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Mindfulness and its correlation with self-regulation, self-efficacy, stress and coping mechanism; a case study on orphans in Kuwait

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Abstract

Background: Mindfulness is a technique that assists people in being aware of their current emotions and enhance focus. Mindfulness-based therapies are used for treating psychological symptoms in adults such as trauma, depression, stress, anxiety and so on. Recently, there is an increase in implementation of these techniques among children and young adults because it shows promising results. However, there is a literature gap regarding the role of Mindfulness on Self-Regulation, Self-Efficacy, Stress, and Coping Mechanisms in orphans living in Kuwait therefore this study aims to assess these variables and its correlation with Mindfulness.

Objective: The objective is to determine the association of Mindfulness with Self-Regulation, Self-Efficacy, Stress, and Coping Mechanisms in orphan children living in Kuwait's orphanages.

Methodology: This study conducted a survey in two of Kuwait's orphanages among the children aged 8 to 18 years. Approximately 1000 orphans were selected to take part in the study using purposeful sampling method. Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS and the tests performed on the variables included Pearson correlation and Frequency Analysis

Result: The results of the study found a direct positive correlation between Mindfulness and Self-Regulation, Self-Efficacy, and Coping Mechanisms. A negative correlation was found between Mindfulness and Stress. Female orphans were more mindful than the male orphans.

Conclusion: Presence of Mindfulness in Kuwaiti orphans can improve their quality of life and chances if a better future. Therefore, it is suggested to introduce Mindfulness based interventions in the orphanages to reduces their stress levels, which is eminent in orphan children and enhance their self-efficacy and self-regulation

Keywords: Mindfulness, Self-Regulation, Kuwait, Orphan, Orphanage, trauma, Self-Efficacy, Stress, coping mechanism

Introduction

The loss of parents and living in orphanages is a reality that has a psychological impact on children and adolescents, which in turn affects their behavior (Apostol, 2024). In institutionalized orphanage settings, many of these centers are unable to cater to the psychological well-being of their residents despite meeting physical needs which leads to issues such as an increased level of stress and depression (Chávez, 2022). In Kuwait, orphans are among those residents of the country who have the least legal protection. These children not only experience the initial trauma of parental desertion, but also the stigma of "illegitimacy" (Aleifan, & Buoroki, 2023). In comparison to other Muslim countries, Kuwait acts as one of the top Middle Eastern countries to invest in the prevention of orphan diseases (Abuhadida et al., 2024). Thus, this position makes Kuwait capable of providing sufficient funds to their orphanages as well.

The country frequently serves as a haven for wartime orphans, but its inhabitants are rarely able to reunite a child

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with their biological parents and only Kuwaiti nationals may adopt Kuwaiti orphans once they have been designated as the State's wards (Leichtman, 2023). This entails that orphans in orphanages in Kuwait remain in these spaces and have less of a chance of being adopted by families. They often experience a lack of psychological security, thus, affects their mental state (Safi, 2023). Furthermore, there is a lack of information regarding their situation when they leave the orphanage in adulthood. Although, the ILO reports that the Middle East has one of the highest rates of youth unemployment in the world, with an average of one in every four young adults (ILO, 2024).

There is a progressive increase in the rate of depression among adolescents, particularly orphans. When orphans are placed with impoverished parents, there is a possibility of dropping out of school, caused of parental demands and over-controlling (Dinkha, Sharma, & Al Enezi, 2023). As per World Bank statistics (2019), there is a 51% learning poverty among children in Kuwait. Orphaned children are more prone to having internalized issues including despair and anxiety (Chávez, 2022). Children who are orphaned experience the loss of a once-secure bond, which has been linked to an increased risk of depression in these children. According to Eljo, Anitha, & Nadaf (2021), orphans are more susceptible to venting their anger and engaging in disruptive conduct than children having both parents. They are unhappier, nervous, and hopeful about the future. According to the UNICEF report (2024), there is tobacco usage in 24% of male and 10% of female adolescents as of 2022.

Stress in adolescents has an adverse effect on their memories. While mild stress can enhance memory, an excessive amount of stress can result in damage to parts of the brain that are critical for new learning and memory consolidation (Guan et al., 2021). In comparison to younger and older groups, normal developing adolescents display heightened stress reactivity on cortisol and other autonomic nervous system measures during challenging situations (Wade et al., 2020).

