

IMPLEMENTATION OF MINDFULNESS-BASED STRESS REDUCTION PRACTICES TO REDUCE STRESS AND DEPRESSION AMONG YOUTH IN KAZAKHSTAN

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Abstract. Stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms serve as key indicators of mental health vulnerability among youth in Kazakhstan, arising amid growing academic and sociocultural pressures; despite the proven effectiveness of mindfulness programs, their empirical validation in the Central Asian context remains underrepresented.

This article summarizes the theoretical rationale, preliminary empirical data, and an implementation model for MBSR practices adapted to reduce stress and depressive symptoms among youth in Kazakhstan. The study is being conducted as part of research project AP26102139, «Application of MBSR Practices to Reduce Stress and Depression Among Youth in Kazakhstan», funded by the Science Committee of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Preliminary empirical data obtained from a sample of 131 university students aged 18 to 22 showed that mindfulness is positively associated with academic performance and psychological well-being and negatively associated with perceived stress. The project also includes the cultural adaptation of the MBSR program to Kazakhstani educational and psychological practices, the implementation of an 8-week intervention course, psychological assessment, and physiological evaluation methods such as biofeedback, heart rate variability (HRV), spark discharge imaging, and electroencephalography (EEG).

The data obtained reveal the complexities and challenges of the proposed model, but also identify promising avenues for MBSR as a scientifically grounded and practically significant tool for promoting the mental health of young people in Kazakhstan.

Keywords: MBSR, mindfulness, stress, depression, youth, Kazakhstan, psychological well-being.

Introduction

Stress and depressive symptoms are included in most significant factors affecting the psychological well-being of young people. The transition to adult life associated with academic requirements, professional uncertainty, social comparison, family expectations, and increasing responsibility. In the context of this work, we note that the demands of higher education institutions are increased by a higher pace of learning, informational overload, and the necessity of maintaining academic performance, while adapting to changing social and emotional conditions, leading to specific stressors characteristic of young people. Previous reviews and empirical studies conducted within the framework of project AP26102139 emphasize that the modern educational environment contributes to psycho-emotional strain, subjective stress and reduced academic performance of students.

In Kazakhstan, this problem is particularly significant, since the system of psychological support and stress prevention among young people is still in the process of development. To give a concept of modern research of this topic, we turn to the work of Yertukeshova G. et al. (2024), in which it is noted that indicators of mental well-being is directly related to academic success, and the research of Issakhanov A. et al. (2026) which highlights significant role of stress factors and underdevelopment of psychological support mechanisms, which is expressed in the existence of structural barriers to seeking help among university students. Materials of the project note that Kazakhstani youth are often facing stress, anxiety, emotional burnout and depressive symptoms associated with social, academic and professional pressure. Accordingly, the project is considered in the context of a broader national task – strengthening mental health, stress resistance and mental well-being of young people.

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) is a structured program developed by John Kabat-Zinn based on the systematic development of awareness of present moment experience (Kabat-Zinn, 2011). MBSR includes meditative practice, breathing exercises, conscious movement, and techniques aimed at enhancing non-judgmental awareness of thoughts, emotions, and body sensations. In the Kazakhstan project, MBSR is considered not only as a method of stress reduction, but also as culturally adaptable psychological technology capable of supporting emotional regulation, self-awareness and stress resistance.

The term mindfulness (*sati/smṛti*) originally means the ability to sustain attention on an object. However, in modern interpretations, it is also associated with focusing on the present moment (Lutz et al., 2015). In the context of modern clinical and experimental psychology, mindfulness is operationalized as a special module of consciousness, characterized by non-judgmental, non-conceptual awareness of current experience, formed through the systematic training of attention (Kabat-Zinn, 2005).

At the same time, modern literature conceptualizes mindfulness as multidimensional, including at least three analytically distinct but interrelated aspects (Chamber et al., 2009; Davidson, 2010):

Dispositional mindfulness as a relatively stable individual characteristic;

Mindfulness as a regulatory practice;

Mindfulness as a phenomenological state of current experience.

