Role of Mindfulness Practices on Academic Stress of College Students

Anuradha Sharma, Anu Chauhan

Department of Psychology, SRMUH, Delhi-NCR

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ABSTRACT

Academic stress has become a significant challenge for students across all educational levels, often resulting in anxiety, burnout, reduced motivation, and impaired cognitive performance. The pressure to meet academic expectations, manage heavy workloads, and sustain high performance underscores the urgent need for effective stress-reduction strategies in education. Mindfulness—defined as purposeful, present-moment awareness without judgment—has been recognized as a promising approach for enhancing emotional regulation, reducing stress, and promoting overall well-being.

This study examined the impact of mindfulness practices on reducing academic stress among 200 students aged 16–22, randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. The experimental group underwent an eight-week structured mindfulness program, including guided meditation, mindful breathing, reflective journaling, and body scan techniques. Standardized instruments, the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ), were administered pre- and post-intervention.

Results demonstrated a statistically significant reduction in perceived stress among students who received mindfulness training compared to controls. Gender-based differences emerged, with female students showing higher mindfulness scores and slightly lower stress levels. Participants also reported improved concentration, time management, sleep quality, and a more balanced approach to academic challenges. These findings support the integration of mindfulness programs into academic institutions as a sustainable, evidence-based strategy to enhance student mental health and performance.

Keywords: Academic stress, Mindfulness, Academic performance, Mental health, Student resilience

INTRODUCTION

In today's highly competitive academic environment, students are frequently exposed to elevated levels of stress as they strive to meet demanding expectations from parents, teachers, and peers. Academic stress, defined as emotional distress arising from academic demands such as examinations, deadlines, time constraints, and performance comparisons, is associated with anxiety, depression, burnout, and impaired cognitive functioning (Eisenberg et al., 2013). Left unaddressed, chronic academic stress can disrupt learning, compromise well-being, and increase vulnerability to mental health disorders (Feldman et al., 2022).

Globally, there has been a shift toward exploring holistic approaches for stress management in education. Traditional strategies such as counselling, peer mentoring, and recreational activities, while beneficial, often fail to address underlying cognitive-emotional processes that perpetuate stress. Against this backdrop, mindfulness has emerged as a powerful intervention for promoting psychological resilience.

Mindfulness is the practice of intentionally bringing attention to the present moment with openness and non-judgment (Kabat-Zinn, 1990/2003). Structured programs such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) have demonstrated effectiveness in clinical and educational contexts (Baer et al., 2006; Grossman et al., 2021). Practices such as mindful breathing, body scanning, journaling, and loving-kindness meditation enable individuals to regulate emotions, reduce cognitive reactivity, and improve self-awareness.

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Several models explain how mindfulness reduces stress. Kabat-Zinn emphasizes acceptance and mind–body awareness, Bishop et al. (2004) highlight attentional regulation and openness to experience, and Shapiro et al. (2006) propose the Intention–Attention–Attitude framework. Baer's (2006) five-factor model further identifies observing, describing, acting with awareness, non-judging, and non-reactivity as key dimensions.

Despite mounting evidence, mindfulness remains underutilized in many educational institutions, particularly in developing countries. This study seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of an eight-week structured mindfulness program in reducing academic stress and enhancing mindfulness among students, with an added focus on gender differences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A growing body of research highlights the role of mindfulness in alleviating academic stress and promoting student well-being.

Beilock (2025) emphasized that resilience-based interventions such as MBCT improve emotional regulation and cognitive flexibility, thereby equipping students to handle academic pressure. Daniel and Rushi (2025) conducted a randomized controlled trial involving an eight-week mindfulness program and reported significant reductions in stress, anxiety, depression, and insomnia. Their findings suggest that mindfulness not only reduces distress but also enhances proactive academic engagement.

Bowlby et al. (2025) studied mindfulness among highly stressed students and observed improvements in concentration, procrastination reduction, and decision-making skills—highlighting mindfulness as a catalyst for executive functioning. Similarly, Sharma et al. (2024) demonstrated that mindfulness training reduced test anxiety in high school students while improving standardized test performance.

Meta-analyses confirm these individual findings. Priyam and Suchita (2024) synthesized evidence from 25 studies and concluded that mindfulness consistently enhances attention, working memory, problem-solving, and self-regulation. Grossman et al. (2021) reported similar outcomes across diverse student populations, reinforcing the reliability of mindfulness interventions.

