

Yoga and Psychological Well-Being: Sequential Mediating Role of Happiness and Mindfulness

Yoga ve Psikolojik İyi Oluş: Mutluluk ve Bilinçli Farkındalığın Sıralı Aracı Rolü

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, individuals do yoga as a way to improve their physical and psychological health with the pursuit of feeling good. Therefore, examining yoga in terms of psychological factors is very important in literature and life. This study aimed to examine psychological well-being, happiness, and mindfulness according to yoga and non-yoga practitioners and the sequential mediating role of happiness and mindfulness in the relationship between yoga and psychological well-being. The sample group of this study consists of 263 participants (129 yoga practitioners and 134 non-yoga practitioners). Participants completed the Demographic Information Form, Psychological Well-Being Scale, Oxford Happiness Scale, and Conscious Awareness Scale online. The data obtained in the study were analyzed by applying the Pearson correlation coefficient and Serial Multi-Mediator Variable Analysis (PROCESS Model 6). According to the study results, it was seen that between psychological well-being and happiness .56, between psychological well-being and mindfulness .34, and between happiness and mindfulness .30 correlations are positive and significant relationships. In conclusion, the results remark on the significant sequential mediating role of happiness and mindfulness in the relationship between yoga and psychological well-being.

Keywords: Yoga, psychological well-being, happiness, mindfulness

ÖZ

Günümüzde sıklıkla bireylerin iyi hissetme arayışı ile bedensel ve psikolojik sağlığına iyi gelen bir yol olarak yoga yaptıkları görülmektedir. Bu nedenle, psikolojik faktörler açısından yoganın incelenmesi literatür ve yaşam açısından oldukça önemlidir. Bu çalışma yoga yapan ve yapmayan bireyleri psikolojik iyi oluş, mutluluk ile bilinçli farkındalık açısından ve yoga ile psikolojik iyi oluş arasındaki ilişkide mutluluk ve bilinçli farkındalığın aracı rolünü incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışmanın örneklem grubu, 18-68 yaş aralığında olan, 129 yoga yapan ve 134 yoga yapmayan toplam 263 katılımcıdan oluşmaktadır. Veri toplama araçları olarak Demografik Bilgi Formu, Psikolojik İyi Oluş Ölçeği, Oxford Mutluluk Ölçeği ve Bilinçli Farkındalık Ölçeği katılımcılar tarafından çevrimiçi olarak doldurulmuştur. Araştırmada elde edilen veriler Pearson korelasyon katsayısı ve Seri Çoklu Aracı Değişken Analizi (PROCESS Model 6) uygulanarak incelenmiştir. Çalışma bulgularına göre, değişkenler arası ilişkiler incelendiğinde psikolojik iyi oluş ile mutluluk arasında ($r=0,56$), psikolojik iyi oluş ile bilinçli farkındalık arasında ($r=0,34$) ve mutluluk ile bilinçli farkındalık arasında ($r=0,30$) düzeyinde pozitif yönde ve anlamlı ilişkiler bulunmuştur. Ayrıca, mutluluk ve bilinçli farkındalığın yoga ile psikolojik iyi oluş arasındaki ilişkide sıralı aracılık etkisinin anlamlı olduğu bulunmuştur.

Anahtar sözcükler: Yoga, psikolojik iyi oluş, mutluluk, bilinçli farkındalık

Introduction

Individuals must prioritize their psychological well-being and actively seek ways to improve it. Maintaining psychological security and improvement is essential in people's daily lives in a global society. Yoga is an effective means of achieving this, as it can help individuals to focus better and have a more positive outlook on life. Many people practice yoga to feel better; research findings support its benefits. By evaluating their lives more positively and focusing better, individuals can protect their psychological health and increase their quality of life. The mind-body connection makes individuals feel happier and more attuned to their environment. Numerous studies show that yoga reduces stress, depression, and anxiety symptoms and promotes mental clarity (Kirkwood et al. 2005, Kjellgren et al. 2007, Cramer et al. 2013). Therefore, investigating the sequential mediating roles of happiness and mindfulness in the effect of yoga on psychological well-being is promising.

