

Mitigating Psychological Distress in the Digital Age: Mindfulness as a Protective Factor among Female IT Professionals in Malaysia

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Abstract

Workplace mental health challenges are increasingly prevalent in high-pressure industries, particularly within the information technology (IT) sector. Working women face compounded stressors due to professional demands and socio-cultural expectations, placing them at heightened risk of psychological distress. Mindfulness has been widely recognized as a protective factor that enhances emotional regulation and psychological resilience; however, empirical research focusing on working women in Malaysia's IT industry remains limited. This study examined mindfulness as a predictor of workplace stress and depression among working women employed in multinational IT companies in Kuala Lumpur. Using a quantitative correlational design, data were collected from 205 participants through standardized instruments measuring mindfulness, workplace stress, and depressive symptoms. Spearman correlation and regression analyses were conducted to examine relationships and predictive effects. The results revealed significant negative relationships between mindfulness and workplace stress ($\rho = -0.745$) and depression ($\rho = -0.758$), indicating that higher mindfulness levels are associated with lower psychological distress. Regression analyses further confirmed mindfulness as a significant predictor of both stress and depression. These findings highlight mindfulness as a protective psychological resource for working women in high-demand professional environments. The study underscores the importance of integrating mindfulness-based strategies into workplace wellness programs and developing gender-sensitive mental health initiatives to support employee well-being in Malaysia's technology sector.

Keywords: Mindfulness, Workplace Stress, Depression, Working Women, IT Industry, Psychological Well-Being, Malaysia

Introduction

Workplace mental health has become an increasingly critical concern in high-pressure professional environments, particularly within the rapidly evolving information technology (IT) sector. Malaysia's rapid advancement toward becoming a leading digital economy in Southeast Asia has intensified the pace, competitiveness, and performance expectations within its technology industry. These developments are supported by national initiatives led by organizations such as the Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC), which promotes digital transformation, technological innovation, and the expansion of Malaysia's digital workforce (Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation, 2023). National initiatives aimed at expanding digital infrastructure, innovation ecosystems, and Industry 4.0 transformation have accelerated productivity demands and technological adaptation. While these developments contribute to economic growth, they may also heighten occupational stress and psychological vulnerability among IT professionals, particularly women balancing multiple social roles. Employees in this sector frequently encounter demanding workloads, tight deadlines, and continuous technological change, all of which contribute to elevated stress levels and emotional strain. Prolonged exposure to such stressors may lead to job burnout and depression, negatively affecting both individual well-being and organizational productivity. Despite the increasing recognition of workplace mental health issues, psychological distress among working women in Malaysia's IT sector remains insufficiently addressed, particularly in relation to context-specific occupational and socio-cultural pressures.

Working women in the IT industry face additional challenges beyond occupational demands. In many contexts, women continue to balance professional responsibilities with domestic and caregiving roles, creating dual pressures that heighten vulnerability to stress and emotional exhaustion. The cumulative burden of workplace demands and societal expectations places working women at greater risk of psychological distress, particularly in high-pressure, male-dominated sectors such as information technology.

Mindfulness, defined as present-moment awareness accompanied by a non-judgmental attitude, has gained significant attention as a protective factor for psychological well-being. Grounded in Kabat-Zinn's conceptualization and further elaborated through Shapiro et al.'s Intention-Attention-Attitude (IAA) model, mindfulness promotes emotional regulation, cognitive flexibility, and resilience. Previous research has demonstrated that mindfulness practices are associated with reduced stress, improved emotional regulation, and decreased depressive symptoms. By fostering awareness and acceptance, mindfulness enables individuals to disengage from automatic stress reactions and maladaptive thought patterns.

Despite the growing body of literature supporting mindfulness as a stress-reduction strategy, several gaps remain. First, existing studies have predominantly focused on general populations or Western contexts, with limited attention given to working women in Malaysia's IT sector. Second, prior research has often examined stress or depression independently rather than simultaneously exploring both outcomes within a single framework. Third, there is a lack of context-specific research that considers the combined impact of occupational demands and socio-cultural expectations faced by women in high-pressure technology environments. These gaps highlight the need for research that integrates psychological, occupational, and gender-specific perspectives within a localized context.

