

# Mindfulness Engagement and its Relationship with Mental Health in College Students

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## Introduction

This research delves into the intersection of mental health challenges — namely depression, anxiety, and rumination — and their impact on college students' engagement with mindfulness practices. Defined by Kabat-Zinn (2003) as a conscious, non-judgmental focus on the present moment, mindfulness is a potent tool for enhancing well-being (González-Martín et al., 2023). Yet, the literature reveals a gap in understanding how mental health factors influence students' willingness to engage in such practices. By investigating predictors of mindfulness engagement within the university context, our study aims to offer insights crucial for the design of effective mental health interventions on college campuses. Highlighting the growing prevalence of mental health issues among students and their potential barriers to engaging in mindfulness, we seek to explore whether depression, anxiety, and rumination significantly deter or promote interest in mindfulness practices. This inquiry is pivotal, aiming to inform strategies that may allow us to effectively tailor mindfulness interventions to the mental health needs of college students, thereby enhancing overall well-being and contributing to the broader field of mental health care and wellness program development.

## Research Goals

- 1) To assess current engagement in mindfulness practices among university students
- 2) To identify the relationship between mental health symptoms (depression, anxiety, and rumination) and engagement in mindfulness practices

## Methods

This quantitative, cross-sectional study investigates the relationship between symptoms of depression, anxiety, and rumination and mindfulness practice engagement. Our hypothesis was that elevated levels of these mental health factors would be inversely related to mindfulness engagement. The study was approved by the University of Texas at Arlington Institutional Review Board (IRB Protocol # 2023-0276).

**Participants.** Students from the University of Texas at Arlington were recruited using diverse recruitment methods, including flyers and the SONA system. Students were eligible if they were age 17 or older.

**Procedures.** Eligible students who provided informed consent completed a comprehensive online survey via QuestionPro that included sociodemographic information, information about mindfulness practices (current engagement and interest), and mental health assessments. Descriptive statistics were conducted to characterize the sample and simple ordinal logistic regression analyses were conducted to understand the predictive capacity of mental health symptoms on the levels of mindfulness practice engagement.

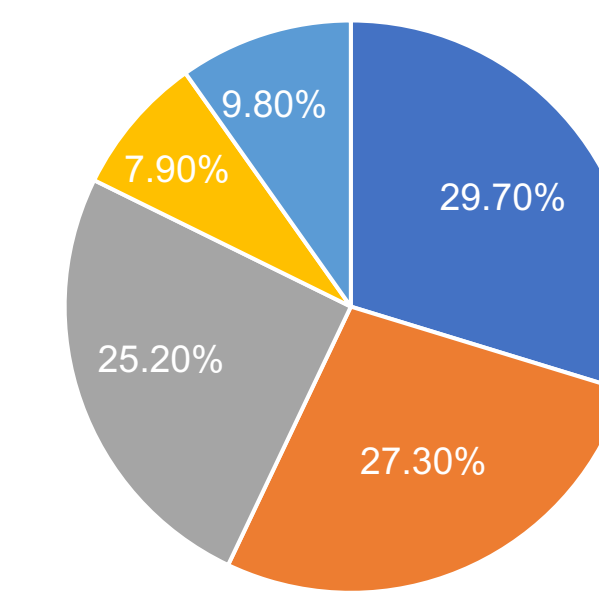
**Mental Health Symptom Assessments.** The **Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9)** was used to measure depressive symptoms. The **Generalized Anxiety Disorder** questionnaire (GAD-7) was used to measure anxiety symptoms. The **Rumination Response Scale (RRS-SF)** was used to measure rumination behaviors.