While studies on Mindfulness have been conducted on adolescents in Western countries (Alshammari & Alshammari, 2021), there is a research gap on the levels of stress and depression in adolescent orphans in Kuwait. The management of stress and emotional regulation is an important factor to take into consideration since it is connected with Mindfulness. Thus, this research determines the level of Mindfulness of orphans in Kuwait. This study brings light to these issues by identifying critical areas for improvement and finding a long-term solution for them.

Aims and Objectives

This research aims to detect the level of Mindfulness of orphans in Kuwait and its association with Self-Regulation, Self-Efficacy, Stress, and Coping Mechanisms. The objective of this study is to determine whether the factor of having mindfulness has an impact on the other variables in Kuwaiti orphans.

Research Question

Does the presence or absence of Mindfulness affect the Self-Regulation, Self-Efficacy, Stress, and Coping Mechanisms among adolescent orphans in Kuwait?

Literature Review

Buddhism and Eastern meditation techniques are the roots of Mindfulness, which means to focus one's mind on experiencing the present with complete attention. Mindfulness Interventions are intended to assist people to be aware of their current emotions, focusing on the work at hand in that particular moment, and encouraging happiness and inner peace (Beaudoin & Maki, 2020). Mindfulness-based therapies, originally developed for adults, have been expanded and adapted to children, adolescents, and young adults for a range of clinical issues and to advance their well-being (Bender et al., 2022).

Following are the three facets of Mindfulness: awareness, acceptance, and decentering. It entails practicing awareness and observation as well as the ability to react to situations as they arise rather than responding to whims (Gehart, 2022). It provides a better understanding of the inner workings of one's brain and body, helps in learning to make decisions from a place of power, wisdom, and compassion, and is a practice that helps individuals connect with themselves and others in a healthy way (Aday et al., 2021).

Attentional Self-Regulation is a kind of mindfulness technique that involves controlling the ability to focus one's attention. It places a strong emphasis on non-discursive, non-judgmental awareness of one's perceptions, sensations, thoughts, and emotions. Since Self-Regulation reflects an evaluative condition that inevitably results in comparisons of the self to standards and attempts to change conduct, both of these notions have different effects on behavior (Zhou et al., 2023). On the other hand, looking at mindful awareness does not necessarily result in the

discovery of discrepancies or making an effort to decrease them. Instead, it involves accepting what is seen (Bender et al., 2022). Even though the relationship between these two features is opposite, Hajifathali et al. (2021) have discovered a negative correlation between Mindfulness and self-consciousness.

Moreover, Biber (2020) has demonstrated that daily self-control exercises enhance one's overall capacity for self-control and that this increase has several positive effects on an individual. Mindfulness treatments could qualify as one type of self-control exercise given the parallels between self-control programs and Mindfulness interventions. According to Ezer et al. (2024), attentive states help people be more self-reliant and happier. A different hypothesis is that effective Self-Regulation results in both well-being and Mindfulness. This difference may explain earlier findings linking dispositional Mindfulness to high self-regulatory capacity, which gives clinical psychologists a powerfully helpful tool to improve therapeutic outcomes. People with high self-control are less likely than others to experience intrusive thought patterns (Massar, Bělostíková, & Sui, 2022). Therefore, the following hypothesis is tested.

H1: There is a significant association between Mindfulness and Self-Regulation

Self-efficacy involves assessing one's aptitude for a task. One is more likely to stay committed until the task is completed if they are more self-assured. As per a study conducted in Kurdistan by Salleh, Ismail, & Idrus (2021), a high sense of Self-Efficacy boosts psychological well-being among young adults. Studies conducted in Indonesia showed that there is a connection between the deviant behavior of adolescents and their low Self-Efficacy (Kusumawardani et al., 2020). These findings reflect the importance of having a sufficient level of Self-Efficacy for individuals growing up to prevent deviant behavior. This study proposes the following hypothesis to measure the correlation of Self-Efficacy with orphan Mindfulness.