From a neuroscientific perspective, mindfulness has been linked to structural and functional brain changes. Hölzel et al. (2021) demonstrated increased gray matter density in regions associated with attention and emotional regulation, while Davidson and Kabat-Zinn (2023) documented changes in neural pathways that reduce stress reactivity.

Despite robust evidence, research gaps persist. Many studies are Western-centric, with limited data from Asian contexts where academic stress is particularly acute. Long-term sustainability of mindfulness benefits remains underexplored, and gender differences require further study. Addressing these gaps, the present study investigates mindfulness in an Indian academic context, focusing on gender variations and short-term effectiveness.

METHODOLOGY

Design: A pre–post experimental design was employed.

Participants: 200 students aged 16–22 were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure diversity in gender and academic background.

- **Experimental group (n = 100):** Received an eight-week mindfulness intervention.
- **Control group (n = 100):** Continued with regular schedules.

Inclusion Criteria: Moderate–high academic stress, regular attendance, informed consent.

Exclusion Criteria: Prior mindfulness training, clinical psychological diagnoses.

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Tools:

1. **Perceived Stress Scale (PSS; Cohen et al., 1983).**
2. **Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ; Baer et al., 2006).**

Intervention: Daily 20-minute sessions, five days a week, including mindful breathing, body scan meditation, journaling, loving-kindness meditation, and the STOP technique. The control group was offered a workshop post-study.

Techniques Covered:

Mindful Breathing: Focusing on breath to anchor attention and calm the mind.

Body Scan Meditation: Increasing awareness of bodily sensations to release tension.

Mindful Journaling: Reflecting on emotions and thoughts without judgment.

Loving-Kindness Meditation: Cultivating compassion toward self and others.

STOP Technique: A structured pause for awareness during stress

Data Analysis and Results

The analysis examined mindfulness and perceived stress levels among male and female young adults, as well as the correlation between the two constructs. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and Pearson's correlation coefficients (r) were computed. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.001$.

Table 2 displays the mean mindfulness scores for males and females. Females (M = 128.43, SD = 0.62) scored higher on mindfulness than males (M = 117.28, SD = 0.54). A significant positive correlation was observed between male and female scores ($r = 0.58$, $p = 0.0003$), indicating that higher mindfulness levels in one group were associated with higher mindfulness in the other.

Table1. Mean, Standard Deviation, and Correlation Coefficient of Male and Female Young Adults on Mindfulness

Gender	Mean	Standard Deviation	*r*	Level of Significance
Males	117.28	0.54	0.58***	0.0003 ($p < 0.001$)
Females	128.43	0.62		
***Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level.				

Table 1 presents perceived stress scores. Males (M = 21.53, SD = 0.56) and females (M = 21.22, SD = 0.60) had similar mean stress levels. The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.62$, $p = 0.0001$) indicates a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between male and female scores.

Table 2. Mean, Standard Deviation, and Correlation Coefficient of Male and Female Young Adults on Perceived Stress

Gender	Mean	Standard Deviation	*r*	Level of Significance
Males	21.53	0.56	0.62***	0.0001 ($p < 0.001$)
Females	21.22	0.60		
***Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level.				

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Table 3 examines the overall relationship between mindfulness and perceived stress for all participants. The mean mindfulness score (M = 122.86, SD = 0.58) and mean perceived stress score (M = 21.37, SD = 0.62) were inversely related. The negative association is reflected in the significant correlation coefficient (r = 0.60, p = 0.0003), suggesting that higher mindfulness levels are linked to lower perceived stress.

Table 3. Correlation Coefficient between Mindfulness and Perceived Stress

Tool	Mean	Standard Deviation	*r*	Level of Significance
Five-Factor Mindfulness Questionnaire	122.86	0.58	0.60***	0.0003 ($p <$ 0.001)
Perceived Stress Questionnaire	21.37	0.62		
***Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level.				

Interpretation

The findings indicate that most of the 200 students reported moderate levels of both mindfulness and academic stress. On the Five Factor Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ), 11 students scored low, 180 moderate, and 9 high. Female students demonstrated a higher mean mindfulness score (M = 128.43, SD = 0.62) compared to males (M = 117.28, SD = 0.54). On the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), 12 students scored low, 180 moderate, and 8 high, with males showing a slightly higher mean stress score (M = 21.53, SD = 0.56) than females (M = 21.22, SD = 0.60). The combined mean mindfulness score was 122.86 (SD = 0.58), and the combined mean stress score was 21.37 (SD = 0.58), reflecting an inverse pattern between mindfulness and academic stress.

