

MINDFULNESS AND COGNITIVE FLEXIBILITY AS PREDICTORS OF MENTAL WELL-BEING AMONG UNIVERSITY TEACHING AND NON-TEACHING FACULTY: A MEDIATING ROLE OF JOB STRESS

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Abstract

The research will be conducted to find the impact of mindfulness and cognitive flexibility as predictors of mental well-being with mediating role of job stress among university teaching and non-teaching faculty. Previous research was conducted in which job stress relation was found with mindfulness of both social support, Optimism, Life satisfaction, procrastination, etc. This study is unique in the sense that it discusses the mediating role of job stress between mindfulness & mental well-being and also between cognitive flexibility & mental well-being. A purposive sampling technique will be used, and data will be collected from teaching and non-teaching faculty from different universities in Rawalpindi and Islamabad Pakistan. Job stress is one of the most common health issues in many organizations, particularly among University teaching and non-teaching staff. Moreover, an increase in job stress with low cognitive flexibility and mindfulness may hurt mental well-being. This study provides evidence that job stress hurts mental well-being among university teaching and Non-teaching faculty, and job stress mediates this relationship. The results highlight the importance of the role of support

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from colleagues and supervisors at the workplace, which may help reduce job stress and improve mental well-being. Sociological and occupational health researchers should not ignore the role of gender when studying work environments and jobs in general. The variable would be marked through cognitive flexibility inventory (Dennis, J. P. & Vander Wal, J. S, 2010), a Mindfulness attention awareness scale (Brown, K.W. & Ryan, R.M, 2003), and work- related stress questionnaire (WSQ) will be used. The data will be analyzed by using a statistical package for social sciences IBM SPSS.

Keywords: Job Stress, Mental well-being, Cognitive flexibility, Mindfulness.

INTRODUCTION

A few previous studies have suggested that mindfulness meditation can improve cognitive performance. Although western empirical findings and Buddhist psychological theory have emphasized the role of cognitive flexibility in the development and maintenance of mental health, few studies have specifically focused on flexibility in mindfulness. (Mirjam Hartkamp, 2017)

Buddhist Psychology theory believes our psychological state depends not so much on our particular circumstances, but more on how we relate to what life brings our way. It acknowledges that pain whether physical or emotional is an unavoidable part of life and with that pain comes some suffering. Long-term meditation practice has been found to reduce attentional blink in older adults when compared to age- matched and younger adults (van Leeuwen, Muller, & Melloni, 2009).

Mindfulness involves non-evaluative attention and attention to the present moment. It is a condition of consciousness that covers open-minded attention in which one is aware of his or her inner state and the external environment. (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007).

Self-reported mindfulness was positively associated with sustained attention in experience. The higher the level of mindfulness, the better the mental health, the greater the relationship satisfaction, and even the better the treatment of pain. (Brown et al., 2007). There is preliminary evidence linking mindfulness to higher levels of adaptive emotional functioning, operationalized as emotional intelligence (Baer, Smith, & Allen, 2004; Brown & Ryan, 2003)

.Mindfulness is an outlook that involves being well-clear about what is

taking place in the present moment and accepting it without judgment. (Brown and Ryan, 2003). In psychological research, trait mindfulness is often conceptualized in terms of five aspects: Observe, Describe, Act with Awareness, Nonjudge, and Non-reaction (Baer et al. 2008).

Analog mindfulness and acceptance interventions for social anxiety have produced mixed results. However, when socially anxious participants were in a none anxious state, a brief induction of mindfulness reduced the state of anxiety and increased positive thinking (Vassilopoulos, 2008), as well as decreased autonomy-related negative self-judgments (Vassilopoulos & Watkins, 2009).

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programs which are usually almost 8 weeks in duration and combine mindfulness meditation and gentle yoga have been found to improve mood and affective processes (Nyklíček & Kuijpers, 2008); and are associated with improvements in immune system functioning (Davidson et al., 2003), stress (Carlson, Speca, Faris, & Patel, 2007).

