

# STUDY ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MINDFULNESS AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE LEVELS IN THE ROMANIAN YOUNG POPULATION

STUDIU ASUPRA RELAȚIEI DINTRE NIVELUL STĂRII DE CONȘTIENȚIZARE  
(MINDFULNESS) ȘI CEL AL ECHILIBRULUI MUNCĂ-VIAȚĂ PERSONALĂ, LA  
NIVELUL POPULAȚIEI TINERE DIN ROMÂNIA

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## STUDII EMPIRICE

# STUDY ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MINDFULNESS AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE LEVELS IN THE ROMANIAN YOUNG POPULATION

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### Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the relationship between the levels of mindfulness and work-life balance at the Romanian young population. In the process of enhancing our levels of work-life balance, satisfaction or well-being, mindfulness plays an essential role, proved by its practice and its applications. The quality of our professional life is a significant contributor to our quality of life as a

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whole. When society provides a qualitative professional life to its citizens, it also proves itself worthy of attracting and retaining employees. Mindfulness is not an independent concept, but one which positively influences multiple areas or dimensions of an individual's life. These dimensions include: perspective, connection, choice, and self-knowledge. The subjects of this study were 60 young people, aged between 20-35. All of them were either students or graduates of higher education institutions. The methods used for this study were two questionnaires: the first one was a questionnaire for identifying the level of mindfulness, based on four dimensions – observe, describe, act with awareness and accept without judgement – and the second one – a scale for measuring the level of work-life balance. The results were processed in SPSS Statistics using the T-test for independent samples and Pearson's correlation coefficient. The results showed a strong relationship between the levels of mindfulness and work-life balance of the Romanian young population.

**Keywords:** mindfulness, satisfaction, well-being, work-life balance.

### **Rezumat**

*Scopul prezentului studiu este de a investiga relația dintre nivelul stării de conștientizare (mindfulness) și cel al echilibrului muncă-via personală (work-life balance) la nivelul populației tinere cu studii superioare, ce apar în mediul urban din România. În procesul de îmbunătățire a nivelurilor de echilibru muncă-via personală, satisfacție sau stare de bine, mindfulness-ul deține un rol esențial, demonstrat prin rezultatele obținute în urma acestei practici. Calitatea vieții noastre profesionale contribuie în mod semnificativ la sporirea calității vieții în ansamblu. Atunci când organizația asigură membrilor săi o viață profesională optimă, aceasta devine, implicit, demnă de a atrage și de a-i plăsi angajații. Conceptul de „mindfulness” nu acționează în mod izolat, ci influențează în mod pozitiv multiple dimensiuni ale vieții unui individ. Aceste dimensiuni includ: perspectiva asupra mediului înconjurător, relaționarea cu cei din jur, modul de luare a deciziilor și autocunoașterea. Subiecții acestui studiu au fost 60 de tineri, cu vârste cuprinse între 20 și 35 de ani. Aceștia urmează sau au absolvit instituții de învățământ superior. Metoda de cercetare la care a apelat acest studiu a fost ancheta, iar instrumentele utilizate au fost două chestionare: primul chestionar a avut ca scop identificarea nivelului de mindfulness, pornind de la patru dimensiuni (observare, descriere, acțiune conștientă și acceptare fără judecăți), iar cel de al doilea a fost reprezentat de o scală pentru măsurarea nivelului de echilibru muncă-via personală în ceea ce privește populația tânără din România. Este necesar menționarea faptului că rezultatele studiului nu denotă o relație de tip cauzal între cele două variabile, ci demonstrează doar existența unei legături între variabilele acestora.*

*Cuvinte-cheie: echilibrul via profesional – via personal , mindfulness, satisfac ie, stare de bine.*

## 1. Introduction

Throughout the past few years, researchers have provided multiple definitions to describe the concept of mindfulness, such as self-discipline capacity (Brown & Ryan, 2003, apud Farghadani, Navabinejad & Shafiabady, 2010), focusing attention on the present (Parto & Besharat, 2011) or concentrating on immediate experience (Gordon, 2013). A more complex definition though was advanced by Bishop et al. (2004, p. 234), who described mindfulness as “a process of regulating attention in order to bring a quality of non-elaborative awareness to current experience and a quality of relating to one’s experience within an orientation of curiosity, experiential openness and acceptance.”

