

# Mediating role of resilience in the impact of mindfulness on life satisfaction and affect as indices of subjective well-being



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## ABSTRACT

Recent research has established the effect of mindfulness on subjective well-being. In this present study we attempt to extend the previous literature by investigating the potential mediating role of resilience in the impact of mindfulness on life satisfaction and affect as indices of subjective well-being. The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC), the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) and Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) were administered to 327 undergraduate university students in India. Structural equation modeling (SEM) results showed that resilience partially mediated the relationship between mindfulness and life satisfaction and affect components. The findings corroborate an important role of resilience in mindfulness exerting its beneficial effects. This study makes a contribution to the potential mechanism of the association between mindfulness and subjective well-being.

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## 1. Introduction

Mindfulness has been conceptualized as a flexible state of consciousness of an individual encompassing refined attention and non-evaluative awareness of one's internal and external experiences as they take place (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007). Further, mindfulness is said to be a state in which one is able to give uninterrupted attention over a period of time in a nonjudgmental way to ongoing physical, cognitive and psychological experience, without critically analyzing or passing a judgment on that experience (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Mindfulness involves being aware of oneself and the environment in the present moment without judging or reacting non-intentionally, as well as being able to describe one's subjective experience (Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006). Mindfulness is also conceptualized as a psychological trait that refers to the tendency to be mindful in everyday life (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Levels of mindfulness may also be increased through meditation or mindfulness training (Baer et al., 2008; Falkenstrom, 2010).

Correlational research has demonstrated that measures of trait mindfulness are closely associated with higher levels of subjective well-being (Baer et al., 2008; Brown, Kasser, Ryan, Linley, & Orzech, 2009; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Howell, Digdon, Buro, & Sheptycki, 2008; Schutte & Malouff, 2011; Kong, Wang, & Zhao, 2014; Wenzel, von Versen, Hirschmüller, & Kubiak, 2015). It has also been firmly established that an increase in mindfulness through interventions

such as meditation training also results in increase of individuals' well-being (e.g., Falkenstrom, 2010; Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008; Zautra et al., 2008; Aikens et al., 2014). Some studies which had college students as sample have shown that mindfulness may impact subjective well-being via mediators such as emotional intelligence, core self-evaluation, and self-esteem (Schutte & Malouff, 2011; Pepping, O'Donovan, & Davis, 2013). However, the model is still somewhat unsatisfactory with regard to its ability to explain how mindfulness conveys its beneficial effects on well-being because empirical evidence is merely in support of the partial mediating role of these mediators. We speculated that there are other potential mediators such as resilience that account for the mechanism underlying the mindfulness–subjective well-being relationship. In this study we attempt to investigate the mediating role of resilience in the impact of mindfulness on life satisfaction and affect as indices of subjective well-being.

Resilience is a personal trait that helps individuals cope with adversity and achieve good adjustment and development during trying circumstances. It is a trait that inoculates individuals against the impact of adversity and traumatic events (Connor & Davidson, 2003; Ong, Bergeman, Bisconti, & Wallace, 2006). In a review of trait mindfulness and resilience to trauma, Thompson, Arnkoff, & Glass (2011) suggest that a mindful and accepting orientation toward experience helps prevent ruminative and depressogenic thinking, thereby promoting psychological resilience following trauma. Resilience should be more pronounced in mindful individuals, as they will, for instance, engage less in rumination and habitual worrying (Shapiro, Brown, & Biegel, 2007; Verplanken & Fisher, 2014), but rather maintain a solution-focused outlook. Mindfulness demonstrates the potential to foster resilience as mindful people are better

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able to respond to difficult situations without reacting in automatic and non-adaptive ways. They are open to new perceptual categories, tend to be more creative, and can better cope with difficult thoughts and emotions without becoming overwhelmed or shutting down (Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000; Wallace & Shapiro, 2006). Neuroscience offers insights into how and why mindfulness may foster resilience. Mindfulness weakens the chain of associations that keep people obsessing about and even wallowing in a setback. Mindfulness strengthens the connections between the prefrontal cortex and the amygdala, promoting an equanimity that will help keep people from spiraling down the setback thoughts (Davidson & Begley, 2012). A study of 124 firefighters showed that trait mindfulness was negatively related to depressive and PTSD symptoms, physical symptoms, and alcohol problems, suggesting that trait mindfulness may reduce avoidant coping in response to stress and contribute to resilience (Smith et al., 2011).

Ryff, Singer, Dienberg Love, and Essex (1998) defined resilience as the capacity to maintain or recover high well-being in the face of life adversity. Studies have showed that resilient individuals could maintain their physical and psychological health both through buffering negative consequences from difficult times (Connor & Davidson, 2003), and through improving psychological well-being (Ryff & Singer, 2000). Thus, resilience can be seen as an important source of subjective well-being. There is strong evidence that resilience is of considerable benefit to people's subjective well-being. Resilience is found to be positively correlated with life satisfaction and positive affect, and inversely related to negative affect (Liu, Wang, & Li, 2012; Liu, Wang, & Lü, 2013; Lü, Wang, Liu, & Zhang, 2014; Mak, Ng, & Wong, 2011; Singh & Yu, 2010; Liu, Wang, Zhou, & Li, 2014; Hu, Zhang, & Wang, 2015).

