

# Relationship between Self-Esteem and Mental Health According to Mindfulness of University Students

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## Abstract

This study is aimed to examine the relationship between self-esteem and mental health according to the mindfulness of university students and to provide the basic data for drawing up measures to improve mental health by understanding and making use of mindfulness through the results. As a survey research, the data was collected from May to June, 2014. The survey was implemented for 458 university students in a university in M city and C city. SPSS 21.0 was used for data analysis, and to grasp the relativity between average, standard deviation, and measurement variable, ANOVA, Pearson's Correlation Coefficient was used. As a result of this study, the degree of the mindfulness of university student was  $39.42 \pm 15.36$ , which was below average, that of self-esteem was  $85.22 \pm 27.58$ , and that of mental health was  $28.47 \pm 4.61$ , both of which over the average. There was a significant, positive correlation between mental health and self-esteem according to mindfulness. The better mindfulness worked out, the better mental health maintained, which showed a strong level of correlation ( $r=.761$ ,  $p<.001$ ), however, the better mindfulness worked out, the higher self-esteem got, which showed a low level of correlation ( $r=.123$ ,  $p<.01$ ). The higher self-esteem was, the better mental health maintained, which showed a low level of correlation ( $r=.192$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Therefore, it is considered that it is necessary to have a program for university students that makes them lead mental health toward a positive direction and have a high level of self-esteem through a training of mindfulness.

**Keywords:** Component, Mental Health, Mindfulness, Self-Esteem

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Need for the Study

University students belong to the late adolescence or early adulthood in the developmental stages of life, when physical, emotional, psychological changes are severe; they experience mental stress a lot, and are vulnerable to development and mental health. Actually, a considerable number of psychiatric disabilities which are diagnosed in the adulthood start from the adolescence or early adulthood<sup>1</sup>.

Mindfulness, awareness which appears by facing one's experience as it is and paying attention to the present moment<sup>2</sup>, enhances the physical and mental health by affecting the emotion of individual positively<sup>3</sup>.

The existing studies have been reporting that mindfulness is effective in the health promotion, and the prevention and treatment of disability of an individual<sup>4</sup>. That is, they show the fact that mindfulness contributes to the promotion of the positive mental health, however, other studies indicate that it contributes to enhancing the health of body and mind by promoting the positive emotion rather than the negative emotion, paying attention to the role of emotion in the effect that mindfulness has on the mental health.

It is said that self-esteem means a basic feeling on the self-acceptance and self-worth which starts with the evaluation of an individual himself or herself and the attitude on the competence of an individual himself or herself<sup>5</sup> and that the mental health is a capability that

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one creates the environment desirably, adjust to it well, is satisfied with it and can enjoy the success, efficiency, and happiness<sup>7</sup>.

The studies related with the positive effect that mindfulness has on the body and spirit of an individual are being proceeded. The relationship between mindfulness, self-esteem and mental health has been empathized through a variety of advance researches over and again. One who maintains a high level of mindfulness, by showing an attitude which one accepts one's image without making any adjustments, he or she comes to think of himself or herself positively and by putting the worth to oneself, he or she copes with the mental, psychological changes positively. Therefore, it is assumed that he or she has a high self-esteem<sup>8</sup>.

As one who has a high self-esteem tends to have a stable mind and express himself or herself, it can be assumed that he or she is likely to have a higher level of mindfulness, compared with the one has a low self-esteem.

Also, it is reported that there is a positive relationship between the perception of the present situation and receptive attitude on the experience of one's own, which can make one admit, respect oneself, maintain mental health and live a mature life<sup>9</sup>. Low self-esteem is becoming a threatening factor to the mental health of university students and mental health is induced by the relationship between mind and environment. Therefore, if one is made to adjust to the environment easily by controlling the mind of one's own, a positive change is achieved in a daily life and mental health problem can be solved<sup>10</sup>.

As a result of conducting emotion regulation intervention program based on mindfulness to university students, the program significantly changed the symptom of depression, the overall negative emotion, psychological well-being, life satisfaction, the degree of difficulties in emotion regulation, and the level of mindfulness<sup>11</sup>. It indicates that the emotional regulation intervention based on mindfulness is effective in enhancing the psychological health. Mindfulness brings about the stability and peace of mind, contributes to the maturation of an individual, and is being used as one of the effective therapeutic interventions.

Considering that mindfulness meditation receives attention as a way to regulate one's own mind, is used as one of the effective therapeutic interventions, and especially there is a result that it has a significant relationship between psychological symptom and mental health<sup>12</sup>, it can be said that mindfulness forms

the psychological stability and relieves the negative effect on the mental health. Through the process that feelings, emotion and thought which happen in his or her own mind are unfolded and watched, one comes to say and act proper to the circumstances naturally and his or her interpersonal relationship gets better as he or she can understand the other party and the circumstances more objectively. When an individual is awake in his or her mind, he or she can regulate himself or herself, becoming the master of the mind, not identifying himself or herself with the feelings, emotion and thought.