According to Golden (2017), mindfulness practice can take two main forms: formal and informal. Formal practice refers to focusing on the action of breathing, whether it is when sitting in a quiet room or when experiencing certain thoughts and feelings. Informal practice on the other hand involves taking breaks from our daily activities (such as taking a shower or listening to music) to observe our state of mind and body. Mindfulness is known to augment consciousness and to improve our ability to focus. At the same time, it helps us develop a routine of analyzing our internal and external environments and be more aware in making decisions (Farghadani et al., 2010). This routine is also known to play an important role in handling stressful situations, by reducing depression and anxiety symptoms and increasing self-esteem (Dewi et al., 2015). Mindfulness practice teaches stress coping strategies, such as breath meditation or body scans, which help us focus our attention, intentionally and nonjudgmentally, on the present moment, i.e. on our present emotions, feelings, perceptions, thoughts, etc. (Lutz et al., 2007; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012, apud Taylor et al., 2015).

Work-life balance, the second key-concept of the present paper, has also proved to be of grown interest in recent years, as employers start paying an increasing attention to the personal needs of their employees. From the

very beginning, it is important to draw attention to the fact that all individuals have to face and deal with work and outside-work requirements, not only those who have family obligations (Dex & Scheibl, 2001; Fu & Shaffer, 2001; Rotondo et al., 2003, apud Pâni oar & erban, 2013).

Work-life balance can be therefore defined as a state of equilibrium between work and family or free-time activities, so that employees can “experience a better fit between their professional and private lives” (White et al., 2003, apud Dolai, 2015). The balance between work and life is usually influenced by a series of factors, such as flexible work schedules or non-standard work arrangements, which “are likely to reduce work-family conflicts and personal stress as well as enhance the work attitudes of employees” (Sturges & Guest, 2004, apud Omar, 2013). Together with individuals’ attitude towards work, the implementation of work-life balance practices is believed to both improve conditions for the workers themselves or enhance the productivity of the institution they work for (Adame-Sánchez et al., 2016).

Considering the above statement, according to which work-life balance reduces personal stress, and the fact that mindfulness holds a significant role in dealing with stress, it can be observed that both mindfulness and work-life balance share the common goal of increasing the individual’s quality of life, a fundamental assumption for our main hypothesis.

The quality of professional life is a significant dimension of the quality of life. When society offers a qualitative professional life to its employees, it is a good indicator for increasing its image in attracting and retaining employees. The quality of professional life is a philosophy, a set of principles that claim that people are the most important resources in an organization because they are trustworthy, responsible and capable of making a valuable contribution when treated with dignity and respect. The quality of professional life is both a multidimensional concept and a way of analyzing interpersonal behaviors and relationships.

Aside from the connection between mindfulness and work-life balance, the two concepts are concurrently linked to other constructs, such as well-being or life satisfaction (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Thus, mindfulness and work-life balance are thought to increase the individual’s level of well-being, generally

seen as “positive functioning in life” (Keyes, 2009) and also the level of life satisfaction, which implies fulfilling his/her needs, wishes and desires (Ardahan, 2012).