## Results

Sample Demographics (n=431)	
Characteristic	Percent
<b>Age</b>	
18-24 years	93.5%
25 years or older	6.5%
<b>Gender</b>	
Female	77.3%
Male	19.6%
Other	3%
<b>Race</b>	
Asian	23.6%
Black	17.8%
White	40.2%
Other	18.4%
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
Hispanic	43.7%
Not Hispanic	56.3%

### Mindfulness Engagement

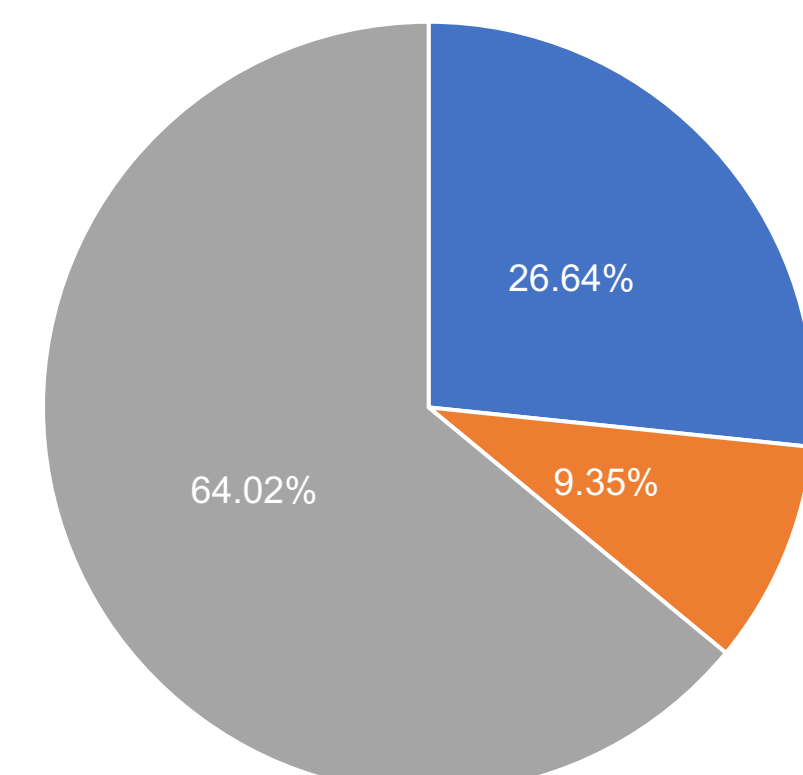
How much time do you dedicate to practicing mindfulness in a week?



Minutes of mindfulness practice per week.

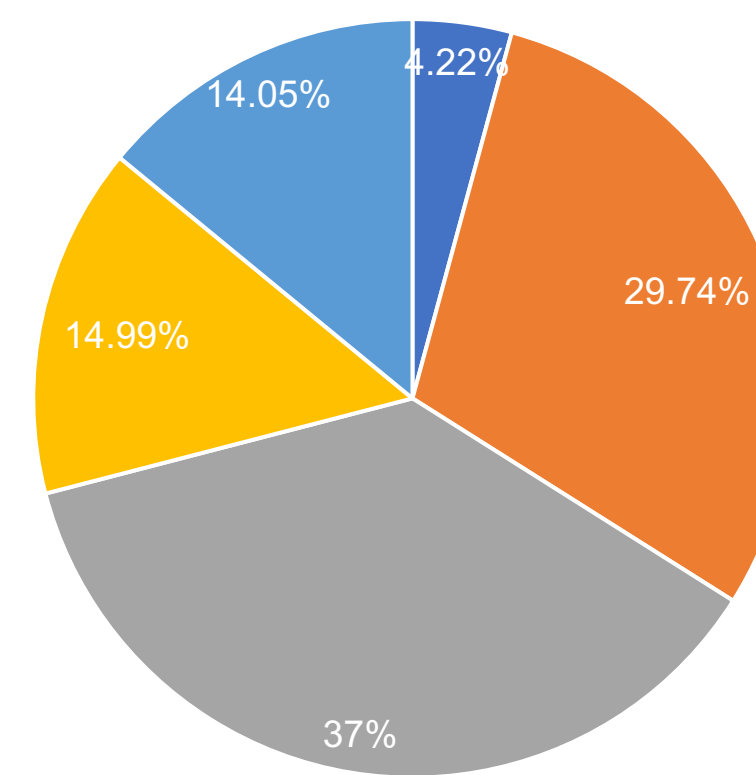
### Mindfulness Interest

If a mindfulness workshop was offered, would you be interested in participating?

