

Self Edification Through Optimal Experiences: A Study On Adolescents**Shikha*, Punam Midha****

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Department of Psychology, M.D.U, Rohtak**Abstract**

Adolescence is a period characterized by a personal quest for purpose, meaning and relationships. During this stage of life, teenagers are tasked with a healthy sense of self and by developing emotional regulation skills which can assist them in successfully exploring this critically important time of growth through optimal or positive experiences (e.g. mindfulness, happiness, spirituality & flow). They find their own way in the world and look for opportunities for action and engagement in the domains of personal growth (e.g. self-actualization, emotional maturity & hardiness). Thus the present study is an attempt to explore mindfulness & spirituality as predictors of self-actualization among adolescents. A purposive sample of teenagers both boys and girls, aged 16-18 years was drawn from Jhajjar & Rohtak city (Haryana, India). Descriptive, correlational & stepwise multiple regression analyses were computed. The findings indicated the average & above average level of mindfulness & spirituality respectively among teenagers, followed by below average level of self-actualization. Correlational analysis indicates the significant positive correlation of mindfulness with self-actualization. Though positive correlation between spirituality & self-actualization was found yet it was insignificant. Further mindfulness emerged as predictor of self-actualization.

Keywords: Adolescents, Mindfulness, Spirituality & Self-actualization.

Introduction: Every fifth person in India is an adolescent (10-19 years). Based on profile of teenage in India, the census of 2011 reported that there were 236.5 million (19.6 percent of the total population) adolescents. Adolescence is a time of rapid growth both physically and psychologically. This phase of life is also a part of their self discovery. Now they develop a more socially constructed sense of self because of peer influence along with self reflection they wanted to attain fullness of life, which is possible through optimal usage of their capabilities and potentials which is possible only after satisfying, lower level of needs such as physical, safety, love and growth need of self esteem. Hence self-actualization-a growth need refers to an enlightened maturity characterized by the achievement of goals, acceptance of oneself and an ability to self-assess in a realistic and positive way (Maslow, 1943). However the term was originally introduced by Kurt Goldstein for the motive to realize one's full potential. It is an ability of a person to act in particularly efficient and intensively enjoyable manner and also a stage where a person is more integrated and less split. Whereas Rogers stated that every person comes into the world with some innate abilities and the goal of his/her life is to develop these abilities which termed as fully actualizing tendency. These tendencies are present in both animals and humans but while human develop special view about themselves which is called self concept. This gives a person a sense of what he is, what he wants. Further he stated that when a person's self-concept meets his or her inborn capacities, the person becomes a fully functioning person. These people are self-directed. These people keep open views for themselves and others. Researchers showed that adolescents who have higher sense of self-actualization they are often motivated by a strong personal ethics and responsibilities. They enjoy applying their problem-solving skills to real-world situations and they like helping other people improve their own lives (Kiaei & Yalda, 2013; Orden & Assist, 2017; Skripkina, Turavets, Vakulenko, Egorova & Shchurov, 2018). Youth is the best time for inner realization, transformation and self enlightenment which can

be achieved through optimal experiences such as hope, joy, optimistic thought, mindfulness, and spirituality) that may lead to the unraveling of self or personal growth.

Mindfulness is a state of active and open attention on the present. It refers to a living in the moment and awakening to our current experience, rather than dwelling on the past or anticipating the future. When the person is mindful, then he carefully observes his thoughts and feelings without judging them as good or bad. It is a healthy way to identify and manage hidden emotions that may be causing problems in our life. This state of mind has been earlier explained by Buddhist meditation called Vipassana which means "clear awareness" or "insight", resulting in the end of suffering which has been termed as a state of "Nirvana". There are mainly two approaches to explain mindfulness such as (i) The clinical psychology (ii) The self discrimination theory (SDT). In clinical psychology approach Kabat-Zinn (2003) defined mindfulness as "the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moments and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment. This approach is based on the assumption that mindfulness is not a natural state of mind, hence needs to be consciously induced and practiced where as self discrimination theory explains mindfulness as open or receptive awareness and attention, which may be reflected in a more regular or sustained consciousness of ongoing events and experiences (Brown and Ragon, 2003). In other words according to SDT mindfulness does not require intentional effort to evoke it.

