

Effect of Mindfulness on Dysfunctional Attitude and Automatic Thoughts in Relation to Gender

Subhash Meena Mohua Das Gupta***

Abstract

Dysfunctional attitude and Automatic Thoughts are major contributors to Depression. In present time lot of emphasis have been laid upon the study of mindfulness, which have been proved to have reducing effects on depression. Mindfulness denotes the tendency to be mindful of moment-to-moment experience. Mindfulness theory addresses awareness of context in the present moment. By Dysfunctional Attitude we mean cognitive distortions and, an automatic thought means the images or thoughts that pop up in mind without conscious efforts. These are the automatic negative statements about the self and such statements lead to development and retention of depression.

The purpose of the present study is to see the effects of Mindfulness on Dysfunctional Attitude and Automatic Thoughts. The study also aimed to see gender difference in mindfulness.

In present study, the scales used are The Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), developed by Kirk W. Brown and Richard M. Ryan, Dysfunctional Attitude Scale developed by Arlene Weissman and Automatic Thoughts Questions developed by Phillip C. Kendall and Steven D. Hollon. The sample consists of 50 males and 50 females between ages 30 -50 years. The scales were administered individually on all the participants. The statistics applied are correlation and t-ratio.

The result found in the study is that there is no significant correlation between mindfulness, dysfunctional attitude and automatic thoughts. Also no gender differences have been found in mindfulness.

It provides initial evidence consistent with the previous notion that the benefit of mindfulness may be achieved through reducing negative cognition. The current findings also contribute to our knowledge regarding the gender effect on negative cognition which affect on well-being of females.

Keywords: *Mindfulness, Dysfunctional Attitude, Automatic Thinking, Gender*

*About Authors: *Ph.D., Assistant Professor; **M.A. (Psychology)*

Department of Psychology, Vasanta College for Women, Rajghat Fort, Varanasi.

Introduction

In present time, we are living in a highly competitive and stressful world where daily needs are met after a lot of strivings. The working conditions are so hectic in recent times that people suffer from not just physiological disorders but also from various psychological disorders. Depression is one of the most common mental disorders people get affected by in recent times. In the most recent surveys, it has been found that major depressive disorder has the highest lifetime prevalence (almost 17 per

cent) of any psychiatric disorder. Studies have also found that women are more prone to the major depressive disorders than men. There are many factors that contribute to the development of depression but in present study the focus has been laid upon only two factors that is, Dysfunctional Attitude and Automatic Thoughts. Studies have proved the fact that these two factors contribute a lot in the origin, development and maintenance of depression.

Dysfunctional Attitude is the negatively biased assumptions and beliefs regarding the

self, world and the future. Many of the cognitive changes reflect an information processing bias in which the importance of negatively valent (pessimistic) information is exaggerated and the importance of positively valent (optimistic) information is minimized. These cognitive changes may influence dysfunctional attitudes. The level of dysfunctional attitudes has also been shown to be higher than normal in patients with self hard behavior and personality disorder. However, the mindfulness has been seen to have reducing effects on the dysfunctional attitudes. In Beck's cognitive model of depression individuals vulnerable to depression have maladaptive schemas which remain dormant until triggered by stressful life events. Dysfunctional beliefs such as perfectionism and need for approval reflect the content of these relatively stable schemas.

Automatic thoughts a concept in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy are images or mental activity that occurs as a response to a trigger (like an action or event). They are automatic and 'pop up' or flash in your mind without conscious thought. Automatic thoughts can be both beneficial and can have negative effects. It can be beneficial while, for example, you are driving and it starts raining very heavily. Automatically you think I need to be careful which leads to feeling of anxiety that causes you to drive more carefully. While it can be negative for those people who have trouble with depression and anxiety. For example: a person with anxiety sees an acquaintance frowning in their direction. They immediately think 'that person hates me', which leads to feelings of anxiety, worry, and sadness. Thoughts like this can be damaging and unnecessary. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy focuses on negative thought patterns and automatic thoughts that make people depressed or anxious. According to Beck's cognitive therapy model, negative Life events activate the schemas and bring about

