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Impact of Mindful Eating Practices on Employees' Well-being and Productivity

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Abstract

Purpose: It has become increasingly necessary for organizations to pay attention to employee well-being and productivity in today's high-pressure work environments. The goal of this study is to understand the working of mindful eating practices on employee well-being and productivity in the dynamic company sector in Dubai.

Methodology: A mixed-methods research design was adopted, consisting of qualitative semi-structured interviews and quantitative survey analysis to offer a more or less comprehensive picture of the topic.

Findings: The qualitative results suggested that mindful eating practices help employees towards their physical and emotional health, regulation of stress, cognitive clarity and work-life balance. Even though there were positive correlations between employee well-being and productivity and mindful eating, they were not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$) because of the small sample size (54).

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: Although there was little quantitative evidence to support this claim, thematic analysis indicated that mindful eating could help with healthier eating habits, better emotional regulation, and better task focus, all of which might subsequently lead to better productivity of time. The study, therefore, points to the need to integrate mindful eating into broader wellness programs and to establish a supportive organizational culture, as well as to take into account a longer time lens in gauging the results of a wellness program. Organizations that wish to support employees' sustainable health, engagement, and efficiency in fast fast-changing work context in Dubai will benefit from these findings.

Keywords: *Knowledge-Based Economy, Human Capital, Work-Related Stress, Employee Well-Being, Mental Health, Absenteeism, Productivity Loss, Mindfulness, Mindful Eating, Cultural Adaptability, Workplace Wellness Programs, Organizational Resilience*

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INTRODUCTION

In a knowledge-based economy, economic value depends on skills and motivation of people, which also termed as “human capital”. According to European Commission (2011), a huge part of workforce suffers from distress and mental health issues. There is notable personal and economic cost associated with stress and outcomes of mental-illness. In context of personal cost, the quality of life is about one standard deviation unit lower when experiencing a mental health disorder. In context of economic cost, the total indirect cost including lost work days and productivity, accounts for 179 billion euros. The work-related stress is identified as significant factor, which accounts for the annual social cost of 20 billion euros. Companies are emphasizing on finding new ways to reduce stress and enhance employees’ well-being. Mindfulness is recognized as a positive psychology movement in its capacity to improve overall well-being as well as enhance cognitive functioning (Kersemakers et al. 2018).

Well-being is a broad term, which is used to emphasize on optimal life experiences and functioning. It has been debated that well-being is an important factor and people may experience it differently based on multiple factors such as culture, ethnicity, and nationality. Globally, well-being has gained profound significance because many countries have established their own well-being indicators as a benchmark of social progress. For instance, the government of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has institutionalized a national program for wellness and happiness in March 2016 with a vision to emerge as one of the happiest countries in the world. Over the years, there have various wellness and happiness theories and models proposed. In recent years, the supervisor roles such as managers, has paid notable attention towards individuals’ well-being at the workplace (Gathani & van Nieuwerburgh, 2021). The International Labor Organization (ILO, n.d) defined well-being as “an aggregation of physical and social environment, as well as health and safety”. The CIPD’s (2021) latest survey based on health and wellness shown that there is strong relationship between absenteeism and employee mental health.

The high level of psychological work stress has major implications for both organizations and employees. The epidemiological studies consistently reflected a strong relationship between high work stress and worse self-reported mental and physical health, which includes depression, anxiety, type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease. In United States, it has estimated that nearly 5% to 8% annual healthcare cost characterized to work-related stressors. Similarly, in United Kingdom, the overall annual cost of work-related stress to organizations had estimated to be over £62 billion, which mainly driven by the increased staff turnover, performance degradation, and absenteeism. Additionally, the epidemiological studies also provided meta-analyses of decades of research, which associated job stress with bad mental and physical health including anxiety, increased blood pressure, metabolic syndrome, and cardiovascular events. Mechanisms associating employee’s well-being and productivity to poor physical health also covers worst health behaviors such as obesity and allostatic load. However, the employee stress can be reduced and psychological well-being can effectively achieve by teaching mindfulness at workplace and it has received increased attention as well as empirical support (Bostock et al. 2019).

Mindful eating is a wellness practice stemming from mindfulness meditation principles. The method encourages an employee to be present at the moment and enjoy the actual eating experience (Mantzios, 2020). Employees are encouraged to notice the food’s taste and texture, think about its nutritional value, and listen to their body’s signals about hunger and fullness.

Such an approach helps stop mindless eating, often caused by stress, looming tight deadlines, or emotional issues, which can be frequently present in demanding work settings. Improving one's mind-centered approach to food can improve employees' overall health, help them establish healthier eating habits, and significantly improve their mental clarity and reduce stress levels. These variables contribute directly to increased productivity and, consequently, higher job satisfaction (Hyży et al., 2023). The integration of mindfulness practices, such as mindful eating, into workplace wellness programs is an innovative technique that is becoming increasingly popular (Schubin et al., 2023). This is particularly true in regions such as Dubai where businesses are fast-paced, and the corresponding stress levels are high. As new industries continue to develop rapidly, the unique pressures experienced by Dubai's employees can result in burnout, lower productivity, and reduced mental and physical health. In this context, organizations increasingly seek to assist their employees holistically (Haar et al., 2014). While this may involve traditional physical wellness programs, offering mental and emotional support also becomes an important component of employee support.

As we have increasingly moved toward a knowledge-driven economy, employee well-being and mental health impact the value that can be placed on employee human capital. Both personally and economically, high levels of workplace stress are very costly: absenteeism, reductions in quality of life, and productivity losses. With increasing numbers of stress-related personal health issues manifesting across the globe, organizations are nevertheless on the prowl for more effective ways to create healthier work environments. Through mindfulness meditation, mindful eating holds promise as a promising approach to helping employees become more connected with eating habits and, in turn, improve physical health and mental clarity as well as mental and emotional resilience. High-paced regions such as Dubai, where employees face a high volume of work, mindful eating can help in integrating it into workplace wellness, in enhancing both health outcomes and productivity. In an era where businesses put great effort into holistic wellbeing initiatives, both physical and mental support are essential. Promoting mindful eating practices, in the end, is a forward-thinking, culturally adaptable strategy to improve organizational resiliency and the satisfaction of employees.