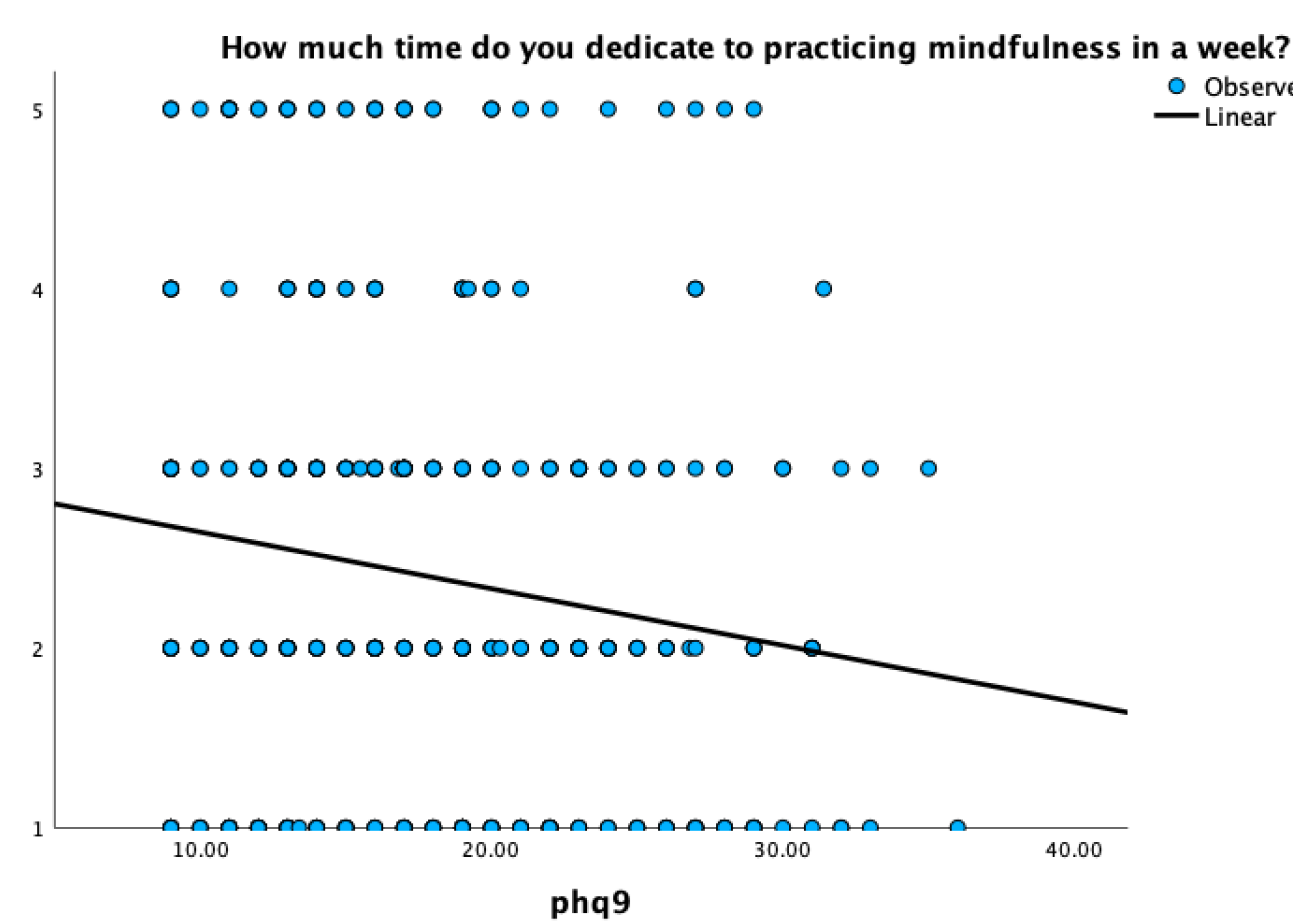


Interest in participating in a mindfulness workshop.