Based on the above stated rationale and the existing literature showing that mindfulness is antecedent to resilience (Davidson & Begley, 2012; Foureur, Besley, Burton, Yu, & Crisp, 2013; Keye & Pidgeon, 2013; Pidgeon & Keye, 2014; Smith et al., 2011; Thompson et al., 2011) and resilience positively correlated with life satisfaction and affect (Hu et al., 2015; Liu et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2013; Liu et al., 2014; Lü et al., 2014; Mak et al., 2011; Singh & Yu, 2010), it was hypothesized that mindfulness exerts a significant indirect effect on life satisfaction and affect through the mediating effect of resilience. Specifically, individuals with higher mindfulness have greater resilience, and thereby increasing their life satisfaction and affect. The detailed hypothesized model concerning the mediator role of resilience in the relationship between mindfulness, life satisfaction, and affect is presented in Fig. 1.

Within the university environment resilience has been viewed as an asset that supports university students' mental health requirements (Hartley, 2012). University students experience larger number of issues concerning mental health as compared to their peers from a non-university background (Stallman, 2010). For university students,

resilience is particularly important, as life at a university can be quite complex and demanding, requiring the capability of coping with highly competitive academic/coursework demands, study/life balance, financial problems, and relationship related issues. Thus, the current study might shed light on a potential psychological mechanism for improving university students' well-being. Examining the role of resilience in university students will further contribute to knowledge in the field of wellbeing.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants and procedure

Three hundred and twenty seven undergraduate students from India volunteered to take part in the study (236 men, 91 women), aged 18–23 years ( $M = 20.3$ ,  $SD = 1.3$ ). In a classroom environment participants were administered a packet of paper-and-pencil questionnaires by a trained research assistant. Participants completed previously developed and validated scales. A brief demographic survey was also included in the questionnaire. All participants were briefly instructed about the purpose of the study. They were ensured about confidentiality of the data. Participants completed the questionnaires in the classroom environment and a trained research assistant was available throughout the process to answer any queries raised by the participants and to also ensure their confidential and independent response. The students took about 15 min to complete all the instruments properly.

### 2.2. Measures

#### 2.2.1. Mindfulness

To assess trait mindfulness, The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS; Brown & Ryan, 2003) was administered. This scale consists of 15 brief statements. It includes items such as, "I tend to walk quickly to get where I'm going without paying attention to what I experience along the way" and "I get so focused on the goal I want to achieve that I lose touch with what I'm doing right now to get there". Excellent test–retest reliability, good internal consistency, and good convergent and discriminant validity have been found with the MAAS (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

#### 2.2.2. Life satisfaction

To assess life satisfaction in participants Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) was administered. The SWLS consists of five brief statements. Using a seven-point Likert scale respondents were instructed to indicate the extent to which they

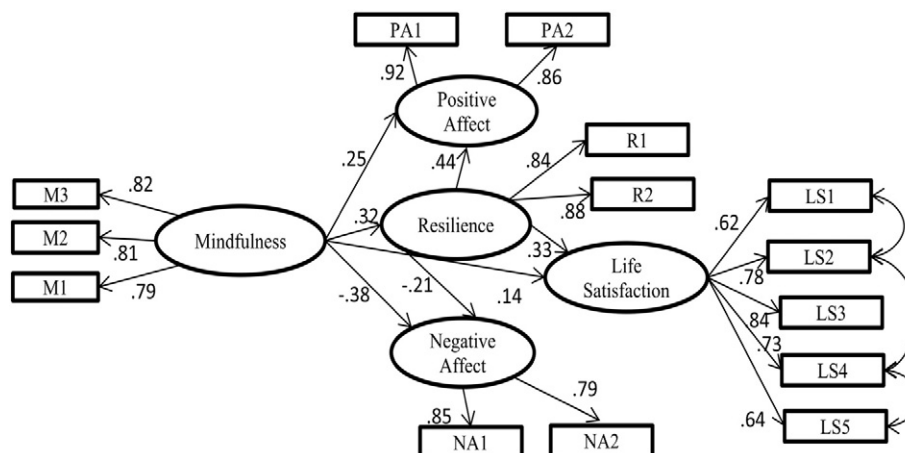


Fig. 1. The finalized structural model ( $N = 327$ ). Note. Factor loadings are standardized. M1–M3 = three parcels of mindfulness; R1–R2 = two parcels of resilience; PA1–PA2 = two parcels of positive affect; NA1–NA2 = two parcels of negative affect.

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