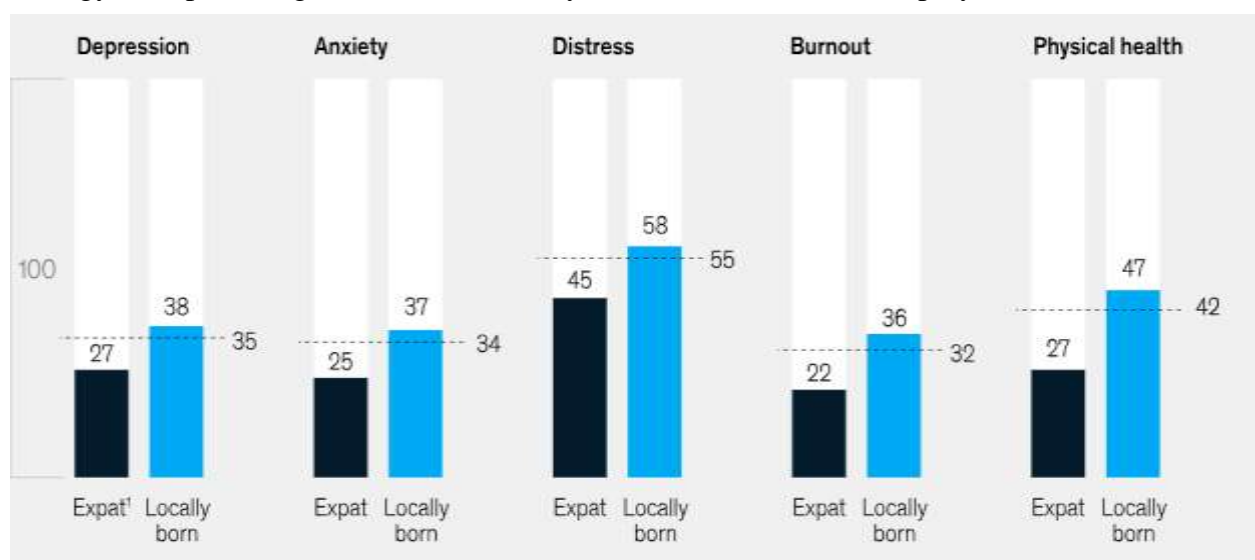


Figure 1: GCC Employee Mental Health and Well-Being Survey (Hammani Et Al. 2023)

When organizations invest in well-being and health of their workforce, they made significant gains in productivity and reduction in attrition. In Middle East, countries are increasingly embracing the modern trend of health, which not only encompasses absence of physical illness but also encompassing a state of equilibrium between individual's internal and external environment. In early 2022, McKinsey Health Institute conducted a survey with more than four thousand employees in Middle Eastern countries that are part of Gulf Corporation Council (GCC) for the purpose of understanding state of employee health in the region. Overall, on an average, 42% of respondents have reported experiencing physical pain, which prevented them from doing work-related activities. Nearly, half of respondents said that the time they dedicated to their jobs restrain the time they have to care for physical health. Some respondents also stated that underlying behaviors such as unhealthy dietary habits and lack of sleep negatively affects their physical health (Hammani et al. 2023).

Outcomes by country, % of respondents citing outcome

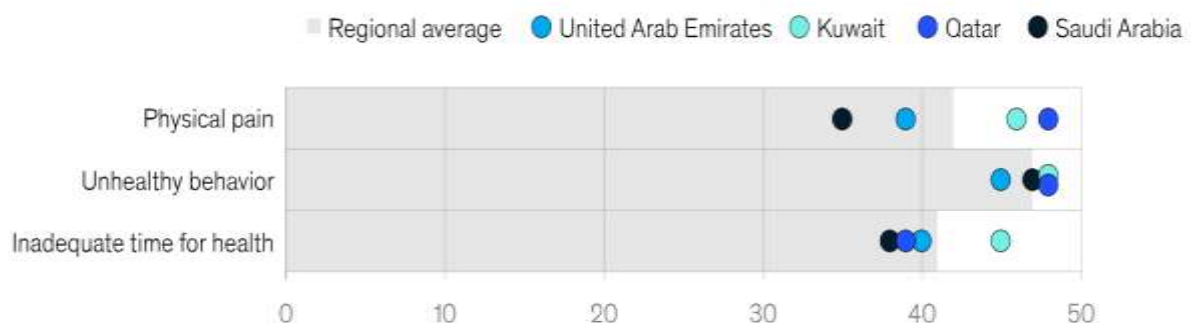


Figure 2: GCC Employee Mental Health and Well-Being Survey (Hammani Et Al. 2023)

Problem Statement

Previous studies entail limitations on analyzing and examining mindfulness interventions as there have particular constructs considered such as job strain rather than depending on dietary habits, perceived stress and psychological stress. Additionally, there is missing the direct impact of workplace interventions on the work-related outcomes such as well-being and productivity. Moreover, the previous studies also mainly emphasized on self-reported health, with few measuring objective indices of physical health (Bostock et al. 2019). Christodoulou et al. (2024) has established a positive link between mindfulness, resilience, and workplace wellbeing and improved performance among employees in Greece and Cyprus. It affirmed that modern workplaces have increasingly recognized as source of stress as employees face high demands, extended working hours and significant pressure to deliver exceptional performance. These factors notably contribute in development of stress-related disorders, burnout, poor dietary habits, and overall damaged wellbeing. In response, there has seen a growing interest in workplace interventions that aim to promote employee wellness and productivity. Among the most promising approaches, mindful eating and lifestyle interventions are effective because they have potential to improve mental and physical health outcomes in various contexts (Michaelson et al. 2023).

Christodoulou et al. (2024) highlighted research gap and suggested to address by future studies. First, Christodoulou et al. (2024) conducted a study, which particularly emphasized on Mediterranean lifestyle that may not directly applicable to employees in UAE due to different

dietary habits, cultural preferences and lifestyle factors. It indicates need of research to examine whether mindful eating practices adapted to UAE's diverse workforce, yield similar advantages. Secondly, Christodoulou et al. (2024) integrated mindfulness as a broader concept, it does not isolate mindful eating as a specific practice. There is need to explore mindful eating's alone influence employees' wellbeing and productivity in UAE. Additionally, Christodoulou et al. (2024) suggested to extend this study by addressing other countries or geographic regions. Dubai is a perfect location with a unique work culture and a diverse, multinational workforce. The study results of mindful eating applicability in these circumstances can indicate other, broader contexts. Additionally, Dubai's sophisticated, nuanced population offers rich knowledge about how various cultural and demographic groups approach food, health, and wellness. While many wellness programs are universal, mindful eating can be easily codified to address Dubai's population's specific cultural and dietary preferences, making it a great, equal, and inclusive approach to employee health (AIGurg et al. 2022). The major issue this research addresses is the lack of attention on how mindful eating can promote employee productivity and well-being, even though many studies have been conducted on general applications of mindfulness and how its benefits employees' health and performance capacities. Mindful eating techniques and their significance in a diverse and fast-demanding corporate sector, such as Dubai, have not been covered expressively. As such, companies are struggling to learn how to make their workers more effective while ensuring they remain healthy for the long term. This research aims to fill this gap by explaining how businesses should integrate mindful eating into support, wellness, and development programs. It will reveal how its use will bring out a healthier workforce that is more equipped to improve their health and physical fitness, mental acuteness, and emotional stability. Addressing this gap will also enable organizations to enhance their support structures for their staff and offer a more substantive guarantee of increased productivity and performance in the long term.