"negative automatic thoughts", which lead to unpleasant feelings like anger, anxiety, guilt and sadness (Demiralp & Oflaz, 2007). Automatic thoughts are "the interpretations that people make related to a situation" (Beck, 2001). They are the internal dialogues that individuals have about themselves, their world and their future. Generally, being spontaneous, latent and serial, they can appear suddenly in the human mind. They are combined with certain feelings based on their content and meaning. Individuals are not generally aware of automatic thoughts, though they are aware of the accompanying feelings. These are the thoughts that pop into people's heads. When we are talking about automatic thoughts, again, mindfulness has reducing effects on this too.

Mindfulness is the opposite of mindlessness. It means waking up out of autopilot and taking 'steering wheel' of our attention again. We can practice mindfulness by maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations and the surrounding environment. Mindfulness also involves non-judgement, meaning that we pay attention to our thoughts and feelings with the attitudes of an impartial witness without believing them. Jon Kabat Zinn (2003) defines mindfulness as "paying attention; on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgementally. There are three components of this definition:

On purpose: mindfulness involves our conscious and deliberate direction of our attention. When we are on autopilot, our attention is being swept by a never ending (and not always positive) current of thought processes but when we're mindful we wake up and step out of that current by placing attention where we choose. Another way of saying 'on purpose' is consciously. We are living more consciously, more awake, more fully ourselves when we pay attention in this way. Secondly, our attention is immersed. And third, our attention is held.

In the present moment: If we leave it to its own device's, our mind habitually wanders away from the present moment. It constantly is caught up in the replaying the past and projecting into the future. Mindful attention is completely engaged in the present moment experience- the here and now. We let go of the tension caused by wanting things to be different, the tension of constant wanting more and instead we accept moment as it is.

Non judgementally: While practicing mindfulness we are not aiming to control or stopping or suppressing our thoughts. We simply aim to pay attention to our experiences as they arise without judging or labelling them in any way. Mindfulness then allows us to become the watcher of sense perception, thoughts and emotions as they arise without being caught up in them and being swept away in their current. Becoming the watcher in this way, we are less likely to mechanically play out old habitual ways of thinking and living. It opens up a new freedom and choice in our lives. It has been proved that mindfulness reduces depression.

The concept of mindfulness is not new. Mindfulness is English translation of the "PALI" word sati. Pali was a language of Buddhist psychology 2500 years ago and mindfulness is the core teaching of this tradition. Sati connotes awareness, attention and remembering. Mindfulness is to be attentive towards the task you are into and it's also about recognizing the present moment with a friendly attitude. It's a skill which allow us to be less reactive to what is happening in the moment or simply it allow us to relate to the experience in the fullest, thus when we are mindful about the moment we are not entangled in the past or future and neither we are rejected or clinging to what is happening in the moment, i.e. we are present in the open-hearted way, and such a attention generates energy, clear headedness and joy. Fortunately, it's a skill which can be cultivated by anyone. As it has the

property of making one aware about the importance of living in present, this technique seems to very useful in the psychotherapy as most of the problem occurs when one is either worried about the future or when one is clinged to their past (Aanchal Sharda & Subhash Meena, 2015).

About the present study: In the explanation of the keywords an important fact that has been underlined is that depression has two contributory factors, that is, dysfunctional attitudes and automatic thoughts. Also, it has been clarified that mindfulness has reducing effects on depression. Taking in notice both these facts, the present study has been done to find out whether mindfulness has any relationship with dysfunctional attitudes and automatic thoughts.

Objectives

The following objectives were framed on the basis of review:

- To see the relationship between Mindfulness and Dysfunctional Attitudes.
- To see the relationship between Mindfulness and Automatic Thoughts.
- To find out significant difference between mindfulness, dysfunctional attitude and automatic thoughts of male and female.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were framed to fulfil the objectives of the study:

- There will be significant correlation between Mindfulness and Dysfunctional Attitudes.
- There will be significant correlation between Mindfulness and Automatic Thoughts.
- There will be no significant difference between Mindfulness gender..

