure.

In addition, academic performance among university students leads to increase in symptoms as well as severity of anxiety (Goodman, 2005). Various factors like sense of competition, fear of exams, anticipation of exam result, delayed placements, peer pressure, work burden, financial issues along with various family factors play a significant role in causing anxiety among students (Semple, 2011). It is well documented that continuous anxiety is related to severe health issues especially mental health problems (Kendall et al., 2006).

In most of the cases anxiety remains unreported until it reaches in acute phase. Overcoming acute anxiety needs immediate

help. Consequences of anxiety are more serious because of its multidimensional impacts and require immediate attention. Ability to perform better, maintain healthy relationships and quality of life are essential goals that students want to fulfil (Pahl & Barrett, 2010).

Students experiencing anxiety at any phase of life may have irritability, frequent drop-outs from institutions and lower grades (Mazzone, 2017) resulting in overall significant impairment in personal as well social life.

In last ten years, mindfulness has been studied and applied to help students facing various psychological issues. Mindfulness emphasizes on paying attention at the present in a particular way (Kabat-Zinn, 1994).

Rationale of the present study:

The demanding nature of academics leads to anxiety among students. Anxiety is characterized by multidimensional symptoms i.e. somatic, cognitive and behavioural. Students may have physical health issues, family

problems, peer pressure, competence in career that often leads to feelings of discomfort.

Furthermore, all such factors ultimately affect psychological well-being of students ranging from low self-confidence to extreme cases of worry.

University students are easily affected because of various goals and responsibilities on them during this age span of life. Their performance in academics usually depends on the coping strategies they use to encounter anxiety. The present study makes an attempt to explore the relationship between anxiety and the trait of mindfulness.

Objectives

- To study the relationship between anxiety and the trait of mindfulness among university students.

Hypothesis

- There shall be significant inverse relationship between anxiety and the trait of mindfulness among university students.

Method

Sample:

The target population of the study was university students with the age group of 16-19 years. The sample for the present research comprises of 200 (N=200) adolescents. The sample is further categorized on the basis of gender, male (n=100) and female (n=100) from the state of Haryana, India.

Tools:

The measures used in the study were selected in accordance with the objective of the study.

1. State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI; Spielberger et al., 1983): The STAI consists of two subscales, namely trait anxiety and state anxiety to assess anxiety. This scale has 40 items which are scored from 0 to 03. Cronbach alpha coefficients are 0.91 and 0.94 respectively for trait and state anxiety with test-retest reliability of 0.81 and 0.40 (Echeburua, 1993).

2. Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS, trait version; Brown & Ryan, 2007): There are 15 items in this scale to measure the trait of mindfulness. It is a short version scale which takes hardly five minutes or less to complete. The scale possesses good psychometric properties with Cronbach alpha.80 to .90. Research also supports high group validity, and criterion validity for the same scale.

Procedure

After establishing the rapport with the subjects, the participants were briefed about the nature and purpose of study. The dimension of anxiety was studied with the help of STAI and the trait of mindfulness was assessed with the help of MAAS. The scales were administered individually on each and every participant. The scores on the respected measures were obtained as per the scoring standards and the data obtained was put to statistical analysis.

Statistical Analysis:

The data obtained was analysed statistically by using Descriptive statistics and Pearson product moment correlation to explore the significance of objectives and hypotheses pertaining to the variables selected.

Results

The data obtained from the present study was analyzed. Mean, standard deviation and Pearson's product moment coefficient of correlation was used to explore the relationship among the variables of the present study.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Inter Correlation Matrix (N=200).

Variables	N	Mean	Std.Deviation	Mindfulness	Anxiety
Mindfulness	200	52.57	9.6	1	-.468**
Anxiety	200	87.32	10.1	-.468**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two tailed).

Table No. 1 reveals that the mean value and standard deviation for the variable mindfulness are 52.57 and 9.6 respectively. In addition for variable anxiety mean value is 87.32 and standard deviation is 10.1.

Furthermore, the findings as depicted in the Table No.1 establish the significant negative correlation ($r = -.468 < .01$) between the anxiety and trait of mindfulness.

Discussion

The findings obtained from the present study establish the significant negative correlation between anxiety and the trait of mindfulness. Therefore, it can be inferred that students who are higher on the trait of mindfulness exhibit less anxiety. It can be concluded that the trait of mindfulness can help adolescents in dealing with anxiety.

Present research findings are consistent with the finding of various other research studies conducted in past (Vollestad, et al., 2011). The findings of the present study are also in line with Sharma, et al., (2012) where they concluded that high scores on the trait of mindfulness predict lower scores on anxiety. Anxious thoughts are catastrophic in nature. It is also observed that anxiety is maintained by rumination of anxious thoughts, and mindfulness is effective in breaking this rumination (Baer, 2006).

The findings of the present study are in line with the hypotheses of the study that there shall be a significant inverse relationship between anxiety and the trait of mindfulness among the university students.

Future suggestions and Limitations:

The present study establishes the inverse correlation between anxiety and the trait of mindfulness among university students. Anxiety comes when various situations in life are perceived more dangerous than reality. Mindfulness also helps to avoid free floating anxiety. Furthermore, mindfulness helps in differentiating various anxiety provoking situations and cues that exaggerate these situations. The main limitation of the present study is its small sample size. Moreover, the study was exploratory in nature it explored the relationship between the trait of mindfulness and anxiety. There is need of incorporating mindfulness based intervention programmes, which will help students in dealing with anxiety. In addition students can differentiate between real anxiety and pseudo anxiety as a result they gain a sense of confidence that they can tackle with anxiety.

Conclusion

The present study established that anxiety and the trait of mindfulness are related to each other. On the basis of the present study it is inferred that there is an inverse relationship between anxiety and the trait of mindfulness. Study suggests the need incorporating mindfulness based intervention programmes, which will help students in dealing with anxiety.

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