

# A Correlational Study on the Trait Mindfulness and Perceived Stress of Secondary School Students

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**Abstract:-** The development of technology has caused the world change a lot at a lightning-fast pace. It is expected of people to achieve more at a younger age, "settled by 30." (Vasudevan & Reddy, 2019). People experience a great deal of stress as a result, particularly in early years of adulthood. Stress and the perception of stress are typically linked to poor mental health conditions. Literature suggests that coping resources have a buffering influence on the negative consequences of stress on mental health. They help in managing the demands created by stressful events in a person's life.

One such coping resource is the trait of mindfulness. The present study was conducted to explore the relationship between perceived stress and trait mindfulness among secondary school students. Thirty-five secondary school students from different Government Higher Secondary schools were selected and computed measures of perceived stress and trait mindfulness. The results showed a negative correlation between perceived stress and trait mindfulness among secondary school students. It was found that the students have a moderate level of perceived stress and a low trait of mindfulness. The findings of the study have significant implications for educational settings. The findings can be utilized to improve and facilitate the well-being of the school students. The results also pointed to the significance of including mindfulness-based techniques and skill development strategies in academic planning. Student-focused stress management programmes can be introduced to maintain a healthy mindset in our students.

**Keywords:-** Perceived Stress, Mindfulness Trait.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The introduction of technology prompted the world to move quickly. It is expected of people to accomplish more at a younger age, "settled by 30". People experience a great deal of pressure as a result, particularly in their early adult years. This stress is experienced as early as their school time itself and affect both the mind and body.

Every classroom has its own story to tell. A child in the Indian context in the school atmosphere is experiencing a wide range of situations where he or she may be happy, maybe sad, stressed or may be motivated or moulded. Most of the times it is seen that the need of the child has never been understood or never been considered. In general, we can see that once the school atmosphere is largely concentrated on

academic performances of pen and paper tests alone, not heading to the intellectual, emotional, mental and social needs of the children, the overall atmosphere of the school will be challenging overwhelming and stressful.

It is common knowledge that different persons have different reactions to and perceptions of stress. Some people could get very irritated and that would impede their work, but others would thrive on it. Though it is well established that how one interprets an event creates the impression that it is stressful, mindfulness, which promotes a nonjudgmental awareness, is gaining popularity as a stress-reduction strategy.

In India, majority of the students suffer from mental health issues due to the stress created by exam-related aspects. Stress and perceived stress are associated with adverse mental health outcomes. Coping resources have been proved by literature to have buffering effects on the impact of stress on mental health. One such coping resource is the trait mindfulness. Mindfulness has captured the attention of educators as a significant, yet traditionally overlooked, capacity that could support both cognitive and social-emotional abilities in students, and, in turn, enhance academic and behavioural outcomes. Therefore, it is critical to understand how secondary school students experience stress and how trait mindfulness, one coping mechanism, allows them to manage it.

## II. NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

In the past, India had its own distinct educational system with a well-established structure that sought to assist students in developing and adapting their bodies, minds, and souls. It is not merely acquiring information, its emphasis was in the development of concentration, memory, reasoning, adjustment, emotional development etc. This paved the way for the inculcation of high moral values and the nurturing of overall well-being. In contrary, now a days the society has witnessed a growing portion of school students experiencing a festoon of social, emotional and behavioural problems that interfere with their personal and interpersonal relationships, academic success and their potential to become talented and productive citizens.

As per the Survey on Mental Health and Wellbeing of School Students published by NCERT in 2022, 81 percent of 3,79,842 students who participated in the survey expressed that their main stressors were studies, exams, and results. It is quite evident that stress and anxiety are significant concerns

among school students in India, highlighting the need for increasing wellness and mental health support programmes in educational contexts.

The crushing weight of India's education system has left students with more than just textbooks to carry. A survey conducted by the National Sample Survey Organization found that 10% of school-going children in India suffer from mental health issues, with exam-related stress being a major contributor. Often, students are evaluated solely on their performance in examinations, which can cause significant anxiety and pressure. Additionally, the emphasis on rote learning, in which students are typically expected to memorize large amounts of information without fully understanding the concepts behind them, can lead to a decrease in creativity and critical thinking.