A review of research on mindfulness generally confirms the effectiveness of mindfulness practices in reducing stress and depression among young people. However, the explanations for these effects differ. The data described are consistent with the results reported by Brown et al. (2021) and Sapulette et al. (2025); their meta-analytical work focuses on the general psychotherapeutic effects of mindfulness interventions, linking improvements in mental health with a decrease in emotional reactivity and enhanced self-regulation.

Modern research related to mindfulness and stress forms a special type of scientific thought that demonstrates a key role of emotional regulation as a central mechanism of influence. In particular, the authors of Chiesa et al. (2013) consider mindfulness as an integrative system that connects cognitive («top-down») and body-oriented («bottom-up») processes of emotional processing. Taking this perspective into account, Crosswell et al. (2017) emphasize the psychological aspects, demonstrating that mindfulness promotes faster recovery from stress, including a reduction in physiological reactivity. Studies on neurocognitive mechanisms allow to quantitatively assess the impact of stress and depression on changes in the brain, nervous and cardiovascular systems. For instance, Farb et al. (2010) demonstrated that the practice of mindfulness changes neuronal patterns underlying emotional processing, reducing the intensity of experiencing a negative effect. Guendelman et al. (2025) demonstrated relationships between mindfulness and autonomous regulation, particularly through improvements in heart rate variability, an indicator of stress resistance.

Moreover, a separate research group (Grawrysiak et al., 2018; Carmody & Baer, 2008) emphasizes the heterogeneous nature of the mindfulness construct. According to their view, its various components (for example, observation, acceptance, and undifferentiation of experience) have a different influence on mental health within the framework of MBSR programs.

Research gap and objectives

Despite the fact that mindfulness is widely studied in the international scientific literature, the effectiveness of MBSR in several psychological disorders has been proven (Hölzel B.K. et al., 2009; Goldin P.R. et al., 2010; Farb N.A. et al., 2012), but empirical research from Kazakhstan and Central Asia remains limited. Existing Kazakh and Russian studies often consider certain aspects of mindfulness, like its connection with stress, sleep quality, creativity, or emotional stability. A complex analysis of mindfulness as a resource for academic success, psychological well-being, and stress reduction remains underdeveloped.

This gap is logically comparable with the study of gambling problems, where psychological predictors are analyzed in a context that is underrepresented in international research. In the case of MBSR, the key gap is the lack of culturally adapted evidence-based interventions for Kazakh youth. Therefore, the project contains three levels: theoretical analysis, empirical assessment of mindfulness and well-being, as well as practical implementation of the 8-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program.

Objectives of this study:

To summarize scientific basis for implementation of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction among Kazakh youth.

To present preliminary empirical data on the relationship between mindfulness, stress, well-being, and academic performance on the Kazakhstan student sample.

Describe the model of implementing an 8-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program.

Determine the practical consequences for education, psychological support, and mental health policy of young people in Kazakhstan.

Methods

Design of research

This research used an interdisciplinary design and mixed research methods. According to the grant requests, the overall goal of the project is to study, adapt and implement MBSR practices to reduce stress and depression among young people in Kazakhstan. The program consists of an 8-week course with evaluation of psychological and physiological results.

The primary empirical stage includes cross-sectional research on awareness, perceived stress, psychological well-being, and academic performance among university students.

Participants

The empirical research involved 131 students from L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University. The inclusion criteria were an age between 18 and 22 years. Participants were studying in the first through fourth years of study and represented various academic disciplines. Participation was voluntary and anonymous; respondents were informed about the purpose of the study.

Measures

Mindfulness was assessed by two instruments: the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) and the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ). These methods allowed us to evaluate a general level of mindfulness, as well as its structural components. Psychological well-being was assessed using PERMA-Profiler, based on M. Seligman. Perceived stress was measured using a scale perceived stress PSS-14. Academic achievement was assessed by the average GPA score.