H2: There is a significant association between Mindfulness and Self-Efficacy

Unhealthy emotional and psychological Coping Mechanisms are pathways through which Mindfulness affects health (Giuliani et al., 2021). Unhealthy behavior is predicted by high stress levels (Cepuch et al., 2023). Coping competence is the capacity to successfully cope with failure and bad life experiences as shown by a lower likelihood of helplessness reactions and quick recovery from any occurring helplessness symptoms (Morgan, 2020). Essential functional coping techniques have been proven to positively correlate with coping competence. Mindfulness is ideally adapted to combat the propensity, also known as an automatic pilot, which means to respond to stimuli in an automatic, unconscious manner (Zhang, 2021). Regular practice of mindfulness makes it possible to perceive components of conscious and subconscious experience from a decentered, decontextualized, and more hospitable viewpoint (Chang et al., 2022). With the use of this technique, reactivity is decreased, attention is improved, and problem-solving and behavior are more carefully and reflectively controlled. Before using Mindfulness as a strategy to reduce the risk of sickness, it must first be determined whether it reduces stress perceptions and reactions, or enhances Coping Mechanisms, and which behaviors are most impacted by these potential pathways. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H3: There is a significant association between Mindfulness and Coping Mechanisms

Distress management approaches are incorporated into emotional regulation to meet the demands of varied circumstances. The process of emotional regulation includes the capacity to identify and accept emotional experiences, manage pain and excitement, prioritize goals, and adapt to and modify behavioral responses (Baker et al., 2021). Teenagers often have difficulties regulating their negative emotions and behaviors, such as melancholy, anxiety, conduct problems, purposeful self-harm, disordered eating, and drug use and abuse (Perry et al., 2020). This heightened emotional distress results in behavioral problems as well as academic failure (Wang et al., 2020). For such cases, it is beneficial to use a mindfulness-based approach as there is a need for effective prevention programs that teach how to regulate emotions for all teenagers.

Results from previous studies have demonstrated that adults who practice Mindfulness have a variety of advantages over adults who do not practice Mindfulness, such as increased body awareness, better emotion control, and enhanced focus, which all contribute to an improved immune system and mood (Todd, & Aspell, 2022). Additionally, it was seen that there was a decrease in depressed relapse, improved empathy, decreased substance usage, and decreased stress (Rodrigues et al., 2017). Therefore, hypothesis 4 tests the correlation between stress and mindfulness.

H4: There is a significant association between Mindfulness and Stress

Since several studies have already been conducted on adults and Mindfulness, this study focuses on young adults and children to test whether similar conclusions are drawn when the age group is much younger along with choosing a less focused demographic for the study. Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework with the study variables.

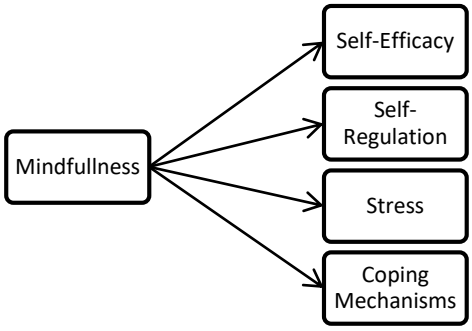

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Methodology

Research Design

This study is based on quantitative methodology. A survey is conducted using a closed-ended questionnaire.

Participants

The total sample size was 1000 orphans living in Kuwait. Children aged between 8 and 18 years were included. Purposeful Sampling was used to select the sample for this study because it required participants with a specific set of character traits as orphans. Since Kuwait is a Muslim country, orphanages are divided between male and female students therefore for this study, one orphanage with male residents and one orphanage with female residents are included.

Research Instrument

This study aimed to assess the correlation of Mindfulness with Self-Efficacy, Self-Regulation, Stress, and Coping Mechanisms. Therefore, relevant scales were selected to measure each aspect. There are five variables and the questionnaire is clustered.

To measure Mindfulness, the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) was selected. The FFMQ is a 39-item questionnaire and taps into five broad dimensions, non-reaction, non-judgment, observation, description, and an awareness scale. Based on the Cronbach's Alpha value (0.73–0.91), its reliability is good.

To measure "Self-Efficacy", the New General Self-Efficacy Scale (NGSE) was used since it has high reliability ranging between 0.86-0.90. While this version does have a relatively smaller number of questions i.e., 8, the reliability of this revised version is still higher than the original which is the rationale behind its selection.

To measure "Self-Regulation", the Self-Regulation Questionnaire was used since it has a reliability score of around 0.94. This questionnaire has 20 questions whose answers often help reflect conditions such as depression, anxiety, and psychosomatic complaints. This is an important factor to measure to address the mental well-being of the participants.

To measure "Stress" the self-report Perceived Stress Questionnaire (PSQ) consisting of 30 items was used where the participants marked on a 4-point Likert Scale how frequently they experienced certain stress-related feelings. A higher score indicates a greater level of stress. This scale has a reliability of 0.82.