Therefore, this study investigates the relationship between mindfulness and psychological outcomes, specifically workplace stress and depression, among working women in Kuala Lumpur's IT industry. By focusing on a specific professional and cultural context, this study contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence on mindfulness as a protective factor in high-demand work environments. Additionally, the study offers practical insights for developing gender-sensitive workplace mental health interventions and organizational wellness strategies within Malaysia's rapidly evolving digital economy.

Literature Review

Mindfulness has gained substantial attention as a psychological resource that enhances emotional regulation and resilience in high-stress environments. Kabat-Zinn (1994) conceptualizes mindfulness as purposeful, present-moment awareness accompanied by a non-judgmental attitude. Expanding on this foundation, Shapiro et al. (2006) proposed the Intention–Attention–Attitude (IAA) model, which emphasizes mindful awareness as a dynamic process involving purposeful focus, present-moment attention, and an accepting stance toward experience. These processes promote cognitive flexibility and emotional regulation, enabling individuals to respond more adaptively to stressors.

Research on IT workplace stress suggests both common global pressures (tight deadlines, rapid change, multitasking) and important cross-cultural differences that shape how those pressures are experienced and managed. Studies from Asian IT and allied professional samples report high role demands and contextual pressures that amplify stress exposure such as heavy workloads in Indian IT samples, multitasking effects on employee wellbeing in contemporary work studies (Kavivarshini & Sudhan, 2023). In East Asian professional contexts, recent work also shows that organizational culture and social expectations can interact with individual factors to influence depression and burnout, and that mindfulness may moderate these culture-linked effects (Lee et al., 2024). Cross-cultural analyses of work engagement and organizational climates further indicate that dimensions such as power distance, collective norms, and workplace trust shape job stress and coping differently across regions, suggesting that findings from Western IT settings (often characterized by higher individual autonomy) may not fully generalize to Asian contexts (Aman et al., 2023). Together, these studies underscore the need to situate mindfulness research within specific cultural and industry contexts. This supports the contribution of the present study in providing evidence from Kuala Lumpur's IT sector and informing cross-cultural comparisons in future work.

Mindfulness and Workplace Stress

Workplace stress is prevalent in high-demand industries such as information technology (IT), where employees frequently encounter heavy workloads, tight deadlines, and rapid technological change (Ramani et al., 2022). Women in male-dominated sectors often experience additional pressures related to gender expectations and work–family responsibilities, increasing their vulnerability to occupational stress (Shamuni Kunjiapu & Mageswari Kunasegaran, 2021). In Malaysia, workplace stress remains a significant concern, with urban professional environments contributing to heightened psychological strain (Langove et al., 2023).

Mindfulness has been shown to mitigate stress by improving emotional regulation and reducing physiological stress responses. Mindfulness practices decrease reactivity to stressors

and promote adaptive coping mechanisms (Bolm et al., 2022). Research indicates that individuals who cultivate mindful awareness demonstrate improved focus, reduced emotional reactivity, and enhanced resilience in demanding work environments (Rattan et al., 2023). Additionally, mindfulness training has been associated with improved work engagement and psychological well-being among employees in high-pressure industries (Kuang et al., 2022). For working women balancing multiple roles, mindfulness has been found to improve work–life balance and overall well-being (Arunachalam & Venugopal, 2023).

Mindfulness and Depression

Chronic workplace stress is a significant contributor to depressive symptoms, particularly among working women managing dual professional and domestic responsibilities (Khan et al., 2012). Depression is often associated with prolonged stress exposure, emotional exhaustion, and difficulties in balancing competing demands (Weston et al., 2019). Mindfulness-based approaches have been shown to alleviate depressive symptoms by reducing rumination and enhancing emotional regulation (Matiz et al., 2020).

By cultivating non-judgmental awareness of thoughts and emotions, mindfulness enables individuals to disengage from maladaptive cognitive patterns associated with psychological distress (Crego et al., 2021). Studies have demonstrated that mindfulness practices improve mood, enhance psychological well-being, and reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression (Rattan et al., 2023). Furthermore, mindfulness interventions have been shown to strengthen resilience and support emotional stability among women in high-stress professional contexts (Faudziah Yusof et al., 2022).

