

A comparative study on the role of dispositional mindfulness on the empathy and life satisfaction among volunteers and non-volunteers.

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Abstract

In the past two decades, research exploring mindfulness and its applications has significantly expanded. Although mindfulness emerged as a Buddhist concept, it is now universally known. Mindfulness have found to be an integral quality of consciousness, which can empirically and scientifically measured. Empirically, dispositional mindfulness has been correlated to socio-demographic characteristics and empathy in the general population. The study of the mindfulness meditation based interventions that foster and maintain empathy in psychologists , medical students , community workers has become incredibly popular, while the studies pertaining trait/dispositional mindfulness are just handful. Dispositional awareness, an evolving concept in the discipline, refers to awareness as an attribute that is inherited or develop over time. The aim of the current research is to evaluate the role of dispositional mindfulness on empathy and life-satisfaction among volunteers and non-volunteers. The study was conducted on 30 volunteers and 30 non-volunteers. Standardised measures were utilised to measure mindfulness, empathy and life-satisfaction. It was found that mindfulness is positively correlated to empathy and life-satisfaction. However, particularly facets of mindfulness such as Observing (OBS) , Describing (D) and Non- reactivity had direct impact on empathy and life-satisfaction .The findings have significant implications for how mindfulness-based interventions can improve empathy and life satisfaction in young people. Furthermore, volunteering and spending one's time, energy, and money will improve one's sense of life satisfaction and contentment, as well as provide life skills such as empathy.

Key-words: Dispositional mindfulness , Empathy , Life-satisfaction and Volunteerism.

INTRODUCTION

“What is the essence of life? To serve others and to do good.” – Aristotle

Volunteering is known to enhance life-skills and provide transformative experiences to the individual's inclined towards such causes. Committing one's time, energy, resources for the needful, that builds grit, generosity, and nourish empathy incredibly. Dispositional mindfulness have found to foster and nourish the trait of empathy as well as it enhances the level of life satisfaction among an individual. Milanovic (2012) found that volunteerism enhances the skill of empathy among an individual. Heo (2016) suggested volunteerism is a significant predictor of life satisfaction and psychological well-being. The level of engagement in volunteer activities was found to have significant path coefficients toward both satisfaction with life and psychological well-being of an individual.

In 1999, the WHO identified six key areas of life skills. Empathy was one of those essential life- skills, that is being able to feel for other people as if their experiences were happening to you. Empathy is an ability that is mastered, like any other, and requires practice.

Empathy is referred to as the ability to perceive and comprehend other people's emotions and opinions on a situation. Empathy gives you the opportunity to boost another's mood, state of mind, or help them in a tough situation. Arguably, the capacity to empathise is the key in the psychotherapeutic and other clinical or communal work. Western psychology has become deeply interested in educational programmes that are thought to promote empathy for oneself and others in recent decades, such as mindfulness meditation programmes (Gilbert 2005, Kabat-Zinn, 1990). While the majority of research on mindfulness-based approaches (MBIs) has been conducted with people who have medical or mental health issues (Baer, 2003) there has been an increasing interest in using MBIs to help healthcare professionals alleviate stress and improve self-compassion and self-care (Shapiro & Carlson, 2009). But in today's world empathy as a skill is a need for every individual to attain physical as well as mental well-being.

Dispositional Mindfulness

Mindfulness has been regarded as a process of bringing a certain degree of attention to experience moment by moment (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). The ability to ostensibly invoke mindfulness is established using different techniques of meditation that derive from Buddhist religious practice (Hanh, 1976). In a structure that has been established as a path leading to the cessation of personal suffering, mindfulness in Buddhist traditions plays a central role (Thera, 1962; Silananda, 1990).

As an approach to raising sensitivity and reacting skillfully to mental processes that lead to emotional distress and maladaptive behaviour, mindfulness in contemporary psychology has been embraced. Mindfulness is connected to empathy and may have ramifications for the design of mindfulness-based training to reduce emotional distress in tense interpersonal environments and to preserve the cognitive capacity to take others viewpoints. A study of American students and adults, trait mindfulness was positively associated with life satisfaction, emotional intelligence, openness to experience, attentiveness, impulsiveness, and receptivity to experience, demonstrated the advantages of mindfulness (Brown, 2015). According to empirical evidence mindfulness is a valuable skill that will help you cope with the pressures of daily life while also enhancing your mental and physical health (Naik, 2016).

Empathy

According to Hodges and Myers (2012), "Empathy is described as knowing another person's experience by imagining oneself in the other person's situation: one recognises the other person's experience as though it were being experienced by the self, but without the self actually experiencing it." Prior research indicates that people with higher empathy levels are more interested in supporting social justice, which is a type of prosocial action (Prot, 2014).