To measure "Coping Mechanisms", the Coping Competence Questionnaire (CCQ) was used since it has a reliability of 0.82. It consists of 12 questions measured using a 6-point Likert scale. The responses range from "very uncharacteristic of me" to "very characteristic of me" where a higher score indicates high resilience.

The results of the FFMQ questionnaire became the basic foundation against which all the other variables were measured and correlated. The relationship between the calculated "Mindfulness" of this questionnaire was correlated with the calculations of "Self-Efficacy", "Self-Regulation" "Stress" and "Coping Mechanism" using Pearson Correlation.

The reliability of all the questionnaires used is displayed above in Table 2. The questionnaire has high levels of construct validity and the reliability with Cronbach alphas ranges from 0.73-0.91. A 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never), 2 (rarely true), 3 (sometimes true), 4 (often true), and 5 (always true) is used in this questionnaire to measure each variable.

Table 1. Reliability Test

Scale	No Of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Mindfulness	39	0.73 – 0.91
Self-Efficacy	8	0.86 – 0.90
Self-Regulation	20	0.94
Stress	30	0.82
Coping Mechanism	12	0.82

Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire was translated into Arabic since it is the primary language used in Kuwait's institutions and the participants were most comfortable using it in both orphanages. Hard copies of the complete questionnaire were distributed to the participants with clear instructions to fill them out.

The gathered results were compiled in an Excel Sheet for clarity and data analysis. The results gathered were then translated back into English to present in this study. The translations were thoroughly reviewed using the concerned boards to ensure that there were no discrepancies.

For the analysis of study variables, Frequency analysis was applied for the demographic characteristics and Pearson Correlation test was applied between Mindfulness, Self-Efficacy, Self-Regulation, Stress, and Coping Mechanism. The analysis is performed using IBM SPSS software.

Ethical Considerations

The purpose of the research and the study variables were discussed with the orphanages to get their permission. Written consents were taken from both the heads of the orphanages as well as the participants before conducting the study. The research does not disclose the names of any of the participants or the names of the institutions to maintain the confidentiality of the participants.

Result

Demographic characteristics

As displayed in Table 1, the total sample size was 1000 orphans (38% female and 62% male). This demographic plays a crucial role in setting this study apart from other studies conducted in the same field because all of the participants were from Kuwait and therefore had Arab nationality. Regarding age, 35% of the participants were between the ages of 8 and 11, 45% of the participants were between the ages of 11 and 15, and 20% of the participants were between the ages of 16 and 18. In terms of education, a majority of 45% had Intermediate Education, followed by 35% with Primary Education, 13.7% with Secondary Education, and 6.3 without educational enrollment.

Table 2. Demographic Statistics

Variables		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex	Female	380	38
	Male	620	62
Age	8-11	350	35
	11-15	450	45
	16-18	200	20

Education	Primary Education	350	35
	Intermediate Education	450	45
	Secondary Education	137	13.7
	No longer Enrolled	63	6.3

Correlation Analysis

The results of the study displayed in Table 3 show that there was a strong positive correlation between Mindfulness and Self-Regulation ($p<0.00$, $r=0.94$). The participants in the study that were more Mindful showed that their ability to Self-Regulate was also more than the participants that had a lower level of Mindfulness. This demonstrates that Mindfulness and Self-Regulation are directly correlated and an increase in one of these causes a direct increase in the other as well. The results showed that an increase in Mindfulness did not cause a decrease in the level of Self-Regulation in the participants.

There was a positive correlation between Mindfulness and Self-Efficacy ($p<0.00$, $r=0.878$). An increase in the level of Mindfulness in the participants showed that there was also a direct increase in their level of Self-Efficacy. An increased level of Mindfulness did not decrease the level of Self-Efficacy.

The results showed that an increase in Mindfulness did not cause an increase in the level of stress as they are negatively correlated ($p<0.00$, $r=-0.91$). Instead, participants with an increased level of Mindfulness had a decrease in their levels of Stress and were able to manage their stress more effectively even if Stress was present.

There is a strong correlation between Mindfulness and Coping Mechanisms ($p<0.00$, $r=0.912$). Participants with an increased level of Mindfulness had a better grasp of effective Coping Mechanisms. An increase in Mindfulness meant that participants had a worse grasp of Coping Mechanisms.

Based on the above results, H1, H2, H3, and H4 are true.

