



Embracing Common Humanity and Mindfulness: Ways to Happiness in Yogic Practitioners

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ARTICLE INFO

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Dates:

Received: 09-09-2025

Accepted: 15-10-2025

Published: 30-06-2025

Keywords:

Common humanity,
mindfulness, happiness,
wellbeing, yogic
practitioners

How to cite:

Gupta, G., Rawat, V.P.,
(2025). Embracing
Common Humanity and
Mindfulness: Ways to
Happiness in Yogic
Practitioners
Mind and Society,14(3):20-27
doi: 1056011/mind-
mri-14320253

Abstract

Human wellbeing and happiness are always central to psychological research. Huge studies have explored the correlates and mechanism of wellbeing but there exists a need to examine the factors that stem from individual practice and experience. Researchers have mentioned that social relations, sense of community feeling are important aspects to one's wellbeing. Similarly, non-judgmental awareness of the present moment has been shown to enhance psychological resilience, reduce distress, and promote emotional balance leading to happiness. It was found that these constructs though play crucial roles individually to happiness; however, very few research has investigated their combined role, particularly within the context of yogic practices. Thus, with this background, the current study intends to examine the contributing role of common humanity and mindful practices in happiness among yogic practitioners seeking to illuminate their synergistic potential in causing happiness in life. The observation suggested that common humanity and mindfulness both have major role in happiness and wellbeing of yogic practitioners.

INTRODUCTION

Men have been concerned about well-being, happiness, life satisfaction, and positive emotional experiences. In the past few years, well-being and happiness as well as their probable correlates have received significant interest among researchers. Due to that, a wealth of experimental and theoretical literature has been explored on the different dimensions, mechanisms, and correlates of health/well-being (Diener, 1999; Hoorn, 2007). Although many researchers have studied correlates of health/well-being (Grossman et al., 2004), from an applied perspective, but much focus is needed to understand the correlates related to practice/training and effort at individual's part.

Delle Fave and Soosai-Nathan (2014) have introduced interconnectivity and argued that social roles and relationships are necessary to provide a sense of direction and a place in society for a meaningful life. They further elaborated that social support, and a sense of

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direction and a place in society for a meaningful life. They further elaborated that social support, and a sense of community are imperative in improving the perception of meaning and happiness. They argued that social exclusion drastically decreases life satisfaction, affirming the need for interpersonal connections for psychological functioning. Thus, interpersonal relationships are a part of one's happiness.

Thus, by giving a close glance, happiness cannot be merely understood as an emotional state, but a construct profoundly embedded into social interaction and a sense of belonging, thereby fostering a fulfilling life. It is found that humans have compassion for their family and friends, but compassion shown towards strangers is a universal form of compassion. Most researchers have considered the perception of common humanity as a foundation of compassion (Blum, 1980; Cassell, 2009; Jinpa, 2016; Ling et al., 2018; Nussbaum, 1996; Von Dietze & Orb, 2000).

Common humanity understands the similarity between self and others and eliminates the sense of others (Ledoux, 2015). Everyone becomes part of an in-group. An outstanding illustration would be when the Nazis occupied Europe, they risked everything to save Jews. When the reservoir was asked why they did this, they highlighted the worth of shared humanity (Monroe, 1998). However, little empirical research on common humanity has been done (Greenaway et al., 2011; McFarland et al., 2013).

Mindfulness is a practice within which a person intentionally focuses his or her attention on an object or activity, intending to be now more open, receptive, and fully alive to the present moment. Simply put, it is a quality, a mental attitude that can be described as non-judgmental awareness about all types of sensations one experiences, perceptions of oneself and others, feelings one experiences, physical states that one is in or around, and the surroundings. Siegel et al. (2011) have also pointed out that mindfulness is an inherent human capacity and the ability to be mindful of the present moment.

