



Article

Relationships between Mindfulness, Purpose in Life, Happiness, Anxiety, and Depression: Testing a Mediation Model in a Sample of Women

Antonio Crego ^{1,*}, José Ramón Yela ¹, María Ángeles Gómez-Martínez ¹, Pablo Riesco-Matías ¹
and Cristina Petisco-Rodríguez ²

¹ Department of Psychology, Pontifical University of Salamanca, Calle de la Compañía 5, 37002 Salamanca, Spain; jryelabe@upsa.es (J.R.Y.); magomezma@upsa.es (M.Á.G.-M.); priescoma@upsa.es (P.R.-M.)

² Faculty of Education, Pontifical University of Salamanca, Calle Henry Collet 52-70, 37007 Salamanca, Spain; cpetisco@upsa.es

* Correspondence: acregodi@upsa.es; Tel.: +34-923-277-100 (ext. 7610)

Abstract: Mindfulness is connected to positive outcomes related to mental health and well-being. However, the psychological mechanisms that account for these relationships are largely unknown. A multiple-step multiple mediator structural equation modeling (SEM) model was tested with mindfulness as the independent variable; purpose in life and behavioral activation as serial mediators; and happiness, anxiety, and depression as outcome measures. Data were obtained from 1267 women. Higher mindfulness was associated with higher levels of happiness and lower anxiety and depression symptoms. The association of mindfulness with the outcome variables could be partially accounted for by purpose in life and behavioral activation. The SEM model explained large proportions of variance in happiness (50%), anxiety (34%), and depression (44%) symptoms. Mindfulness is associated with both a sense of purpose in life and engagement in activities, which are also connected with positive outcomes. Moreover, having purposes in life is linked to higher levels of behavioral activation.

Keywords: mindfulness; purpose in life; behavioral activation; happiness; anxiety; depression



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1. Introduction

The positive effects of mindfulness have been highlighted by a growing number of publications. Mindfulness-based interventions have demonstrated efficacy in the treatment of depression, anxiety, and stress-related disorders, among many other psychological problems [1–3]. In addition, research has found that those people reporting higher levels of dispositional mindfulness also tend to experience positive states of mind and lower levels of depression and anxiety [4,5].

Essentially, mindfulness involves the self-regulation of attention so that it remains focused on the present moment. Along with this self-regulation, mindfulness also requires a focus on the immediate experience with an attitude of curiosity, openness, and acceptance [6]. How can this attention-related capacity lead to beneficial consequences in terms of mental health and well-being? Several mechanisms have been proposed. For example, it has been suggested that mindfulness practices could elicit processes of decentering, value clarification, exposure, cognitive/behavioral flexibility, and self-management [7–10]. Others propose attention monitoring and acceptance of inner experiences [11]; emotional intelligence [5]; self-compassion [7,12]; and self-regulation of processes such as attention, increased body awareness, emotional regulation through reappraisal, exposure, extinction and reconsolidation, and change in one's perspective of the self [13,14]. However, empirical testing of such explanatory mechanisms is still scarce, and results are often not conclusive.