Mindfulness will affect the self-esteem and mental health, based on the results of previous studies and a theoretical basis. It is possible to set up the hypothesis that one who has a high level of mindfulness is likely to have a high self-esteem and mental health.

Therefore, this study is aimed to grasp the level of mindfulness, self-esteem, mental health of the university students, find out the relationship between self-esteem and mental health according to mindfulness, and especially identify that there is a significant correlation between these three variables.

Through these results, this study intends to provide a basic data in arranging the devices which can enhance the mental health by understanding and using mindfulness.

## 1.2 Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to compare the mindfulness, self-esteem, and health level for university students and find out the relationship between major variables.

The concrete goals of this study are as follows.

- To grasp the degree of the mindfulness, self-esteem and mental health of the subjects.
- To identify the relationship between the mindfulness, self-esteem and mental health of the subjects.

## 2. Research Method

### 2.1 Subjects and Data Collection

The data was collected from May to June, 2014. The survey was implemented for 458 university students in a university in M city and C city.

### 2.2 Survey Tools

The contents of a questionnaire of this study consisted of General Characteristics (6 questions), Mindfulness (20 questions), Self-Esteem (10 questions) and Mental Health (47 questions).

### 2.2.1 Mindfulness

The scale of mindfulness meditation is a tool revised and developed based on a theory of Vipassana meditation<sup>13</sup>, and can measure the degree of de-centrism, acceptance without judging, the awareness of the present, and attention. It is composed of 20 questions in total 5 points scales. The whole questions consist of reversed questions. It is evaluated that after reversed scoring, the higher the score is, the stronger the degree of mindfulness is. The reliability of a tool was cronbach's  $\alpha = .73^{13}$ .

### 2.2.2 Self-Esteem

As for a measuring tool of self-esteem, the adapted Korean version<sup>14</sup> was used. It consisted of 5-point scale and had positive self-esteem (5 questions) and negative self-esteem (5 questions). It means the higher the score is, the higher the self-esteem is. The reliability of a tool was cronbach's  $\alpha = .89^{14}$ .

### 2.2.3 Mental Health

As for a measuring tool of mental health level, Symptom Check List – 90 (SCL-90), which was made by improving Hopkins Check List, was used. The tool used in this study consisted of 47 questions, the microcosm which was made to be relevant to our society and revised for the freshmen of a university<sup>15</sup>. The tool had a 5-point scale and consisted of 9 sub-regions, such as somatization, obsession, interpersonal sensitivity, depression, anxiety, hostility, phobic anxiety, paranoia, and psychosis. It is assessed that the lower the score is, the better the mental health is. The reliability of a tool was cronbach's  $\alpha = .79^{15}$ .

## 2.3 Data Analysis

The collected data in this study was entered, arranged and analyzed using SPSS WIN 20.0 program. The level of significance was set  $\alpha = .05$ .

- The variables of the characteristics, mindfulness, self-esteem, and mental health of the subjects were analyzed with real number, percentage, mean and standard deviation.
- The correlation between the variables of mindfulness, self-esteem, and mental health was analyzed with Pearson Correlation.

## 3. Results of Study

### 3.1 General Characteristics of Subjects

The general characteristics of the subjects were like that the average age was 20.38 (SD=1.68), those who were under 20 were 32.5% (149), those who were in 20~24 were 63.8%(292) and those who were over 25 were 3.7% (17). As for gender, there were 24.9% males (114), and 75.1% females(344), and as for grade, there were 42.1% freshmen (193), 30.1% sophomores (142), and 26.9% juniors (123). AS for religion, 50.9% students (233) had no religion and 49.1% students (225) had religion. As for stress, 60.7% students (278) had a studying problem, which was most, 17.7% students (81) had a career problem, 5.5% students (25) had an opposite sex problem, 3.7% students (17) had a peer relation problem, 3.7% students (17) had a health problem, and 2.8% students (13) had a family problem. As for meditation experience, 64.8% students (297) had no meditation experience and 35.2% ones (161) had meditation experience (Table 1).

**Table 1.** General Characteristics

| Character-istics | Category               | n   | %    | Mean $\pm$ SD                      |
|------------------|------------------------|-----|------|------------------------------------|
| Age              | < 20                   | 149 | 32.5 | 20.38 $\pm$ 1.68<br>(Range: 18-27) |
|                  | 20-24                  | 292 | 63.8 |                                    |
|                  | $\leq$ 25              | 17  | 3.7  |                                    |
| Gender           | Male                   | 114 | 24.9 |                                    |
|                  | Female                 | 344 | 75.1 |                                    |
| Grade            | Freshmen               | 193 | 42.1 |                                    |
|                  | Sophomore              | 142 | 31.0 |                                    |
|                  | Junior                 | 123 | 26.9 |                                    |
| Religion         | No                     | 233 | 50.9 |                                    |
|                  | Yes                    | 225 | 49.1 |                                    |
| Stress           | Family Problem         | 13  | 2.8  |                                    |
|                  | Opposite Sex Problem   | 25  | 5.5  |                                    |
|                  | Health Problem         | 17  | 3.7  |                                    |
|                  | Studying Problem       | 278 | 60.7 |                                    |
|                  | Interpersonal Relation | 17  | 3.7  |                                    |
|                  | Career Problem         | 81  | 17.7 |                                    |
|                  | Others                 | 27  | 5.9  |                                    |
|                  | Meditation Experience  | No  | 297  |                                    |
|                  | Yes                    | 161 | 35.2 |                                    |