For the planned intervention stage, project materials included the use of PSS, GAD-7, MSCEIT, biofeedback, heart rate variability, gas discharge visualization, and EEG. These methods are aimed at combining subjective psychological evaluation with objective physiological indicators of stress and emotional regulation.

Procedures and data analysis

Empirical data were collected remotely using Google Forms. Students completed the diagnostic methods on their own, and the average completion time was 20-25 minutes. Statistical analysis was conducted using Jamovi 2.6.13. To identify the link between mindfulness, well-being, perceived stress, and academic achievements, descriptive statistics and Spearman's correlation analysis were used.

Results

The preliminary empirical study has shown that mindfulness is meaningfully connected to the academic and psychological functioning of students; enrolment and randomization of the study are described in detail in Abishev et al. (2026). The research involved 131 students from L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University. The inclusion criteria were an age between 18 and 22 years. To assess mindfulness, used scale Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) and the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ). Psychological well-being was measured with the PERMA-Profiler, perceived stress using the PSS-14, and academic performance according to GPA.

Overall, the distribution of mindfulness levels showed that most of the students have an average level of mindfulness. According to the results of the MAAS, 50.3% of respondents showed a moderate level of mindfulness, 26% showed a high level, and 23.7% showed a low level of mindfulness. This indicates that a significant part of students already have basic resources for regulating attention, but some students remain highly vulnerable to automatic reactions, emotional involvement, and insufficient mindfulness of current experience.

This study assessed the connection between mindfulness, academic performance, psychological well-being, and perceived stress. A non-parametric Spearman's rank correlation analysis was selected, since the GPA variable did not correspond to a normal distribution. The analysis included a total mindfulness index measured by the MAAS scale, as well as five facets of mindfulness measured by the FFMQ: observation, description, mindfulness of action, non-judgment, and non-reactivity. Academic achievements were assessed by GPA, psychological well-being using PERMA-Profiler, and perceived stress using the PSS-14 scale.

Previously reported data by Abishev et al. (2026) demonstrated a significant positive relationship between total level of mindfulness and academic performance ($r=0.635$, $p<.001$). Moreover, several components of the FFMQ were statistically significantly associated with indicators of psychological well-being. Then we analyzed the results and found that the most connection were observed for the "awareness of action" which is positively connected to general psychological well-being, involvement, meaning, achievements, happiness, and health, and negatively to loneliness. These results suggest that acting with awareness may be one of the key psychological mechanisms, connecting mindfulness with more effective emotional functioning and academic adaptation of students (Abishev et al., 2026). The overall level of mindfulness is not significantly related to the psychological well-being indicators; at the same time, individual components demonstrate differentiated associations.

The data obtained during analysis show that the most pronounced positive connections:

«Awareness of action» correlates with engagement ($p=0.257$, $p<.001$), as well as with achievements ($p=0.240$, $p<.01$), meaning ($p=0.222$, $p<.05$), happiness ($p=0.220$, $p<.05$), health ($p=0.172$, $p<.05$) and psychological well-being ($p=0.236$, $p<.01$)

The «description» component is related to general psychological well-being ($p=0.213$, $p<.05$) as well as positive emotions ($p=0.178$, $p<.05$), relationships ($p=0.274$, $p<.01$) and happiness ($p=0.248$, $p<.01$).

The «observation» component was characterized by the strongest connection with the relationship ($p = 0.290$, $p < .001$), as well as with involvement ($p = 0.183$, $p < .05$).

It is also important to note that the most pronounced negative connection; with loneliness: there are negative connections for «description» (-0.209^* , $p < .05$), «acting with awareness» ($p = -0.213$, $p < .05$), and "non-judgment" ($p = -0.234$, $p < .01$).