This study contributes to a gap in current literature and thus examines the direct effect of mindful eating practices on employee well-being and productivity, especially in a multicultural, high-pressure work environment in Dubai. Previous studies have been mostly general mindfulness, or job strain, and not specific mindful eating impact on the outcome in the workplace. This research isolated mindful eating as a unique intervention and stressed its ability to promote healthier dietary behavior, alleviate stress-related disorders, and improve the mental and physical well-being of employees. The findings essentially reinforce the fact that wellness programs should consider local cultural and lifestyle differences and be customized. Moreover, the research highlights the importance of organisations moving beyond more conventional wellness approaches and developing targeted mindful eating programmes as an integral part of their broader employee support structures. Such interventions help bring a healthier, more resilient workforce that can sustain long-term productivity and engagement. Considering Dubai's culture of dynamic and multicultural working, while mindful eating is culturally flexible, inclusive, and gives scope for improvement in the performance of the workforce. Future research can refine and broaden to more sectors and demographic groups to continue bearing long-term benefits for employees and organizations alike.

Research Question

This study aims to investigate following research questions:

- How can the practice of mindful eating in workplace wellness programs contribute to enhanced employees' productivity and the promotions of employees' wellbeing within organizations in Dubai?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mindfulness

According to Bostock et al. (2019), the term “mindful” can describe as a state where an individual is paying full attention to their present moment experiences with openness as well as non-judgmental acceptance. Kersemaekers et al. (2018) defined mindfulness as “state of paying attention in the present moment, on the purpose and in an accepting and kin way”. Mindfulness recognized as crucial cognitive skill, which found to be enhanced through training such as psycho-education, group interaction, and secular meditation. It is evident that increased mindfulness reduces stress and positively contributes in an individual's well-being (Gu et al. 2015). The term “mindful eating” introduced couple of decades ago and perceived as an element, which can rehabilitate a healthy relationship with food, and people are aware of what they are eating, moment by moment. It helps to overcome the automatic as well as impulsive reactions around food (Mantzios, 2021). Shapiro (2019) elaborated that mindful eating derived from theories and process of mindfulness and defined it as “the awareness, which emerges from intentionally attending an open and subtle way to whatever is arising in the present moment”. Taylor et al. (2015) operationally defined mindful eating as “food consumption that driven from appropriate cues for eating”.

Employee Well-being

Employee well-being can define as overall mental, physical and emotional health of employees at workplace. It includes various factors such as job satisfaction, physical health, work-life balance, financial stability, emotional resilience, and quality of relationships and support within the organization (Jamieson & Tuckey, 2017). Employee well-being also refers to a state of being comfortable, healthy and happy at work, which achieved through addressing physical, mental, emotional and social needs within organizational context. It also demonstrates the quality of organization's work-life experiences including their emotional safety, physical safety, social connections, and access to resources that allows employees to thrive personally and professionally (Lomas et al. 2017).

Employee Productivity

Productivity can be defined as measure of efficiency and effectiveness and it is crucial to recognize which employees are productive. According to Coker (2011), employee productivity refers to “the level of employees' performance in relation to work quality, attendance, the capacity of performance and personal factors”. Naeem and Ozuem (2021) indicated that employee productivity is the degree to which adoption of technology reduces the time and effort needed to complete a particular task. For instance, when healthcare professionals use social platforms, they get opportunity to learn from their own experiences, wisdom and knowledge with colleagues and their subordinates. The increased productivity provides several advantages to organizations such as economic expansion, high profits, and better social advancements. Similarly, the productive employees get more earnings, better work environment, and favorable employment opportunities. Additionally, increased productivity optimizes the competitive advantage of organizations by minimizing cost and enhancing high production quality (Singh et al. 2022).

The foundations for understanding the interconnection between mindful eating, mindfulness, employee well-being, and productivity within organizational contexts are explored. Cognitive skills, such as mindfulness characterized by present moment awareness and non-judgmental acceptance, can be developed through targeted interventions such as meditation and psycho education. In terms of eating behaviors, mindfulness is applied to make routine consumption into mindful eating, which is defined as engaging people to be more aware of what they eat, their hunger cues, and their emotions related to eating patterns. Employee well-being, or physical, mental, and emotional state, is one of the critical ways to make work a better experience. Currently, as organizations learn to place importance on comprehensive wellness strategies, well-being has become critical to help reduce stress, increase job satisfaction, and more. Like the efficiency of people, productivity is equally important, with tangible benefits for both enterprises as well as the individual. This increases the organizational profitability, creativity, and growth opportunities. Together, these concepts demonstrate that businesses need to emphasize mindfully investing in it, that is, mindful eating, to dedicate themselves to sustainable health, wellness, and increased performance. As these organizations try to align these elements, they find they have more resilient, engaged, high-performing workforces in today's competitive environment.

Impact of Mindful Eating Practices on Employee Well-being

Janssen et al. (2018) has conducted a comprehensive systematic review that based on PsycInfo, PubMed, and CINAHL databases to investigate impacts of mindfulness interventions in enhancing employees' well-being and mental health. There have 24 articles systematically analyzed, which investigated the effects of mindful practices and it significantly contributed to growing body of research on workplace well-being. Findings revealed that in this era where stress and burnouts are prevalent, understanding the efficacy of mindful interventions has become critical. The review highlighted several positive outcomes of mindfulness practices on workplace including reductions in emotional exhaustion, psychological distress, occupational stress, anxiety and depression. These findings align with existing literature focusing on ability of mindfulness to mitigate the negative impacts of workplace stress. The improvements in mindfulness, self-compassion, personal achievements, sleep quality, and dietary habits underscores the holistic benefits of mindfulness. Furthermore, burnout has identified as growing concern in modern workplaces and findings suggested that mindful practices can serves as significant tool to address this challenge. Additionally, the observes enhancements in occupational self-compassion is promising as it encourages employees to adopt healthier attitudes towards work-related stress.

Mindfulness draws an individual's attention towards present experiences on a moment-to-moment basis by enhancing attention to and awareness of present reality. It empowers awareness, which reflects an individual's consciousness of what they are experiencing. The first concern of mindfulness is self-regulation of attention, which emphasizes immediate experiences win the present. The second concern of mindfulness deals with an open, curious, and accepting attitudes towards that experience. Previous studies have investigated the effects of mindfulness interventions and found that mindfulness decreases the stress sensitivity, increases stress management, improves physical reliance, enhances concentration, and reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression. Recent studies also demonstrated the positive effects of mindfulness interventions on immunity, generalized anxiety disorders, addiction, eating disorders, and depression relapse (Janssen et al. 2018).