Many see the concept of mindfulness as emptying the mind or even closing the thought stream. This is generally true but achievable only during very intensive retreat exercises. It is developing a separate connection to our thoughts so that individuals let the smooth flow of every moment in an accepting view. Therefore,

mindfulness is a practice or exercise that provides stability to a fickle mind using techniques like breathing, yoga, etc. Nevertheless, it is considered as a powerful and effective technique for reducing psychological distress and an incredible path for achieving enlightenment, benevolence and a sense of fulfilment from ancient times. Through mindfulness practice, one becomes better acquainted with his desires and how desire contributes to suffering. This transformative process opens a pathway that could potentially lead to being free from suffering, thus further emphasizing the potential of mindfulness as an efficient tool for overall well-being enhancement.

Shreds of empirical evidence support the notion that mindfulness develops positive psychological resources (Mandal et al., 2012), induces self-regulatory behaviours, improves happiness and experiences of positive emotional states (Brown & Ryan, 2003), reduces stress (Mackenzie et al., 2006) improves positive functioning (Micheal & Graham, 2011) and psychological well-being (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Prazak et al., 2012). There is substantial research evidence that offers a positive correlation between mindfulness, positive effects, life satisfaction, and purposeful engagement with life, well-being, self-esteem, and self-actualization needs of a person, which finally lead to the ultimate happiness (Beitel et al., 2014; Garland et al., 2015; Pepping et al., 2013). Mindfulness meditation has been documented as a good predictor of psychological well-being and happiness.

It is evident from the preceding paras, how sense of connection to others increases life satisfaction and happiness and mindfulness enhances self-awareness, allowing individuals to recognize their thoughts and emotions without harsh self-criticism, fostering self-acceptance, which is crucial for psychological well-being. Shared humanity reduces loneliness and self-reproach while promoting empathy. By promoting self-acceptance, mindfulness mitigates feelings of inadequacy, guilt, or shame, ultimately enhancing overall satisfaction. As oneness, unity and interconnectedness are critical yogic values and mindfulness is fundamental to traditional yoga. These two are essential processes in yogic transformation which may cause happiness and wellbeing in them. Thus, with this background, the current study aims to explore the combined role of

common humanity and mindfulness on happiness, as their relationship is well-documented separately but not sufficiently examined together in yogic practitioners.

Method

Sample

Initially, the data was collected on one hundred and two adults using purposive sampling. Four data were screened out due to random responses and errors found during analysis. Finally, the data on ninety-eight adults, individuals ranging from 25 to 35 years (mean age=30.25), were retained for final analysis. These individuals reportedly mentioned that they practice mindful yoga daily for thirty minutes. All the participants were graduates and were engaged in private jobs.

Measures

1. Common humanity and mindfulness were measured by the items from the Hindi version of Self-compassion Scale developed by Parihar et al. (2020). The common humanity consists of shared human experiences, broadens realities of life, connectedness, imperfections and errors of life. Both while which had four items and mindfulness had four items. All the items were on five-point

response scale from “almost never” to “almost always”. The reliability and validity of the scale have been well established in numerous studies (Neff, K. D. et al., 2017; Pandey, R. et al., 2019).

2. Happiness was measured using Hindi version of Happiness Scale prepared by Rastogi and Moorjani (2017) which had 62 positively worded items and response ranged from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree”. This scale has five factors: subjective well-being, social well-being, emotional well-being, career well-being and spiritual well-being with 0.88 reliability and 0.91 validity.

Procedure:

Each participant was contacted individually and informed consent was obtained before data collection. Personal data sheet was used to collect the demographic information. Scales were administered as per standard instructions printed on each scale. Instructions were made clear to each participant, and their queries were answered appropriately. Each participant was requested to ensure they responded to all the items on the given scales. Further, the scoring was done per the standard procedures of respective scales.

Results

Table-1: Correlations between common humanity, mindfulness and happiness

	Career wellbeing	Subjective wellbeing	Social wellbeing	Spiritual wellbeing	Emotional wellbeing	Total score on happiness
Common humanity	.514**	.428**	.257*	.348**	.419**	.478**
Mindfulness	.347**	.377**	.221*	.288**	.457**	.406**

Note- Correlation is significant (2-tailed) at **(.01) & *(.05) level

It is evident from Table 1 that Common humanity correlated significantly and positively with all the dimensions of happiness, which are career well-being ($r = .514$), subjective well-being ($r = .428$), social well-being ($r = .257$), spiritual well-being ($r = .348$), and emotional well-being ($r = .419$), and with total Happiness ($r = .478$). Further, mindfulness also correlated significantly and positively with

career well-being ($r = .347$), subjective well-being ($r = .377$), social well-being ($r = .221$), spiritual well-being ($r = .288$), and emotional well-being ($r = .457$), and total happiness ($r = .406$). Overall, the findings suggested that increased sense of common humanity and mindfulness are related with greater happiness in life.

