

Mindfulness to Cope with the Stress: Empowering Adolescents to Convalesce Wellness During Covid-19

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Abstract

The world was severely hit by the catastrophic repercussions of the pandemic COVID-19. Nevertheless, human beings can always be above the chances and changes of this world. In taxing situations of this sort, mental health awareness is necessary. Consistent attention to mental healthcare is inevitable for maintaining proper mental hygiene. Tested mindfulness programs can undoubtedly bring about significant positive conscientisation of mental well-being. Through various studies, we know how mindfulness among young people successfully countered the pandemic's repercussions on adolescents and provided specific ways to enhance their emotional and psychological well-being and mental-care awareness. Since even the young people have the potential for self-compassion, the role of the mentors is to enable them to grow in self-awareness, seek required help, and equip themselves for mental wellness.

Key Words: Mindfulness, Pandemic, well-being

Introduction

Since the end of 2019, the entire world has passed a rollercoaster ride. There was havoc and heartache, catastrophic deprivations and unprecedented deficiencies in handling the pandemic repercussions of various grades, unanticipated psychological and emotional distress and failure of public and private sector systems to meet the basic material

needs and medical supplies of the masses. Although no one is spared from the upshots, the adolescents had become particularly vulnerable from a psychological point of view. The impact on adolescents' mental health and quality of life has been adverse. Many governmental institutions worldwide plunged into drastic yet inevitable measures to gain control of the critical situation and assure the citizens' needed security and well-being. Lockdowns, quarantine and strict isolation were enforced. People also were subjected to huge losses of financial securities. The restrictions in interpersonal contact and social interactions, the rise in various psychological problems and suicides are being reported. Health-care personnel went through great stress and sleepless nights in attending to and caring for the patients of COVID-19. In stressful situations of this sort, awareness of mental health is necessary.

Tested mindfulness programs can undoubtedly bring about significant positive conscientisation of mental well-being. As witnessed in the preservation of proper mental hygiene, consistent support from mental health-care employees played an important role. Hence, the article will attempt to present how mindfulness is successful in counteracting the repercussions of the pandemic on adolescents and provide specific ways of enhancing emotional and psychological well-being and mental-care awareness among them.

The Havoc That Needs Attention

As we said in the introduction, COVID-19 had created havoc on adolescents' psychiatric and psychological well-being. Globally, adolescents of varying backgrounds experience higher stress, anxiety and depression rates than COVID-19. Research also reveals that adolescents have a higher frequency of using alcohol and cannabis during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Lancet Psychiatry* discovered during the pandemic that adolescents are at increased risk of psychological problems (Patra & Patro, 2020). A study by *Psychiatric Quarterly* found that mental health problems are grave among most youth groups (Liang, Ren, Cao, Hu, Qin, Li, & Mei, 2020). This adversity is caused by what they witnessed in their kith and kin: the death of a dear one, fear of illness and many other stressors caused by the pandemic parallel to adjustment disorders and posttraumatic stress disorder (Rousseau & Miconi, 2020). Another social psychiatry research hypothesised that adolescents manifest a closer association between pandemic-related stress and psychopathology (Rosen, Rodman, Kasperek, Mayes, Freeman, Lengua, Meltzoff, & McLaughlin, 2021). The "State of

the World's Children 2021" report indicated that 14% of 15-24-year-olds in India reported losing interest in daily activities and feeling depressed. This parallels the American Psychological Association research that confirms increased isolation due to continuing pandemic has only worsened the mental state of youth. And the report shows that nearly 80% of college students across a wider range of ages felt depressed by the impact. Gen Z, young people between 13-23, is the age group that suffered greater mental balance in the United States due to the pandemic (Multani, 2022). Hence, adopting solutions and establishing the required technological infrastructure could increase efficiencies in accessing and delivering quality mental health care that could also enable a dynamic response to public health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Davenport, Cheng, Iorfino, Hamilton, Castaldi, Burton, & Hickie, 2020). It is a compelling urgency to meet adolescents' psychological and psychiatric problems during the pandemic.

Necessity of Self-care to Solve Mental Problems

There isn't a better solution than self-care to solve mental problems. 'Care for others' and 'self-care' go hand in hand. In this regard, social support undoubtedly plays a great role in psychological well-being but can be turned into serving self-help. Research by American Psychological Association proposes to introduce Skills for Psychological Recovery. They felt the need to expand and focus on social media for what may be prolonged isolation or future need for periodic social distancing, which can help reinforce or detect positive coping skills and support mental health (Saltzman, Hansel, & Bordnick, 2020). Since emotional well-being is a state of positive mental health to handle one's emotions and all life activities, understand one's emotions, moods, and feelings and learn how to cope with various negative situations, adapt oneself and find a positive emotional state. It finally leads to well-being delineating concrete ways to find and progress well-being in challenging situations like the pandemic.