Keng et al. (2011) has conducted empirical review of studies to examine the effects of mindfulness on psychological health. There has thorough exploration of mindfulness undertaken, its conceptual evolution and empirical impact on mental health, which efficiently bridged Eastern philosophical roots with Western scientific paradigms. Researchers highlighted mindfulness as multifaceted construct, which involves purposeful awareness of present moment, characterized by openness, non-judgement, and acceptance. This distinction establishes a strong foundation for developing understanding to mindfulness-oriented interventions that aims cultivate such qualities to diminish psychological distress. Furthermore, there have strong associations between mindfulness and psychological indicator such as well-being identified. Evidence pointed out strong relationship between higher mindfulness levels and improved psychological outcomes. For instance, employees with greater mindfulness reported reduced stress, anxiety, depression alongside with emotional stability, increased life satisfaction and dietary habits. Secondly, the review also successfully underscored that mindfulness-oriented interventions such as mindful eating habits, mindful-based stress reduction and mindful-based cognitive therapy demonstrated profound advantages for individual with clinical and sub-clinical psychological disorders. Additionally, the laboratory-based experiments provided insights into the immediate effects of mindful practices. It revealed that the brief mindful inductions can effectively reduce the emotional reactivity, improves focus, and enhances decision-making. Thus, such findings support the idea that mindfulness, even practiced shortly, can positively impacts the overall behavioral and emotional well-being.

According to Menardo et al. (2022), mindfulness practice as a means of coping with work-related stress has been narrated. We have found it helpful to explore mindfulness-based practice to counter the problem of work-related stress, which is a source of stress in employees' lives. Research pointed out the increasing level of work-induced stress and its twofold effect on an individual's well-being and productivity. The importance of both individual and organizational intervention to address such pervasive challenges has been emphasized, and a comprehensive model has been offered to bridge the gap between stressors and coping mechanisms. As per Attention Restoration theory (ART), attention to the environment leads to the restoration of attention capacity from mental fatigue. Two types of attention, Effortless Attention (which is restorative, engages in a restorative environment, and rejuvenates the mind) and Directed Attention (which is effortful, depletes over time), are depicted in the ART. In mindful eating practice, the ART concept refers to using a meal as a point of cognitive restoration when employees view their meals in this way. Because sensory aspects of food, such as texture, smell, and taste, force attention, employees can redirect attention to such sensory aspects of food to alleviate attentional requirements of work. And in terms of mindful eating practices generally, those are things to be present in the now, experience flavor, and be exposed to sensory experiences.

For the work context, Hilton et al. (2019) provided an excellent synthesis of research in mindfulness interventions. Using an evidence map based on the systems of systematic reviews of Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs), researchers exploit an evidence framework that acts as an evidence-based approach to support organizational decision-making for improving employees' well-being. In line with the growing acceptance of this band of interventions, organizations are seeking original methods of improving employees' health and productivity. Both Mindfulness and its character of building present moment awareness and attention have become a mainstream strategy in corporate wellness initiatives. In findings summarized from 175 systematic reviews, Hilton et al. (2019) provide a robust evidence map of mindfulness-

based interventions. The evidence map has depicted the concentration of mindfulness research on multiple domains. The basis of a subset of 26 reviews was workplace settings and the relevance of mindfulness for professionals in high-stress environments such as healthcare and education. The result was that stress management, mindful eating, positive relationships with others, and increased focus are vital ingredients of organizational resilience, improving employee productivity and the well-being of employees. It is a patient practice whereby one is trained to focus on what is happening right now. First, it helps people to be in the present moment with a non-judging attitude. Mindful eating makes employees focus on what they eat, which results in healthier eating choices and reasonable portions. Maintaining a healthy weight is also helped by awareness of hunger because it helps to prevent overeating. But it also allows time to eat mindfully, which is also a mental break that drastically increases overall concentration and productivity. Brain health, as in the case above, is also impacted by a balanced diet (Bazarko et al. 2013). Therefore, the hypothesis states that:

H₁: Mindful eating practices have positive impact on employee wellbeing.

The results of this study correspond with other recent research establishing a positive connection between mindfulness practices and employee well-being, and therefore confirm that mindful eating practices have a great positive impact on employee well-being. Where systematic reviews have been conducted, such as by Janssen et al. (2018) and Keng et al. (2011), mindfulness interventions involving mindful eating positively impact emotional exhaustion, occupational stress, anxiety, and depression. Promoting present-moment awareness and self-regulation of attention, mindful eating makes it easier for employees to better regulate stress and develop healthier attitudes towards food, so that physical and emotional resilience improve.

Moreover, consistent with Menardo et al. (2022) and the Attention Restoration Theory (ART), mindfeating engages in cognitive restoration during work hours, reducing mental fatigue and increasing focus. The mindfulness of eating doesn't just support better eating and weight management, it is a mental reset that helps employees get back to their tasks with renewed clarity and energy.

Additionally, they (Hilton et al., 2019) underline that systematic integration of mindfulness at work programs contributes to resilience, improved interpersonal relations and stronger attentional control that leads to better well-being outcomes. It means that organizations initiating support of mindful eating should have more emotionally stable and satisfied, more resilient employees.

Mindful eating, overall, is a simple and effective way to make the workplace better. Though they are not large, the consistent results across a variety of studies provide evidence for their usefulness; this is the case regardless of organizational culture and differences, for example. Further research should seek to examine longer-term consequences and broader organisational outcomes, although current evidence is strong to integrate mindful eating practices into employee wellness programmes to enhance the health, sustainability, and productivity of the workforce.

Impact of Mindful Eating Practices on Employee Productivity

It has reported by Virgili (2015) that mindful-based psychological interventions notably contributes in reducing stress in healthy non-clinical populations and enhances psychosocial outcomes for people with clinical disorders such as depression and anxiety. Similarly, mindful

eating encourages healthier food choices such as consumption of balanced meals and avoiding processed food or sugar, which could lead to energy crashes. The stable energy levels throughout the day improves focus and efficiency in completing work activities. Eby et al. (2019) has conducted a qualitative review of literature on adoption of mindful-based trainings for employees. There have 67 published studies comprehensively analyzed based on implementation of mindful practices in organizational context. The researchers had provided an overview of methodological approaches, which use in mindful-based trainings research, underscored a profound dependence on pre-test/ post-test designs (35.8%) and randomized waitlist control designs (26.9%). It highlighted that these methodologies provide useful insights regarding effectiveness of interventions. Although, the dominance of short-term designs highlights the need for long-term studies for assessing sustained impact of mindful-based trainings. It discovered that Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program is a well-established framework and it indicates that workplace mindfulness interventions draw from proven clinical methods, adapting them to address the employees' needs.