The duration of the mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) program was designed by Kabat-Zinn to be long enough that participants could grasp the values of self-regulation through mindfulness and develop skills and autonomy in mindfulness practice (Kabat-Zinn, 1982).

Cognitive flexibility is one part of executive functioning and is a quality trademark that permits a person to think about different thoughts, skillfully switch mental sets and repress routine answering (Scott, 1962).

Cognitive Flexibility Theory focuses on the nature of learning in the complex and ill-structured domain. It emphasizes advanced knowledge acquisition, which allows "flexible reassembly of previous knowledge to adaptively fit the needs of a new

situation." (Spiro, Feltovich, Jacobson & Coulson, 1991). The cognitive flexibility theory intends to foster the learners' ability to spontaneously reconstruct their knowledge to adopt different situational demands (Spiro & Jehng, 1990).

In Cognitive-Behavior Therapy (CBT), the individual achieves cognitive flexibility and while going up against such disastrous convictions and suppositions, rather than giving up, he/she challenges and examines them from all angles. This treatment furnishes the person with broad data and new experiences of present- previous occasions. Subsequently, the individual has

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more choices and likewise, trains CBT, evaluation abilities, and scope of standard going up against mental conduct abilities to rule for flexibility in picking the methodologies which are fitting to the present circumstance (Fazeli, M., Ehteshamzadeh, P., Hashemi, S. (2015).

Many studies have suggested that job stress may be associated with negative health and mental well-being outcomes, including blood pressure, musculoskeletal disorders, cardiovascular disease, anxiety, depression, burnout, emotional exhaustion, dissatisfaction, and poor mental health. For example, a longitudinal study conducted by Tyssen et al. in Norway found evidence that job stress is a risk factor for poor mental well-being among working adults. A systematic review of both cross-sectional and longitudinal cohort studies that were conducted recently indicated a strong association between job stress and poor mental health. Although the relationship between job stress and negative mental well-being is well established, some scholars have argued that there is a gender difference in the relationship. According to these scholars, the relationship between job stress and adverse health outcomes among men and women may differ because of their exposure to different job stress levels. They argue that men and women differ in terms of the jobs they do, how they are perceived and treated in society, and kind the of working conditions available to them. Using the gender role theory, the authors attributed the gender difference in the relationship to the concentration of men and women into different sectors (horizontal segregation), occupational distribution (vertical segregation), and double burden roles in work and family life. For instance, in explaining horizontal segregation, the authors indicated that while men are concentrated in certain sectors of employment such as industry and manufacturing, women are mostly concentrated in teaching, nursing, clerical, and sales jobs, which are highly related to job stress. In regards to vertical segregation, the authors explain that men and women may differ in their hierarchical areas and levels and that women continue to occupy more precarious jobs, occupy less significant positions, and earn fewer wages as compared to men. Meanwhile, evidence suggests that these kinds of working conditions may be highly related to job stress. Also, using the double burden role to explain the gender difference in the relationship between job stress and

mental well-being, many scholars have argued that while women have increased their engagement in work activities, women continue to engage more in household and care responsibilities than men. Moreover, the double burden role may put additional stress on women which may subsequently influence their mental health outcomes. However, there have been inconsistent results in the gender difference in the relationship between job stress and negative mental well-being outcomes, with some showing a higher association between job stress and negative mental well-being among men, while others show a higher association between job stress and negative mental well-being among women.