Methodology

Design

The present research is a correlational study in which effects of mindfulness were studied upon dysfunctional attitude and automatic thoughts in relation to gender. Independent variables in the study were mindfulness and gender and dependent variable were dysfunctional attitude and automatic thoughts.

Sample

For the present study an incidental purposive random sample consists of 100 adults, (50 male and 50 female) between the age group of 30 to 50 years from Patna were randomly taken.

Tools

- MAAS (The Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale, 2003): Kirk W. Brown and Richard M. Ryan developed this scale. It consists of 15 items. The scale has a reliability ranging of 0.82 and 0.87 in students and adult samples (respectively). The test is valid with many other tests such as NEO-PI, NEO-FFI etc. The scale was a 6-point Likert scale.
- DAS (Dysfunctional Attitude Scale, 2004): Arlene Weissman developed this scale. It consists of 40 items. The items contained on the DAS are based on

Beck's cognitive therapy model and present 7 major value systems: Approval, Love, Achievement, Entitlement, Omnipotence and Autonomy. The scale has a reliability ranging from 0.84 to 0.92. The test is valid with (BDI). The scale was a 7-point scale.

- ATQ (Automatic Thought Questionnaire, 1988): Phillip C. Kendall and Steven D. Hollon developed this scale. It consists of 30 items. ATQ taps 4 aspects of these automatic thoughts: personal maladjustment and desire for change (PMDC), negative self-concepts and negative expectations (NSNE), low self-esteem (LSE), and Helplessness. The scale has a reliability of 0.97. The test is valid with BDI and MMPI. The scale is a 5-point scale.

Results and Discussion

Table No.1: Showing Mean, Standard Deviation and t-ratio of Mindfulness, Dysfunctional attitude and automatic thoughts among males and females.

Dimensions	Gender	N	Mean	S.D	t
Mindfulness	Male	50	4.46	3.78	0.143
	Female	50	4.58	4.04	
Dysfunctional Attitude	Male	50	76.86	15.52	1.08
	Female	50	96.94	29.52	
Automatic Thoughts	Male	50	60.48	15.92	0.163
	Female	50	60.98	14.81	

** P<0.01 *P<0.05

From the above result table it is found that there is no significant difference among male and female on mindfulness, dysfunctional attitude and automatic thoughts dimensions. It indicates that there is no effect of gender on these dimensions. Both males and females use their own mindfulness techniques to deal with their daily life hassles and automatic thoughts. But there is slight mean difference was found on dysfunctional attitude among males (76.86) and females (96.94) and this indicates that females are more prone to dysfunctional belief i.e. negative cognitions which also affects their quality of life. Ciarrochi (2004) compared the relationship between negative cognition, and positive and negative indices of well-being. He used seven negative indices of well-being including anxiety and depressive symptoms, and three positive indicators of well-being including

life satisfaction in his study. Although it was found that dysfunctional belief accounted for more variance in negative indices of wellbeing, life satisfaction was significantly and negatively correlated with dysfunctional belief. Another study also provided empirical support for the notion that negative cognition was associated with quality of life. Wong, Chan and Lau (2010) showed that dysfunctional attitudes were negatively correlated with some domains of quality of life including leisure activities and social relationship satisfaction. Lewinsohn et al. (2000) conducted a study among 1507 adolescents and found that high level of negative cognition was a significant contributor to the onset of major depressive disorder. Other previous studies have also shown that negative cognition is positively correlated with recurrence of depression (Segal et al. 2002).

Table no. 2 Correlation between Mindfulness (MAAS), Dysfunctional attitude (DAS) and Automatic thoughts (ATQ) (N=100).

		MAAS	DAS	ATQ
MAAS	Pearson Correlation	1	.020	-.093
DAS	Pearson Correlation		1	-.124
ATQ	Pearson Correlation			1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table no 1. shows that there is no significant correlation between mindfulness and dysfunctional attitude. The correlation between mindfulness and dysfunctional attitude is 0.020, which is not significant according to the table values. Thus, the hypothesis i.e. there will be significant correlation between mindfulness and dysfunctional attitude is not proved. This result goes in against to some research findings, which

show that mindfulness has reducing effects on dysfunctional attitudes (Kuehner, Huffziqer, & Liebsch, 2009).