There are certain models which focused upon the process of a state of mindfulness. As per meta-cognition model, mindfulness state includes two levels of information processing. The first is lower object level i.e. related to contents of consciousness such as perceptions, thoughts and emotions. The second level is higher meta-level which is related to awareness or consciousness monitoring and controlling the situation. The major purpose of mindfulness is to cultivate consciousness towards our experiences, mental processes and activities (Jankowski and Holas, 2014). Further the five aggregate model of the mind explains subjective conscious experiences of a person. According to this model -all our experiences involve five major aggregates such as material form, feelings, perception, volition and sensory consciousness. In Buddhist traditions, analysis of these aggregates result in the enlightenment of self. According to two-component model, mindfulness consists of self-regulated attention which involves bringing awareness to current experience by observing and attending to the changing fields of "objects" (thoughts, feelings & sensations), from moment to moment. The second component is orientation to experience which is related to maintaining an attitude of curiosity about objects experienced at each moment. As per Mindfulness to meaning theory mindfulness is a positive psychological and reappraisal state which leads to a sense of meaning in stressful events. It is a process which motivates values-driven behavior and engenders a deeper sense of purpose and self-actualization (Garland, 2015). Further cognitive model of mindfulness emphasized upon understanding the cognitive process which help in shaping a state of mindfulness (i.e. the links between unconsciousness, meta-awareness and the conscious) and as their determinants (i.e. the executive functions of attention and the components of working memory) (Segal, Williams & Teasdale, 2002).

There is a wealth of literature which have revealed that people who have an average level of mindfulness or awareness of present moments, they reported better realization of self, self esteem, self-control & psychological functioning (Napoli, Krech and Holli, 2005; Thompson and Gauntlett-Gillbert, 2008; Biegel, Brown, Shapiro and Schbert, 2009; Huppert and Johnson, 2010; Mendelson, Greenberg, Dariotis and Gould, 2010; Henelly, 2011; Bowlin & Baer, 2012; Frank, Broderick, Reibel and Canrell, 2013; Dahm, 2013; Beitel, Bogus, Hutz, Green, Cecero, & Barry, 2014; Haertal, 2016; Xiao, Yue, He & Yu, 2017).

Another optimal experience i.e. spirituality which refers to piousness. It includes aspects of higher consciousness, transcendence, self-efficacy & love. It is a unifying force, providing meaning in life & consisting of individual values, perception and faith as well as being a common bond among individuals (DeLaune & Ladner, 2006). There are some theories which are related to the nature of spirituality. According to holistic model of spirituality, the spiritual aspects provide meaning and purpose and give many ways or solution to a person in difficult circumstances /situations which

connects to a larger reality of life (Purdy, 2005). According to Erikson in his theory of psychosocial development (1968) at the stage of ego identity v/s role confusion focused upon conscious sense of self that we develop through daily interaction with others, which constantly changes due to new experiences and information. In this way, spirituality plays a major role in the process of forming a strong identity in society and developing a sense of direction in life. Whereas Fowler (1981) proposed a model of Spiritual/faith development where he stated that spirituality is a basic aspect of human existence and goes through six stages of development. From 3rd and 4th stage the spiritual journey of adolescent's generally start. In 3rd stage i.e. synthetic-conventional stage people develop the ability to think abstractly as well as concretely and to evaluate various concepts that are presented to them. They focus on other's thoughts. Adolescent adopts a social stance, realizing that others have also their own perspectives i.e. feelings, thoughts, desires, motivations, and intentions. They begin to develop their individuality and faith, on the basis of their own values, relationships, and commitments. In 4th stage i.e. Individuative-reflective stage when person begins to recognize that they are in a "box" and they have a need to look outside of it. They ask questions to themselves and see the contradictions or problems in their beliefs. It may be a very painful stage as old ideas are now modified and sometimes rejected altogether. Some people give up on faith altogether or faith strengthened as beliefs become explicitly, personally held while at 5th stage the person reaches to permeable psychological spiritual boundaries where spirituality and positive youth development model stated that there are some developmental assets which participate an important role in adolescent development, where life meaning and positive beliefs are significant internal assets that influence adolescent's self development (Benson, 1997). Many researchers showed that spirituality plays an important role in enlightenment of self among adolescent and as well as in elderly (Maslow 1971, 1968, 1954; Fernando, 2008; Dhar, Chaturvedi & Nandan, 2012).

Problem: To assess and find out the relationship between optimal experiences (mindfulness & spirituality) & self-actualization among adolescents.

On the basis of above problem the following objectives were taken into consideration.

Objectives:

- a) To assess the self-actualization among adolescents.
- b) To assess optimal experiences i.e. mindfulness & spirituality among adolescents.
- c) To find out the correlation of mindfulness and spirituality with self-actualization among adolescents.
- d) To find out the predicting potency of mindfulness and spirituality with regard to self-actualization.