Yoga is a practice that dates back centuries, with philosophical roots and is used to improve physical and mental health. It allows individuals to engage in a process that affects them both physically and mentally (Iyengar 2016).

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Through yoga, individuals become aware of their physical and mental limits and learn to confront themselves. This awareness is essential for staying in the moment and being mindful without being tied to the past or future. During the pandemic, many individuals who stayed home during quarantine found that yoga helped them feel well (Hosseinzadeh et al., 2020). Multiple research studies have shown that practicing yoga has positive psychological and physiological effects, reducing stress levels and protecting psychological health (Hartfiel et al. 2010, Telles et al. 2014, Hendriks et al. 2017, Kaplan 2022). Furthermore, yoga has been found to reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety and, in some studies, contribute to recovery as much as traditional psychotherapy (Kirkwood et al. 2005, Kjellgren et al. 2007, Cramer et al. 2013). Overall, yoga has a significant impact on an individual's psychological health.

Well-being is a fundamental need for every individual. People who believe they have a meaningful and fulfilling life feel valued and motivated (Diener 1984, Ryff and Keyes 1995, Ryff and Singer 2008). Individuals who recognize their potential and work towards self-improvement are happier, have a greater sense of purpose, and are more likely to take steps toward achieving their goals. One way to increase psychological well-being and prevent psychological problems such as depression and anxiety is to focus on an individual's strengths (Kirkwood et al., 2005, Prathikanti et al., 2017). Studies have shown a negative relationship between depression, anxiety, and well-being (Ryff and Singer 2008, Canlıöz and Coşkun 2018). Yoga can significantly improve an individual's quality of life by positively affecting their psychological well-being (Culo-Reed et al. 2012).

Furthermore, a positive correlation exists between psychological and subjective well-being, which is an essential factor in achieving happiness (Sarı and Çakır 2016). Practicing yoga can help individuals develop emotion regulation skills through techniques such as breathing exercises and meditation, which can improve their psychological health and well-being (Khalsa et al. 2015). Therefore, many research findings support using yoga as a tool for individuals to increase self-awareness, recognize their strengths, and improve their psychological functioning (Gaiswinkler and Unterrainer 2016). Although happiness is a subjective evaluation, it is an emotion experienced when individuals experience more positive emotions than negative emotions and generally evaluate their lives positively (Eryılmaz 2011). An individual feels happy when they experience more positive emotions. Each individual's emotional reactions to similar events are different. Therefore, it is not possible for every individual to feel happy about the same event. Individuals who feel happy evaluate their life more positively (Diener 1984, Diener and Seligman 2002), are less likely to encounter psychological problems such as depression and anxiety, and are generally more satisfied with their lives. For this purpose, it is thought that yoga may increase an individual's happiness levels. Yoga is considered a tool that is good for both the body and mind, and thus yoga can potentially increase an individual's happiness (Bektaş and Arslan 2020).

One of the most compelling reasons to turn to yoga to feel better is mindfulness. It is a concept of conscious awareness that focuses on staying in the present moment, allowing individuals to observe their emotions, thoughts, and situations in their natural state. Mindfulness emphasizes the need to focus on what is experienced with transparency, avoiding the concepts of good and evil. People who practice yoga develop the ability to look at their feelings and thoughts objectively and to understand them better, leading to a high level of mindfulness (Kirkwood et al. 2005). Many studies investigating the relationship between yoga and psychological well-being emphasize the role of mindfulness, as yoga has been shown to increase the level of conscious awareness (Mikulas 2011). Research findings also support the idea that people who observe and accept their essence without judgment experience greater happiness and higher levels of psychological well-being (Gülderen 2020). Since one of the fundamental principles of yoga is to be aware of the body and mind without judging, it has an effect that increases an individual's level of conscious awareness (Gaiswinkler and Unterrainer 2016, Gülderen 2020, Hosseinzadeh et al. 2020).

In line with all this information, it is aimed in this study to examine the sequential mediating role of happiness and conscious awareness in the effect of yoga on psychological well-being. The hypotheses proposed in this study are stated as follows: Happiness has a mediating role in the effect of yoga on psychological well-being. Mindfulness also has a mediating role in the effect of yoga on psychological well-being. And finally, happiness and mindfulness play a sequential mediating role in the effect of doing yoga on psychological well-being.