METHODOLOGY

The study will be conducted by using a cross-sectional survey method. The self-reported survey will be utilized. In the current study, the purposive sampling technique will be used to collect data. Samples will be taken from different universities in Rawalpindi and Islamabad Pakistan. The population will come from the capital city Rawalpindi and Islamabad in Pakistan. The researcher will focus on university teaching and non-teaching faculty in Islamabad and Rawalpindi. 300 participants were included in the research study. Participants would be from the age bracket of 25 years and onwards. They must be affiliated with a teaching staff on a university level of the profession. As such their educational qualifications would be a Master's degree or above. The other sample of the population to be considered is the Non-teaching staff recruited to work in a university environment. This qualification applies to the coordination staff members or administration staff. The requirement is that they are to be able to understand the questionnaire. The population in a university setting that is academically enrolled there would not be considered. The janitorial staff, guards, or institute help would also not be considered in the population sample due to their educational insufficiency. This also goes for the age bracket of anyone below 25 years of age due to them not being eligible for a master's degree as of yet. The following instrument will be used in this study:

- *Consent form*
- *Demographic sheet*
- *Cognitive Flexibility Inventory (CFI).*
- *Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS)*
- *Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS)*

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The consent form is designed to take permission from the participants and briefly elaborate to them on the nature and purpose of this study. Participants will be assured that information taken from them will be kept confidential and will only be used for the purpose of research. A demographic sheet will be consisting of the following variables I- e., age, gender, educational level, position currently held, and experience they have. Initially, permission to conduct the research will be taken from the authorities of Riphah International University Board of Advanced Studies and Research (BASAR). After that, to measure the study variables, the authors of the instruments will be approached to seek permission to use their scales. After getting permission, the process of data collection will be started. Participants who meet the eligibility criteria will be approached and those who agree to participate in the study will be included in the research. Written informed consent will be given to the participants and they will be informed about their rights to safety, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any time. After collecting the data from the participants, data analysis will be performed to test the hypothesis and the findings will be reported in the result section. Primary data was collected for this research. Questionnaires were distributed and filled out by the participants of the sample which asked some basic questions about their psychological and physical health. Ethical guidelines given by the American psychological association (2012) will be strictly followed throughout the study. It includes.

- *The dignity of the research participants is prioritized during the study.*
- *Confidentiality of the research data is ensured.*
- *All communications regarding research are honest and transparent.*
- *Voluntary participation of respondents in surveys is certified.*
- *Participants also have the right to refuse to participate in the study at any stage.*
- *Respondents have participated with informed consent.*
- *The principle of informed consent includes ensuring the participation of researchers and providing enough information so that people can understand what participation means and make a*

well-informed and free decision about whether to participate without pressure or any forcefulness.

- *The confidentiality and anonymity of respondents are paramount.*

RESULTS

Table 1

Frequencies and percentages of demographic variables of Study (N =300)

<i>Categories</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>(%)</i>
<hr/>		
<i>Age</i>		
<i>20-25</i>	<i>53</i>	<i>18.9</i>
<i>26-30</i>	<i>176</i>	<i>62.9</i>
<i>31-40</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>17.9</i>
<i>Education</i>		
<i>Masters</i>	<i>66</i>	<i>23.6</i>
<i>P.H.D</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>14.6</i>
<i>Experience</i>		
<i>0-5 years</i>	<i>33</i>	<i>11.8</i>
<i>6-10 years</i>	<i>189</i>	<i>67.5</i>
<i>11-20 years</i>	<i>58</i>	<i>20.7</i>

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Family System

<i>Nuclear</i>	130	46.4
<i>Joint</i>	150	53.6

Note: *f*=Frequency, % = Percentage

Table 1 indicates the sample characteristic of the research. There was no missing response in the collected data. For age, the maximum responses were from the 20-45 age group of 20-25 53 and a percentage of (18.9 %), 26-30 176 and a percentage of (62.9%), 31-40 50 and a percentage of (17.9%). 88 (31.4%) .66 participants (23.6%) were in masters. 41 participants(14.6%) were Ph.D. 33 participants (11.8) % had 0-5 experience, 189 participants (67.5%) have 6-10 years of experience, and 58 participants (20.7%) have 11-20 years of experience.

TABLE 2

Correlation among measured variables by gender.