Table 3. Correlation Analysis between Mindfulness, Self-efficacy, Self-regulation, Stress, and Coping Mechanism

		Mindfulness	Self-efficacy	Self-regulation	Stress	Coping Mechanism
Mindfulness	Pearson Correlation	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
Self-efficacy	Pearson Correlation	.878**	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000				
Self-regulation	Pearson Correlation	.940**	.920**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000			
Stress	Pearson Correlation	-.911**	-.904**	-.960**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		
Coping Mechanism	Pearson Correlation	.912**	.780**	.863**	-.779**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	

Discussion

Mindful individuals have the ability to Self-Regulate effectively (Zhou et al., 2023). However, orphans in Kuwait's orphanages that are Mindful were relatively low, thus, they did not possess the ability to Self-Regulate. Studies show that Self-Regulation skills become

diminished when one has experienced a traumatic event (Neal, 2021), which is observed in the current study. The loss of parents is considered to have an adverse effect on the mental well-being of children (Guzzo, & Gobbi, 2023) and this factor affects their ability to Self-Regulate effectively. The results of this study showed that some orphans were more Mindful than others however and the ones that were more Mindful also had a greater ability to Self-Regulate. This study found a correlation between Mindfulness and Self-Regulation however it remains undetermined why some orphans were more Mindful than others, therefore, further investigation to discover factors leading to this is required.

The results of this study align with the results of previous studies conducted since it acknowledges that the level of stress in orphans is much higher than that of a child or adolescent belonging to a complete family background regardless of demographic background. Komariah et al. (2022) also observed that being more mindful is associated with less stress. It showcases that the practice of Mindfulness and meditation helps individuals reduce stress and ultimately achieve a more positive state of mind (Shafiq et al., 2020). Although, the Kuwaiti institutes were highly funded and allowed orphans to pursue education, However, good facilities do not ensure a healthy mental space since the factor of Mindfulness remains highly ignored.

Another finding is that orphans who were more Mindful also had a greater level of Self-Efficacy. According to Bandura (2023), Self-efficacy is the most crucial type of human agency that enables people to endure in the face of adversity and improves one's functioning and emotional wellness. Self-efficacy encourages competence and self-worth in the face of challenges (Seikkula-Leino, & Salomaa, (2021). Since the participants living in orphanages have been through a traumatic event, it is crucial to improve their level of Self-Efficacy which is likely to be relatively less due to the impact of the trauma (Gallagher, Long, & Phillips, 2020). Since the study has proved an association between Mindfulness and Self-Efficacy, introducing Mindfulness therapy techniques to orphans in Kuwait can directly improve their level of Self-Efficacy and overall well-being.

There was a slight difference in the level of Mindfulness between the two genders. Female orphans are more mindful than male orphans. Silvianetri et al. (2022) also observed this gender-based Mindfulness difference. This, in turn, had a direct positive association with Self-Efficacy, Self-Regulation, and Coping Mechanisms. The more Mindful female orphans were, their levels of Self-Efficacy, Self-Regulation, and Coping Mechanisms also improved as seen in the results. Mindfulness also had a direct negative association with their levels of Stress since female orphans that were more Mindful faced relatively less amount of Stress because they were aware of how to handle that stress. Male orphans, on the other hand, were relatively less Mindful than the female orphans and therefore their levels of Self-Efficacy, Self-Regulation, and Coping Mechanisms were also much greater. These male orphans faced a greater degree of Stress and did not know how to combat these levels of stress effectively. There is a further need to conduct research and teach Mindfulness techniques in orphanages to improve the quality of life (QoL) and personal development of its residents.

Conclusion

Since the results of the study have demonstrated that there is a direct correlation between Mindfulness and Self-Efficacy, Stress, Coping Mechanisms, and Self-Regulation, the need to introduce Mindfulness strategies to Orphanages becomes increasingly important. The study showcases the potential for improvement of the mental health of the orphans by introducing Mindfulness techniques into their routine. This is potentially beneficial because Mindfulness is proven to have a positive correlation with Self-Efficacy, Self-Regulation, and Coping Mechanisms and a negative correlation with Stress.

Limitations

The scope of the study while being unique is limited in terms of the sample size since it only takes into consideration the orphans living in two orphanages in Kuwait. It did not take into consideration factors such as where the orphans had come from or how long they had been present at the orphanages therefore the root of factors such as stress and depression were not considered. There is room to expand this study to include other demographics as well since it reveals important information in regard to Mindfulness and its correlation with Self-Efficacy, Self-Regulation, Stress, and Coping Mechanisms.

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