Mindfulness, non-attachment, and emotional well-being in Korean adults

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Abstract. The mediating effects of nonattachment were examined in the relationship between mindfulness and emotional well-being. Students (N = 780) from one cyber university in South Korea. At the beginning of 2014 fall semester, study participants were surveyed using self-report measures from mindful attention awareness, nonattachment, depression, and psychological well-being. Regression analysis showed that self-compassion partially mediated the relationship between mindfulness and depression. And nonattachment also partially mediated the relationship between mindfulness and psychological well-being. This study presents an empirical framework for the researches through investigating the relationship among mindfulness, nonattachment, emotional well-being.

Keywords: mindfulness, nonattachment, emotional well-being

1 Introduction

Mindfulness is conceptualized as a “receptive attention to and awareness of internal and external experiences as they occur” [1]. Researches about dispositional mindfulness, mindful state induced by experiment, and mindfulness based training have reported that the concept of mindfulness is associated to mental health and emotional well-being [1][2][3].

Considering these researches, mindfulness is conceptualized as both skill to be trained and psychological trait to be mindful in the present moment [1]. The negative relationship between mindfulness and depression and the positive relationship between mindfulness and psychological well-being has been well established in the literature, and the mechanisms that would link this relationship also received research attention.[4] The mechanisms such as reperceiving, self-regulation and self-management, emotional, cognitive and behavioral flexibility, values clarification and exposure may be mediators which contribute to the positive outcomes caused by mindfulness based intervention [5].

The present study focuses on the trait mindfulness, instead of mindfulness skill produced by mindfulness training. We specifically investigate the mechanism or
process that may mediate the relationship between mindfulness and emotional well-being. Recently, some researchers [6]. Sahdra et al. [6] have reported that Buddhist concept of nonattachment (Sanskrit: vir¯aga) is positively associated with mindfulness and psychological well-being. Shadra et al. [6] conceptualized the nonattachment as “lack of fixation, nonreactivity, more quickly recovering from the emotional distress”. Nonattachment also has the quality of “not feeling an inner pressures to avoid or cling to other person”, like anxious attachment or avoidant attachment in western psychology [6]. With a high trait dispositional mindfulness, nonattachment can be increased. Although positive relationship between mindfulness and nonattachment was reported, to now, there was no research on causal relation between two variables. Considering that nonattachment was associated adaptive functioning and reduction of painful emotion [6], we speculate that the nonattachment may be process variable between mindfulness and emotional well-being. Therefore, the present study is to investigate the prominent role of nonattachment on the rink of mindfulness and emotional well-being. Especially, this study is first to explore the mediating role of nonattachment on the relationship between two variables. This study may expand our knowledge of the mechanisms in the relation between mindfulness and psychological well-being.

2 Methods

Participants

Study participants were 780 university students who were taking one of several undergraduate courses in counseling psychology (187 men, 593 women; M = 39.67 years; SD = 1.72) at the cyber university in 2014 academic year.

Measures

The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS)[1][7]

Korean version of MAAS was used to assess mindfulness. It consists of 15 items. Participants are asked to evaluate their agreement on a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = almost always, 6 = almost never). Higher scores reflect more dispositional mindfulness. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of Korean version MAAS was .95.

The Nonattachment Scale (NAS)[6]

We used Korean version of NAS. Participants are asked to rate on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (disagree strongly) to 6 (agree strongly). Higher scores reflect more nonattachment. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of Korean version NAS was .92.
Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression (CES-D)[8]

We used Korean version of CES-D[9]. Participants are asked to rate on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (rarely/none of the time) to 3 (most/all of the time). Higher scores reflect more depressive mood. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of Korean version CES-D was .90.

Psychological Well-Being (PWB)[10]

The PWB is a self-report inventory that measures six dimensions of psychological well-being such as environmental mastery, self-acceptance, purpose in life, and personal growth. We used the reduced 18-items version of the scale that had been translated into Korean [11]. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of Korean version PWB was .83.