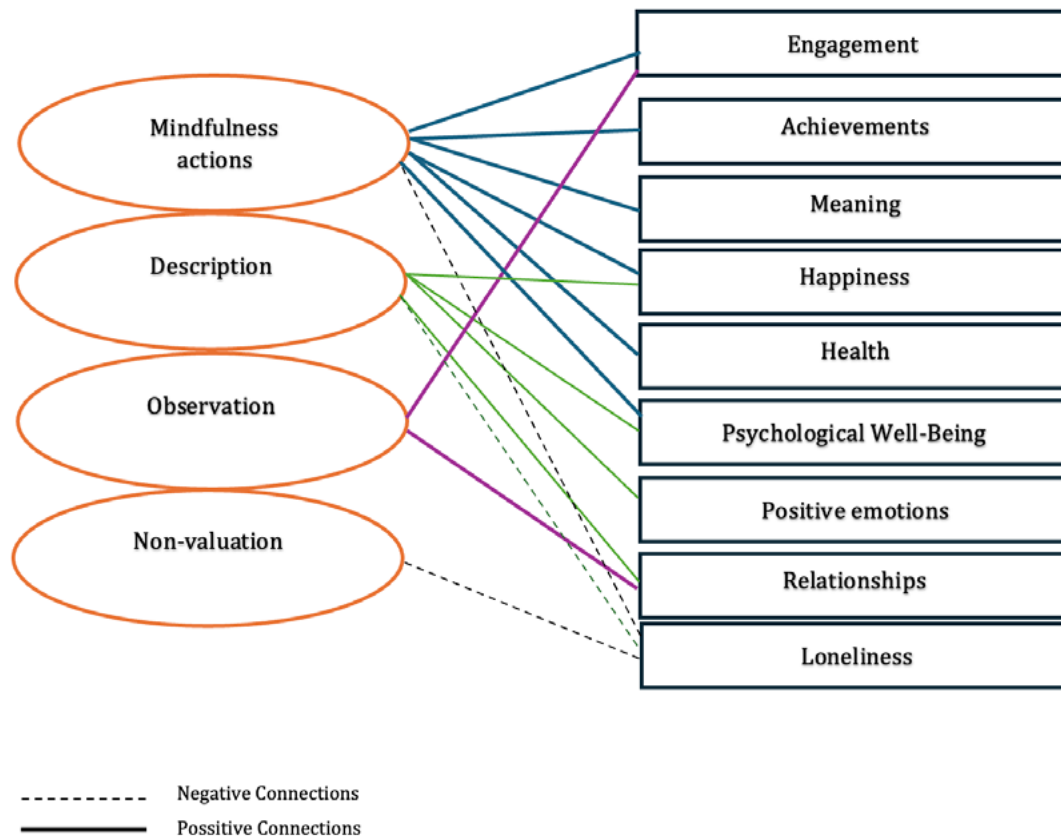


Fig. 1. Correlation between mindfulness and indicators of psychological well-being

As shown in Figure 1, the generalisation of the main results allows us to make a conclusion that psychological well-being is connected with individual facets of mindfulness and not with its integral indicators.

The study confirms that the general MAAS score didn't show significant connections with the components of ECMA, but individual facets of the FFMQ became statistically significant. The most meaningful component is «awareness of action»: it was positively connected with general well-being, involvement, meaning, achievements, happiness and health, and also negatively related to loneliness. The «description» component was also positively connected with general well-being, positive emotions, relationships and happiness was negatively associated with loneliness. The «observation» component is strongly linked with quality of relationships, which may reflect the importance of attention to oneself and others in interpersonal interaction.

Based on the results of the research and correlation analysis, we found that mindfulness is substantively related to the academic and psychological functioning of students. Overall mindset showed a strong positive connection with GPA, which indicates that students with a higher level of mindfulness at the present moment have higher academic performance. At the same time, psychological well-being turned out to be more strongly related not to the MAAS score but to individual facets of mindfulness, primarily with awareness of actions, description, and observation. Awareness of action has been the most stable correlate of well-being, which can suggest: ability to make daily and educational activities conscious, rather than automatically, can lead to greater involvement, achievements, a sense of meaning, happiness, and subjective health, while at the same time reducing feelings of loneliness. These results prove the understanding of mindfulness as a multidimensional psychological resource significant for academic adaptation, emotional stability, and stress prevention among young people in Kazakhstan (Abishev et al., 2026). A narrative review conducted within the framework of the project confirmed that MBSR is associated with a decrease in perceived stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms among young people. An important feature is that the strongest and most persistent effects are observed in reducing stress, while the impact on depressive symptoms is often indirect and depends on the duration of the intervention, involvement of participants, the level

of rumination, and individual differences (Aubakirova et al., 2026). The authors believe that, in aggregate, empirical and review data allow us to consider Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction as a perspective intervention, aimed at developing the skill of self-regulation, emotional stability and psychological well-being in young people.