Method:

In order to execute the above mentioned objectives, the study was planned as per following framework.

Design:

A correlational predictor design was used.

Sample:

A purposive sample of teenagers both boys & girls, aged 16-18 years was drawn from Jhajjar & Rohtak city (Haryana, India).

Tools:

The following tools were used for the study.

- Self-actualization scale

- Five-facet mindfulness scale
- Spirituality scale

Self-actualization (Sharma, K.N.;2000): It consists of 75 items and each item has to be responded on 3 point scale such as “never”, “sometimes”, “always” and has to be scored as 1,2 and 3 respectively. The possible score range can be 75 to 225. The test retest reliability of test is 0.85.

Five-facet Mindfulness scale (Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Kretzmer & Toney; 2006): It consists of 39 statements having five facets such as- non reactivity to inner experiences, observing to sensation, acting with awareness, describing and non judging of experience. All items are to be rated on 5 point scale ranging from never or very rarely true to often and very often. The possible score range can be 39 to 195. It is applicable for adolescents as well as adults also. The cronbach alpha for total measure is 0.93 & for the five facets, 0.86 for non reactivity, 0.90 for awareness, 0.91 for describing, 0.84 for observing, & 0.93 for non judging.

Spirituality scale (Biswas & Biswas; 2006): it consists of 21 statements, which included centrality of God, ethical & moral values, the cyclical nature of pain and pleasure in one's life & power of meditation.

All items are to be rated on 4 point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The possible score range on the scale can be 21 to 84. The cronbach alpha for the measure has 0.84.

Results & Discussion: The main objective of the current study was to explore optimal experiences (mindfulness & spirituality) as predictors of self-actualization among adolescents. Descriptive statistics, correlation and regression analyses were computed to assess the levels of self-actualization, mindfulness & spirituality among adolescents and correlation of optimal experiences (mindfulness & spirituality) with self-actualization and their (i.e. mindfulness & spirituality) potential to predict self-actualization among adolescents (As shown Table 1, 2 & 3).

Table 1

Descriptive statistics of the scores obtained on scales of self-actualization, mindfulness and spirituality among adolescents

S.N.	Variables	Mean	S.D	Range	of	Interpretation
1.	Self-actualization	137.42	15.41	75-225 21-84	Scores	Below average
2.	Mindfulness	109.23	13.87			Average
3.	Spirituality	65.46	6.69			Above average

In order to attain the first objective of the current study i.e. 'To assess the level of self-actualization among teenagers', it has been observed from Table 1 that teenagers were having below average level of self-actualization (i.e. mean score 137.42, range of scores 75-225). It is indication of their below moderate tendency of actualizing their potentials. No doubt they are in a stage of self discovery hence can maximally actualize their self. As there are many studies which showed a higher level of self-actualization among both teenagers (male & female) as well as elderly (Ivtan et al., 2013; Mohamadi et al., 2014; Singh, 2016; Jena et al., 2016; Odun et al., 2017). Thus the reasons for below moderate level of self-actualization may be attributed to cultural differences as most of the review reported here is with teenagers/elderly of western culture, where enough autonomy is given to adolescents to navigate their self, whereas in India parents don't give enough autonomy to take the decisions of their

lives by themselves. Thus they are less reliant on their own experiences and take judgments by themselves. As they are less open to growth, health, acceptance of facts, spontaneity, creativity and sense of morality.

Further from Table 1 it is clearly showed that adolescents scored 109.23 mean scores on mindfulness scale which indicated average level of mindfulness in them. In other words they are moderately awakened to their current experience. Thus they appeared to have an average level of nonjudgmental capacity. They may have reached to first stage of meta cognition i.e. lower object level which is related to the consciousness of the contents of perceptions, thought and emotions, however not fully aware towards monitoring or control of the situations (as per meta cognition theory). Thus they appeared to have an average level of self understanding, self acceptance and self control (as per five aggregate model). Being a moderate in mindfulness state they are capable of driving meaning from stressful events to some extent (as per mindfulness-to-meaning theory), ultimately resulting in an average level of relief from stressful events (as per cognitive model of mindfulness). However similar findings with children and elderly were reported by huge numbers of researchers (Napoli et al., 2005; Thompson et al., 2008; Zylowska et al., 2008; Biegel et al., 2009; Mendelson et al., 2010; Huppert et al., 2010; Henelly, 2011; Dahm, 2013; Frank et al., 2013; Beitel et al., 2014; Haertal, 2016; Xiao et al., 2017).