3 Procedure

This research was performed in the 2014 fall academic year. The measures were administered to the students via online class periods. The completion of the self-report questionnaires was anonymous and confidentiality was guaranteed. The study protocol was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of the university at which self-report measures were conducted (IRB: AN01-20140901-HR-003)

4 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using multiple regression. Before conducting the regressions, we examined scatter plots of the data and tested for normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity. Results indicated that the assumptions needed for regression were met. Sobel test was calculated to test the significance of a mediation effect as per Baron and Kenny (1986)[12]. All statistics were tested at an alpha level of .05. SPSS/PC Version 21 was used for statistical analysis.

5 Results

Before examining the mediational analysis, correlations among related variables and predictors were examined. All variables were significantly correlated in the predicted directions. Mindfulness was negatively associated with the depression and positively associated with psychological well-being. As expected, nonattachment was negatively associated with the depression and positively associated with psychological well-being.
Non-attachment scale as a Mediator

According to Baron and Kenny (1986)[12], a series of regressions were performed to test mediation effect of nonattachment between the variables. First, nonattachment was regressed on mindfulness ($\beta = .51$, $p < .001$). Mindfulness contributed a significant amount of variance to nonattachment (26%). Second, depression regressed on mindfulness ($\beta = -.48$, $p < .001$). Mindfulness explained a significant amount of variance to psychological well-being (22%). In the third equation, depression was simultaneously regressed on both nonattachment ($\beta = -.42$, $p < .001$), and mindfulness ($\beta = -.25$, $p < .001$). Finally, the regression model contributed a significant amount of variance to depression (35%). The results of regression analyses testing mediation effects of nonattachment on the relationship between mindfulness and depression in upper part of Figure 1. As shown in Figure 1, the beta weight when mindfulness was regressed alone on depression was -.48. The beta weight dropped from -.48 to -.25 when self-compassion was added into the equation. The Sobel test showed that nonattachment significantly mediated the relationship between mindfulness and depression ($z = -18.45$, $p < .001$). These results indicated that nonattachment partially mediated the relationship between mindfulness and depression.

To test for a mediation effect of nonattachment on the relationship between mindfulness and psychological well-being, a series of regressions were conducted. First, nonattachment was regressed on mindfulness ($\beta = .51$, $p < .001$). Mindfulness contributed a significant amount of variance to nonattachment (26%). Second, psychological well-being regressed on mindfulness ($\beta = .58$, $p < .001$). Mindfulness explained a significant amount of variance to psychological well-being (34%). In the third equation, psychological well-being was simultaneously regressed on both nonattachment ($\beta = .53$, $p < .001$), and mindfulness ($\beta = .31$, $p < .001$). Finally, the regression model contributed a significant amount of variance to depression (55%). The beta weight when mindfulness was regressed alone on psychological well-being was .58. The beta weight dropped from .58 to .31 when self-compassion was added into the equation. The Sobel test showed that nonattachment significantly mediated the relationship between mindfulness and psychological well-being ($z = 26.49$, $p < .001$). These results indicated that nonattachment partially mediated the relationship between mindfulness and psychological well-being.

6 Discussion

This study examined the mediator effects of nonattachment between mindfulness and emotional well-being in adult students. As expected, the correlational findings of the study indicate that depression and psychological well-being are associated with nonattachment. These results are consistent with earlier study reporting a relationship between nonattachment and emotional well-being [6]. Shadra et al.(2010)[6] reported that nonattachment was associated with scale relevant to well-being and interpersonal functioning, such as subjective well-being, eudemonic wellbeing, mental health, and interpersonal functioning constructs. The results of this study support the idea that nonattachment plays a role in mental health and emotional well-being. Nonattachment
may provide a release from mental fixations and encourage more objective judgment about the events, greater compassion, letting go of painful emotions [6].

The participants in this study were mainly women students of the specific cyber university, and it should not be generalized to more various university students including men. Another limitation is that the study data relied mainly on self-report measures, and cross-sectional method. Experimentally-based methods and longitudinal study would give additional insight into the role of nonattachment between related factors.

In conclusion, the results of the study give insight into the mechanism between trait mindfulness and emotional well-being in a sample of Korean adult students. Further study will be needed to explore another potential mechanism stronger than nonattachment the relationship between mindfulness and emotional well-being.

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References