In this study, the comprehensive effect of yoga on psychological well-being was examined, and its relationship with the psychological factors in the study was discussed in detail. Upon examination of the literature, the number of studies investigating the simple mediating role of doing yoga on psychological well-being and the sequential mediating effects of happiness and mindfulness with a Turkish sample group is minimal. Therefore, the research findings aim to fill this gap in the literature and psychologically address the practice of yoga, which individuals apply to feel better.

Methods

Sample

The research was conducted with 263 participants, consisting of 129 yoga practitioners and 134 non-yoga practitioners residing in various provinces of Turkey. Since yoga practitioners are a complex group to reach and the province is not one of the main variables in the study, data from various provinces were included in the analysis. After announcing the research, the number of accessible areas was examined in the G*Power analysis (Faul et al. 2009), and the power analysis result of the model was found to be 0.95. All participants who completed the scale were included. The ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 68 (Mean = 28.49, SD = 9.74) and included 234 women and 29 men.

Regarding education level, 11% were high school students, 45.2% were university students, 21.3% were university graduates, 10.6% were graduate students, and 21.7% were postgraduate students. When asked how they received psychotherapy, 22% of the participants stated that they had received it. When the participants were asked how anxious and depressed they felt in the last two weeks using a 7-point Likert-type question, the mean anxiety level was 4.51, and the mean depression level was 4.03.

The snowball sampling method was used because the participants who were yoga practitioners were challenging to reach. To differentiate between participants who are yoga practitioners and non-yoga practitioners, they were asked whether they practiced yoga or not, and 49% of them stated that they are. Participants, 5.3% of whom are yoga practitioners, stated they were yoga instructors. When asked about the purpose of practicing yoga, 7.6% of the participants stated that they felt physically good, 4.2% felt mentally sound, 38% said they practiced yoga for both purposes, and 1.1% for other purposes. Regarding frequency, 4.6% of the participants practiced yoga daily, 19.8% practiced 2 or 3 days a week, 13.3% practiced once a week, and 7.2% practiced once a month.

Procedure

The data of this research was acquired via an online link. The data collection process began after obtaining permission from the Balıkesir University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee (2023/01) on February 24, 2023. The researcher selected and added online forms to the study with input from five experts. A pilot study was conducted with 20 participants to test the online scale form, and the results indicated that it was appropriate to administer the form online for this study. Due to the difficulty of accessing yoga practitioners, a wide age range was included in the sample. Participants completed the research form online after being informed of the study through social media and individual communication channels. The announcement briefly explained the study's purpose, informed participants that their participation was voluntary, and assured them that they could discontinue the study at any time. Informed consent was obtained from participants on the scale entry page. Since the study was based on volunteerism, participants were not required to answer any mandatory questions, and they could leave questions blank or discontinue the study at any time. The data collected in this study were kept confidential and used only for analysis. In that order, participants completed the Demographic Information Form, Psychological Well-Being Scale, Oxford Happiness Scale, and Conscious Awareness Scale. The scale form consisted of 47 questions and four screens and took approximately 15 minutes to complete. No compensation was provided to participants, as their participation was voluntary. Participants were informed about the importance of using the data for scientific purposes in the consent form and were asked to complete the scale form.

Measures

Demographic Information Form

The form administered to participants included questions regarding their gender, age, marital status, educational status, place of residence, socioeconomic status, whether they had received psychotherapy at the time of filling the scale, how anxious and depressed they felt in the last two weeks, whether they are yoga or non-yoga practitioners, how long they had been practicing, and the purpose of starting to yoga. Concerning the psychotherapy question, participants were asked whether they received psychotherapy previously. For the yoga instructor question, participants were asked whether they had received an official document from an authorized institution for becoming a yoga instructor.

Psychological Well-Being Scale

The Psychological Well-Being Scale was used to measure levels of psychological well-being (Diener et al. 2010). The one-dimensional scale consists of 8 items in total. Each scale item was prepared as a 7-point Likert type (Telef 2013). The Cronbach Alpha reliability value of the scale was found to be 0.80. If the first and second applications of the scale were leading, the ratio coefficient between the two applications was found to be 0.86. The Cronbach Alpha reliability value for this study parameter was 0.88.