While observing Table 1 it has been seen that teenagers obtained 65.46 mean scores thereby indicating an above average level in spirituality. It reveals that they feel good about the little things in life and look at the world through empathetic eyes. They appeared to have quite positive relationships with others, self-compassion, generosity, wisdom, self-esteem, optimistic, and have meaning and purpose in life.

Further in order to achieve the third objective of the study i.e. 'To find out the correlation of mindfulness, spirituality with self-actualization among adolescents' correlation analysis was conducted and has been shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Intercorrelational matrix of mindfulness, spirituality and self-actualization among adolescents

Variables	Mindfulness	Spirituality	Self-actualization
Mindfulness	-	.040	.218*
Spirituality	-	-	.102

*p<0.05

Further Table 2, indicated the significant positive correlation between mindfulness and self-actualization. In other words the current findings emphasized that as a sense of mindfulness increases there is likelihood of increment of self-actualization among teenagers. The current findings corroborate the previous findings because mindfulness focuses on self processing and underlying neural systems. It functions to reduce suffering resulting in substantially healthy mind. It is described as reducing a biased sense of self. It helps in developing a meta-awareness of self i.e. an ability to effectively manage one's responses and impulses resulting in transcending of self focused needs. In other words it may be stated that it leads to the embodied integration and internalization of the non-self. Thus it helps in boosting authentic functioning i.e. being aware of and regulating oneself, thereby helps in aware of true self which are the major pillars of self actualization (Brown et al., 2003; Ghorbani et al., 2010; Xiao et al., 2017). Subsequently Table 2 also

indicated the insignificant positive correlation between spirituality and self-actualization thereby indicating that spirituality is not a primary pathway leading to a state of self actualization. Contrary to the above findings, there are some researcher who reported the positive significant correlation between spirituality and self-actualization (Janowike et al., 1994; Dubow et al., 2000; Tuck et al., 2006; Pajouhandeh, 2013; Bulut, 2018; Perera et al., 2018; Skripkina et al., 2018).

Subsequently, the fourth objective i.e. 'To find out the predicting potency of mindfulness and spirituality with regard to self-actualization' was meted out by computing stepwise multiple regression analysis and has been shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Stepwise multiple regression of self-actualization on mindfulness & spirituality among adolescents

Criterion Variable	Independent Variable	R	R ²	Standard error of estimate	β	F
Self-Actualization	Mindfulness	.258*	.067	14.964	.258	6.98*

*p<.01

Predictor: (constant) Mindfulness, Excluded: Spirituality

Criterion Variable: Self-actualization

From Table 3 it is clearly apparent that out of two optimal experiences (mindfulness & spirituality) mindfulness emerged as a significant potent predictor of self-actualization among teenagers. The value of R² (.067) indicates that 6.7% variance in self-actualization may be explained by mindfulness. While the β value i.e. .258, reveals that one percent increase in mindfulness will lead to 25.8 percent increment in self-actualization. The significant value of F reveals the fitness of the model. The reason for emerging mindfulness as a predictor of self-actualization among teenagers may be as mindfulness fixes concentration which leads to self control, positive affect, flexibility and mental clarity, all of these are the pathways which lead to a state of self-actualization. It may be a state of transcendence where a person enjoys a high level of self acceptance with all his/ her shortcomings. It helps in enhancing the energy level which improves to be helpful in maximizing one's potential. It guides to the acceptance of self in a stoic sense. It also alleviates stress- anxiety and reduces various mental & physical symptoms so that a person focuses upon self functioning and evaluates his/her potential. Brown & Ryan (2003) stated that mindfulness is an attribute of consciousness, long believed to promote psychological well-being i.e. self regulated behavior, positive emotional states of self & others. Voluminous earlier research findings supported the current findings of mindfulness as being a major source of self-actualization (Beital et al., 2005; Ryan et al., 2012; Beital et al., 2013).

Further Table 3 revealed that, spirituality did not emerge as predictor of self-actualization among teenagers. It may be helpful in purifying mind, but unable to serve as a resource for actualizing one's potential.

To sum up, it may be inferred from the above findings that teenagers have average & above average level of mindfulness & spirituality respectively, however below average level in self-actualization. Further significant positive correlation has been found between mindfulness and self-actualization.

Where mindful also emerged as a predictor of self-actualization: on the contrary, spirituality (an optimal experience) failed to predict self-actualization. The present study endorsed some suggestions with regard to the need of enhancement in the level of self-actualization which can be achieved through mindful interventions. The implication of the current study is that schools in Haryana should provide mindful intervention to their students for their adequate personal growth.

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