To help others, one needs to help oneself priorly to know its effectiveness. Compassion toward others necessitates self-compassion primarily. Hence, reducing feelings of isolation and anxiety is paramount to promote well-being for everyone by raising awareness of the importance of self-care (Butler, Carello, & Maguin, 2017). Tulane School of Social Work in New Orleans, Louisiana, in support of this effort, developed an extensive website dedicated to self-care tools and resources realising that the first step in the recovery process

is the accessibility to self-care tools that promote individual coping. The aim consisted of developing a website that provides easy access to devices across the main self-care areas of meditation/mindfulness, physical activity, social connectedness, and indulging/fun activities (Saltzman, Hansel, & Bordnick, 2020). Of course, self-care needs to be cultivated in India to face mental problems since those who think it is good to seek support for mental health issues are just 41% of young people between 15 and 24. This is a detailed comparison between Indian young adults with those of other countries, where an average of 83% felt that reaching out for help for mental health problems was the appropriate way to deal with these problems (Multani, 2022).

Mindfulness and Mental Well-Being

Mindfulness can be of great help at this point. Positive psychology is an umbrella term which encompasses all that makes life go well with scientific understanding. Instead, mindfulness practices are congruent with much of the theory and practice in positive psychology (Hupperta & Johnson, 2010). By drawing people to the present moment, mindfulness provides the type of balanced awareness that forms the foundation of self-compassion. Mindfulness is concerned with observing what is going on in our field of awareness just as it is – right here, right now. Mindfulness is “meta-awareness,” which means awareness of awareness (Neff, 2013). To late philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti, meditation does not consist of the suppression of thought or conformity to a system but a discipline that comes into existence through observation of thought (Krishnamurti, 2021). In a situation like a pandemic, one can have many negative and self-defeating thoughts, which can be rightly remedied by mindfulness. And meditation is an irreplaceable technique to rest the mind and attain a kind of consciousness which distinctly differs from that of the normal waking consciousness. Mindfulness and meditation have become more mainstream and socially acceptable ways to manage stress and increase productivity (Chung, Smart, Zdradzinski, Roth, Gende, Conroy, & Battaglioli, 2018). Therefore it is truly a necessity during COVID- 19 times that the adolescents are conscientized to feel the need for self-help to enhance their psychological well-being.

Urgency of Training in Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a constituent of self-compassion and can also be used purposefully as a regular practice for self-care. The practise of

mindfulness has been integrated into many facets of counselling. For those who are drawn to mindfulness, non-judgmental awareness for self-care can be integrated as a practice with a set time for engaging in a specific mindfulness exercise or by way of being during the progression of the day. Exercises such as mindful eating or walking and maintaining sensory awareness while washing dishes are optimal means of brief daily self-care (Coaston, 2017). Mindfulness is the practice of purposeful and non-judgmental attentiveness to one's own experience, thoughts, and feelings (Chung, Smart, Zdradzinski, Roth, Gende, Conroy, & Battaglioli, 2018). As the repercussions of COVID-19 exasperate adolescents, the practice of mindfulness certainly works to get a grip over their lives. It's necessary to train adolescents in this way. It strengthens their immune function, reduces stress, improves sleep, and offers countless other benefits (Shapiro, 2020). When they undergo a depressive or disheartening moment in these troubling times, they can be taught to stop for a breath or two and acknowledge that they have a hard time and that their pain is deserving of a kind, attentive and caring response (Neff, 2013).

Young people can be taught this very easy method that Krishnamurti proposed: "Watch, observe, be attentive to what is happening around you, what is happening in yourself, be aware of the whole movement. A meditative mind is a silent mind. Silence is not the product of suppression of noise, it is not the opposite of noise. But it comes when the mind has completely understood itself" (Krishnamurti, 2021). And so here is the observation of everything and the silence that one can reach through observatory understanding.

Similarly, DeMello (2020) echoed, "Be aware of what you're saying, be aware of what you're doing, be aware of what you're thinking, be aware of how you're acting. Be aware of where you're coming from and your motives. An unaware life is not worth living. The unaware life is mechanical. It's not human. It's programmed, conditioned." So the young generation can be trained to become consciously aware of whatever feelings and emotions they undergo and understand, including their reactions to them.