From the above result table the correlation between mindfulness and automatic thoughts is -0.093 which is not significant according to the table value. These results revealed that the hypothesis which states that, there will be significant correlation between

mindfulness and automatic thoughts is not proved. Researchers support this finding. Empirical research has not examined associations between mindfulness and responses to negative automatic thoughts, such as the ability to let go of negative cognition (Paul A. Frewen, Elspeth M. Evans, Nicholas Maraj, David J. A. Dozois, 2008). Although research finding support the fact the automatic thoughts are contributory factors to depression, mindfulness is helpful in reducing depression, still no relation between mindfulness, and automatic thoughts are found.

Table no. 1 also shows that there is no significant relationship between dysfunctional attitude and automatic thoughts. The correlation found between dysfunctional attitude and automatic thoughts is found to be -0.124, which is less than the table values. Thus there is no significant correlation between the both. The same fact is supported by various studies in which no relationship between the two variables is found. 'Automatic thoughts are not directly related to the dysfunctional attitudes' (Michele Furlong & Tian Po Oei, 2002).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the present study tried to find out the relationship between mindfulness and automatic thoughts from a cognitive perspective. Importantly, it provides initial evidence consistent with the previous notion that the benefit of mindfulness may be achieved through reducing negative cognition. The current findings also contribute to our knowledge regarding the gender effect on negative cognition which affect on well-being of females. Although the limitations of the study necessitate caution as regards the results, it should provide enough stimulation for further research using an improved design to verify the present findings. Future, work should replicate and modify the present study design to reach a more persuasive conclusion.

References

- Aanchal Sharda & Subhash Meena (2015). A Nurturing Approach Towards Your Own Physical and Mental Well Being. In Nandita Chaube (Ed.) Spirituality and Human Psyche. SansRack Publishing Solutions Private Limited: Patridge India. Pp. 275-281.
- Beck, J. S. (2001). Cognitive Therapy: Basic Principles and Beyond. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Ciarrochi, J. (2004). Relationships between dysfunctional beliefs and positive and negative indices of well-being: A critical evaluation of the common beliefs survey-III. *Journal of Rational-Emotive and Cognitive Behavior Therapy*, 22 (3), 171-188.
- Demiralp, M. & Oflaz, F. (2007). Cognitive behavioral therapy techniques and psychiatric nursing practice. *Anatolian Journal of Psychiatry*, 8, 132-139.
- Frewen, P. A., Evans, E. M., & Maraj, N. et al., (2008). *Cogn Ther Res.*, 32, 758. Doi: 10.1007/s10608-007-9142-1.
- Furlong, M., & Oei, T.P. (2002). Changes to automatic thoughts and dysfunctional attitudes in group CBT for depression. *Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapy*, 30 (3), Doi: 10.1017/s1352465802003107.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). Mindfulness-based interventions in context: Past, present, and future. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 10(2), 144-156.
- Kuehner, C., Huffziqer, S., Liebsch, K. (2009). Rumination, distraction and mindful self-focus: effects on mood, dysfunctional attitudes and cortisol stress response. *Psychol Med.*, 39(2), 219-28.

- Lewinsohn, P. M., Rohde, P., Seeley, J. R., Klein, D. N., & Gotlib, I. H. (2000). Natural course of adolescent major depressive disorder in a community sample: Predictors of recurrence in young adults. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 157, 1584-1591.
- Segal, Z., Williams, M., & Teasdale, J. (2002). *Mindfulness based cognitive therapy for depression: A new approach to prevent relapse*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Wong, D. F. K., Chan, K. S., & Lau, Y. (2010). The role of perfectionism and dysfunctional attitudes in depression and quality of life of a community sample of Chinese adults in Hong Kong. *International Journal of Mental Health*, 39(4), 40-48.