Lomas et al. (2019) has presented an insightful examination of the effectiveness of mindfulness-based interventions in improving various aspects of occupational wellbeing and productivity. The findings of study suggested that mindfulness-based interventions entail positive impact on employees' productivity, stress reduction, anxiety and burnout. There has presented a promising evidence for advantages of adoption of mindfulness at workplace. For instance, in United States, the workplace stress contributes to at least 120,000 deaths annually, which costs up to \$190 billion (8% of national spending on healthcare). According to European Union's data, the estimated annual cost of work-related depression accounts for €617 billion annually (where €272 billion accounts comprise from absenteeism and presentism, €242 from productivity loss, and €39 billion from disability benefit payments). It indicated that work-related challenges becoming more demanding.

According to Abdul Basir (2022), mindful eating is all about being non-judgmental and aware about an individual's physical and emotional sensations in a food-related environment. The Self-Regulation Theory (SRT) based on the idea that individual have ability to control themselves such as their behaviors, thoughts, and emotions to achieve long-term goals. It involves setting goals, monitoring own progress, and adjusting behaviors whenever needed. In mindful eating, self-regulation plays notable role because it helps in fostering healthier eating habits and enhancing overall wellbeing that in turn maximizes employee productivity. The self-regulation theory posits that the regulation on internal psychological processes relies on the ability to observe internal responses. In context of eating, it demonstrates the ability to respond internal cues such as hunger, satiety etc. and without being affected by external cues i.e. food, emotional factors etc. Moreover, the obesity related eating habits can partially explain by the inability to identify and respond to the internal cues of hunger and satiety. It is strongly correlated with increased overeating and more risk of weight gain. Thus, the adoption of mindful eating practice is beneficial for employees because it aids in reducing food cravings, portion control and body weight (Tylka et al. 2019).

It expected that mindful practices improve attention and awareness, which in turn enhances self-regulation and positively influences productivity. The mindful interventions also associated with improved resilience as well as efficacy in regulating emotions. For instance, mindful interventions encourage employees to observe their eating habits, thoughts and behaviors. This awareness will allow them to identify unproductive thoughts that is negatively

influencing their behavior and decision-making. In situation of distress and depression, mindfulness allows them to choose a constructive response. Furthermore, the setting-based approach identified cost-effective policy to reduce the obesity. It includes development of supportive environment that empowers mindfulness and healthy eating behaviors. Particularly, the World Health Organization (WHO) emphasizes on workplace interventions addressing physical activities, diet, and work environment. By integrating mindful eating into organizational culture and physical spaces, encourages employees to adopt mindful eating practices to maximize their productivity (Fitzhugh et al. 2024). Bellet et al. (2024) also identified positive impacts of mindfulness and well-being on employee productivity that significantly contributes to organizational competitive advantage. It claimed by large number of employers that they care about their workforce and focus on investing in management and organizational practices to create and maintain happier workforce. The happier workforce expects to retain for longer time and considered as more productive. According to 79% managers in United States, workforce unhappiness likely to decrease productivity.

H₂: Mindful eating practices have positive impact on employee productivity

In this study, an emphasis is put on the importance of mindful eating practices in enhancing employee productivity in organisational settings. Basing its methodology on broader mindfulness interventions, mindful eating has imposed on individuals the ability to make healthier food choices, regulate emotions, and sustain energy levels within a workday in a stable fashion. In particular, as discussed by Virgili (2015) and Eby et al. (2019), mindfulness-based interventions are found to substantially impact reducing workplace stress, improving focus, and increasing emotional resilience, which all have a direct impact on productivity outcomes. Such evaluations also need to keep researching for long-term benefits of such practices by many researchers.

In this regard, as well as asserting the Self-Regulation Theory (SRT) that informs how mindful eating strengthens employees' internal self-monitoring processes that enable them to better respond to hunger cues, avoid eating excessively, as well as manage emotional eating triggers (Tylka et al., 2019). In turn, stable nutrition and emotional control will allow employees to work more efficiently, think more clearly, and avoid burning out. Further, the World Health Organization goes on to support a setting-based approach in which supportive environments are created within which mindful eating behaviors can thrive.

Ultimately, the idea of promoting mindful eating in organisations has more to do with corporate wellness than it does getting employees more involved with their food, it's a business case to incentivise employees to be more efficient, stable emotionally and resilient organisationally. With the increase of work-related stressors, mindful eating is a low-cost and valuable option in incorporated will allow higher productivity, employee retention, and d a competitive advantage for the company. Long-term impacts of such interventions should be explored further to quantify the return on investment for them.

Research Gap

Although a lot has been achieved in research on the applicability of mindfulness-based interventions in the well-being of employees, there is still a gap in the literature on the relevance of mindful eating interventions on wellness programs at the workplace. The earlier research has been done on mindfulness in general or stress-management interventions that are more holistic and which do not single out mindful eating as an intervention. Though mindfulness-

based intervention has a positive effect on mental health, stress, and productivity (Janssen et al., 2018), the direct correlation between mindful eating and work performance, including a better sense of well-being and productivity, remains an under investigated phenomenon.

Moreover, the literature at hand does not give sufficient consideration to cultural and dietary variations in international workplaces, specifically, in the United Arab Emirates, where the health promotion strategy of the employees might have to be adapted to the needs of the multicultural workforce and the particular eating habits. Similar to the article by Christodoulou et al. (2024), the authors highlight that mindfulness programs could be utilised in the Mediterranean context, but the study should be proven in areas such as the UAE, where mindful eating programs may not be effective because of cultural factors and employment. The difference in terms of the cultural adaptability of mindful eating within workplace wellness programs, specifically within a multicultural environment, e.g. in Dubai, is one of the indicators of the necessity of further research.

Secondly, only a little is done on objective health indices of mindful eating, although the other studies were conducted on self-reported health outcomes. This is a gap in knowledge that exists in the overall state of information on the effects of mindful eating on long-term health outcomes, such as cardiovascular health and emotional control.

It can therefore be concluded that mindful eating as a workplace wellness program has been noted to have a research gap in the literature since its effects on the well-being of employees, productivity, and cultural adaptability in high-stress and high-tempo workplaces, such as Dubai, have not been studied. The study will close the research gap of providing workable recommendations that can be applied by those organisations that have been keen on introducing such culturally mindful, sensitive classes on eating as part of their wellness programs.