Discussion

The results confirm that mindfulness can be considered an important psychological resource for young people in Kazakhstan. Correlation data demonstrate that the general level of mindfulness is primarily associated with academic performance, whereas psychological well-being is more linked to specific facets of mindfulness measured by FFMQ. These findings highlight the need to consider mindfulness not as a single global indicator but as a multidimensional construct that includes observation, description, awareness of action, non-judgment, and non-reactivity (Abishev et al., 2026). We believe that the role of the action awareness component is important. This component reflects the ability to maintain attention to present activities and not to act automatically. In the student sample, this ability can support academic achievements, reduce emotional overload, and increase resilience in stressful educational situations. Positive relations between awareness of action and involvement, achievements, meaning, happiness, and health allow us to consider this as one of the central mechanisms of psychological adaptation of students. These findings are consistent with modern conceptualization of MBSR as a program aimed at cultivating present moment awareness, emotional regulation, and the ability to non-judgmental acceptance of internal experience. International meta-analyses confirm the effectiveness of MBSR in reducing stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms in clinical and non-clinical samples (Khouri et al., 2015; De Vibe et al., 2017). The most important result of our research is that empirical data were obtained in the context of Kazakh students. This allows us to expand the scientific understanding of mindfulness beyond Western samples and highlights the need for cultural adaptation of MBSR for educational and psychological practice in Kazakhstan. Considering the high levels of perceived stress among students and the significant associations observed between mindfulness, GPA, and psychological well-being, implementing MBSR in university settings may be a promising approach to prevent stress, reduce emotional burnout, and alleviate psychological distress among young people.

Practical implementation

In this research, adding MBSR in Kazakhstan, as shown in Fig. 2, can have a few practical directions:

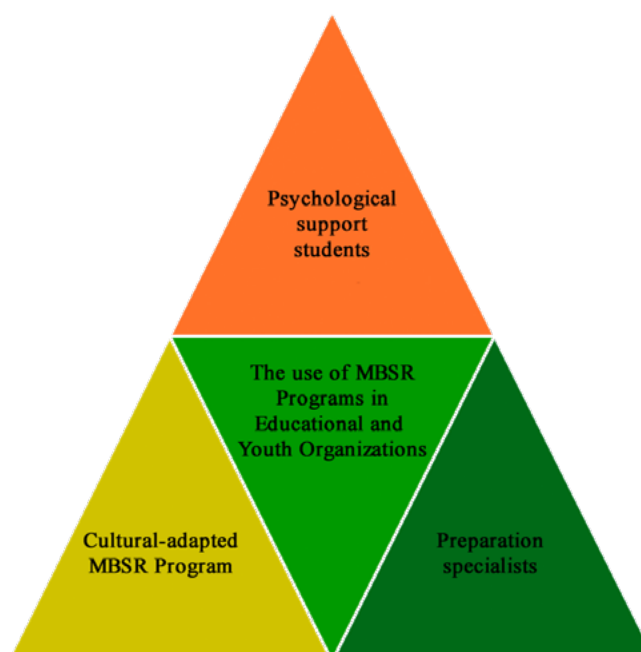


Fig.2. Directions for the practical implementation of the MBSR program in Kazakhstan

Psychological support for students

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction may be implemented in universities as part of psychological support of students. Preliminary data demonstrate that mindfulness is associated with a high level of well-being and a lower level of perceived stress, which makes a program relevant for student consulting centers, academic support and preventive mental health programs.