Research Gap

Despite extensive evidence supporting the benefits of mindfulness for stress reduction and mental health, empirical research focusing specifically on working women in Malaysia's IT sector remains limited. Much of the existing literature examines general populations or does not account for gender-specific workplace experiences in high-pressure professional environments. Women in Kuala Lumpur's technology sector face unique socio-cultural and occupational demands, including work–family role strain and gendered workplace expectations. Consequently, there is a need to examine whether mindfulness functions as a protective factor against stress and depression within this specific context.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative correlational design to examine the relationship between mindfulness and psychological outcomes among working women in the information technology (IT) sector. A correlational approach was appropriate for assessing associations between variables without manipulation and for evaluating the predictive role of mindfulness on workplace stress and depression.

Participants

Participants consisted of 205 working women employed in multinational IT companies in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Respondents were aged between 21 and 65 years and represented diverse job roles and organizational levels. Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants who met the inclusion criteria of full-time employment within the IT sector. This

sampling approach enabled the study to target a population relevant to the research objectives.

Instruments

Data were collected using standardized and validated self-report instruments:

- **Mindfulness** was measured using the *Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS)*, which assesses present-moment awareness and attentional focus (Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Shapiro et al., 2006).
- **Workplace stress** was assessed using the *Workplace Stress Scale* (The Marlin Company, 2001).
- **Depression** was measured using the *Zung Self-Rating Depression Scale*, a widely used instrument for assessing depressive symptoms.

All instruments demonstrated acceptable reliability in previous research and were measured using Likert-type response formats.

Procedure

Data were collected using an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The survey link was shared through professional networks, email, and social media platforms to eligible participants. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained prior to completion. Responses were screened for completeness, and incomplete submissions were excluded from analysis to ensure data quality.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS Version 30. Spearman's rank-order correlation was conducted to examine relationships between mindfulness, workplace stress, and depression due to non-normal distribution of variables. Simple linear regression analyses were performed to assess the predictive effect of mindfulness on stress and depression. Statistical significance was evaluated at the 0.05 level.

Results

A total of 205 working women employed in multinational IT companies in Kuala Lumpur participated in the study. Descriptive statistics indicated that participants reported relatively high levels of mindfulness ($M = 24.78$, $SD = 7.40$) and moderate levels of workplace stress ($M = 22.51$, $SD = 9.54$) and depressive symptoms ($M = 12.49$, $SD = 8.10$). Summary statistics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Mindfulness, Workplace Stress, and Depression

Variable	M	SD
Mindfulness	24.78	7.40
Workplace Stress	22.51	9.54
Depression	12.49	8.10

Note. $N = 205$.

Spearman's rank-order correlation analysis revealed significant negative relationships between mindfulness and workplace stress ($p = -0.745$, $p < .001$) and between mindfulness

and depression ($p = -0.758, p < .001$). These findings indicate that higher levels of mindfulness were associated with lower levels of stress and depressive symptoms among participants. Correlations among the study variables are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Spearman Correlations Between Mindfulness and Psychological Outcomes

Variable	Mindfulness
Workplace Stress	-.745
Depression	-.758

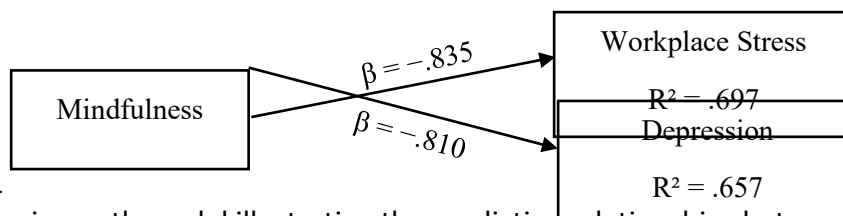
Note. N = 205. $p < .001$.

Simple linear regression analyses were conducted to examine whether mindfulness significantly predicted workplace stress and depression. Mindfulness significantly predicted workplace stress, $F(1, 203) = 467.38, p < .001$, explaining 69.7% of the variance ($R^2 = .697$). Mindfulness also significantly predicted depression, $F(1, 203) = 388.23, p < .001$, accounting for 65.7% of the variance ($R^2 = .657$). Higher levels of mindfulness were associated with lower levels of stress and depressive symptoms. Regression results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Simple Linear Regression Analyses Predicting Workplace Stress and Depression from Mindfulness

Outcome Variable	B	β	R^2	F	p
Workplace Stress	-1.076	-.835	.697	467.38	< .001
Depression	-0.887	-.810	.657	388.23	< .001

Note. N = 205.