Stress is commonly experienced by students and can negatively affect their daily activities, overall health and wellbeing. The interaction and accumulation of these stressors can affect a student's ability to cope with his surroundings. Due to the increase in demands and expectations, immense pressure is experienced by school students to accomplish and achieve early in life. As a result of this stress health related issues also have begun to occur at an early age. Thus, it is essential to study the levels of stress perceived by secondary school students. In recent days, mindfulness has been identified as beneficial to academic performance and well-being.

This implies that, if students are learnt to be fully present, they can increase the quality of their learning performance by being more focused and become capable to deal with the stressful academic situation. Mindfulness enables the adults to approach the learning situations from a novel perspective. Further, it can be stated that mindfulness as a cognitive state, can add to one's own knowledge and increase the levels of emotional stability and productivity. When students use mindfulness in their learning processes, they utilize creativity, experience cognitive flexibility and can better use information to enhance memory for instructional retention. As a result, students tend to have high optimism, positive state, and feel more in control of their lives.

Majority of the recent research focuses on the effects of temporarily induced mindfulness or state mindfulness in individuals. There is no significant amount of literature available in the influences of trait mindfulness.

The present study will provide an insight into the amount of stress perceived by secondary school students. The results of the study will also help to understand the relationship between trait mindfulness and perceived stress and which aspect of mindfulness should be focused upon to reduce the levels of stress that are perceived by the secondary school students. It will add to the literature on the amount of research performed on trait mindfulness in India.

### III. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Stress is commonly experienced by students and can negatively affect their overall wellbeing. The transitional nature to adolescence, the pressure to succeed academically, and the adjustment of new social settings etc are all sources of perceived stress. The interaction and accumulation of these stress creators may affect a student's ability to cope with his academic and personal environment. As a result of this stress health related issues also have begun to occur at an early age. Thus, it is imperative to study the levels of perceived stress that secondary school students experience. The present study deals with assessing two variables-perceived stress and trait mindfulness-among secondary school students in Kerala. Hence the study is stated as "A Correlational Study on the Trait Mindfulness and Perceived Stress of Secondary School Students".

### IV. DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

#### A. Perceived Stress

Perceived stress is the feelings or thoughts that an individual has about how much stress they are under at a given point in time or over a given time period.

#### ➤ Operational Definition:

In this study, perceived stress refers to the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised as stressful by senior secondary school students.

#### B. Trait Mindfulness:

It refers to the innate capacity of paying and maintaining attention to present-moment experiences with an open and nonjudgmental attitude (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

#### ➤ Operational Definition:

In this study, trait mindfulness refers to students' tendency toward mindfulness or mindlessness i.e., frequency of mindful states over time.

### V. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study include:

- To assess the level of perceived stress among secondary school students.
- To assess level of trait mindfulness among secondary school students.
- To identify the relationship between perceived stress and trait mindfulness among secondary school students

### VI. HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

The hypothesis of the study is:

- There exists a significant relationship between perceived stress and trait mindfulness among secondary school students.

## VII. METHODOLOGY

### A. Method

In this study, survey method is adopted. The study used different tools for collecting required primary data.

### B. Sample

The sample of the study comprised secondary school students studying in three Government Higher Secondary Schools. The total number of samples is 35. They were standard VIII and standard IX students.

### C. Tools

- Personal Data Sheet
- Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) (Adopted)
- Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) (Adopted)

### D. Measures Adopted for Calculation of Data

The interrelationship between perceived stress and trait mindfulness was identified by applying Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation.

### E. Procedure

The participants were given the informed consent form, and a positive rapport was built. The purpose of the personal data sheet was to gather demographic data. The respondents were then given rating scales to indicate their answers in order to measure their perceived stress and level of mindfulness. After collecting the data, calculations were done to find out the correlation between the variables.