- Culturally adapted MBSR program

Adaptation of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction in Kazakh and Russian languages may make a program culturally accessible. The materials of the grant project highlight that the program must be adapted to the cultural and social specificities of Kazakhstan rather than directly transferred from a Western context.

- Using MBSR in educational and youth organizations.

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction can be used in schools, universities, and youth resource centers. The narrative review defines these platforms as perspectives for strengthening the mental health of Kazakh youth.

- Training of specialists

The project includes advanced training of psychologists and teachers based on the practice of mindfulness. It creates an opportunity to scale the program across the regions and train specialists who can support youth in managing stress and emotional difficulties.

Limitations and directions for future researchers.

In the context of this research, several limitations should be considered:

The preliminary empirical study had a cross-sectional design, which does not allow causal conclusions to be drawn about whether mindfulness reduces stress directly or students with lower stress levels are more likely to demonstrate a higher level of mindfulness.

Research was based on self-reporting methods, and the results may depend on social desirability and subjective interpretation.

The limitations we described must include longitudinal and experimental designs for future studies, especially assessment before and after completing an 8-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program. This indicates that it's important to conducting follow up assessments to determine whether the effects of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction persist over time. It is also important to achieving the study objectives requires the use of physiological indicators, such as variability of heart rate, gas discharge visualization, EEG, and biological feedback as targeted tools for improving methodological rigor of the study and provide objective data on stress regulation.

Conclusion

The growing interest of the scientific community on the topic of mindfulness is aimed for a better understanding of mechanisms, underlying the observed mental and neurocognitive changes, as well as in connection with the need of improving the level of academic performance of students, introduction to stress reduction practices based on mindfulness in Kazakhstan is a promising and scientifically based direction for strengthening a mental health of young people in modern realities. Project AP26102139 fills an important gap by adapting Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction to the Kazakh cultural and educational context and combining theoretical analysis, empirical research, and practical intervention obtained as a result of studying processes occurring during mindfulness practices. Scientific study experience in implementing a stress reduction program based on Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction showed that this direction represents a structured psychological intervention aimed at developing mindfulness of the present moment, emotional regulation, and adaptive coping strategies. The study was carried out as part of the analysis methodical literature and conducted empirical experience during which is discovered that received on an experimental group consisted from 131 university students, result showed how general level of mindfulness positively connected with academic performance, and individual facets of mindfulness especially awareness of action, description and observation are related to indicators of psychological well-being. The strongest connection was

found between overall mindfulness and GPA ($\rho=0.635$; $p<.001$), which suggests that mindfulness plays a key role in increasing the resources for academic adaptation. Awareness of action has proven to be a sustainable component associated with well-being, involvement, achievements, meaning, happiness, and health, as well as a reduction of loneliness (Abishev et al., 2026). Highlighted key factors and changes which are needed to be considered within the framework of psychological work with young people during the study period.

Generally, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction may be an effective instrument for preventing stress, emotional self-regulation, and psychological support for Kazakh young people. To achieve the set goals and successfully implement the program, it's necessary to meet a number of requirements such as:

- Cultural adaptation;
- Training specialists;
- Rigorous assessment of effectiveness;
- Integration in the system of educational and psychological support.

The conducted research expands the presentation of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction as a tool for preventing stress and depression, and the obtained results can be used in research and practice.

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Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Contribution of the Authors

A. Mambetalina – development of the research idea and concept, scientific supervision, manuscript editing, and preparation of the final manuscript.

S. Karagulakova – writing the text, conceptualization of the research, methodological support, and manuscript editing.

A. Mambetalina, Zh. Abishev, K. Kuanzhanova – writing the text, conducting the empirical study, data collection.

N. Bissembayeva – translator of the article and manuscript editing.

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Қазақстан жастары арасында стресс пен депрессияны төмендетуге арналған саналы зейінге негізделген тәжірибелерді енгізу

Аңдатпа. Стресс, мазасыздық және депрессиялық көріністер Қазақстан жастарының психикалық денсаулығының осалдық көрсеткіштері ретінде қарастырылады. Олар академиялық және әлеуметтік-мәдени қысымның артуы жағдайында қалыптасады. Саналы зейінге негізделген бағдарламалардың тиімділігі дәлелденгеніне қарамастан, олардың Орталық Азия контексіндегі эмпирикалық валидациясы жеткіліксіз зерттелген.