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Job Stress</i>	<i>Mindfulness</i>	<i>Mental wellbeing</i>
<i>Men</i>			
<i>Job stress</i>	1		
<i>Mindfulness</i>	-0.0847 **	1	
<i>Mental wellbeing</i>	-0.2412 **	0.2782 **	1
<i>Women</i>			
<i>Job stress</i>	1		
<i>Mindfulness</i>	-0.1002 **	1	
<i>Mental wellbeing</i>	-0.2480 **	0.2727 **	1

Significance level: ***p*<0.05

Table 2 revealed significant marital differences with the correlations between variables. The results showed a weak and negatively significant correlation between job stress and mental well-being among men and women.

More precisely, the correlation for men was ($\rho=-0.2412$) and for women was ($\rho=-0.2480$). Social support at work also decreased job stress. Furthermore, social support at work had positive a correlation with mental well-being. Overall, there were similar patterns of correlation between the measured variables for both men and women.

TABLE 3

Effects from the Hayes Process Macro model 4 on the mediating effect of job stress in the relationship between cognitive flexibility, mindfulness, and mental well- being.

Variable	Effects	JS	MWB
<i>Cf</i>	<i>Direct</i>	-0.0820^{**}	-0.2352^{**}
<i>JS</i>	<i>Direct</i>		0.2213^{**}
<i>JS</i>	<i>Indirect</i>		-0.0181 $(-0.0212-$ $0.0153)$
<i>Total</i>			-0.2533^{**}

***p<0.05: Confidence Interval. JS: job stress; CF: Cognitive flexibility, MWB: mental well-being.*

Hayes Process Macro model 4 was applied to estimate the direct, indirect, and total effects in the relationships between job stress, cognitive flexibility, and mental well-being. First, this study estimated the relationship between job stress on mental well-being via cognitive flexibility. After controlling for demographic variables, working conditions, socio-economic positions and, the study found a direct and negative effect of job stress on mental well-being ($\beta=-0.2352, p<0.05$) among working adults. Job stress negatively and directly influenced job stress ($\beta=-0.0820, p<0.05$). Furthermore, there was a direct positive relationship between job stress and mental well-being ($\beta=0.2213, p<0.05$). Also, the total effect of job stress via job stress on mental well-being among working adults was $\beta=-0.2533, p<0.05$.

Based on the bias-corrected bootstrapping method that was

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recommended by Hayes the analysis showed that job stress significantly mediated the relationship between cognitive flexibility and mental well-being. More specifically, the indirect effect of job stress on mental well-being was $\beta = -0.0181$, 95% CI: $-0.0212-0.0153$. A

proportional analysis of the indirect effect (mediator) indicated that about 7.1% of the variance in mental well-being was explained by job stress.

TABLE 4

Effects from the Hayes Process Macro model 4 on the mediating effect of job stress in the relationship between mental well-being on mindfulness.

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Effects</i>	<i>MF</i>	<i>JS</i>
<i>MWB</i>	<i>Direct</i>	0.2407 **	-0.2419**
<i>MF</i>	<i>Direct</i>		-0.0217 **
<i>MF</i>	<i>Indirect</i>		-0.0052 (-0.0081- 0.0024)
	<i>Total</i>		-0.2471 **

*Significance level: ** $p < 0.05$. (): Confidence Interval.*

In regards to the relationship of mental well-being on job stress through Mindfulness, the analysis from Table 4 indicated that mental well-being positively influenced job stress ($\beta = 0.2407, p < 0.05$), and job stress in turn negatively influenced mindfulness ($\beta = -0.0217, p < 0.05$). Based on the recommended bias-corrected bootstrapping by Hayes, social support significantly mediated the relationship between mental well-being on job stress ($\beta = -0.0052$, 95% CI: $-0.0081-0.0024$) among university teaching and non-teaching faculty. The overall total effect of mental well-being on mindfulness via job stress was $\beta = -0.2471, p < 0.05$. A proportional analysis conducted indicated that only 2.1% of the modification in mental well-being was explained by job stress.