## VIII. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The results and discussion of the data collected using different tools are given below:

The data were consolidated and scored.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Perceived Stress and Trait Mindfulness among Secondary School Students

Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum Score Obtained	Maximum Score Obtained
Perceived Stress	19.16	4.68	7	27
Mindfulness Trait	3.06	0.73	4.1	2

Table 1 showed that the mean score obtained for perceived stress is 19.16 which means that it falls under moderate stress level. This indicated that the students have poorer health practices, such as sleeping fewer hours, skipping breakfast etc. It can have a negative impact on the student’s learning ability. It can result in mental and physical problems, diminish a student’s sense of worth and affect his/her academic achievement. Perceptions of stress contribute to an increase in negative emotional experiences and a decrease in positive emotional experiences and a decrease in life satisfaction and psychological well-being which in turn lead to depression and conflicts. Students who perceive their lives as more stressful also report greater adjustment problems as well as experience shorter sleep. This indicates low level of self confidence also. Empirical studies have shown that the higher level of stress perception will result in increased depression and irritations in life.

The mean score obtained for mindfulness trait is 3.06 which falls under low level. A low level of mindfulness increase depression and anxiety, resulting in a high level of emotional imbalance and adjustment problems. The respondents have low coping skills as well decreased creativity. They are often distracted with anxious thoughts and adopt avoidance behaviours and experience decreased enjoyment whilst learning.

The low level of mindfulness trait showed that the respondents have lower emotional regulation abilities. They are less aware of thoughts in the present moment, and this decreased self- awareness can lead to lower processing and control over one’s responses to surroundings or circumstances. The value suggested that the respondents lack focus and attention in their daily activities too This pointed towards a low level of self-insights in them.

Table 2: Relationship between Perceived Stress and Trait Mindfulness among Secondary School Students

Variables	Pearson Correlation Coefficient
Perceived stress Mindfulness trait	-0.86

Table 2 showed the relationship between perceived stress and mindfulness trait among secondary school students. The result from the table showed that the Pearson correlation coefficient (r value) obtained is -0.86. The result indicated that there is a negative correlation between perceived stress and mindfulness trait. Hence the hypothesis “There exists a significant relationship between perceived stress and trait mindfulness among secondary school students” is rejected. This revealed that students who have high perceived stress are having low mindfulness trait. This finding is supported by the results of the study conducted by Gupta & Panshikar (2023). and Vonderheyde & Marie(2017).

In the current study, respondents' lack of attention to stress indicators has resulted under an assessment of stress as moderate which may subsequently lower health and well-being. It showed that the respondents can adopt maladaptive behaviour in the context of stressful events. They may report low well-being, negative mood and high levels of anxiety, stress because of low mindfulness trait. The negative correlation between perceived stress and mindfulness trait is also a risk factor for poor educational achievement and health among the respondents. The findings of the present study suggests that the low mindfulness trait of respondents can intensify the negative effects of their perceived stress level.

The individual differences in the basic qualities of mindfulness of the respondents can also relate to differences in perception and appraisal of stress. Individuals with greater dispositional mindfulness experience better health because mindfulness protects them from the negative effects of stressful experiences. As such, in the present study, the respondent’s low mindfulness trait is the reason that they are not free from situations that are appraised as stressful, and as a result they can experience decreased health and well-being in the face of such contexts. This is evident from the respondent’s answers to statements such as “I find it difficult to stay focused on what’s happening in the present”, “I do jobs or tasks automatically, without being aware of what I’m doing.”, “I find myself doing things without paying attention” in which majority of them have agreed to these statements. Similarly, majority have agreed that very often they were “unable to control the important things in their life”, “felt nervous and stressed”, “felt that you were on top of things” etc.

The low trait mindfulness of the respondent can affect their psychological health. It can lower their subjective well-being, life satisfaction and compassion They can have lowered coping mechanisms to deal with stressful situations. They are less likely to engage in healthy coping strategies like acceptance and more likely to engage in unhealthy strategies like rumination. These factors have been validated by several studies.

The result of the study revealed that there exists a negative correlation between perceived stress and mindfulness among secondary school students. This showed that as mindfulness trait decreased, the perceived stress increased among the respondents. The mean scores of the two variables indicated that the respondents have low mindfulness trait and moderate level of perceived stress.

In the present study, the low mindfulness trait is associated with the moderate perceived stress of the respondents. The respondents have decreased awareness of stress symptoms and reduced ability to detect or appraise the situation as non-stressful in most cases. This, in turn, increased their perceived stress level. The low mindfulness trait can reduce their ability to handle with a set of situations/circumstances appraised as stressful, which results in adverse mental health outcomes. Trait mindfulness act as a buffer to reduce the tendency to experience perceived stress.