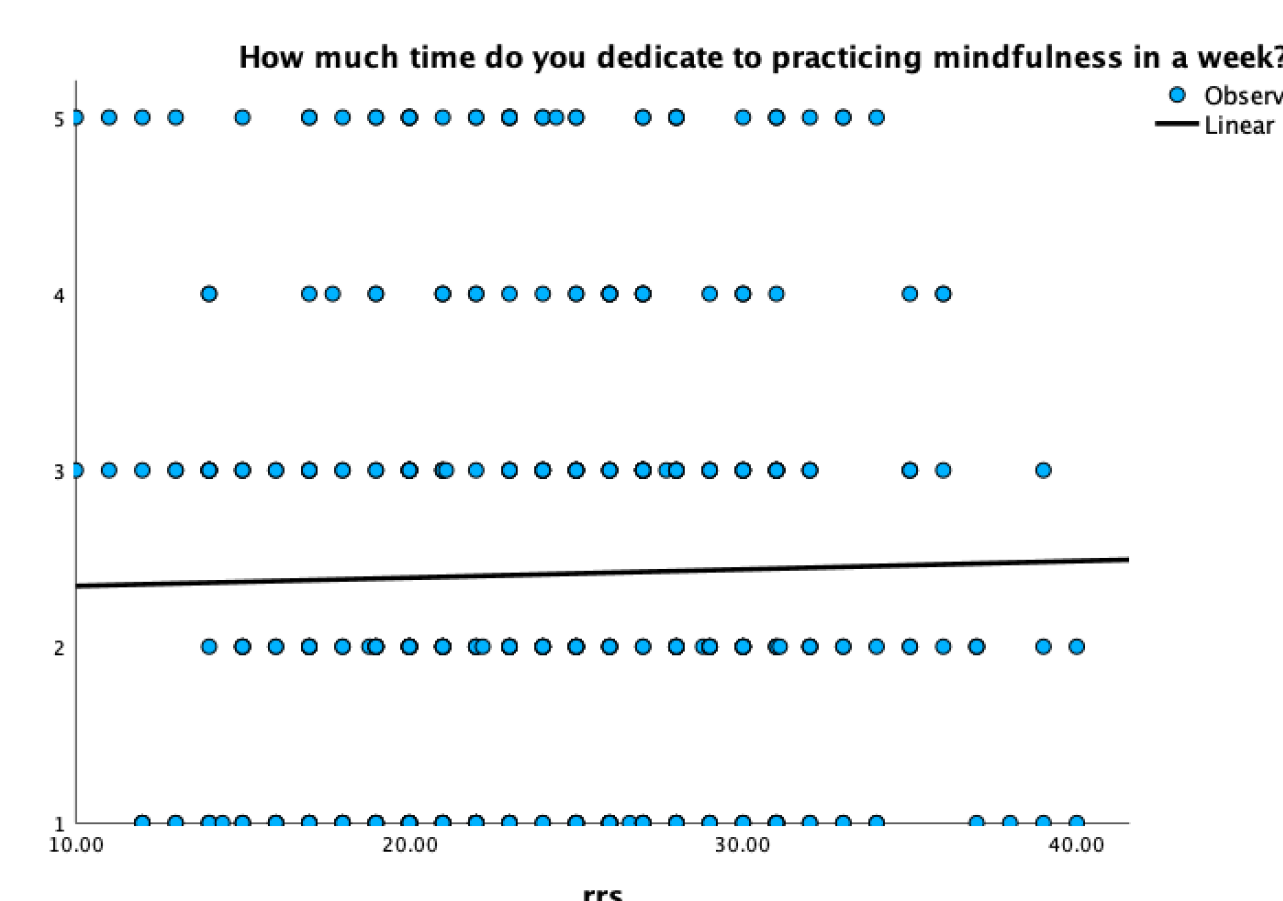
How much time would you be willing to dedicate to mindfulness daily?