Table - 2: Results of multiple regression analysis (stepwise) using various dimensions of Self-compassion as predictor and various dimensions of happiness as criterion.

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Predictors ↓	R	R ²	R Square change	F change	Sig. of F change	Beta	t	Sig.
Dependent Variable: Career Well-Being								
Common humanity	.514	.264	.264	34.490	.000	.514	5.873	.000
Mindfulness	.552	.305	.041	5.595	.020	.212	2.365	.020
Dependent Variable: Subjective Well-Being								
Common humanity	.428	.183	.183	21.533	.000	.428	4.640	.000
Mindfulness	.501	.251	.068	8.602	.004	.273	2.933	.004
Dependent Variable: Social well-being								
Common humanity	.257	.066	.066	6.802	.011	.257	2.608	.011
Dependent Variable: Spiritual well-being								
Common humanity	.348	.121	.121	13.234	.000	.348	3.638	.000
Mindfulness	.398	.158	.037	4.168	.044	.201	2.042	.044
Dependent Variable: Emotional Well-being								
Mindfulness	.457	.208	.208	25.278	.000	.457	5.028	.000
Common humanity	.544	.296	.088	11.849	.001	.311	3.442	.001

In order to examine the relative contribution of common humanity and mindfulness in predicting happiness, stepwise regression was performed. Table 2 indicates that common humanity and mindfulness has emerged as the best predictor of happiness. For example, common humanity predicted 26.4per cent, and mindfulness contributed only a 4.1per cent variance in predicting career well-being. Similarly, common humanity predicted 18.3 per cent and mindfulness 6.8per cent in subjective well-being. Social well-being was predicted by common humanity, indicating a 6.66per cent variance. Spiritual well-being was predicted highly by common humanity by 12.1per cent and then by mindfulness by 3.7per cent in total variance. Lastly, mindfulness has emerged as the best predictor in predicting emotional well-being and contributed 20.8per cent in total variance; common humanity predicted 8.8per cent variance in criterion. However, the said interpretation of results is based on the fact that all the beta weights

associated with various predictors are positive, suggesting a higher score on common humanity and mindfulness is associated with a more significant experience of happiness.

Discussion

The study intended to examine how the common humanity and mindfulness relates with and have a contribution in happiness. These observations however are consistent with previous research linking common humanity and mindfulness with happiness, wellbeing and satisfaction with life (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). The current observation demonstrated positive correlation with common humanity, mindfulness and happiness.

These findings present an insight that common humanity increases career wellbeing because sense of belongingness promotes empathy and perspective with others, facilitating supportive and harmonious work setting. This

reduces conflict and improves both collaboration and career satisfaction making the work experience more enjoyable (Batson, 2009; Baumeister et al., 1995; Keltner et al., 2014). Common humanity also predicted subjective wellbeing in this study. Thus, shared experiences increase subjective wellbeing and the connection with others strengthens relationships and boosts positive emotions like love and kindness, further contributing to a sense of happiness (Leary et al., 2007; Neff, K.D., 2003).

Spiritual wellbeing was also found to be predicted by common humanity. Shared experiences enhance feeling of spiritual connectedness and helps in developing meaning and purpose in life as individuals are often found to contribute to the well-being of others, aligning with their spiritual values which really deepens their sense of happiness (Harris et al., 2011; Pargament et al., 2005; Steger et al., 2006). When individual recognises that emotional struggles are not individual but its universal, reduces their feeling of isolation and embarrassment (Leary et al., 2007; Neff & Germer, 2013). Thus, person navigates these negative emotions with ease resulting in emotional happiness.

