



Role of Adverse Childhood Experiences, Mindfulness Attention Awareness and Gratitude in Shame and Guilt among Young Female Adults.

Miss. Srushti Shah

Department of Psychology,
Sir Parashurambhau College (Empowered
Autonomous),
Pune-30.

Dr. Shilpa Salve

Sir Parashurambhau College (Empowered
Autonomous),
Pune-30.

Abstract:

It is necessary to study Adverse Childhood Experiences because it can have long-lasting effects on physical health and play a significant role in determining health and wellbeing (Felitti, 2002). The purpose of this study is to investigate the Role of Adverse Childhood Experiences, Mindfulness Attention Awareness and Gratitude in Shame and Guilt among Young Female Adults.

Method:

Participants were 42 young female adults from Maharashtra. Adverse Childhood Experiences, Mindfulness Attention Awareness, Gratitude, Shame and Guilt were measured by Self-report questionnaires of Adverse Childhood Experiences Questionnaire (Felitti, Anda, Nordenberg, Williamson, Spitz, Edwards, Koss, & Marks, 1998), Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (Brown & Ryan, 2003), Gratitude Questionnaire (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002), Guilt and Shame Proneness Scale (Cohen, Wolf, Panter, & Insko, 2011) respectively. ACE significantly predicted Mindfulness Attention Awareness by 24.3% of variance. Gratitude significantly predicted Shame Negative Self-Evaluation by 8.4% of variance. Shame Negative Self-Evaluation significantly predict Guilt repair by 24.4% of variance. The results are discussed in the light of literature.

Keywords- *adverse childhood experiences, Mindfulness attention awareness, gratitude.*

Introduction

This literature review explores the relationships between ACEs, Mindfulness, gratitude, shame, guilt, and how these factors contribute to mental health outcomes in young female adults. It also discusses preventive measures and the relevance of the current research. The variables explored in this correlational study are, Adverse Childhood Experiences- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) are stated as the frequently stressful events occurred in the Childhood from the age of 0-17 (Adverse Childhood Experiences, 2020). Mindfulness Attention Awareness (MAA) - Mindfulness Attention Awareness is a state of mind in which attention and sensitive awareness of what is happening inside occurs by simple observations (Brown, Ryan, & Carlson, 2003). Gratitude- Gratitude is a human strength and virtue that has

been a focus of both religious traditions and psychological research. It is defined as an acknowledgment of value received from others and is associated with enhanced well-being and positive life outcomes (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000; Emmons & Mishra, 2010). Shame- Shame is a highly unpleasant self-conscious emotion arising from something being dis-honorable, immodest in one's own circumstances. It is also withdrawal from social intercourse (APA Dictionary of Psychology, n.d.).

According to Charles Darwin, like other characteristics, emotions help us to respond to our environment. Similarly guilt is an emotion linked with internal event rather than external event because it's our own behavior, a sense about we have done something that we shouldn't (Understanding Guilt: The Useless Emotion?, 2022). Guilt develops when someone behaves differently from moral principles of how others ought to be treated. In order to overcome guilt, one must acknowledge that their actions are wrong and take ownership of the harm they have caused (Wohl and Branscombe, 2011).

Literature Review:

Adverse Childhood Experiences: Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) have gained global attention as significant risk factors for adult health outcomes (Alhowaymel, Kalmakis, & Jacelon, 2020). Some of the surveys by Nagy, Szabó, Hann, & Kósa, (2019) have also been conducted to measure ACEs and it's prevalence across various countries and the overall ACE prevalence stated that ACEs are as common as 14.1% to 35.2% in all the countries. Adverse Childhood Experiences have become a major public health concern as one in two young people face childhood abuse and maltreatment. These childhood maltreatment in-turn leads to substance use and domestic violence (Fernandes, Spiers, Vaidya, Zhang, Sharma, Holla, Heron, Hickman, Murthy, Chakrabarti, Basu, Subodh, Singh, Singh, Kalyanram, Kartik, Kumaran, Krishnaveni, Kuriyan, Benegal, .2021). ACEs are found to have a long-term impact on the mental health and well-being and when we are exposed to stress our body gives the flight, fight and freeze responses to protect us from danger during the stressful situation. However if the stress in for the prolonged period of time, it will have a negative impact on the structure of the brain (Webster, 2022) also the sympathetic nervous system can be aroused when the individual faces fight or flight responses and to sooth the arousal, one can indulge in alcohol and other substances (Gantt, 2006). According to Boullier and Blair (2018) can lead to risk of chronic illness leading to risk of cancer, heart disease and diabetes.