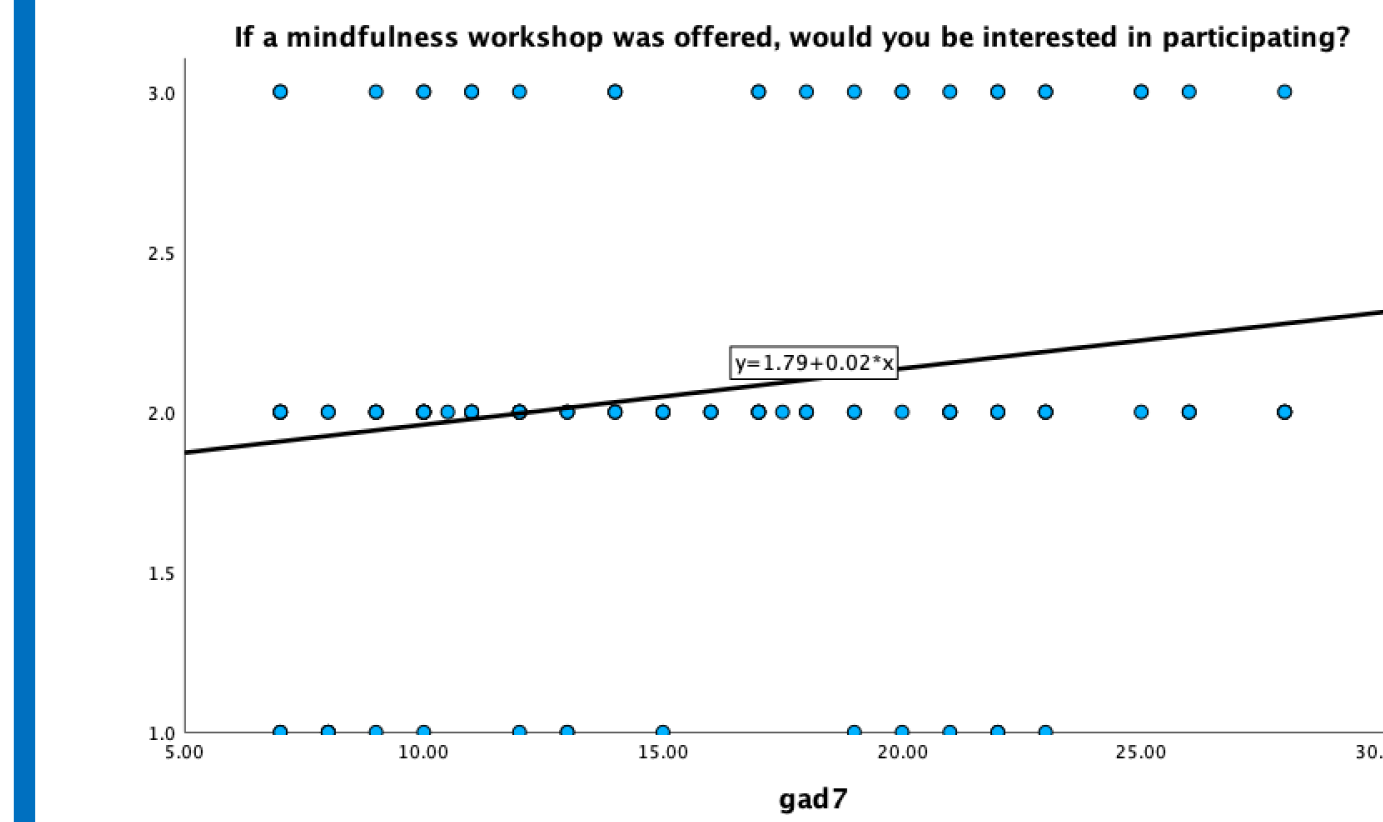
Willingness to dedicate time to mindfulness daily.



Higher ruminative tendencies, as measured by the RRS, predicted greater level of engagement in mindfulness practice ( $\beta = .046, p = .009$ ).



## Results, cont'd



## Conclusions

In our sample of college students, levels of depression, anxiety, and ruminative symptoms was differentially associated with current levels of mindfulness practice and interest in practicing mindfulness. Importantly, higher depressive symptoms predicted a reduced likelihood of engagement in mindfulness practice, despite noted benefits. This information may be helpful to student wellness, counseling, and related programs to understand characteristics that may enhance or reduce the likelihood of practicing mindfulness.

## Strengths and Limitations

**Strengths:** Data were collected from a large, diverse sample of college students.

**Limitations:** The study's cross-sectional nature and reliance on self-reported data may limit causal inferences and may reflect reporting biases. Additionally, the exclusivity of the sample to UTA students and the treatment of incomplete responses — either through exclusion or mean imputation — may influence the generalizability and interpretation of the findings.

## Acknowledgments

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## References

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