TABLE 5

Effects from the Hayes Process Macro model 59 on the moderated mediating effect of Job stress in the relationship between mindfulness and cognitive flexibility as mental well-being among university teaching and non-teaching faculty

Variable	Effects	JS	MWB
<i>JS * Gender</i>	<i>Direct</i>	-0.0090	-0.3729 **
<i>CF * Gender</i>	<i>Direct</i>		0.0651
	<i>Indexof moderation mediation</i>		-0.0397(-0.141 40.0598)

*Significance level: **p<0.05. (): Confidence Interval*

To test whether gender moderated the relationship between job stress and mental well-being between mindfulness and cognitive flexibility as mental wellbeing among university teaching and non-teaching faculty via job stress, Hayes process macro model 59 was applied to estimate the moderated mediation modeling as outlined by Hayes. The model allowed us to moderate gender on all direct and indirect paths. Table 5 showed that after adjusting for demographic variables, working conditions, socio-economic characteristics, and universities, gender did not moderate the relationship between job stress and mental well-being Furthermore, the relationship between mindfulness and mental well-being did not differ by gender.

However, there was a significant gender difference in the relationship between job stress and mental well-being ($\beta=-0.3729, p<0.05$), and women had higher associations as compared to men (men: $\beta=-3.9129, p<0.05$ vs. women: $\beta=-4.2858, p<0.05$). The bias-corrected bootstrapping method did not reveal a statistically significant moderating mediating effect ($\beta=-0.0397, 95\% CI: -0.1414 0.0598$). This indicates that gender did not moderate the mediating effect of job stress in the relationship between mindfulness, cognitive flexibility, and mental well-being

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this had been to observe the impact of mindfulness and cognitive flexibility as predictors of mental well-being with mediating role of job stress among university teaching and non-teaching faculty. For this purpose, three scales were used; cognitive flexibility inventory (Dennis, J. P. & Vander Wal, J. S, 2010), a Mindfulness attention awareness scale (Brown, K.W. & Ryan, R.M, 2003) and work-related stress questionnaire (WSQ) will be used. the variables of the above scales are as follows; social support, Optimism, Life

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satisfaction, procrastination, etc.

This study applied Hayes process macro model to investigate the mutual relationships between mindfulness, cognitive flexibility, mental well-being, and job stress among university teaching and non-teaching faculty with a particular focus on gender differences. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to examine whether job stress is indirectly related to mental well-being via cognitive flexibility and whether the direct and indirect effects of job stress on mental well-being are moderated by gender. In addition, the study explores whether mindfulness mediated the relationship between mental well-being on job stress. The findings suggested that job stress had a direct and negative relationship with mental well-being and that women had higher effects as compared to men. Furthermore, the study confirmed that social support played a significant mediating role in the relationship between job stress and mental well-being, but it did not differ by gender. Also, social support acted as a mediator in the relationship between mental well-being on job stress. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of stress at work and the need for support from colleagues and supervisors to improve and promote mental health and safety at the workplace.

The frequencies and demographic variables for the complete sample (N = 300) were acquired for a better understanding of the population characteristics (see Table 1). The target population itself comprised Teaching faculty and Non-teaching faculty of different universities in Islamabad (see Table 2), along with the normal distribution of data on the entire sample to check the psychometric features of the scale.

For the first hypothesis, Job stress is negatively associated with mental well-being among university teaching and non-teaching faculty and the results in Table 3 confirmed the hypothesis. Faculty Correlation was computed which showed the first hypothesis to be fully supported by the terms stated above. The mindfulness-to-meaning theory (Garland, E. L, 2007) raises an apparent contradiction that encourages non-evaluative contact with phenomenological experience and weakens emotional distortions of the perceptual process, whereas positive reappraisal attributes a positively balanced, semantic meaning to experience. Striving to reconstrue true situations as positive would seem to be

contrary to the ethic and quality of mindfulness. In addition, the semantic elaboration and emphasis on meaning involved in positive reappraisal may be seen in stark contrast to the no conceptual state that is the peak of mindfulness practice. On the other hand, there is a long tradition of using mindfulness as a means of gaining insight and wisdom (Bodhi, 2011; Dreyfus, 2011).