Note. $p < .001$

Figure 1 Regression path model illustrating the predictive relationships between mindfulness and psychological outcomes.

Practical Significance of the Model

The substantial proportion of variance explained by mindfulness may reflect the relatively homogeneous occupational context of the sample. Participants were drawn from multinational IT companies operating under similar performance demands and technological pressures. In cognitively demanding professions such as software development, where employees must maintain sustained concentration, rapid problem-solving, and continuous mental engagement, internal self-regulation mechanisms like mindfulness may play a particularly influential role in managing stress and emotional responses.

Discussion

The present study examined whether mindfulness functions as a protective factor against workplace stress and depression among working women in Kuala Lumpur’s IT sector. The

findings revealed strong negative relationships between mindfulness and both stress and depression, indicating that higher levels of mindfulness are associated with lower psychological distress. Regression analyses further demonstrated that mindfulness significantly predicted both outcomes, accounting for substantial variance in stress and depressive symptoms.

Mindfulness and Workplace Stress

The findings indicate that mindfulness is strongly associated with reduced workplace stress among working women in the technology sector. This supports previous research suggesting that mindfulness enhances emotional regulation and reduces physiological stress responses (Bolm et al., 2022; Rattan et al., 2023). By promoting present-moment awareness and non-judgmental acceptance, mindfulness enables individuals to disengage from automatic stress reactions and respond more adaptively to workplace demands.

The IT industry is characterized by high workloads, rapid technological change, and performance pressures, all of which contribute to elevated stress levels. Mindfulness may serve as a psychological buffer by enhancing cognitive flexibility and improving coping strategies, allowing employees to manage occupational stress more effectively.

To further understand why mindfulness demonstrated such a strong predictive effect in this sample, the Intention–Attention–Attitude (IAA) model (Shapiro et al., 2006) provides a useful explanatory framework. In high-pressure IT environments characterized by multitasking, rapid technological change, and tight deadlines, the “Attention” component of mindfulness may play a central role. Focused present-moment attention may reduce cognitive overload and prevent attentional fragmentation, which are common stress triggers in digital work settings. By maintaining sustained attentional control, employees may be less susceptible to overwhelm and performance-related anxiety.

Equally important is the “Attitude” component, particularly the cultivation of non-judgmental awareness. In project-driven environments where errors, delays, or technical challenges are inevitable, self-critical thinking may intensify stress responses. For example, when an IT professional faces pressure to meet sales targets, manage demanding clients, or respond to urgent project requests while balancing family responsibilities, a non-judgmental attitude may reduce self-criticism and emotional overwhelm, allowing the individual to remain focused on problem-solving and professional decision-making. A non-judgmental stance toward internal experiences may buffer against maladaptive rumination and reduce emotional reactivity. This mechanism may help explain the substantial variance in stress accounted for by mindfulness in the present study.

Mindfulness and Depression

A similarly strong relationship was observed between mindfulness and depression, suggesting that individuals with higher mindfulness levels experience fewer depressive symptoms. This finding aligns with research indicating that mindfulness reduces rumination and promotes emotional regulation, both of which are key mechanisms in alleviating depressive symptoms (Matiz et al., 2020; Crego et al., 2021).

Chronic workplace stress is a known contributor to depression, particularly among women managing dual professional and domestic responsibilities. Mindfulness may mitigate depressive symptoms by fostering awareness of negative thought patterns and encouraging adaptive emotional processing.

From the perspective of the Intention–Attention–Attitude (IAA) model, the “Attitude” component of mindfulness may be particularly relevant in understanding its relationship with depression. Non-judgmental awareness may interrupt cycles of rumination and self-evaluative thinking, which are central cognitive features of depressive symptoms. By cultivating acceptance rather than avoidance of negative emotional experiences, mindfulness may reduce the persistence of maladaptive thought patterns. This mechanism may partially explain the strong predictive association observed between mindfulness and depressive symptoms in the present study.

