

The Relationship between Mindful Attention Awareness and Parenting Stress among Chinese Parents

Ruirui Li*

School of Psychology, Northwest Normal University, Lanzhou, Gansu, China

2089158904@qq.com

**Corresponding author*

Keywords: Mindful Attention Awareness; Parenting Stress; Socioeconomic Status; Psychological Intervention

Abstract: This study aimed to examine the relationship between parents' mindful attention awareness and their parenting stress. A survey was conducted with 461 parents from various provinces in China, and both correlation and regression analyses were applied to the data. The findings revealed a significant negative correlation between mindful attention awareness and parenting stress ($r = -0.235$, $p < 0.001$). Even after controlling for demographic variables such as parent gender, number of children, educational attainment, and socioeconomic status, mindful attention awareness remained a significant negative predictor of parenting stress ($\beta = -0.232$, $t = -5.061$, $p < 0.001$). Moreover, socioeconomic status was also found to have a significant influence on parenting stress. These results suggest that enhancing parents' mindful attention awareness may help alleviate parenting stress, improve parent-child relationships, and foster overall family functioning. Theoretically, this study expands the cross-cultural understanding of the relationship between mindful attention awareness and parenting stress, while practically, it provides valuable insights for developing targeted interventions to support parents. Future research should consider employing longitudinal designs and incorporating multiple measurement methods to further explore the mechanisms underlying mindful attention awareness in diverse parenting contexts.

1. Introduction

With the accelerating pace of modern life and the rising costs of child-rearing, parents are experiencing increasingly pronounced parenting stress during the upbringing of their children [1]. Parenting stress generally refers to the psychological burden parents feel when they perceive that their resources or abilities are insufficient to meet their children's needs in the process of caring for and educating them [2]. This stress not only adversely affects parents' mental and physical health but can also negatively impact the overall well-being and functioning of the family [1]. Numerous studies have shown that chronic high levels of parenting stress can lead to emotional exhaustion, which may further exacerbate parental burnout and reduce parents' sense of efficacy and satisfaction in their parenting role [3,4]. Specifically, when faced with challenging child behaviors, parents often experience anxiety, fatigue, and role-related conflicts—pressures that, in severe cases, can

even trigger parent–child conflicts and deteriorate the quality of family relationships [5]. Therefore, identifying effective strategies to mitigate parenting stress is crucial for promoting family functioning, fostering healthy child development, and advancing social harmony.

In recent years, mindful attention awareness has increasingly been recognized in the field of mental health as both a psychological intervention and a self-regulation strategy [6]. It emphasizes the intentional, open, and non-judgmental awareness of present experiences, helping individuals stay attuned to the here and now, thereby enhancing emotional regulation and psychological resilience [6,7]. Studies have shown that higher levels of mindful attention awareness are closely associated with improved emotional regulation and lower levels of anxiety and depression [7]. Within family settings, parents' mindful attention awareness has been linked to enhanced parent–child interactions, reduced negative emotional responses, and greater psychological resilience in the parenting process [8]. For example, mindfulness training can help parents become more attuned to their own and their children's emotional needs, mitigating excessive emotional reactions and stress responses, ultimately reducing parenting burden [5]. Additionally, increased levels of mindfulness can help parents maintain better focus and flexibility when facing complex parenting situations, thereby improving their stress tolerance and psychological adaptability [7]. Although the benefits of mindful attention awareness in alleviating general psychological stress have received some research attention, there is still a lack of systematic theoretical and empirical studies examining its specific effects and mechanisms within the parenting context.

Building on the aforementioned background, this study focuses on the relationship between parents' mindful attention awareness and parenting stress. It aims to uncover the dynamic association between these two constructs and to explore their underlying mechanisms, thereby providing a scientific basis for developing targeted psychological interventions to alleviate parenting stress. Additionally, this study will examine the moderating effects of demographic variables such as parent gender, socioeconomic status, and child age, offering a multidimensional analysis of how mindful attention awareness influences parenting stress. By doing so, this research seeks to enrich the theoretical foundation of parenting stress interventions and provide valuable guidance for practical implementation.

2. Methods

2.1 Subject

This study recruited parents from multiple provinces across China using a random sampling approach through an online questionnaire survey. A total of 465 questionnaires were collected, and after excluding those with abnormal response times or uniform answer patterns, 461 valid questionnaires remained, yielding a high effective response rate of 99.13%. Among the valid respondents, 74 were male (16.1%), and 387 were female (83.9%). Regarding educational attainment, 3.6% (17 participants) had completed junior high school or below, 8.2% (38 participants) had completed high school, 76.5% (353 participants) had attained a university degree, and 11.4% (53 participants) had obtained a master's degree or above.

