

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

The Role of Small Acts of Kindness in Improving Mental Health and Reducing Daily Stress Levels

Chandra Chud V¹, Maheswar B²

¹Associate Professor, Department of Psychiatry, Vydehi Institute of Medical Sciences & Research Centre, Bangalore, Karnataka, India

²Associate Professor, Department of General Medicine, Dr Patnam Mahender Reddy Institute of Medical Sciences, Chevella (V & M), Rangareddy, Telangana, India

Corresponding Author

Chandra Chud V

Associate Professor, Department of Psychiatry, Vydehi Institute of Medical Sciences & Research Centre, Bangalore, Karnataka, India

Email: dr_chandrachud@yahoo.com

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ABSTRACT

Background: Small acts of kindness, such as offering compliments or helping others, are often overlooked as a means to improve mental well-being and manage stress. These acts, however, hold significant potential for enhancing psychological health through positive social interactions and neurochemical benefits. **Objective:** To investigate the impact of small acts of kindness on mental health and stress levels and to analyze their effectiveness as a simple, accessible intervention for improving well-being. **Methodology:** A mixed-methods study involving 265 participants aged 18–65 years was conducted over eight weeks. Participants were divided into an experimental group (engaging in daily acts of kindness) and a control group (no specific instructions). Quantitative data were collected using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12), while qualitative feedback provided insights into participants' experiences. **Results:** The experimental group showed a 32.9% reduction in stress levels and a 25.7% improvement in mental health compared to minor changes in the control group. Statistical analysis revealed significant differences between the groups ($p < 0.001$). Qualitative feedback highlighted increased positivity, improved social connections, and a reduction in personal stress. **Conclusion:** It is concluded that small acts of kindness are a powerful and accessible tool for improving mental health and reducing stress. Promoting kindness through personal practices and organizational initiatives can foster a culture of compassion, contributing to individual and societal well-being.

Keywords: Kindness, mental health, stress reduction, well-being, social connections, neurochemical benefits.

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INTRODUCTION

In a world often characterized by fast-paced routines and mounting stress, small acts of kindness stand out as a simple yet profound way to enhance mental well-being and reduce daily stress. These acts, ranging from offering a kind word to helping a stranger, are often overlooked for their transformative potential. However, research shows that such gestures not only uplift the recipient but also bring significant psychological benefits to the giver [1]. Kindness fosters positive social interactions, strengthens relationships, and cultivates a sense of belonging—all of which are essential components of mental health. It triggers the release of "feel-good" chemicals in the brain, such as oxytocin, dopamine, and serotonin, which help combat stress and promote emotional

resilience. Additionally, engaging in kind acts can shift focus away from personal worries, fostering a more mindful and positive outlook on life [2].

Small acts of kindness have a profound impact on mental health by fostering a sense of purpose and connection. Engaging in altruistic behavior activates the brain's reward system, particularly the release of oxytocin, which is often referred to as the "love hormone." Oxytocin not only strengthens bonds between individuals but also reduces cortisol levels, the hormone associated with stress [3]. When people feel connected and valued through acts of kindness, their mental well-being significantly improves, leading to reduced feelings of loneliness and depression. Moreover, practicing kindness can help alleviate anxiety. A study published in *Emotion*

(2016) found that participants who performed small acts of kindness experienced greater reductions in social anxiety compared to those who did not. Acts as simple as complimenting someone or holding the door open can encourage positive social interactions, which in turn reduce feelings of isolation and foster a sense of belonging [4].

Stress is an inevitable part of life, but how we manage it can make a significant difference in our overall well-being. Small acts of kindness serve as an effective coping mechanism for daily stressors [5]. When individuals focus on helping others, they shift their attention away from their own stress and worries. This redirection helps create a sense of perspective, allowing people to view their own challenges in a more manageable light. Additionally, acts of kindness stimulate the production of endorphins, natural painkillers in the brain that improve mood and reduce stress. This phenomenon, often referred to as the "helper's high," creates a feedback loop: the more kindness one expresses, the greater the emotional and physiological rewards. This cycle not only reduces stress but also builds resilience, enabling individuals to cope better with future challenges [6].