The second hypothesis assumed that Job stress is more negatively associated with mental well-being among women than men. The stance was negated by the results which showcased Job stress has no gender differences associated with mental well-being among women than men. Park and Folkman (1997) recommend that adjusting is the basic technique by which incongruence between overall significance and situational importance is made, which is according to Stop and Folkman (1997) and through dependable with Festinger's (1957) thought of mental friction as a justification behind mental hopelessness.

The third hypothesis assumes Cognitive flexibility is positively associated with mental well-being among university teaching and non-teaching faculty, this was validated by the results in table 3 which showcased the occurrence of moderation in the variables.

The fourth hypothesis assumes that mindfulness mediates the relationship between job stress on mental well-being positively. As per the results of table 3, mindfulness mediates the relationship between job stress on mental well-being positively. A study has suggested that mindfulness meditation can improve cognitive performance. Although western empirical findings and Buddhist psychological theory have emphasized the role of cognitive flexibility in the development and maintenance of mental health, few studies have specifically focused on flexibility in mindfulness.

The fifth and the last hypothesis assume that findings suggested that job stress had a direct and negative relationship with mental well-being and that women had higher effects as compared to men. Furthermore, the study confirmed that social support played a significant mediating role in the relationship between job stress and mental well-being, but it did not differ by gender. Also, social support acted as a mediator in the relationship between mental well-being on job stress. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of stress at work and the need for support from colleagues and supervisors to improve and promote mental health and safety at the workplace. This study has several practical implications that may be useful to occupational

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health practitioners and policymakers who wish to reduce psychosocial strain as a result of job stress to promote good health and productivity at the workplace. To reduce stress and increase mental well-being at the workplace, government, policymakers, and managers must provide workers with good working conditions including effective support from both colleagues and supervisors, reduce long working hours, and increase career opportunities. Furthermore, effective organizational interventions such as flexible working arrangements, improvement in communication, and job redesign may serve as an effective way of reducing stress at the workplace. In addition, government and occupational health practitioners may also promote a culture of recognition to reduce the impact of stress and well-being at the workplace. There must be promotion and encouragement of work-family practices at the workplace for both men and women to tooth job stress and any stress that may emanate from family responsibilities. Finally, managers and organizations must design effective stress management and well-being training programs for their employees on how to handle and reduce negative psychosocial factors in the workplace.

CONCLUSION

The study investigated mindfulness and cognitive flexibility as predictors of mental well-being. The secondary objective was to check the moderating effect of mindfulness and cognitive flexibility as predictors of mental well-being of job stress. mindfulness mediates the relationship between job stress on mental well-being positively. Appropriate scales were used to assess the study variables. The finding of the study fully supported all the hypotheses except the second; the correlation to be Job stress is more negatively associated with mental well-being among females than males. The stance was negated by the results which showcased that Job stress is shown no gender differences associated with mental well-being among females than males. In general, job stress had a significantly negative and direct effect on mental well-being among working staff, but the magnitude of the effect was higher among women than men. Furthermore, this study observed that although social support mediated the relationship between job stress on mental well-being among university teaching and non-teaching faculty, there was no gender difference in the

mediating effect. Also, mindfulness mediated the relationship between mental well-being on job stress. The present study highlights the importance of the role of gender in sociological and occupational health research. Therefore, governments, organizations, and policymakers should develop and implement work-family-friendly policies that may promote gender equality and further improve employment and working conditions for men and women. There is also the need for organizations to train their employees to fully understand and adequately meet the support needs of workers.



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