Previous studies have resulted that, having ACEs may result into risk taking behaviors, developmental disruptions and self-regulations among young adults (Kalmakis & Chandler, 2015; Rollins and Crandall, 2021). As stated by Levenson, J. S., Willis, G. M., & Prescott, D. S. (2014) Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are prevalent among various male populations and can have significant impacts on adult outcomes. Trauma Theory by Felman (1992) states that individual experience trauma when why face any events that are overwhelming, threatening to life and create the feelings of helplessness.

Mindfulness Attention Awareness: Mindfulness aligns with many approaches but remains underutilized, suggesting a need for greater integration into global health efforts (Oman, 2023) and Recent studies in India have explored the effects of mindfulness on various psychological and health-related outcomes, promising results in improving mental well-being, quality of life, and anxiety and depression levels in Indian adults were seeing as a results for practicing Mindfulness (Mukhopadhyay & Pal, 2022). Mindful Attention Awareness is also

found to be helpful for cancer patients, that helps them in mood disturbances, stress symptoms and building overall psychological well-being (Carlson and Brown, 2005; Hepburn, Carroll, & McCuaig, 2021). In general population and trauma-exposed adults, Mindfulness interventions have demonstrated to reduce anxiety, depression, trauma related symptoms, and enhanced coping, mood and quality of life (Ortiz and Sibinga, 2017). Mindfulness based stress reduction theory states that Mindfulness is a form of meditation that focuses on the awareness of the present moment such as what are you thinking, feeling and sensing right now in the moment for which non-judgment plays an important role. (Zinn, n.d.).

The negative effects of stress and adverse childhood exposures can be mitigated through high quality and structured Mindfulness instruction (Ortiz and Sibinga, 2017). Dolbier, Haley, Conder, & Guiler (2021) stated that when Mindfulness is increased, the ACEs and generalized anxiety weakened, so Mindfulness can be used as a treatment or prevention for individuals who have experienced ACEs.

Gratitude:

Gratitude is globally recognized as essential to civilized human interactions and potentially significant in some social animals (Robert A Emmons & M. McCullough, 2004). A cross-cultural study by Thurackal, J. T., Corveleyn, J., & Dezutter, J. (2016) revealed that Indians are high on gratitude as it is commonly associated in spiritual development and awareness of God's presence. An experiment by Watkins, Woodward, Stone, & Kolts, (2003) shows that grateful thinking improves mood and overall subjective well-being. Some researchers suggested that practicing gratitude also enhances mental well-being, reduces depression, lessens anxiety, supports heart health, relieves stress and improves overall well-being and sleep quality (Health Benefits of Gratitude, 2023; Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010). Some studies also revealed that Gratitude also helps us with shifting the emotions such as resentment or envy (Brown & Wong, 2017).

Gender based study revealed that women and young adults experience highest levels of Gratitude leading to higher amounts of Self-esteem, emotional intelligence and kindness (Preś, Kurpisz, Pełka-Wysiecka, Adamowicz, Suchecka-Fidura, Ilnicka, Mak, & Samochowiec, 2018). The find, remind and bind theory of gratitude by Sara Algoe (2012), states that 'Gratitude helps in strengthening relationships by understanding and valuing the partners which in turn enhances social bonds by reminding and deepening people of their commitments and relationships. The study by Leary, Dockray, & Hammond (2016) found out that gratitude is strongly linked with positive emotions, life satisfaction and positive pregnancy experiences and being Mindfulness reduces negative emotions during pregnancy also emotional Intelligence is also a significant mediator between Mindfulness Attention Awareness and gratitude (Schutte, Keng, & Cheung, 2021).