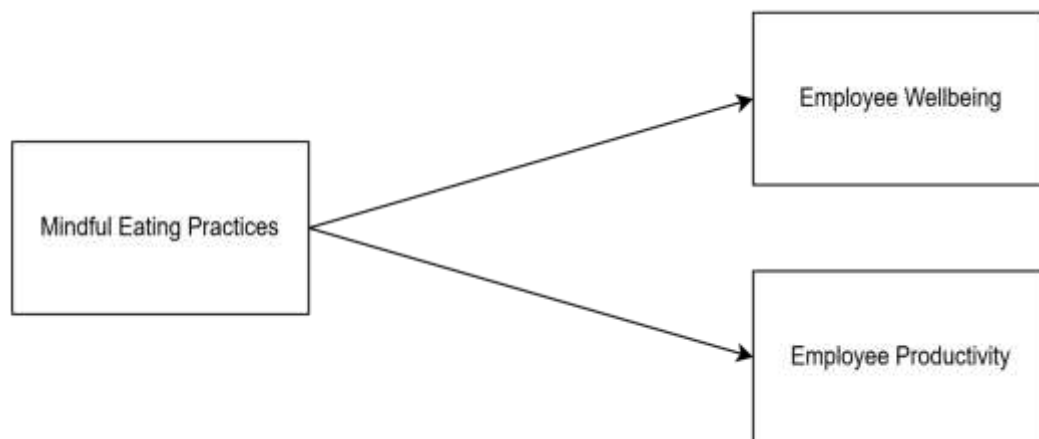


Figure 3: Research Framework

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted mixed method research approach. The study used both quantitative and qualitative data. The targeted population include employees working in private and public organizations across Dubai, UAE who are currently engage in the mindful eating practices such as focusing on sensory experience of food, avoid distractions during meals, and following structured mindful eating programs. The participants were selected from range of industries including corporate offices, healthcare, education and technology sector to ensure varied

workplace dynamics and lifestyle influences. The chosen participants were aged between 25 to 55 years old, which representing the middle-career professionals who are likely to experience work-related stress and productivity challenges that can significantly influence by eating habits. It included both male and female. A sample size of 250 to 300 people was used. Semi-structured interviews and structured surveys was used for data collection. Qualitative data was analyzed through thematic analysis and Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software for quantatitive data. Data was presented inform of tables and charts.

RESULTS

Qualitative Analysis

Thematic Analysis

To conduct thematic analysis, there has been interviews conducted with 20 participants including both male and females.

Theme 1: Motivations for practicing mindful eating

The primary motivations found mainly due to health-related concerns such as digestive issues, fatigue, developing acid reflux and frequent headaches because of poor eating habits. However, external influences, which motivated participants to practice mindful eating included inspiration from a friend, workshop, or motivated by workplace nutrition seminar.

Theme 2: Changes in Daily Eating Habits

Participants revealed that they focused on prioritizing conscious food choices such as balanced, whole and unprocessed food, and consuming smaller portions. Moreover, some participants revealed that practiced mindful eating by avoid eating while working, and incorporated hydration as a part of mindful eating.

Theme 3: Physical and Emotional Well-being

Participants reported that mindful eating improved their digestion and reduced bloating, which made them feel lighter and less sluggish. Moreover, due to mindful eating participants shared that they experienced lower anxiety, better stress management, improved patience and decision-making.

Theme 4: Improved Work-Life Balance

Participants reported that mindful eating helped them to clear work-life boundaries i.e. taking designated meal breaks, improved balance between work and life. Additionally, mindful eating also helped them to maintain discipline in work-life separation.

Theme 5: Productivity and Cognitive Performance

Participants shared that they experienced improved alertness and sustained energy as well as they avoided post-lunch drowsiness by making better food choices. Additionally, it found that mindful eating increased task efficiency and deadline management through effective prioritization. Mindful eating made people to avoid procrastination due to increased energy.

Theme 6: Perceived relationship between eating habits and work efficiency

It found that all participants strongly associated healthy eating with higher productivity and cognitive efficiency as well as they emphasized on food quality as crucial factor for problem-solving skills.

Overall, the thematic analysis indicates strong patterns that exist between mindful eating practice in the workplace and physical and cognitive benefits. However, participants continuously maintained that implementing mindful eating in their lives not only helped their immediate physical state, such as improved digestion and energy regulation, but also equipped them with the ability to handle stressful times within the workplace. Setting aside dedicated, distraction-free meal times was reported by many of them to recharge their minds, thus improving their capacity to concentrate, meet deadlines, and make sound decisions. Additionally, participants reported that a change in eating habits resulted in more self-discipline in other parts of life (which then translated to a more structured and balanced daily routine). To the extent that the practice of mindful eating was either facilitated or hindered, cultural influences and organizational support were important factors. Continued mindful eating was made easy by workplaces whose regular meal breaks and promotion of health-related initiatives. This suggests that mindful eating is about more than just being healthy for both yourself and your business; mindful eating can be a valuable way for us to get work done. Therefore, mindful eating can be considered a viable approach to improving employee outcomes through integration into workplace health programs.

