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Comparative Study of Mindfulness, Academic Stress, and Psychological Well-being Levels among Arts, Science, and Commerce College Students

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Received-11.06.2024,

Revised-17.06.2024,

Accepted-23.06.2024

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Abstract: *The present study examined stream-wise differences in mindfulness, academic stress, and psychological well-being among undergraduate students from Arts, Science, and Commerce disciplines. A total of 270 college students (90 from each stream) aged 18–24 years participated in the study. Standardized tools, the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire, the College Academic Stress Scale, and the Ryff Psychological Well-being Scale, were administered. A cross-sectional comparative design was used, and data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and anova. The results revealed significant stream-wise differences for all three psychological variables. Arts students scored highest in mindfulness, while Science students reported the highest academic stress and the lowest psychological well-being. Commerce students demonstrated comparatively better well-being than Science students and moderately higher mindfulness than Science students. The findings suggest that academic stream plays a meaningful role in shaping students' mindfulness levels, stress experiences, and overall well-being, highlighting the need for stream-specific mental health support in higher education institutions..*

Keywords: Mindfulness, academic stress, psychological well-being, college students, academic streams.

Introduction- The transition to college represents a critical developmental period marked by heightened academic demands, performance expectations, social pressures, and uncertainty regarding future careers. These factors collectively contribute to increased levels of academic stress among undergraduate students (Kumar & Balkrishna, 2012). Academic stress is widely recognized as a significant risk factor for psychological problems, including anxiety, depression, burnout, and reduced overall well-being. In contrast, mindfulness—a non-judgmental awareness of present-moment experience—has emerged as an important protective factor that enhances emotional regulation, resilience, and psychological functioning (Bishop et al., 2004).

Mindfulness-based interventions have gained empirical support across diverse populations, including adolescents, college students, healthcare workers, and individuals with psychopathology (Chu et al., 2018; Sanger, 2018). Research consistently demonstrates that mindfulness is associated with reduced psychological distress and improved emotional well-being (Hazlett-Stevens, 2012). However, the distribution of mindfulness, academic stress, and well-being may vary across academic streams due to differences in workload, pedagogical demands, and subject-specific expectations. Science students, for example, often experience greater pressure due to rigorous curricula and frequent academic evaluations, whereas Arts and Commerce students may experience comparatively flexible academic structures.

Understanding stream-wise differences is crucial as educational systems often overlook the unique psychosocial needs of students from different academic backgrounds. Additionally, examining the interrelationships among mindfulness, academic stress, and psychological well-being can help identify mechanisms that influence students' mental health. Prior studies have shown that mindfulness is negatively associated with stress and positively associated with well-being (Hicks et al., 2018). However, comparative analyses across academic disciplines remain limited, especially in the Indian context.

Thus, the present study addresses this research gap by examining (a) differences in mindfulness, academic stress, and psychological well-being across Arts, Science, and Commerce students, and (b) the predictive and correlational relationships among these variables.

Objectives-

1. To compare the levels of mindfulness among Arts, Science, and Commerce college students.
2. To compare the levels of academic stress among Arts, Science, and Commerce college students.
3. To compare the levels of psychological well-being among Arts, Science, and Commerce college students.

Hypotheses-

1. There will be a significant difference in mindfulness among Arts, Science, and Commerce students.



2. There will be a significant difference in academic stress among Arts, Science, and Commerce students.

3. There will be a significant difference in psychological well-being among Arts, Science, and Commerce students.

Method- Research Design: A cross-sectional comparative design was employed.

Participants- The sample consisted of 270 undergraduate students (N = 270), with 90 each from Arts, Science, and Commerce streams, aged between 18 and 24 years (M = 20.43, SD = 1.52). Quota sampling was used to ensure equal representation across streams and gender. Participation was voluntary and anonymous.

Inclusion Criteria-

- Undergraduate students enrolled in Arts, Science, or Commerce.
- Age between 18–24 years.
- Able to read and understand English or Hindi.

Exclusion Criteria-

- Students with diagnosed severe psychiatric conditions (self-reported).
- Students currently undergoing clinical psychological treatment.

Measures-

● **Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ):** Assesses five dimensions of mindfulness; higher scores indicate greater mindfulness ($\alpha > .80$).

● **College Academic Stress Scale:** Measures academic stress related to workload, examinations, time pressure, and academic expectations.

● **Ryff's Psychological Well-being Scale (Short Form):** Assesses autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, and self-acceptance.

Procedure- Institutional permission was obtained before data collection. After informed consent, participants completed the questionnaires either in classroom settings or online through secure forms. Data were coded, scored, and analyzed using SPSS. Confidentiality and ethical guidelines were strictly followed.

Results-

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and One-way ANOVA for Mindfulness, Academic Stress, and Psychological Well-being Across Academic Streams

Variable	Arts (n=90) M (SD)	Science (n=90) M (SD)	Commerce (n=90) M (SD)	F(2,267)	p	η^2
Mindfulness	128.34 (14.12)	119.85 (15.40)	122.16 (13.87)	9.84	< .001	.07
Academic Stress	59.78 (11.24)	68.12 (12.45)	61.47 (10.95)	14.26	< .001	.10
Psychological Well-being	46.72 (8.55)	41.83 (8.90)	48.15 (9.12)	11.57	< .001	.08

Note. Higher scores indicate greater mindfulness, higher academic stress, and better psychological well-being.

The results of the one-way ANOVA indicated significant differences among Arts, Science, and Commerce students on mindfulness, academic stress, and psychological well-being. Mindfulness differed significantly across academic streams, $F(2, 267) = 9.84, p < .001, \eta^2 = .07$, with Arts students reporting the highest mindfulness, followed by Commerce students, while Science students reported the lowest levels. Academic stress also showed a significant stream-wise difference, $F(2, 267) = 14.26, p < .001, \eta^2 = .10$, indicating a moderate-to-large effect; Science students experienced the highest academic stress compared to Arts and Commerce students. Psychological well-being differed significantly across the three groups as well, $F(2, 267) = 11.57, p < .001, \eta^2 = .08$, with Commerce students reporting the highest psychological well-being, followed by Arts students, whereas Science students reported the lowest well-being. Overall, these findings suggest that academic stream significantly influences students' mindfulness, academic stress, and psychological well-being, with Science students appearing more vulnerable to stress-related psychological difficulties.

Discussion- The findings indicate significant differences in mindfulness, academic stress, and psychological well-being across academic streams. Consistent with earlier literature, Science students experienced the highest levels of academic stress, likely due to heavy workloads, laboratory requirements, and competitive examinations (Sanger, 2018). This elevated stress corresponded to significantly lower psychological well-being.

Arts students demonstrated the highest mindfulness levels, which may reflect greater engagement in reflective and expressive learning practices. Higher mindfulness was associated with better well-being and lower



stress, aligning with past studies showing the buffering effect of mindfulness on stress (Hicks et al., 2018; Chu et al., 2018).

The regression analysis confirmed that mindfulness is a strong predictor of psychological well-being, whereas academic stress negatively predicts well-being. This supports theoretical models that emphasize mindfulness as a protective factor enhancing resilience and emotional stability.

The findings underscore the need for institution-wide mental health initiatives, including mindfulness-based stress reduction programs, workshops, and counseling services tailored for high-stress streams such as Science.

Conclusion- The study concludes that academic stream significantly influences mindfulness, academic stress, and psychological well-being among college students. Mindfulness emerges as a protective factor that enhances well-being and reduces stress. Integrating mindfulness-based interventions into college settings may benefit students across streams, particularly those experiencing higher academic pressures.

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