The beauty of kindness lies in its accessibility. Small gestures, such as smiling at a coworker, leaving a positive note for a friend, or donating time to a charitable cause, require minimal effort but yield substantial benefits. Practicing mindfulness can enhance the impact of these acts, as being present in the moment allows individuals to fully experience the joy and connection that kindness brings [7]. Organizations and workplaces are increasingly recognizing the value of kindness initiatives. Programs that encourage employees to engage in small acts of kindness have shown to improve morale, reduce burnout, and foster a collaborative environment [8]. On an individual level, keeping a journal to document daily acts of kindness can reinforce the habit and help individuals reflect on the positive changes in their mental health and stress levels. Small acts of kindness hold immense power to improve mental health and reduce daily stress [9]. By promoting positive emotions, fostering connections, and shifting focus away from personal worries, these gestures create a ripple effect that benefits both the giver and the recipient. In a world often overshadowed by challenges, kindness emerges as a beacon of hope, reminding us of our shared humanity and the profound impact of simple, thoughtful actions. Embracing kindness as a daily practice not only enhances individual well-being but also contributes to building healthier, more compassionate communities [10].

Objective

To investigate the impact of small acts of kindness on mental health and stress levels and to analyze their effectiveness as a simple, accessible intervention for improving well-being.

Methodology

This cross-sectional study was conducted at-----during----- A total of 265 participants were involved in the study, recruited through online platforms, community groups, and workplace networks. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 65 years, representing diverse socio-economic backgrounds, professions, and geographic locations. Inclusion criteria required participants to have no history of severe mental health conditions and to be able to engage in daily activities without assistance. This ensured that the focus remained on general mental well-being and stress management rather than clinical interventions.

Data collection

The study spanned eight weeks and consisted of three phases: baseline assessment, intervention, and follow-up. During the first phase, participants completed standardized questionnaires to measure their initial mental health status and stress levels. Tools such as the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) were used to gather baseline data. Additionally, participants were asked about their frequency of performing small acts of kindness in their daily lives. In the second phase, participants were randomly assigned to two groups:

- **Experimental Group (n = 135):** This group was instructed to perform at least three small acts of kindness daily, such as expressing gratitude, offering help, or giving compliments.
- **Control Group (n = 130):** This group was not given any specific instructions but continued their routine activities.

Both groups received weekly reminders and motivational messages to maintain engagement throughout the study.

At the end of the eight weeks, participants completed the same standardized questionnaires as in the baseline phase. They also provided qualitative feedback through open-ended questions about their experiences, challenges, and observations related to the study.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS v11. Paired sample t-tests were used to measure changes within groups, while independent sample t-tests evaluated differences between groups. Qualitative responses were analyzed thematically to identify common patterns and insights related to the impact of kindness on participants' daily lives.

RESULTS

Data were collected from 265 participants. The demographic analysis of the participants provides a diverse representation across key variables. The average age of participants was 35 years, with a range spanning from 18 to 65 years, ensuring inclusion of both younger and older adults. The gender distribution

was balanced, comprising 54% females and 46% males, allowing for insights across genders. Participants came from varied occupational backgrounds, including students, working professionals, and retired individuals, reflecting diverse life experiences.

Table 1: Demographic Data of Participants

Demographic Variable	Details
Age (Mean)	35 years (range: 18-65 years)
Gender Distribution	54% Female, 46% Male
Occupational Background	Students, Professionals, Retired Individuals
Geographic Location	Urban and Rural Areas across multiple regions

The results show a reduction in stress levels among participants in the experimental group compared to the control group. The experimental group, which performed daily acts of kindness, experienced a decrease in the mean Perceived Stress Scale score from 22.8 to 15.3, reflecting a 32.9 percent reduction in stress levels. In contrast, the control group, with no specific intervention, showed only a slight decrease in the mean score from 22.5 to 21.9, accounting for a 2.7 percent reduction.

Table 2: Stress Levels Analysis

Group	Baseline PSS Score (Mean)	Post-Intervention PSS Score (Mean)	Percentage Change in Stress Levels
Experimental	22.8	15.3	-32.9%
Control	22.5	21.9	-2.7%

The results indicate improvements in mental health among participants in the experimental group compared to the control group. The experimental group, which engaged in daily acts of kindness, showed a decrease in the mean General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) score from 16.7 to 12.4, reflecting a 25.7 percent improvement in mental health. The control group demonstrated a smaller improvement, with the mean GHQ-12 score decreasing from 16.5 to 15.8, accounting for a 4.2 percent change.