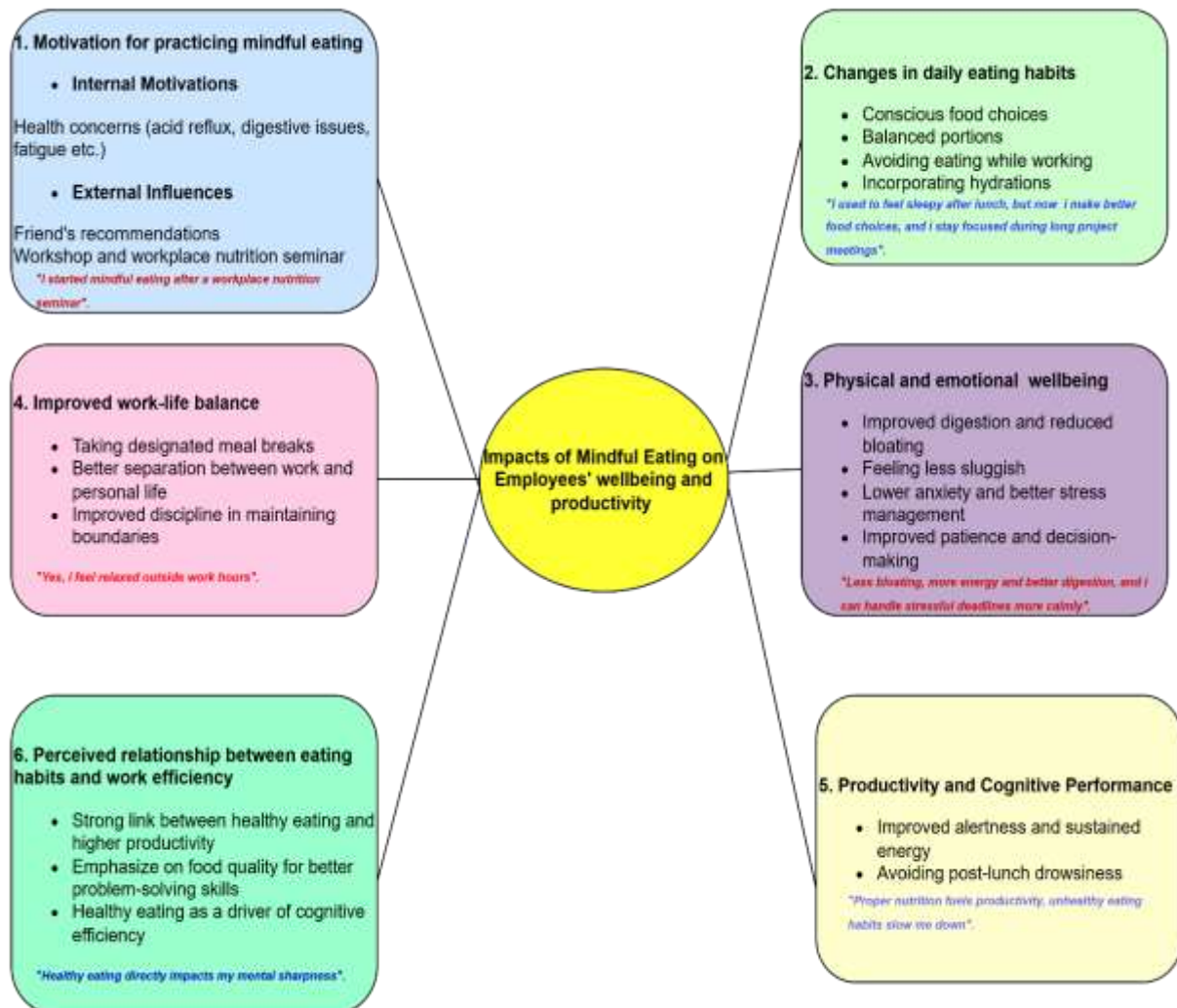


Figure 4. Thematic Map

Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative analysis has conducted on SPSS where different tests performed including demographic analysis, reliability analysis, correlation, and regression analysis.

Demographic Analysis

The demographic analysis included gender, age, education and income. There were total 54 participants, among them 26 (48.1%) were male whereas 28 (51.9%) were females. The respondents between age group of 25 to 30 years old found in majority, and most of participants had bachelor's degree.

Table 1: Demographic Analysis

Variable	Item	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	26	48.1%
	Female	28	51.9%
Total	N	54	100%
Age	25 to 30 Years	22	23.9%
	31 to 35 years	11	12.0%
	36 to 40 years	8	8.7%
	41 to 45 years	7	7.6%
	46 to 50 years	0	0%
	51 to 55 years	6	6.5%
	56 to 60 years	0	0%
Education	High School or less	10	10.9%
	Bachelor	26	28.3%
	Masters and Above	18	19.6%
Income	AED 11,000 to AED 20,000	23	25.0%
	AED 21,000 to AED 30,000	13	14.1%
	AED 31,000 to AED 40,000	10	10.9%
	AED 41,000 and above	8	8.7%

The steps were taken to conduct the quantitative analysis through SPSS software, and a series of statistical tests to examine which types of mindful eating practice are associated with improved employee well-being and productivity. The first step of the process was demographic analysis to characterize sample characteristics. The sample contained 54 individuals, of which 26 (48.1%) were male and 28 (51.9%) were female, a gender distribution that is quite balanced. By and large, most of the participants were within the 25–30-year-old age group, indicating that young early to mid-career employees were the largest group screened in the study. Most participants had a bachelor's degree (28.3%), followed by those with master's degrees and above (19.6%), and a smaller proportion with a high school degree or less (10.9% in terms of education). Income distribution suggested that a large section of the respondents earned between AED 11,000 – 20,000 (25%) and a smaller group in the higher income brackets.

Reliability of the internal consistency of the variables measured was tested by performing demographic profiling. More specifically, both the mindful eating practices and the employability Cronbach's Alpha values went above the 0.6 acceptable threshold 0.6, and the same applies to productivity. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to evaluate the strength and direction of relationships between variables in the correlation analysis. Results showed that there is a strong positive relationship between employee productivity and the practice of mindful eating and a weak positive relationship with employee well-being. Finally, mindful eating practices were regressed against employee outcomes to determine if they are a predictor of employee outcomes. Correlations were positive however, regression evidence indicated that the predictive relationships were insignificant at the 0.05 level, probably owing to the small sample size. However, the patterns discovered served as a useful guide to where mindful eating behaviors might connect positively to workplace performance and general well-being.