Shame:

Global surveys on shame reveal that Shame plays a significant role in perpetuating poverty and impacting mental health. Shame is identified as a core element of poverty, affecting individuals across diverse cultures and socioeconomic contexts (Chase & Bantebya-Kyomuhendo, 2014). Another study by Yadav (2020), investigated shame and social comparison in depressive disorders among Indian patients, results were significantly higher shame scores in depressed individuals compared to controls, with a positive correlation between depression and shame scores. Shame involves negatively judging yourself and

believing that something is wrong with you as a person, this emotion operates outside of conscious awareness making it difficult and challenging to identify and overcome (“Shame,” n.d.). Shame is the “master emotion of everyday life,” yet because it is taboo to talk about it in contemporary societies, it is frequently hidden (Scheff, 2003). Research done by Tangney, Wagner, Fletcher, & Gramzow, (1992) states that Proneness to shame is correlated with anger arousal, suspiciousness, resentment, irritability and blame.

A strong relationship between insecure attachment, low self-esteem and shame was established, relevance of attachment styles and self-esteem is necessary for understanding the feelings of shame in adults which can also help in preventing the risk for development of pathological disorders (Passanisi, Gervasi, Madonia, Guzzo, & Greco, 2015). Shame resilience theory states that ‘Shame is a primitive emotion experienced by everyone, talking about shame brings in a sense of control to overcome our feelings of shame and move forward with our lives’ (Sutton, 2024). Also, Some negative parenting experiences have been shown to be the main contributory factors to experience shame through attachment styles (Sedighimornani, Rimes & Verplanken, 2020) also study done by Weaver and Sullins (2022) suggests a significantly positive relationship of ACE with Shame proneness.

Guilt:

Some recent studies have explored the prevalence and impact of guilt feelings in adult populations. A German survey found that 10.6% of adults experienced current guilt feelings, with a higher prevalence (37.4%) among those with major depression (Luck & Luck-Sikorski, 2020). A comparative study found that Indian depressed patients expressed guilt less frequently than North American counterparts, possibly due to cultural factors rather than religious beliefs (Ananth, Engelsman, Ghadirian, Wohl, Shamasundara, & Hs, (1993). However, another study reported varying frequencies of guilt feelings in Indian depressive patients, ranging from 48% to 67.5% (Trivedi, JDubé, Raz, & Sethi, 1981) some studies showed that parental depression can also contribute to pathogenic guilt in children which in turn creates risk for developing Depression. Also, genetic and environmental conditions determine the likelihood of developing empathy based pathogenic guilt and depression (Oakley, 2012). Interpersonal theory of guilt states that ‘Guilt plays a key role in enhancing relationship by motivating good treatment and balancing emotional distress between partners which also helps strengthens social bonds’ (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994).

Researches shows that being able to appreciate the positive aspects of life that can reduce depression and guilt, which is a common factor among people who have faced ACEs (Ramsey, 2019). The study by Wojcik, Cox, & Kealy (2019) resulted that interpersonal sensitivity and interpersonal aggression had an important role to play in ACEs leading to guilt. Individuals who have shame for them self-compassion could be useful for gaining Mindfulness Attention Awareness (Sedighimornani, Rimes, & Verplanken, 2019). Acceptance and Commitment Therapy is also helpful for individuals with self-stigma and shame, which may include Mindfulness based therapy that may improve quality of life and support psychological health (Stynes, Leão & McHugh, L., 2022). Mindfulness Attention Awareness and Guilt-Mindfulness skills helps in reduction of trauma related guilt suggesting that Mindfulness skills may have an important role in reducing experiences of trauma-related guilt during psychotherapy (Held, Owens, Monroe, & Chard, 2017). Cognitive rehabilitation and Cognitive Therapy based on Mindfulness have a positive and significant effect on quality of life and guilt

of mothers with cerebral palsy (Manouchehri, 2023). Shame and guilt are the rich human emotions that are important at an individual as well as relationship levels (Shame and Guilt, n.d.). The post traumatic states and guilt are associated with PTSD, depression, substance use (Wilson, Droždek & Turkovic, 2006).

According to the previous researches, Individuals that have faced ACEs of any kind have been more prone to Shame, Guilt and other Psychological distress, but Mindfulness and Gratitude practices have proven to be more effective in dealing with ACEs and Shame and Guilt. Many researches have been conducted on ACEs and Mindfulness but very less attention was given on the Indian female samples, this research addresses the research gap to study the correlation between Adverse Childhood Experiences, Mindfulness Attention Awareness, Gratitude, Shame and Guilt among young female adults.