Satisfaction and well-being are key-elements in building a positive self-image, in agreement with the individual’s own strengths and abilities. When an individual manages to gain a strong feeling of self-sufficiency, this significantly contributes to achieving performance in his/her activities. In order to ensure a balance between well-being, self-image and self-confidence, it becomes necessary for any individual to possess specific mechanisms of self-assessment and self-perception, so that he/she can become capable to properly integrate into the outer environment. An individual’s self-perception is the primary indicator for his/her degree of self-esteem, the latter one being a comprehensive concept which encompasses a series of mechanisms, such as behavioral, cognitive or affective ones. Self-esteem is influenced by a series of social factors, such as the relationships with friends or other important people, as well as the tasks teenagers are most successful at. People with a high level of well-being are usually extrovert, optimistic, open to new challenges and highly sociable.

As stated above, along with self-esteem, mindfulness and work-life balance are also known to have a strong influence upon life satisfaction, regarded as “a global evaluation by the person of his or her life” (Dolai, 2015) and not to be confounded with other concepts, like well-being (Goldon, 2017), positive affect (Parto & Besharat, 2011), etc. Up to the present moment, most of the studies regarding life satisfaction have focused their attention on its occurrence among adult people (Keyes, 2009). Nonetheless, recent empirical work has proved that life satisfaction is equally important for university students, adolescents and children as well, being a powerful indicator of their general state of well-being. Thus, life satisfaction is integral to the subjective well-being, or in other words “happiness”, and it is highly determined by the students’ everyday tasks, if they are stressful or not (Civitci, 2015). According to Pâni oar ’s et al. opinions (2016), what school should teach students, in terms of positive psychology and life satisfaction as well, is how to develop their self-confidence, how to be more courageous and to take part in constructive and positive experiences, which bring them satisfaction.

In the process of enhancing our levels of work-life balance, satisfaction or well-being, mindfulness plays therefore an essential role, with “its power lying in its practice and its applications (...). It is a way to take charge of the direction and quality of our own lives, including our relationships within the family, our relationship to work (...) and most fundamentally, our relationship with ourselves as a person”. (Kabat-Zinn, 2001, p. 23)

These being said, mindfulness is not a unidirectional or independent concept, but one which positively influences multiple areas or dimensions of an individual’s life. These dimensions include: perspective (creating an objective overall picture of our lives), connection (being aware of our experiences and linking them to our environment), choice (wisely choosing our life paths), self-knowledge (better familiarizing oneself with his/her states) and compassion (displaying these behaviors towards oneself or the others) (Silverton, 2016).

## **2. Topic statement**

Mindfulness is one of the main elements that should be analyzed by educational psychology, as the relationship between mindfulness and student performance is of the utmost importance not only in school, but also later on, in developing a successful professional activity. Work-life balance, on the other hand, is a powerful indicator for the awareness of the importance of well-being, along with building a high level of emotional self-regulation, so that the individual is able to plan his/her activities and actions in an optimal and positive way. In this context, the present study aims to investigate the connection between mindfulness and work-life balance, and it is expected that the former one will positively correlate with the latter. In other words, a high level of mindfulness will correspond to a high level of balance between personal and professional life.

## **3. Research hypotheses**

H1. There is a statistically significant correlation between the dimensions

of mindfulness and the levels of work-life balance at the Romanian young population.

H2. There is a high level of mindfulness, for all its four dimensions, at the Romanian young population.

H3. There is a high level of work-life balance at the Romanian young population.

#### **4. Purpose of the study**

The first objective of this study is to identify the levels of mindfulness and work-life balance in the Romanian urban young population, with higher education.

This leads to the second and main purpose of the study, which is to investigate and analyze the relationship between the level of mindfulness, with all its four dimensions, and the level of work-life balance in the Romanian young population.

#### **5. Research methods**

##### **5.1. Participants**

The participants of this study were 60 people, all of them students or graduates of the University of Bucharest. The students were both male and female, aged 20-35. Both categories were selected from the urban environment. The subjects were briefly instructed before filling in the questionnaires. The extend of the investigated population and its representativeness for the Romanian young population represent limits of the present research and of the findings of it.

##### **5.2. Data collection**

The first instrument used for this study was the Scale for assessing work-life

balance, developed in 2005 by Jeremy Hayman, professor at Auckland University of Technology. The questionnaire includes 15 items, with a Likert 1-to-7 response scale. The items are meant to investigate the level of work-life balance.