Table 3: Mental Health Improvement Analysis

Group	Baseline GHQ-12 Score (Mean)	Post-Intervention GHQ-12 Score (Mean)	Percentage Change in Mental Health
Experimental	16.7	12.4	+25.7%
Control	16.5	15.8	+4.2%

The experimental group, which engaged in daily acts of kindness, showed a mean change in Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) score of -7.5, with a p-value of less than 0.001, indicating a statistically significant reduction in stress levels. In contrast, the control group exhibited a mean change of -0.6, with a p-value of 0.09, which is not statistically significant. These results underscore the effectiveness of kindness interventions in significantly reducing stress levels.

Table 4: Statistical Summary of Stress Reduction

Group	Mean Change in PSS Score	Statistical Significance (p-value)
Experimental	-7.5	< 0.001
Control	-0.6	0.09

The experimental group, which performed daily acts of kindness, exhibited a mean change in General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) score of -4.3, with a p-value of less than 0.001, indicating a statistically significant improvement in mental health. Conversely, the control group showed a mean change of -0.7, with a p-value of 0.07, which is not statistically significant. These findings highlight the considerable impact of kindness interventions on enhancing mental health compared to routine activities.

Table 5: Statistical Summary of Mental Health Improvement

Group	Mean Change in GHQ-12 Score	Statistical Significance (p-value)
Experimental	-4.3	< 0.001
Control	-0.7	0.07

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the significant impact of small acts of kindness on mental health and stress reduction. Participants who actively engaged in daily acts of kindness experienced notable improvements in their mental well-being, as demonstrated by the substantial reductions in Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) scores and improvements in General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) scores. The experimental group consistently outperformed the control group across all metrics, emphasizing the effectiveness of kindness as a simple and accessible intervention for promoting psychological health [11]. The results align with existing research that underscores the role of kindness in stimulating the brain's reward system. Acts of kindness activate the release of oxytocin, dopamine, and serotonin—neurotransmitters associated with positive emotions and stress reduction [12]. This biochemical response not only fosters a sense of connection and belonging but also reduces cortisol levels, mitigating the physiological effects of stress. Participants' qualitative feedback supports these mechanisms, with many reporting increased positivity, enhanced social interactions, and a shift in focus away from personal challenges [13]. Additionally, kindness appears to create a "helper's high," where individuals derive satisfaction and purpose from contributing to others' well-being. This effect likely explains why over 70% of participants in the experimental group expressed a desire to sustain these behaviors beyond the study period, highlighting the potential for long-term adoption [14]. The study also reveals the broader societal benefits of small acts of kindness. Improved social connections and strengthened interpersonal bonds were recurring themes in participant feedback. These findings suggest that kindness not only benefits individuals but also fosters a more cohesive and supportive community environment. The ripple effect of kindness—where recipients are inspired to pay it forward—may further amplify these positive outcomes. Moreover, the study's diverse participant demographics demonstrate the universal applicability of kindness across different age groups, genders, and socio-economic backgrounds [15]. This universality underscores the potential of kindness-based interventions in various settings, including schools, workplaces, and community organizations [16]. Despite the promising results, the study has several limitations. First, the self-reported nature of the data introduces the possibility of response bias, as participants may have overestimated the impact of kindness on their well-being. Second, the study's duration was limited to eight weeks, which restricts insights into the long-term sustainability of the observed benefits. Future research could explore the enduring effects of kindness and identify strategies to maintain these behaviors over time.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that small acts of kindness play a significant role in improving mental health and reducing daily stress levels. The study demonstrated that engaging in simple, altruistic behaviors leads to measurable improvements in well-being, as evidenced by reduced stress levels (PSS scores) and enhanced mental health (GHQ-12 scores) in the experimental group. These findings highlight the psychological and social benefits of kindness, including the activation of "feel-good" chemicals, improved social connections, and a reduction in self-focused stress.

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