Hypotheses:

1. ACE will be significantly positively correlated with Mindfulness Attention Awareness.
2. ACE will be significantly positively correlated with Gratitude
3. ACE will be significantly positively correlated with Guilt Repair
4. ACE will be significantly positively correlated with Shame Negative Self- Evaluation.
5. Mindfulness Attention Awareness will be significantly positively correlated with Gratitude
6. Mindfulness Attention Awareness will be significantly positively correlated with Guilt Repair
7. Mindfulness Attention Awareness will be significantly positively correlated with Shame Negative Self Evaluation.
8. Gratitude will be significantly positively correlated with Shame Negative Self Evaluation
9. Gratitude will be significantly positively correlated with Guilt Repair
10. Shame Negative Self-Evaluation will be significantly positively correlated with Guilt repair.

Methods

Sampling Methods-

A convenient sampling method was used for this research. The sample size was 42 young female adults from the age range of 18-25 years of age from Maharashtra.

Procedure-

Before administration of the tests, all participants were informed about the purpose of the study. All the participants had voluntarily participated in the research. Four Self-report questionnaires on Adverse Childhood Experiences, Mindfulness Attention Awareness, Gratitude, Shame and Guilt were given to young female adults. There was no specific time limit for answering these questionnaires.

Tools-

The following tools were used for the study:

Personal Data Sheet:

The participants were asked to fill in the name, age, gender and education on the personal data sheet and the consent of the participants was taken before starting with the research.

1] Adverse Childhood Experiences Questionnaire [ACE-Q]-

Adverse Childhood Experiences Questionnaire (ACE-Q) by Felitti et al, (1998) is a 10 item questionnaire, which measures traumatic or un-favourable experiences a client had before to turning 18 (Hegarty, 2024). According to Kovács-Tóth, Oláh, Szabó, & Fekete, (2023), the ACE-Q has adequate internal validity of $p < 0.001$ and good internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.64$).

2] *The Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale [MAAS]-*

The purpose of the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale by Brown, Ryan, & Carlson, (2003) is to evaluate the receptive state of mind that characterizes Mindfulness, which is characterized by sensitive awareness and attention to what is happening in the present. The validity and reliability of the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale were maintained by Cronbach's $\alpha = .89-.93$ and test-re-test $r = .35-.52$ (Black, Sussman, Johnson, & Milam, 2011).

3] *Gratitude Questionnaire [GQ]-*

The six-item self-report Gratitude Questionnaire by McCullough, Emmons & Tsang, (2002) measures a person's attitude toward thankfulness. It is associated with optimism and has an excellent internal reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .82-.87$).

4] *Guilt and Shame Proneness Scale [GASP]-*

Guilt and Shame Proneness Scale by Cohen, Wolf. Panter & Insko, (2011) measures guilt and shame. Guilt-Negative Behaviour-Evaluation, Guilt-Repair, Shame-Negative Self-Evaluation, and Shame-Withdraw are its four primary domains. The concept, criteria, and content validity of this scale are strong, and its Cronbach's alpha is high—above 0.80 (APA PsycNet, n.d.).

Results and Discussion

In this research Quantitative Data Analysis was done containing Descriptive Statistics, Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Multiple Regression. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to investigate the relationship between Adverse Childhood Experiences, Mindfulness Attention Awareness, Gratitude, Shame Negative Self-Evaluation and Guilt-Repair.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness		Kurtosis	
ACE	6.0	4.0	10.0	8.548	1.7279	2.985	-1.067	.365	.372	.717
MAA	3.40	2.3	5.7	4.124	.8613	.742	.092	.365	-.591	.717
Gratitude	15.0	21.0	36.0	30.000	3.4429	11.854	-.331	.365	.067	.717
Guilt repair	15.0	13.0	28.0	22.786	3.7840	14.319	-.489	.365	-.305	.717
Shame negative	19.0	9.0	28.0	22.214	4.5130	20.368	-.563	.365	.221	.717

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics between all the variables- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE), Mindfulness Attention Awareness (MAA), Gratitude, Guilt Repair and Shame Negative Self- Evaluation.