Research in clinical literature has provided evidence on the positive impact of empathy on physician-patient communication, trust, treatment adherence, and clinical outcomes (Blasi, 2001). The regression models' findings indicate that cognitive empathy is one of the most important predictor variables for self-esteem. Empathy and EI are related to higher levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction, according to a study.

Empathy has been linked to higher levels of psychological well-being across a range of cultures (Conner, 2015). Empathy, according to studies by Figley (1995), Jones et al. (2000), Batson, Ahmad & Stocks (2004), Prinz (2011), and Bloom (2013), may be correlated with negative emotions and anxiety if taken to extremes,

adversely influencing an individual's health. Researchers have started to distinguish between positive and negative empathy as a result of such statements (Morelli, Lieberman, & Zaki, 2015). Empathy has also been found to have a positive effect on psychological well-being (Ickes, 2003; Khajeh, Baharloo, & Soliemani, 2017).

Life-satisfaction.

Satisfaction is the state of mind. This is an estimate of anything. The term refers to both 'Satisfaction' and 'pleasure'. This includes cognitive and impact-assessments. Satisfaction is something that manifests and is sustained over time. Life satisfaction is described as an assessment of a person's life based on their personal expectations (Pavot & Diener, 1993). As a consequence, life satisfaction is defined by contrasting one's ideal life conditions with one's actual quality of life experience (Lucas, Diener & Suh, 1996; Pavot & Diener, 2009). It refers to how well one is achieving personal goals and how well one is doing in relation to others (Lucas et al. 1996). Individuals evaluate different aspects of their lives, measure the positive against the negative, and arrive at a global assessment of overall happiness when measuring life satisfaction (Rothmann, 2013).

“Life-satisfaction is an overall assessment of feelings and attitudes about one’s life at a particular point in time ranging from negative to positive” (Buetell, 2006). In a research, mindfulness was positively correlated with levels of life satisfaction among American students and adult (Brown, 2015). Also, mindfulness was found to have an evident positive relationship with life satisfaction (Christopher & Gilbert, 2010).

Purpose:

The aim of the current research is to evaluate the role of dispositional mindfulness on empathy and life-satisfaction among volunteers and non-volunteers.

Hypothesis:

1. There will be a positive correlation between dispositional mindfulness and empathy.
2. There will be a positive correlation between dispositional mindfulness and life-satisfaction.
3. Volunteers will be high on dispositional mindfulness, empathy and life-satisfaction as compared to non-volunteers.

METHOD

Sample

The sample consisted of 60 young adults both male and female from Delhi NCR out of which 30 were volunteers and 30 were non-volunteers.

Measure

Five-facet mindfulness questionnaire: (Baer 2006) is a 39 item self-report questionnaire which tends to measure the mindfulness on the five domains which includes observation (OBS), describing (D), acting with awareness (AA), non-reactivity (NR), non-judging (NJ) which are also known as five facets. It is constructed on a 5-point scale from 1 “never or very rarely true” to 5 “very often or always true”. It also holds good psychometric properties such as test-retest validity and construct validity. Overall, Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire is an established and valid psychometric self-assessment for mindfulness.

The Toronto Empathy Questionnaire: (Spreng et al., 2009) is a self-report style, uni-dimensional, scale including 16 items constructed on five-point Likert type scale which is intended to examine the levels of empathy among individuals.

The Satisfaction with Life Scale: (Emmons 1985) was developed to assess satisfaction with the individual's life as a whole. A 5-item scale designed to measure global cognitive judgments of one's life satisfaction (not a measure of either positive or negative affect). Participants indicate how much they agree or disagree with each of the 5 items using a 7-point scale that ranges from 7 strongly agree to 1 strongly disagree.

Procedure

The participants were informed about the purpose of research and the questionnaires were filled through Google forms. Each participant was thanked for their cooperation. Standardized psychological tests were administered to the participants.

Analysis of data

Results

The responses of the participants were analysed using Pearson correlation matrix to see examine the correlation among mindfulness, empathy and life-satisfaction. Also, t-test was utilised to investigate the compare the levels of mindfulness, empathy and life-satisfaction among sample of volunteers and non-volunteers. Mean and Standard Deviation data is

presented in Table 1. Table 2 shows the correlation between the mindfulness ,empathy and life-satisfaction.

Table 3. shows the significance of mindfulness, empathy and life-satisfaction among sample of volunteers and non-volunteers.