Strength of the Findings

The regression analyses revealed that mindfulness explained a substantial proportion of variance in workplace stress (69.7%) and depression (65.7%). These large effect sizes highlight mindfulness as a powerful protective factor for psychological well-being in high-demand work environments. The strength of these relationships underscores the importance of psychological resources in buffering against occupational stressors and mental health challenges.

Workplace and Gender Context

Working women in Malaysia’s IT sector face unique challenges arising from workplace demands and socio-cultural expectations. Balancing professional responsibilities with family and caregiving roles can intensify stress and emotional strain. In male-dominated industries, women may also encounter additional pressures related to role expectations and career advancement. The present findings suggest that mindfulness may serve as an important self-regulation strategy that supports psychological resilience within this context.

Practical Implications

The findings have important implications for organizational wellness initiatives. Employers in high-pressure industries may benefit from integrating mindfulness-based programs into workplace wellness strategies. Such interventions may help reduce stress, improve emotional well-being, and enhance employee productivity. Additionally, gender-sensitive mental health initiatives that acknowledge the dual roles of working women may further support psychological well-being.

Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw causal inferences regarding the relationship between mindfulness and psychological outcomes. Although mindfulness was identified as a significant predictor of stress and depression, longitudinal or experimental designs are necessary to establish temporal directionality.

Second, the study employed purposive sampling and recruitment through professional networks, email circulation, and social media platforms. While this approach enabled access

to the target population of working women in the IT sector, it may have introduced sampling bias. Participants recruited through professional and digital networks may be more digitally literate, professionally engaged, or aware of mental health concepts than the broader population of working women. Consequently, the sample may not fully represent individuals with lower digital engagement or differing levels of psychological awareness, potentially limiting generalizability.

Additionally, all variables were measured using self-report instruments administered within a single survey session. The reliance on self-report data raises the possibility of common method variance, shared response tendencies, and social desirability bias, which may have contributed to the strength of observed associations. Future research employing multi-method approaches, such as behavioral indicators, supervisor ratings, or physiological measures, would strengthen the robustness of these findings.

Future Research

Future studies may explore longitudinal designs to examine causal relationships and evaluate the long-term effectiveness of mindfulness interventions. Further research may also investigate organizational factors influencing stress and explore gender-sensitive workplace strategies that enhance psychological well-being.

Implications

The findings of this study highlight the importance of mindfulness as a psychological resource for managing workplace stress and depression among working women in high-demand professional environments. Given the strong predictive relationship identified, organizations within the information technology sector may benefit from incorporating mindfulness-based interventions into employee wellness programs. Structured mindfulness training, stress management workshops, and digital well-being initiatives may help employees develop emotional regulation skills and enhance resilience to occupational stressors.

From an employee well-being perspective, mindfulness practices may empower working women to better manage the dual demands of professional responsibilities and family roles. By promoting self-awareness and adaptive coping strategies, mindfulness may support emotional balance and reduce vulnerability to stress-related psychological distress.

Human resource practitioners and organizational leaders may also consider integrating gender-sensitive mental health initiatives that acknowledge the unique pressures faced by women in male-dominated industries. Supportive workplace policies, flexible work arrangements, and mental health awareness programs may complement mindfulness-based strategies to foster a healthier and more inclusive work environment.

At a broader level, the findings contribute to ongoing discussions on workplace mental health and employee well-being in Malaysia's rapidly expanding technology sector. Promoting preventive mental health strategies such as mindfulness may help reduce burnout risk, enhance productivity, and support sustainable workforce development.

Conclusion

This study examined the role of mindfulness as a protective factor against workplace stress and depression among working women in Kuala Lumpur's IT sector. The findings revealed

strong negative relationships between mindfulness and both stress and depressive symptoms, with mindfulness emerging as a significant predictor of psychological well-being. These results suggest that mindfulness plays an important role in enhancing emotional regulation and resilience in high-pressure professional environments.

Given the increasing mental health challenges faced by working women balancing occupational demands and socio-cultural responsibilities, mindfulness may serve as a valuable self-regulation strategy for reducing psychological distress. Integrating mindfulness-based approaches into workplace wellness initiatives may support employee well-being, improve resilience, and contribute to healthier organizational environments. The present findings contribute to the growing body of research on workplace mental health and highlight the importance of preventive psychological strategies within Malaysia's evolving technology sector.

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