### 3.2 Level of Mindfulness, Self-Esteem, and Mental Health of University Students

The degree of the mindfulness of university students was  $39.42 \pm 15.36$ , which was below average, that of self-esteem was  $85.22 \pm 27.58$ , and that of mental health was  $28.47 \pm 4.61$ , both of which were over the average (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Level of Mindfulness, Self-Esteem, and Mental Health of University Students

|               | Number of Items | Minimum Value | Maximum Value | Mean $\pm$ SD     |
|---------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Mindfulness   | 20              | 20.00         | 94.00         | $39.42 \pm 15.36$ |
| Self-Esteem   | 10              | 47.00         | 188.00        | $85.22 \pm 27.58$ |
| Mental Health | 47              | 10.00         | 50.00         | $28.47 \pm 4.61$  |

### 3.3 Correlation between Mindfulness, Self-Esteem, and Mental Health

The mental health and self-esteem according to the mindfulness of university students showed a significant positive correlation.

The better mindfulness worked out, the better mental health maintained, which showed a strong level of correlation ( $r=.761$ ,  $p<.001$ ), and, the better mindfulness worked out, the higher self-esteem got, which showed a low level of correlation ( $r=.123$ ,  $p<.01$ ).

The higher self-esteem was, the better mental health maintained, which showed a low level of correlation ( $r=.192$ ,  $p<.01$ ) (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Relationship between Mindfulness, Self-Esteem, and Mental Health

|               | Mindfulness | Self-Esteem | Mental Health |
|---------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| Mindfulness   | 1           |             |               |
| Self-Esteem   | .123**      | 1           |               |
| Mental Health | .761***     | .192**      | 1             |

\*\*\* $<.001$ , \*\* $<.01$

## 4. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to grasp the level of the mindfulness, self-esteem, and mental health of university students and to identify the relationship between mindfulness, self-esteem, and mental health.

The degree of the mindfulness of university students was  $39.42 \pm 15.36$ , that of mental health was  $28.47 \pm 4.61$ ,

and that of self-esteem was  $85.22 \pm 27.58$ . It is considered that the higher the score is in the degree of mindfulness and self-esteem, the degree of mindfulness and self-esteem are high, and that the lower the score is in mental health, the better mental health is.

The university students in this survey showed that mindfulness was below the average and that self-esteem and mental health were over the average.

There was a correlation that the better mindfulness became, the higher mental health and self-esteem got, which shows that mindfulness has a significant effect on self-esteem and mental health, and which partly corresponds with the existing studies that mindfulness is correlated with the positive psychological factors, such as happiness, spiritual well-being and self-esteem<sup>16</sup>. One who performs mindfulness well sees and accepts a fact just as it is, and accepts oneself well just as it is, not perverting oneself or others.

That is, if one feels oneself desirable and thinks oneself a worthwhile being, it is considered that one attains a satisfactory human relation in one's life and that one can achieve a good state of mental health as well. In this study, it could be identified that the level of the mindfulness, self-esteem, mental health of the university students and that the better mindfulness works out, the better self-esteem and mental health are. It is considered that mindfulness, as a method to control one's mind, controls the emotion by reducing the negative feelings and thought and affects self-esteem and mental health. The person who is mentally healthy can optimistically improve in a given situation and properly perceive and express his or her feelings as well as cope with the best of the various problematic situations well. Also, by affection the mind positively, such as the reduction of depression and anxiety, the regulation emotion etc. Through the mindfulness of an individual, both physical and mental health, life quality and well-being can be enhanced.

Therefore, based on the above results, it is considered that it is necessary to have a program for university students which can lead mental health to positive direction through a training of mindfulness and which may have them a high level of self-esteem. Although many studies have been preceded on the positive effect of mindfulness on the individual, it is necessary to grasp the major factors which affect the mindfulness to enhance the mental health and self-esteem of university students in follow-up studies.

As in this study, only the university students were

surveyed, ignoring their majors, there is a limit in interpreting the results of this study.

In the future, by verifying whether there is difference between the majors of the university students in the level of mindfulness or not, it is necessary to provide customized mindfulness programs by majors, specify the effect of mindfulness through experimental studies and qualitative studies, and examine the mindfulness specific to university students. And by conducting the study targeting the group who experienced mindfulness mediation, it is necessary to identify that the level of self-esteem and mental health significantly increases. This study is significant in that it looked into the correlation between self-esteem and mental health to enhance and activate the effect of mindfulness.

## 5. References

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