Oxford Happiness Scale

The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire, initially developed by Hills and Argyle (2002) and adapted to Turkish by Doğan and Akıncı-Çötök (2011), was used to measure happiness scores. The questionnaire consists of 7 items and employs a 7-point Likert scale, with a lowest possible score of 7 and a highest possible score of 35. The factor loadings of the scale ranged from 0.53 to 0.72, indicating good validity. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.74, and the reliability coefficient for this study was 0.73.

Mindful Attention Awareness Scale

The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale, developed by Brown and Ryan (2003) and adapted to Turkish by Özyeşil et al. (2011), was used to measure participants' levels of mindfulness. The scale consists of 15 items and employs a 6-point Likert scale. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of the original scale was 0.80, and the test-retest correlation coefficient was 0.86. In this study, Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.87.

Statistical Analysis

The data obtained in this study were analyzed in the SPSS 22.0 package program. Before starting the analysis, the normality assumptions of the variables were examined, and it was found that the skewness and kurtosis values of all variables were in the appropriate range (Field 2009). The mean and standard deviation values of psychological well-being, happiness, and mindfulness variables included in the study were calculated. Pearson Correlation Coefficient analysis was applied to examine the relationships between psychological well-being, happiness, and mindfulness variables. The study was carried out by adding the PROCESS version 4.2 plug-in to the SPSS package program. The sequential mediating role of happiness and mindfulness in the effect of yoga on psychological well-being was investigated by applying Model 6 in this version (Preacher and Hayes 2004).

Results

In order to analyze the data obtained in this study, the mean, standard deviation, and correlation values between the total scores of the scales were calculated. In addition, the sequential mediating role of happiness and mindfulness in the effect of yoga on psychological well-being was examined. The study's variables are the mean and standard deviation for psychological well-being, happiness, and mindfulness, and the findings regarding the relationships between the variables are given in Table 1.

	Yoga Practitioners		Non-Yoga Practitioners		1	2	3
	Mean	SD	Mea	SD			
1.Psychological Well-Being	43.60	8.12	36.55	6.72	1	0.56**	0.34**
2.Happiness	20.47	4.03	18.64	2.53	0.56**	1	0.30**
3.Mindfulness	56.72	14.89	54.99	9.60	0.34**	0.30**	1

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01., SD = Standard deviation

When the descriptive statistical results of the variables were examined, the mean score of psychological well-being was 43.60 (SD = 8.12), the mean score of happiness was 20.47 (SD = 4.03), and the mean score of mindfulness was 56.72 (SD = 14.89) found in yoga practitioners. The mean score of psychological well-being was 36.55 (SD = 6.72), the mean score of happiness was 18.64 (SD = 2.53), and the mean score of mindfulness was 54.99 (SD = 9.60) found in non-yoga practitioners.

When the correlations between the variables are examined, psychological well-being and happiness ($r=0.56$, $p<0.00$), psychological well-being and mindfulness ($r=0.34$, $p<0.00$), and happiness and mindfulness ($r=0.34$, $p<0.00$) were found. $r=0.30$, $p<0.00$) significant relationships were found.

Mediation Analysis

In order to test the research model, Serial Multiple Mediator Variable Analysis (PROCESS Model 6) was applied to examine whether happiness and mindfulness have a sequential mediating role in the effect of yoga on psychological well-being (Preacher and Hayes 2004). Depending on the correlation values obtained as a result of the correlation analysis, the regression analysis was tested. All the effects between the variables included in the model are shown in detail in Table 2 and Figure 1.