Different individuals interpret the life situations in different ways, some might appraise it as stressful while others may not. Thus, individual differences in other personality traits and perceptions of stress have also influenced the results. The result, thus, indicated that trait mindfulness is a beneficial factor in decreasing perceived stress among the students.

**IX. TENABILITY OF THE HYPOTHESIS**

Based on the results, the tenability of the hypothesis framed for the study is validated.

Table 3: Hypothesis Acceptance or Rejection

Hypothesis	Accepted/Rejected
There exists a significant relationship between perceived stress and trait mindfulness among secondary school students.	Rejected

Since the Pearson’s correlation coefficient was found to be -0.86 which indicated a negative correlation between the perceived stress and trait mindfulness among the secondary school students, the hypothesis “There exists a significant relationship between perceived stress and trait mindfulness among secondary school students” is rejected.

**X. MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

*A. The Results of the Study Revealed that the Respondents have a Moderate Level of Perceived Stress*

The moderate perceived stress level means that the respondents often have thoughts about what could happen and decide that awful things are inevitable. This worrying about *what could be*, can cause physical, mental, and emotional problems in them. High stress perceptions often lead to a range of mental health issues. Some of these are direct effects of stress, and some are unhealthy coping mechanisms. Perceptions of stress contribute to an increase in negative emotional experiences and conflicts, a decrease in positive emotional experiences and a decrease in life satisfaction and psychological well-being which in turn leads to problematic social experiences or depression.

*B. The Results of the Study Indicated that the Respondents have a Low Level of Mindfulness Trait*

Usually trait mindfulness aids in controlling negative thoughts, emotional regulation and curbing unhealthy habits and behaviour patterns. Thus, in the present study, a low mindfulness trait results in decreasing the respondents’ well-being, and increasing stress and anxiety. It prevents the respondents in dealing effectively with unpleasant feelings and leads to a low level of focus and attention in their life. As a result, the respondents will be preoccupied with stressors as well. Lower mindfulness is associated with the practice of less healthy coping skills, like acceptance, and more use of unhealthy strategies like substance use. Lack of source of support in life, being unprotective in nature, family conflicts and other personality trait and individual differences can inhibit the development of a person’s level of trait mindfulness.



*C. The Present Study Revealed that there is Negative Correlation Between Perceived Stress and Mindfulness Trait*

This indicated that as perceived stress increased, the trait mindfulness decreased among the secondary school students. In this study sample, the respondents reported moderate stress level and a low mindfulness trait. Trait mindfulness did not act as a protective factor against perceptions of stress among the selected sample. Mindfulness tends to help individuals deal effectively with unpleasant situations and in reducing stress. Therefore, in the present study sample, low mindfulness resulted in the respondents being preoccupied with stressors, and thus their increased level of perceived stress.

Mindfulness paves the way for developing acceptance and less over thinking, which in turn helps in reducing perceived stress. The negative correlation found in the present study showed that the low mindfulness trait reduces the avenue for general curiosity, openness, and acceptance of one's experience without expectations. This results in an increased level of perceived stress. The respondents may adopt adverse strategies for coping as a result of their low dispositional mindfulness level, which has been related to elevated distress in stressful or adverse situations. Low mindful individuals are more likely to practice unhealthy behaviours and to engage in risky habits. Research reveals that being low mindful can decrease positive mood and create All these factors explain the association between the low trait mindfulness and moderate perceived stress among the respondents.

The present study results are consistent with the widely held view that low levels of mindfulness decrease the person's ability to respond mindfully to their daily experiences.

## XI. CONCLUSION

The aim of the present study was to explore the relationship between perceived stress and trait mindfulness among secondary school students. The results of the study indicated that the students have moderate level of perceived stress and a low trait mindfulness. It is also found that there exists a negative correlation between perceived stress and trait mindfulness among secondary school students. This means that as perceived stress increased, the trait mindfulness decreased. Trait mindfulness has many psychological benefits such as enhanced well-being, life satisfaction, coping strategies etc. Therefore the low trait mindfulness may be the reason for the study sample to experience a moderate level of perceived stress. The study has major implications in the educational landscape. The school authorities should take measures for implementing programmes that aim at reducing perceived stress of students and enhancing trait mindfulness.

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