2.2 Research Tools

2.2.1 Demographic Information

The first section of the questionnaire covered demographic information, including variables such as child gender, parent gender, number of children, monthly household income, socioeconomic status, and educational level.

2.2.2 Mindful Attention Awareness Scale

This study utilized the 15-item Mindful Attention Awareness Scale, revised by Chen Siyu et al. (2012), to assess parents' levels of mindful attention awareness. The scale uses a 6-point rating system ranging from 1 (almost always) to 6 (almost never), with higher scores indicating greater mindful awareness in daily life. In this study, the scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.890 [9].

2.2.3 Parenting Stress Scale

This study employed the brief version of the Parenting Stress Scale, revised by Yeh et al. (2001), consisting of 15 items that encompass three dimensions: parenting difficulties, parent–child interaction problems, and child-related issues. Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), with higher scores indicating greater levels of parenting stress. In this study, the scale demonstrated strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.89 [10].

2.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 26.0. Pearson correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis were employed to statistically examine and validate the relationship between parents' mindful attention awareness and parenting stress.

3. Results

Table 1 Correlation Analysis between Mindful Attention Awareness and Parenting Stress (N = 461)

	1) Parent Gender	2) Number of Children	3) Educational Level	4) Socioeconomic Status	5) Mindful Attention Awareness
5) Mindful Attention Awareness	-0.059	0.149**	0.047	0.038	——
6) Parenting Stress	0.029	-0.025	-0.032	-0.140**	-0.235***

Note:***P<0.001,**P<0.01,*P<0.05

As shown in Table 1, the results of the Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant negative correlation between parents' mindful attention awareness and parenting stress ($r = -0.235$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that higher levels of mindful attention awareness were associated with lower levels of perceived parenting stress. Additionally, the number of children was positively correlated with mindful attention awareness ($r = 0.149$, $p < 0.01$), while socioeconomic status was negatively correlated with parenting stress ($r = -0.140$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that parents with higher socioeconomic status tended to report lower levels of parenting stress.

Table 2 The Effect of Mindful Attention Awareness on Parenting Stress (N = 461)

	Parenting Stress					
	Model 1			Model 2		
	β	t	p	β	t	p
1) Parent Gender	0.011	0.231	0.818	-0.003	-0.060	0.953
Number of Children	-0.034	-0.720	0.472	0.003	0.070	0.944
Educational Level	0.019	0.369	0.712	0.033	0.670	0.504
Socioeconomic Status	-0.148	-2.942	0.003	-0.144	-2.927	0.004
2) Mindful Attention Awareness				-0.232	-5.061	0.000
R ²	0.021			0.073		
F	2.484*			7.217***		

Note:***P<0.001,**P<0.01,*P<0.05.

As presented in Table 2, the results of the linear regression analysis indicated that parent gender, number of children, and educational level did not significantly predict parenting stress (p s > 0.05). However, socioeconomic status emerged as a significant predictor of parenting stress (p s < 0.01). Additionally, mindful attention awareness demonstrated a significant negative predictive effect on parenting stress (β = -0.232, t = -5.061, p < 0.001), suggesting that parents with higher levels of mindfulness tended to experience lower levels of parenting stress.

4. Discussion

This study aimed to examine the relationship between parents' mindful attention awareness and parenting stress. The results revealed a significant negative correlation between mindful attention awareness and parenting stress (r = -0.235, p < 0.001). Moreover, even after controlling for demographic variables such as parent gender, number of children, educational level, and socioeconomic status, mindful attention awareness remained a significant negative predictor of parenting stress (β = -0.232, t = -5.061, p < 0.001). This finding aligns with previous research suggesting that higher levels of mindful attention awareness help individuals better regulate their stress experiences and cope with stressors, as demonstrated in studies involving children [11]. The present study further validates this mechanism among Chinese parents, thereby extending the cross-cultural understanding of the role of mindful attention awareness in the parenting context.

Theoretically, mindful attention awareness emphasizes an open and non-judgmental focus on present experiences, which can help parents reduce negative emotions and maladaptive cognitions when facing parenting stress, thereby alleviating their psychological burden [11]. Mo et al. highlighted that mindfulness practices such as breathing meditation can effectively enhance individuals' attention control and emotional regulation skills, thereby reducing stress [7]. From a practical perspective, this study suggests that incorporating mindful attention awareness into parental stress management interventions may be an effective approach to reducing parenting stress. Previous research has demonstrated that mindfulness training can improve parents' psychological flexibility and emotional regulation, thus enabling them to better cope with parenting challenges [8]. For instance, Elgendy et al. found that parents who participated in mindfulness-based parenting interventions reported significantly reduced negative emotional responses and improved parent-child relationship quality compared to the control group [8].