Shapiro proposed a new paradigm for mindfulness. "It was the first scientifically-based model that explicitly included intention, attention, and attitude:

- Intention directs our heart's compass, reflecting our deepest hopes and values.

- Attention trains and stabilises our mind in the present moment.
- Attitude refers to how we pay attention – with an attitude of kindness and curiosity” (Shapiro, 2020)

The more one practices this, the more one’s mindfulness grows. And Shauna Shapiro affirms in categorical terms that neuroscience is catching up with ancient wisdom. But then again, revolutionary findings in neuroscience have demonstrated that we can change our happiness set-point. But it is not to be so through changing our external life or external situations of life (Shapiro, 2020) like COVID-19 but through changing the internal landscape. We’ve got to drop illusions or false notions and conceptions of life that anything outside will make us happy. Life is easy and delightful to those who can change their inner landscape. It’s only hard on the one with illusions, ambitions, greed, cravings etc., with which one has identified oneself (DeMello, 2020). And the best way we can change our inner landscape is by just focussing on the now.

Just Be Happy, Don’t Strain to Be Happy!

The youngsters can be trained to be happy, which can become the key to their growth, well-being and lasting happiness. To transform young people’s lives, we must keep them young, always ready to change, and liberate them from the myth of perfection (Shapiro, 2020). Teenagers should be made to understand that perfection can be expected neither from themselves nor from external situations. This mind-set keeps them on the track of constant and continuous growth. When one has a perfectionist attitude, one starts fighting the unacceptable situation one is entangled with, and it gets worse.

Therefore to transform the lives of the youngsters, we need to focus on direction and not on the destination, says Shauna. And only by understanding, we can flow, cope, be pliable and thus overcome with spiritual intelligence. She, therefore, proposes a toolkit of questions to answer oneself, which we can adapt to the condition of the pandemic. There we can pose questions to the young to introspect and answer:

- “At the calamitous strike of COVID- 19, can you remain perfectly calm?
- Can you cope with the challenges it poses with resisting or fighting?
- Can you love everyone around you unconditionally, even in these troubling times? Can you find contentment just where you are?

- Can you be equanimous in the midst of the havoc and tragedy caused by the present situation? (Shapiro, 2020)

If we can answer these questions ‘yes’ and aid young people to do the same, then mindfulness is effective.

Experience of Effortless Happiness

And yet this shouldn’t come as a result of effort. Lykken and Tellegen (1996) study made a dour conclusion: “Trying to be happier is as futile as trying to be taller.” Krishnamurti (2021), questioning the pursuit of happiness, said, “If you pursue happiness, it becomes an escape from unhappiness, and therefore it will always remain, covered over perhaps, hidden, but always there, festering inside.” Complementing this, DeMello (2021) once said, “Come home to yourself. Observe yourself. Self-observation is such a delightful and extraordinary thing. After a while, you don’t have to make any effort because, as illusions begin to crumble, you begin to know things that cannot be described. It’s called happiness.” Paradoxically the harder we try to find happiness by living up to some ideal of perfection, the more elusive real peace, happiness and connection become. It is because, in the pursuit of all of that, we lose touch with what matters, what is essential, and what is deepest in ourselves, which is the trustworthy source of peace and transformation. All that we see is that we’re not measuring up. Dispirited and defeated, we give up (Shapiro, 2020).

Therefore’ we can assist the young people in practising certain exercises so that they can elevate their set-point of happiness in the life circumstances enabled by volitional activity:

- living gratitude in the daily moments of life, in the concrete situations of life,
- doing good things to others or helping others selflessly
- doing things to develop one’s creativity just delightfully.

But certainly, one thing needs to be kept in mind while doing these things: youngsters must change their mind-set from one of self-improvement to one of self-liberation. Self-liberation means freedom from our limiting beliefs, our misguided idea that there is something wrong with us that needs to be “fixed”. Our constant attempts to “get it right” and to be “perfect” leave us in a state of exhaustion, never resting in the present moment, and never happy with who we are (Shapiro, 2020). Real liberation is the liberation from the self, the

greatest tyrant of life who voluntarily and willfully seeks the self-aggrandisement that deludes effortless happiness.