Table 2:
Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation between all the variables (ACE, MAA, Gratitude, Guilt Repair and Shame Negative Self Evaluation)

Variables	ACE	MAA	Gratitude	Guilt repair	Shame negative
ACE	1	.512**	.008	.216	-.053
MAA	.512**	1	.083	.227	.151
Gratitude	.008	.083	1	-.084	.327*
Guilt repair	.216	.227	-.084	1	.513**
Shame negative	-.053	.151	.327*	.513**	1

** = $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

As seen in Table 2, Adverse Childhood Experiences was found to be significantly co-related with Mindfulness Attention Awareness. Gratitude was found to be significantly correlated with Shame Negative Self Evaluation. Guilt Repair was also found to be significantly correlated with Shame Negative Self Evaluation, Thus Hypotheses 1, 8 and 10 were supported and however the other hypotheses were not supported. Hence, regression was performed only on the hypotheses that were supported.

The previous Literature also suggested that Mindfulness instructions may lessen negative effects of stress and trauma related to ACEs and improving health outcomes in adulthood (Ortiz & Sibinga, 2017). Also, shame and guilt are positively correlated with PTSD and depression. (Wilson, Droždek & Turkovic, 2006). Not many researches were found on Gratitude and Shame Negative Self-Evaluation.

Table 3
Regression between Mindfulness Attention Awareness and Adverse Childhood Experiences

Predictor	R	R square	Adjusted R square	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	t	Beta	B	Sig. F Change
ACE	.512 ^a	.262	.243	.262	14.186	1	40	3.766	.512	.255	.001

a. Dependent Variable: MAA (Mindfulness Attention Awareness)

b. Predictors: ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences)

As seen in Table 3, ACE significantly emerged as the predictor of Mindfulness Attention Awareness which supported the Hypothesis 1 as ACE significantly predict Mindfulness Attention Awareness by 24.3% of variance.

Table 4
Regression between Shame Negative Self Evaluation and Gratitude

Predictor	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	t	Beta	B	Sig. F Change
Gratitude	.327 ^a	.107	.084	.107	4.773	1	40	2.185	.327	.428	.035

a. Dependent Variable: Shame Negative Self Evaluation

b. Predictors: Gratitude

As seen in Table 4, Gratitude significantly emerged as the predictor of Shame Negative Self-Evaluation which supported the Hypothesis 8 as Gratitude significantly predicted Shame Negative Self-Evaluation by 8.4% of variance.

Table 5

Summary of Regression between Guilt repair and Shame Negative Self Evaluation

Predictor	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	B	Beta	t	Sig. F Change
Shame Negative	.513 ^a	.263	.244	.263	14.258	1	40	.430	.513	3.776	.001

a. Dependent Variable: Guilt repair

b. Predictors: Shame Negative Self Evaluation

As seen in Table 5, Shame Negative Self-Evaluation significantly emerged as the predictor of Guilt Repair which supported the Hypothesis 10 Shame Negative Self-Evaluation will significantly predict Guilt repair by 24.4% of variance.

Conclusion

This study shows the role of Adverse Childhood Experiences, Mindfulness Attention Awareness, and Gratitude affect feelings of Shame and Guilt in young female adults. It highlights the need for strategies that promote Mindfulness and gratitude to improve mental health and reduce the effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences, Shame and Guilt.

Implications-

- Mindfulness and Gratitude elements can be added to Therapies for clients with ACEs.
- Interventions or workshops can be conducted for the awareness of the effects of ACEs and some gratitude and Mindfulness techniques can be given in academic settings.
- Few therapeutic tools can be developed for females who have been scored high on ACEs

Limitations-

- The study had a small sample size and used convenience sampling via Google Forms for data collection.
- Participants may have given socially desirable answers due to the personal nature of some questions.
- Cultural bias in the tests could be a limitation.
- Possible memory biases affecting childhood experience recollection.

Future Suggestions-

- Long-term intervention studies can examine the impact of Mindfulness and gratitude on individuals with psychological effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).
- Shame and guilt can be explored as mediators between ACEs and anxiety or depression in specific populations, such as housewives or judicial cases.
- Adaptation of psychological tests to Indian standards can be considered.
- Gender comparative studies may offer valuable insights.

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