	B	SE	t	p	R	R²
Model 1						
Constant	22.30	0.66	33.96	0.00	0.26	0.07
Yoga	-1.83	0.41	-4.43	0.00		
Model 2						
Constant	34.15	5.46	6.25	0.00	0.30	0.09
Yoga	0.26	1.52	0.17	0.86		
Happiness	1.09	0.22	4.93	0.00		
Model 3						
Constant	20.83	3.05	6.83	0.00	0.66	0.43
Yoga	-4.99	0.80	-6.26	0.00		
Happiness	1.00	0.12	8.35	0.00		
Mindfulness	0.13	0.03	3.91	0.00		

*p < 0,05, **p < 0,01, B = Beta, SE = Standard error

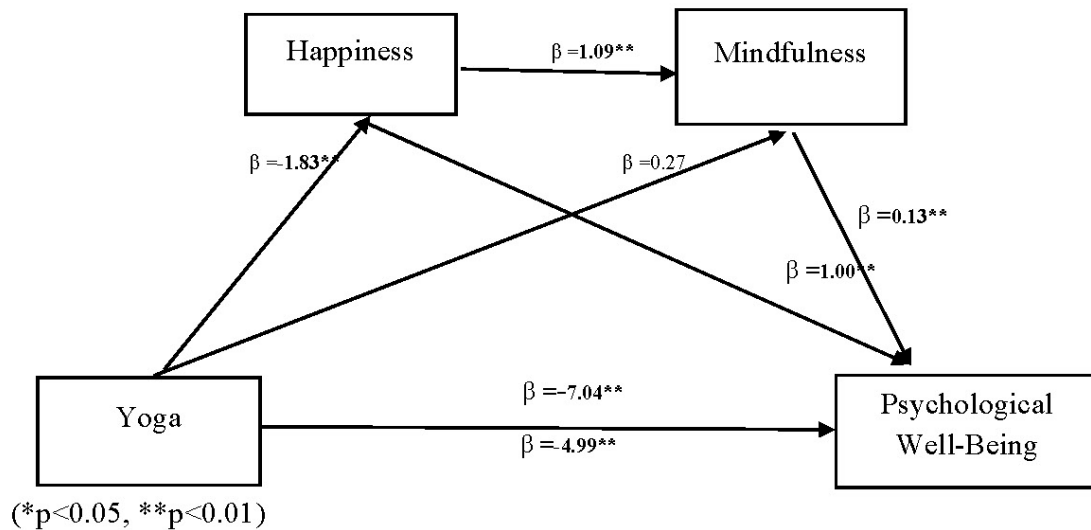


Figure 1. Serial multiple mediator model

β : Non-standardized coefficient

Yoga predicted happiness ($\beta = -1.83$, $p < .00$) negatively. Happiness predicted psychological well-being positively and significantly ($\beta = 1.00$, $p < .00$). As stated by Preacher and Hayes (2004) if the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable becomes statistically significant with the inclusion of a third variable in the model, this third variable is called a partial mediating variable. According to the results, it was seen that happiness had a partial mediator role (Figure 1).

When the mediating role of mindfulness is examined, yoga does not significantly predict mindfulness ($\beta = 0.27$, $p > .05$), and mindfulness positively and significantly predicts psychological well-being ($\beta = 0.13$, $p < .00$) in Table 2. According to the results, no mediating role of mindfulness was found in the relationship between yoga and psychological well-being (Figure 1).

According to the findings of multiple regression analysis, yoga has a direct and significant effect on psychological well-being ($\beta = -7.04$, $p < .00$). With the addition of happiness and mindfulness to the analysis, it is seen that yoga has a significant indirect effect on psychological well-being ($\beta = -4.99$, $p < .00$). happiness and mindfulness seem

to mediate sequentially in the effect of yoga on psychological well-being. The variables are serial multiple mediator variables (Figure 1).

Discussion

In this research, relationships between variable and sequential mediating roles of happiness and mindfulness in the effect of yoga on psychological well-being were measured. The analysis showed positive and significant relationships between psychological well-being, happiness, and mindfulness variables. As the participants' scores of psychological well-being increase, they become happier and more mindful (Gaiswinkler and Unterrainer 2016, Gülderen 2020, Hosseinzadeh et al. 2020). Furthermore, individuals whose happiness levels increase also exhibit an increase in their level of conscious awareness. Many research findings support these variables' positive and significant relationships (Diener et al. 1999, Lyubomirsky et al. 2005, Hartfiel et al. 2010, Hendriks et al. 2017, Kaplan 2022). Individuals with high psychological functioning tend to feel happier, and the psychological well-being levels of happy individuals increase (Diener et al. 1999, Doğan 2016, Sarı and Çakır 2016). When individuals feel positive emotions and focus on their purpose, they can enjoy the moment more, seek new options to improve themselves and shape their lives with the gains they have acquired through new experiences. Happier individuals tend to be more aware of the moment and have a better ability to focus on the present. Individuals with high psychological functioning tend to live with a purpose (Diener et al. 1999), making them more willing to live in the moment and thus increasing their level of conscious awareness. Overall, the positive and significant relationships between the variables observed in this study are consistent with the research findings in the literature.