The second instrument was the Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills, developed by professor Ruth Baer (2004), at the University of Kentucky. The inventory contains 39 items with a Likert-type response scale and is meant to investigate four dimensions of mindfulness: observe, describe, act with awareness and accept without judgement.

## 6. Findings

The collected data were entered into SPSS statistical software. Due to the normal distribution of data, we were able to apply a Pearson correlation test, with the purpose of observing if there is a statistically significant correlation between the dimensions of mindfulness and the levels of work-life balance at the Romanian young population investigated in the present study.

In order to identify the level of work-life balance for all the subjects selected for this study, we used the descriptive statistics (number of subjects, sum, mean and standard deviation) from Table no. 1. The results show a high level of work-life balance among young respondents, which leads to the idea that the profession-life relationship can be successfully built and developed if it is found on satisfaction and self-esteem.

*Table no. 1. Results for descriptive statistics work life balance*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Work-life balance sum	60	15.00	105.00	89.00	142.2714	12.83310
Subject	60	1.00	140.00	9870.00	70.5000	40.55860
Valid N (listwise)	60					

Table no. 2 shows the descriptive statistics which confirm the second hypothesis, according to which there are high levels of mindfulness, for all its four dimensions, at the investigated Romanian urban young population with higher education. As it can be noticed in the table below, all the four dimensions of mindfulness – observe, describe, act with awareness and accept without judgement – show high scores, although the highest score we encounter is in the description of emotions, feelings, beliefs, opinions, perceptions and experiences. This can also be due to the age of the participants, all of them being aged 20-35. The ability to act without judging is a common trait for the young people, as they take risks and approach new challenges very easily, often without previously considering the possible outcomes of their actions (Steinberg, 2010).

*Table no. 2. Results of the descriptive statistics for the four dimensions of mindfulness*

Group Statistics	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Observe	60	33.0714	4.33831	.51853
Describe	60	37.3714	4.97580	.59472
Act with awareness	60	32.0714	4.73446	.56588
Accept without judgement	60	34.1000	4.89054	.58453

Table no. 3 presents the results of the Pearson correlation test, with a statistically significant correlation between mindfulness and work-life balance,  $\text{sig}=.179$ , which stands for a strong relationship between mindfulness and work-life balance among young Romanians. Awareness, expression and action of one's emotional states, together with work-life balance, are amongst the most important elements in building well-being, self-esteem and a positive thinking.

**Table no. 3.** *Correlations between tests*

		Work-life	Mindfulness
Work-life	Pearson Correlation	1	.724
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.179
	N	60	60
Mindfulness	Pearson Correlation	.724	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.179	
	N	60	60

## 7. Conclusion

As we can infer from the results above, mindfulness aimed at minimizing stress helps young people to live better by providing a balance between their personal and professional lives. By forming skills such as describing and expressing their own emotional states, beliefs, opinions, perceptions and personal experiences or accepting ourselves and others without judgment or negative criticism, young people are able to focus only on those positive thoughts and emotions which can ensure them a high level of professional and personal satisfaction.

Indeed, most students are not as yet in the position to deal with the responsibility of a full-time job, but they are accountable for their own personal and professional development and, depending on their inclinations, they gain satisfaction through specific activities or fields of interest. In this context, it becomes of utmost importance to teach them how to focus their attention on those areas of interest which bring them fulfillment. Concurrently, they should learn to be more self-confident and engage fearlessly in those activities which not only bring them contentment but also help them evolve.

What should be retained is that mindfulness is most efficient not on its own, but when associated with well-being and self-esteem, the last two being directly influenced by the practice of mindfulness. This partnership is what supports the development of a productive self-image, the

augmentation of self-confidence, the ability to adapt and communicate efficiently and, ultimately, life satisfaction as a whole.

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