Enter into the Flow of Life

Flow isn't an uncommon experience for most of us. Most people can remember experiencing such a state. Athletes term it as 'being in the zone', others a 'heightened state of consciousness.' Psychologists call these absorbing experiences 'flow states'. The word was coined by a world-renowned psychologist, Csikszentmihalyi (Boniwell, 2012). Regarding the phenomenon called 'flow,' Csikszentmihalyi explained a few characteristics like the clarity of goals and immediate feedback on progress, complete concentration, losing awareness of oneself or self-consciousness, sense of control, the transformation of time and intrinsically rewarding of actions (Boniwell, 2012).

Psychologists also call the engagement of life flow. It refers to the experience of completely losing oneself in an activity. Individuals in flow become absorbed in what they are doing and lose the sense of time. They are not thinking about the action they are into but are unified with what they are doing. Seligman refers to this phenomenon as the 'engaged life'. Being in flow invigorates the person, filling oneself with positive energy (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009). In one of the studies, the engagement reflected absorption and interest. As one might expect, psychological interest resulted in greater commitment to and engagement in school. It similarly gave students a greater sense of hope (Kern, Waters, Adler, & White, 2015).

When a person is broken down by the troubles of life caused by COVID- 19, what is essentially needed is understanding, insight, and awareness of the problem one is entangled with. Logically when there is effort, struggle and conflict within, there is little understanding of the situation because the person is overwhelmed by the problems. But when there is understanding, awareness and insight, the person flows with life situations without resisting, fighting and grudging, without blaming oneself and others for the problems but facing them as they come on the way realistically (DeMello, 2020). Therefore the youth can be brought to the awareness of the detrimental feeling and self-defeating thoughts in this way:

- Can you decipher and call the feeling or thoughts at the moment by name?

- Can you objectively understand that the feeling or thinking is in you and not outside you?
- Can you disidentify yourself with the noxious thoughts and feelings running in you?
- Can you give yourself the right medicine called self-compassion (without self-condemnation) and compassion (without condemning others and the situation around you)? (DeMello, 2020)

In flow, one is not to be a dictator to oneself and not to push oneself. Once the youth gain the right understanding, they are already into the reality of life and the flow of life.

Always Be on the Journey of Transformation

Dougherty (2015) was determined to change students' mind-sets about taking exams, which are typically anxiety-provoking. He used a variety of strategies to shift these negative expectations. First, he labelled exam days "learning celebrations" to create a positive expectation about how students would perform. Then he brought in balloons, streamers, and treats on these days to "create an ambience for assessment that enhances learning and joy." In other words, he wanted to shift students' mind-sets about exams from dread and fear to joy and celebration. These strategies led to improved test scores (Sanderson, 2019). Similarly, it assists youths in changing their mind-set to face the challenges posed by COVID- 19.

Further, they need to understand that change is the direction and not the destination for an effective transformation. This empowering mind-set requires that we reassess many of the "facts" about personal change that society has conditioned us to believe, such as the benefits of "no pain, no gain" or "whipping ourselves into shape." We aren't changing ourselves so much as liberating our best selves. This path is not a self-improvement project with perfection as its ever-receding goal. Instead, it's about opening to the possibility of change, growth, and evolution (Shapiro, 2020). Psychiatrist Siegel (2021) reminds us, "We are always in a perpetual state of being created and creating ourselves." When the youngsters are brought to this state of continuous and constant self-transformation, life becomes delightful, refreshed and loved. Therefore, St. John of the Cross says emphatically, "Where there is no love, put love, and you will draw out love"(Sullivan & Dodd, 2012). It is because love is a proper transformer. Love can transform every

situation and enable the youth to immune themselves to the pests and tempests of life like COVID- 19.

Conclusion

The article emphasised the necessity of leading the youngsters to emotional well-being. It is a state of positive mental health where the individual is in a position to handle one's emotions and all life activities. It is where one understands one's emotions, learns ways and copes with all the negative situations, and achieves and finds a positive emotional state, finally leading them to embrace wellness. The outbreak of COVID- 19 has adversely shaken the world's wellness from many angles and parameters around the world, where rich and poor alike felt the urgency to re-equilibrate themselves existentially and psychologically after the shocking adverse impact of the pandemic. The article attempted to give attention to mindfulness and how it had been positive and constructive in handling and healing the world. Mindfulness training can truly aid them to subvert stress, despair and depression and empower them to live happy, contented and fulfilling lives by entering into the flow of life. It is important to seek and use all available resources and therapies to help youths mediate the adjustments caused by the pandemic. Undoubtedly more research is needed on improving youngsters' mental health during COVID-19 and similar disasters to address the same's psychological needs and enhance holistic wellness.

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