When examining the mediator role of happiness in the effect of yoga on psychological well-being, it is seen that it is a partial mediator. Adding happiness to this relationship causes the relationship between yoga and psychological well-being to continue to decrease. Numerous research findings in the literature support the effect of yoga on psychological well-being (Kirkwood et al. 2005, Kjellgren et al. 2007, Hartfiel et al. 2010, Cramer et al. 2013, Telles et al. 2014, Hendriks et al. 2017, Kaplan, 2022). The philosophy of yoga focuses on improving both physical and mental well-being. As a result, yoga practitioners are known to have higher psychological functionality and increased psychological well-being. Yoga helps individuals with a purpose in their life to focus on achieving their goals and increasing their level of functionality. It is also known that yoga strengthens individuals' physical and psychological health, reduces their stress levels, provides a more positive evaluation of life, and enables better focus on life through its subcomponents, such as meditation practices (Hartfiel et al. 2010, Hendriks et al. 2017, Kaplan 2022). Through all these benefits, yoga also plays a role in protecting individuals' psychological health. When happiness is included in this relationship, significant relationships are observed between yoga and happiness, as well as happiness and psychological well-being. Yoga practitioners experience fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety (Kirkwood et al. 2005, Kjellgren et al. 2007, Cramer et al. 2013) and feel happier (Bektaş and Arslan 2020). Individuals who experience fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety tend to feel happier (Canlıöz and Coşkun 2018, Kaya and Canlıöz 2021). Through yoga, which helps to reduce stress, individuals can feel happier. And happy individuals can more easily shape their lives with their goals, increase their functionality, and protect their psychological health. In conclusion, the findings obtained from the research are consistent with the literature.

When examining the mediator role of mindfulness in the relationship between yoga and psychological well-being, it was found that there was no significant relationship between yoga and mindfulness. Thus, mindfulness did not have a mediator role. However, the sequential mediation analysis revealed that happiness and mindfulness played sequential mediating roles in the relationship between yoga and psychological well-being. The analysis also showed a positive and significant relationship between happiness and mindfulness. The literature suggests that happy individuals tend to have a higher level of awareness. Research has shown that practicing yoga helps individuals to focus better and gain a deeper awareness of their lives. Increased awareness improves an individual's quality of life, aids decision-making toward achieving personal goals, and helps protect their psychological health. Thus, it can be concluded that the effect of yoga on psychological well-being is impacted by the sequential mediation effect of happiness and mindfulness and that happiness and mindfulness have a shared effect on an individual's psychological well-being (Gaiswinkler and Unterrainer 2016, Gülderen 2020, Hosseinzadeh et al. 2020).

As with any research, this study has some limitations. Firstly, it was challenging to recruit individuals who were yoga practitioners, which affected the number of participants. Secondly, data collection was conducted online, which may have affected the quality of responses. Finally, the generalizability of the findings may be limited as

the data was collected from participants across Turkey, which may have been influenced by factors such as education level and cultural differences.

Conclusion

The analysis revealed that happiness and mindfulness mediate this relationship sequentially. There is a limited number of studies in the literature in Turkey that investigate the mediation effect of happiness, and mindfulness on the relationship between yoga and psychological well-being, particularly with the participation of yoga and non-yoga practitioners. Moreover, recruiting individuals who are yoga practitioners can be a challenging process. Therefore, this study fills an essential gap in the literature and provides significant findings based on a sample group from Turkey. Future research could benefit from including additional variables to examine the psychological perspective of yoga in greater depth. Increasing the number of participants is recommended, notably by expanding the age range and extending the data collection process.

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