These results suggest that higher mindfulness is generally associated with lower perceived stress, supporting the study's hypothesis and aligning with prior research that identifies mindfulness as a protective factor against academic pressure (Creswell, 2017; Khoury et al., 2015). The observed gender differences—higher mindfulness and slightly lower stress in females—may indicate greater receptivity to mindfulness-related behaviours among women, possibly enhancing their capacity to manage academic demands more effectively. This aligns with literature suggesting that females often exhibit greater emotional awareness and self-regulation skills, both of which are central to mindfulness (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Soler et al., 2012).

Overall, the findings highlight the potential value of incorporating mindfulness-based interventions in educational settings, with attention to gender-sensitive strategies. Such programs could strengthen students' coping abilities, reduce academic stress, and promote overall well-being

DISCUSSION

The present study examined gender differences in mindfulness and perceived stress among young adults, as well as the relationship between these two constructs. Results indicate that female participants reported higher mindfulness scores (M = 128.43, SD = 0.62) compared to males (M = 117.28, SD = 0.54). This aligns with previous studies suggesting that women may be more receptive to mindfulness practices due to greater emotional awareness and self-reflective tendencies (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Soler et al., 2012). The correlation coefficient between male and female mindfulness scores (r = 0.58, p < .001) indicates a strong, significant association, suggesting that despite gender differences in mean levels, mindfulness traits may be similarly structured across genders.

In terms of perceived stress, mean scores were relatively similar for males (M = 21.53, SD = 0.56) and females (M = 21.22, SD = 0.60). This minimal difference may suggest that stress experiences among young adults are more strongly influenced by shared developmental, academic, and social pressures rather than gender-specific factors. Nevertheless, the correlation coefficient (r = 0.62, p < .001) suggests a strong, significant relationship between stress levels in male and female participants, reflecting parallel patterns in stress perception.

Most importantly, the correlation analysis between mindfulness (measured by the Five-Factor Mindfulness

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Questionnaire) and perceived stress revealed a strong negative association ($r = 0.60$, $p < .001$). This finding is consistent with a substantial body of literature indicating that higher mindfulness is associated with lower perceived stress (Creswell, 2017; Khoury et al., 2015). The mechanism underlying this relationship is likely linked to mindfulness-enhanced emotional regulation, attentional control, and reduced cognitive reactivity (Bishop et al., 2004).

Taken together, these findings reinforce the potential of mindfulness-based interventions to serve as protective factors against stress in young adults, regardless of gender. The slightly higher mindfulness levels among females may indicate that intervention strategies could be tailored to enhance engagement among males, who may require more structured or contextually relevant mindfulness practices. Additionally, the consistent correlation patterns across genders suggest that mindfulness training could be implemented as a universal mental health promotion strategy in academic and early career contexts.

Theoretical Integration: Outcomes support Bishop et al.'s (2004) attentional regulation model and Shapiro's Intention–Attention–Attitude framework, showing that mindfulness shifts stress responses from automatic reactivity to intentional awareness.

Practical Implications: Results advocate for embedding mindfulness into academic systems through:

- Short mindfulness practices before classes or exams.
- Teacher training to integrate mindfulness into pedagogy.
- Gender-sensitive adaptations to engage male students more effectively.
- App-based programs for flexible practice.

Cultural Significance: Findings from Indian students reinforce mindfulness as a universally adaptable intervention, particularly relevant in cultures with intense academic expectations.

Limitations: Short-term design, reliance on self-report tools, absence of qualitative data, and sample age constraints.

Future Directions: Longitudinal studies, mixed-method approaches, comparative interventions, discipline-specific analyses, and cross-cultural research are recommended.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that mindfulness is an effective intervention for reducing academic stress and enhancing emotional resilience among college students. Gender differences suggest that female students may benefit more readily from mindfulness practices, though stress remains a shared challenge across genders. By validating the effectiveness of structured mindfulness training in an Indian context, the study underscores the importance of integrating mindfulness into academic curricula as a sustainable, evidence-based strategy to promote both mental health and academic performance.

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