5. Limitations and Future Directions

Although this study confirmed the negative predictive effect of mindful attention awareness on parenting stress, it also has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design precludes conclusions about causal relationships; future research could employ longitudinal or experimental designs to establish causality. Second, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce social desirability and subjective bias; future studies might incorporate partner or child reports as well as objective measures to enhance data validity. Third, because the sample was obtained through online questionnaires, its representativeness is somewhat limited; future research should aim to expand the sample and improve generalizability. Additionally, certain potential confounding variables (e.g., marital status, work-related stress) were not controlled for in the current model; future studies could apply structural equation modeling to explore the interactions and mechanisms of these multiple factors.

6. Conclusion

This study conducted a preliminary investigation into the relationship between parents' mindful

attention awareness and parenting stress. The results indicated that mindful attention awareness was a significant negative predictor of parenting stress. This finding not only underscores the potential value of mindful attention awareness in reducing stress but also provides empirical support for its practical application in parenting interventions. Additionally, the study identified a significant association between socioeconomic status and parenting stress, highlighting the importance of considering family background in future intervention strategies. Overall, enhancing parents' mindful attention awareness may serve as an effective approach to reducing parenting stress and promoting family functioning, warranting further exploration and implementation in practice.

References

- [1] Parkes, A., Sweeting, H., & Wight, D. (2015). Parenting stress and parent support among mothers with high and low education. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 29(6), 907. <https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000129>
- [2] Younger, J. B. (1991). A model of parenting stress. *Research in nursing & health*, 14 (3), 197-204. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nur.4770140306>
- [3] De Maat, D. A., Jansen, P. W., Prinzie, P., Keizer, R., Franken, I. H. & Lucassen, N. (2021). Examining longitudinal relations between mothers' and fathers' parenting stress, parenting behaviors, and adolescents' behavior problems. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 30, 771-783. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-020-01885-0>
- [4] Fang, Y., Luo, J., Boele, M., Windhorst, D., van Grieken, A. & Raat, H. (2024). Parent, child, and situational factors associated with parenting stress: a systematic review. *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 33 (6), 1687-1705. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-022-02027-1>
- [5] Barroso, N. E., Mendez, L., Graziano, P. A. & Bagner, D. M. (2018). Parenting stress through the lens of different clinical groups: A systematic review & meta-analysis. *Journal of abnormal child psychology*, 46, 449-461. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10802-017-0313-6>
- [6] Lawlor, M. S., Schonert-Reichl, K. A., Gadermann, A. M. & Zumbo, B. D. (2014). A validation study of the mindful attention awareness scale adapted for children. *Mindfulness*, 5, 730-741. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-013-0228-4>
- [7] Mo, X., Qin, Q., Wu, F., Li, H., Tang, Y., Cheng, Q. & Wen, Y. (2021). Effects of breathing meditation training on sustained attention level, mindfulness attention awareness level, and mental state of operating room nurses. *American Journal of Health Behavior*, 45 (6), 993-1001. DOI:10.5993/AJHB.45.6.4
- [8] S Elgendy, R., I El Malky, M., & M Ebrahim, S. (2021). Effect of mindful parenting training for parents with children having attention deficit hyperactivity disorder on parenting stress. *Egyptian Journal of Health Care*, 12(1), 16-29. DOI:10.21608/ejhc.2021.135119
- [9] Chen, S. Y., Cui, H., Zhou, R. L. & Jia, Y. Y. (2012). Revision of mindful attention awareness scale (MAAS). *Chinese Journal of Clinical Psychology*. DOI:10.16128/j.cnki.1005-3611.2012.02.024
- [10] Yeh, C. H., Chen, M. L., Li, W. & Chuang, H. L. (2001). The Chinese version of the Parenting Stress Index: a psychometric study. *Acta paediatrica (Oslo, Norway: 1992)*, 90 (12), 1470-1477. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08035250152708914>
- [11] Black, D. S., Sussman, S., Johnson, C. A. & Milam, J. (2012). Psychometric assessment of the mindful attention awareness scale (MAAS) among Chinese adolescents. *Assessment*, 19(1), 42-52. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1073191111415365>