Table 1 showing the descriptives of the data

	volunteering status	observing	describing	acting with awareness	non-judging	non-reactivity	empathy	life-satisfaction
N	volunteer	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
	non-volunteer	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
Mean	volunteer	30.8	30.0	28.6	28.2	27.4	55.7	25.7
	non-volunteer	24.4	24.8	25.5	25.5	22.6	47.6	20.6
Standard deviation	volunteer	2.86	3.08	3.02	3.80	3.06	4.88	2.17
	non-volunteer	4.02	2.80	4.44	5.42	3.34	4.46	2.74

Table 2 showing correlation between the variables.

	observing	describing	acting with awareness	non-judging	non-reactivity	empathy	life-satisfaction
observing	—						
describing	0.399 **	—					
acting with awareness	0.342 **	0.261 *	—				
non-judging	0.084	0.263 *	0.197	—			
non-reactivity	0.355 **	0.364 **	0.120	0.181	—		
empathy	0.382 **	0.296 *	0.016	0.001	0.352 **	—	
life-satisfaction	0.409 **	0.408 **	0.220	0.141	0.568 ***	0.673 ***	—

Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Table 3 shows significant difference in levels of groups

	Group	N	Mean	SD	Statistics	df	p	
observing	volunteer	30	30.8	2.86	7.03	58	<.001	Discussion An inspection of variables by using Pearson correlation matrix displayed in table 2, which depicted that
	non-volunteer	30	24.4	4.02				
describing	volunteer	30	30	3.08	6.89	58	<.001	
	non-volunteer	30	24.8	2.8				
acting with awareness	volunteer	30	28.6	3.02	3.09	58	0.003	
	non-volunteer	30	25.5	4.44				
non-judging	volunteer	30	28.2	3.8	2.21	58	0.031	
	non-volunteer	30	25.5	5.42				
non-reactivity	volunteer	30	27.4	3.06	5.81	58	<.001	
	non-volunteer	30	22.6	3.34				
empathy	volunteer	30	55.7	4.88	6.77	58	<.001	
	non-volunteer	30	47.6	4.46				
life-satisfaction	volunteer	30	25.7	26	8.05	0.396	<.001	
	non-volunteer	30	20.6	21				

there is a positive significant relationship between mindfulness and empathy. Also, it depicted a positive correlation between mindfulness and life-satisfaction.

However, facets of mindfulness such as observing ($r = .382, p < .05$), describing ($r = .296, p < .01$), and non-reactivity ($r = .351, p < .01$) showed significant positive relation with empathy.

Furthermore, subscales of mindfulness such as observing ($r = 0.409, p < .01$), describing ($r = 0.408, p < .01$) and non-reactivity ($r = 0.5608, p < .001$).

In a study by Jones et al., (2016) found that three of the five mindfulness subscales, to be precise observing, describing, and nonjudging, impacted the levels of empathy, whereas both describing and observing directly predicted facilitating reappraisals. No results emerged for nonreacting or aware acting. Furthermore, people who scored high on mindful observing and describing also reported increased levels of empathy. Ardenghi

et al., (2020) found that dispositional mindfulness is positively related to empathy among medical under graduates.

Using independent t- test it was established that the people who were volunteering or are inclined to such causes have higher levels of mindfulness , empathy as well as life-satisfaction in contrast to non-volunteers.

Milanovic(2012) found that volunteerism enhances the skill of empathy among an individual

Conclusion

Volunteering has such a positive effect on one's wellbeing, one thing is certain.it is thought that one of the main factors is that volunteering allows one to express and promote opportunities to fulfil one's sense of intent. By definition, volunteering entails choosing to work without being compensated. As a result, people tend to devote their time to causes that they are passionate about. If you care deeply about how animals are handled and cared for, for example, working at an animal shelter will help you solve a social issue that is important to you and that in turn will generate a sense of belongingness , life-satisfaction and a better psychological well-being. Volunteerism is a distinct category of helping activity that is connected to personality characteristics and traits. Volunteerism is reliably predicted by the Big Five personality characteristics of agreeableness and extraversion. There are also a variety of dynamic, or changeable, characteristics and states that accurately predict volunteerism, such as empathy and mindfulness. The aim of the current research is to evaluate the role of dispositional mindfulness on empathy and life-satisfaction among volunteers and non-volunteers. The study was conducted on 30 volunteers and 30 non-volunteers. Standardised measures were utilised to measure mindfulness, empathy and life-satisfaction. It was found that mindfulness is positively correlated to empathy and life-satisfaction. However, particularly facets of mindfulness such as Observing (OBS) , Describing (D) and Non- reactivity had direct impact on empathy and life-satisfaction .This study has important implications as how mindfulness based practices can enhance empathy and life-satisfaction among youth. Furthermore, indulging in practices of volunteering and investing one's time, energy , resources can elevate a sense of life-satisfaction and contentment and provide one with life-skills such as empathy.

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