Apart from the above research orientations, the current observation that common humanity is positively related with one's happiness can be explained better through social comparison theory and Buddhist approach of interconnectedness. The social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) explains that while realizing that others also experience failure and imperfection in life may prevent the negative experiences. Thus, understanding that everyone experiences hardship reduces envy and fosters contentment with one's own life circumstances (Festinger, 1954). Further, researches have mentioned that feeling of common humanity is associated closely with social connectedness, as it fosters the understanding that we are not alone in our experiences (Neff, K.D., 2003). Henceforth, sense of belongingness reduces feelings of isolation and increases happiness (Gilbert, 2009). On similar note, Buddhist teachings underscore interconnectedness that all beings are interconnected and all suffering is a shared experience. Recognizing this interconnectedness can foster empathy and altruistic behaviour, and a deeper sense of compassion both for others and self which cultivate happiness in life (Dalai Lama, 1999; Gilbert, 2009).

Common humanity plays a pivotal role in boosting happiness across career, subjective, spiritual and emotional spheres of life by fostering connection, compassion and empathy. Taken above observations together, it can be suggested that seeing others' struggles can lead to compassionate acts, and empathetic experience, resulting to reduced isolation, improved mood, and deeper happiness and fulfilment in all areas of life.

Another finding that mindfulness is associated positively with happiness has also received considerable support from previous researches (Kiken et al., 2015). For example, Kabat-Zinn's foundational work on Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) have studied how mindfulness reduces stress and improves emotional regulation, which in turn enhances happiness and overall life satisfaction. The reason why mindfulness is related with happiness can be understood under several speculations such as, practice of being fully aware in the present moment plays a huge role in happiness across various aspects of life. Being mindful may help individual to manage workplace stress and develop resilience which promotes to work-life balance (Shapiro et al., 2007) contributing to greater satisfaction and happiness. Being mindful enhances one's focus, creativity, and engagement in tasks, often leading to a sense of accomplishment and happiness in one's professional life as well (Zeidan et al., 2010). Further, mindfulness reduces the person's tendency to dwell on the past and worry about future and encourages a huge appreciation for present (Brown & Ryan, 2003), by bringing attention to the positive aspects of life. In fact, many researchers have also reported that mindfulness somehow help people connect with greater sense of purpose and meaning in life which brings peace, serenity and contentment (Creswell et al., 2012) facilitating happiness thereby. This observation can be further understood as suggested by Brown and Ryan (2003) and Seligman (2011) that practicing mindfulness encourages people to break cycles of rumination and negative thoughts and also by replacing them with a more positive and accepting mindset, resulting in increased overall happiness.

Additionally, mindfulness-to-meaning theory suggest that facilitates positive cognitive affective processing which improves people's perspective such as viewing a failure as a chance for growth increases wellbeing consequently. In this light,

Brown and Ryan (2003) have demonstrated how increased level of mindfulness in mediators are related with lower report of anxiety, neuroticism, depression and negative emotions on one hand and associated positively with greater life satisfaction, optimism, positive emotions, relatedness, competence, autonomy.

Another plausible explanation between mindfulness and happiness can be explained on the basis of mindfulness and behavioural activation. Behavioural Activation (BA) is a therapeutic approach, where people are encouraged to focus or perform pleasurable and meaningful activity which helps in reducing patterns of avoidance that maintain or exacerbate depression. Keng et al. (2011) have reported that mindfulness was associated with increased behavioural regulation, reduced emotional reactivity and psychological symptoms, and greater well-being. Further, greater sense of purpose in life, leads to more engagement with valued activities (Ryff & Singer, 1998).

Conclusion:

Understanding the relationship between common humanity, mindfulness, and happiness is of deep significance. Common humanity promotes compassion and empathy, allowing us to feel less isolated when confronted with challenges. Mindfulness is a powerful tool which helps to create a sense of here and now without judgment, promotes emotional equilibrium and strength. Thus, practicing them may give a grounding for one's genuine happiness—a happiness based not in the external world but in a compassionate and gentle understanding of ourselves and the world around us leading to more fulfilling, peaceful, and connected life. So, the current observation can be used in developing interventions that integrate yogic insight and psychological tools (mindfulness-based stress reduction, compassion training) to improve people's wellbeing.

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