Осы мақалада Қазақстан жастары арасында стресс пен депрессиялық симптомдарды төмендетуге бағытталған MBSR тәжірибелерін енгізудің теориялық негіздемесі, алдын ала эмпирикалық деректері және іске асыру моделі ұсынылады. Зерттеу Қазақстан Республикасы Ғылым және жоғары білім министрлігі Ғылым комитеті қаржыландыратын АР26102139 «Қазақстан жастары арасында стресс пен депрессияны төмендету үшін MBSR тәжірибелерін қолдану» ғылыми жобасы аясында жүргізілуде. 18–22 жас аралығындағы 131 университет студентін қамтитын іріктеме бойынша алынған алдын ала эмпирикалық деректер саналы зейіннің академиялық үлгеріммен және психологиялық әл-ауқатпен оң байланысын, ал қабылданатын стресс деңгейімен теріс байланысын көрсетті. Жоба сондай-ақ MBSR бағдарламасын Қазақстанның білім беру және психологиялық тәжірибесіне мәдени бейімдеуді, 8 апталық интервенциялық курсты өткізуді, психологиялық диагностика жүргізуді және биологиялық кері байланыс, жүрек соғу ырғағының вариабельділігі (HRV), газоразрядтық визуализация және электроэнцефалография (ЭЭГ) сияқты физиологиялық бағалау әдістерін қамтиды.

Алынған нәтижелер ұсынылған модельдің бірқатар қиындықтары мен шектеулерін көрсеткенімен, MBSR-дің Қазақстан жастарының психикалық денсаулығын нығайтудың ғылыми негізделген әрі практикалық маңызды құралы ретіндегі перспективаларын айқындайды.

Түйін сөздер: MBSR, саналы зейін, стресс, депрессия, жастар, Қазақстан, психологиялық әл-ауқат.

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Внедрение практик осознанности для снижения уровня стресса и депрессии среди молодежи Казахстана

Аннотация. Стресс, тревожность и депрессивные проявления выступают как ключевые индикаторы уязвимости психического здоровья молодежи в Казахстане. Они формируются в условиях нарастающего академического и социокультурного давления и, несмотря на доказанную эффективность программ осознанности, их эмпирическая валидизация в центральноазиатском контексте остается недостаточно представленной.

В настоящей статье обобщаются теоретическое обоснование, предварительные эмпирические данные и модель внедрения практик MBSR, адаптированных для снижения стресса и депрессивных симптомов среди молодежи Казахстана. Исследование проводится в рамках научного проекта АР26102139 «Применение практик MBSR для снижения стресса и депрессии среди молодежи Казахстана», финансируемого Комитетом науки Министерства науки и высшего образования Республики Казахстан. Предварительные эмпирические данные, полученные на выборке из 131 студента университета в возрасте от 18 до 22 лет, показали, что

осознанность положительно связана с академической успеваемостью и психологическим благополучием и отрицательно связана с воспринимаемым стрессом. Проект также включает культурную адаптацию программы MBSR к казахстанской образовательной и психологической практике, проведение 8-недельного интервенционного курса, психологическую диагностику и физиологические методы оценки, такие как биологическая обратная связь, вариабельность сердечного ритма (HRV), газоразрядной визуализации и электроэнцефалография (ЭЭГ).

Полученные данные выявляют сложности и проблемы предложенной модели, однако также определяются перспективные пути MBSR как научно обоснованный и практически значимый инструмент укрепления психического здоровья молодежи Казахстана.

Ключевые слова: MBSR, осознанность, стресс, депрессия, молодежь, Казахстан, психологическое благополучие.

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