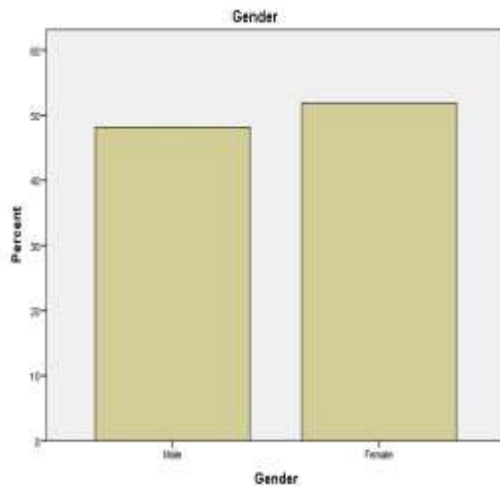


Figure 5: Gender

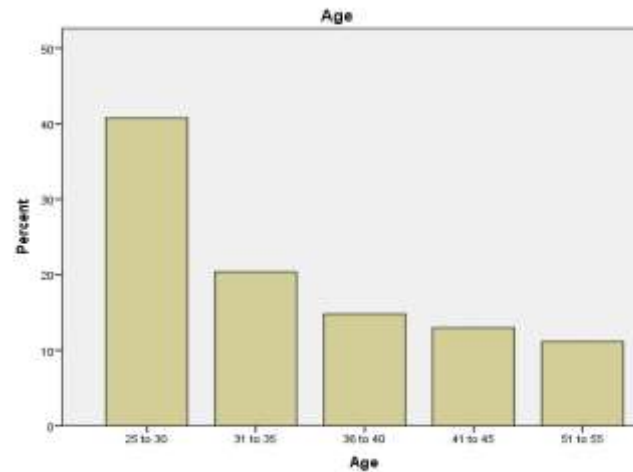


Figure 6: Age

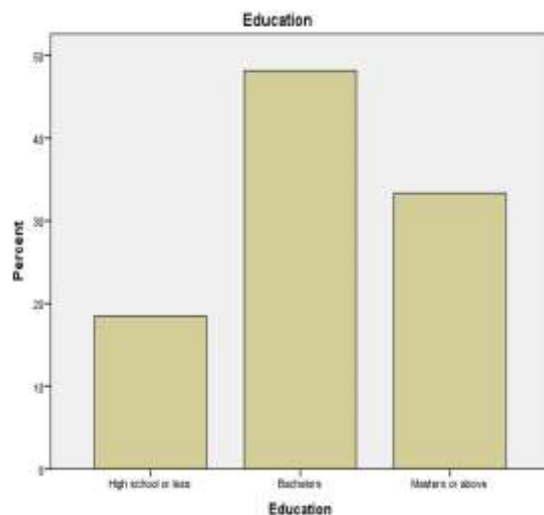


Figure 7: Education

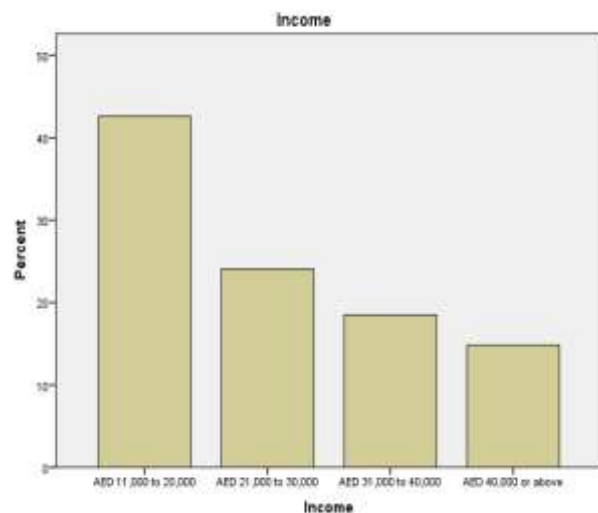


Figure 8: Income

Reliability Analysis

The reliability analysis is used to evaluate the consistency, stability and dependability of datasets. In reliability, the value of Cronbach's alpha represents reliability or internal consistency and survey items. The value of Cronbach's alpha less than 0.5 show low reliability and considered unacceptable, $0.5 < \alpha < 0.8$ considered as moderate and $\alpha > 0.8$ considered as highly reliable. The low reliability can occur due to small number of items, poorly interrelated items, and heterogeneity of items (Ekolu & Quainoo, 2019). The reliability of Mindful Eating Practices (MEP) is 0.699, Employee wellbeing (EW) is 0.675, and Employee Productivity is 0.708, which is greater than 0.5, and considered as moderate.

Table 2: Reliability Analysis

Variable	Mean	Cronbach's Alpha	Bartlett's test of Sphericity	KMO
MEP	3.917	0.699	0.000	0.605
EW	4.164	0.675	0.000	0.566
EP	4.144	0.708	0.000	0.540

Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis use to represent the closeness of one related variable to another. The value of correlation range between -1 to +1, where -1 indicates negative correlation (one variable increases, other decreases), 0 shown no relationship between variables, and +1 shows strong positive correlation between variables (Senthilnathan, 2019).

Table 3: Correlation Analysis

		MEP	EW	EP
1.	MEP	1		
2.	EW	0.221	1	
3.	EP	0.983	0.004	1

The results of correlation indicate that correlation between MEP and EW is 0.221, which is weak positive correlation, as an employee increase emphasize on mindful eating practice, the employee wellbeing will slightly increase. Furthermore, the correlation between MEP and EP is 0.983, which shows there is strong positive correlation as Mindful eating practice increase, the employee productivity will strongly increase.

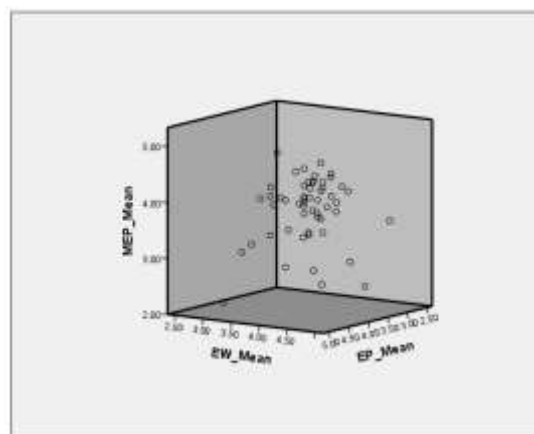


Figure 9: Correlation between DV, IV1 and IV2

Regression Analysis

Regression analysis use to analyze relationship between independent and dependent variables. It used to determine that how changes in predictor are associated with changes in the outcome variable. The B shows effect size, standard error (std. error) shows accuracy of coefficient estimate, and sig. value shows probability that the observed data could occur by chance. When sig. value is <0.05, it means the relation between IV and DV is significant and when sig. value > 0.05, it means relationship between IV and DV is not statistically significant (Pratam et al. 2022).

Table 4: Regression Analysis

	B	Std. Error	T	Sig.
MEP (DV: EP)	-0.008	0.133	-0.061	0.952
MEP (DV: EW)	0.153	0.141	1.086	0.283
Gender	0.081	0.164	0.497	0.622
Age	0.059	0.059	0.990	0.327
Education	-0.024	0.104	-0.233	0.817
Income	0.065	0.070	0.931	0.357

The results shown that relationship between Mindful Eating Practice (MEP) and Employee Productivity (EP) is not statistically significant because the sig. value is greater than 0.05 and other values shown that MEP have negative but negligible effect on EP. Thus, H1 has rejected. Furthermore, there is no significant relation between Mindful Eating Practice (MEP) and Employee Wellbeing (EW) because values shown little positive effect of MEP on EW but sig. value is greater than 0.05 so H2 has rejected. Although, the correlation between correlation between MEP and EP is strong positive and between MEP and EW is weak positive, but regression analysis shown insignificant results for hypothesis so H1 and H2 both rejected. One significant limitation of this study is relatively small sample size of only 54 respondents. A small sample size substantially reduces the statistical power of regression analysis, and increase the likelihood of Type II error where true relationships between variables fail to reach statistical significance (Ertefaie et al. 2017).

The reliability, correlation, and regression analyses proved very useful in revealing the link between mindful eating practices and employee well-being and productivity. Reliability was shown by MEP, EW, and EP assessment scales, with all three constructs Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.6. It confirmed that the survey items were used in a way that would be properly used to measure the intended set of variables with adequate stability and consistency.

Analysis of correlation showed a very strong positive correlation ($r = 0.983$) between mindful eating practice and employees' productivity, and a weak positive correlation ($r = 0.221$) between mindful eating practice and employees' well-being. According to these findings, the performance and well-being of employees are also improved, although to varying degrees, as they turn to conscious eating practices in the workplace. Nevertheless, when analyzed using the regression methods, no statistical significance was found in the relationship between mindful practices of eating and the dependent variables ($p > 0.05$). Therefore, both H1 and H2 hypotheses were rejected.

This study is, however, limited by the small sample size ($n = 54$) that limits the availability of statistical power and increases the possibility of a Type II error; real effects that could be detected would remain undetected. While there is no statistically significant regression, the observed positive correlations provide preliminary encouraging evidence that mindful eating could have an impact on workplace outcomes; therefore, larger-scale studies are needed to validate the relationships. Future research should employ longitudinal designs to capture longer-term effects of mindful eating interventions and to increase the sample size, so that we can better understand the effects of mindful eating interventions on employee health and satisfaction as well as productivity.

Conclusion

Mindful eating practices have shown the effect they can have on the employee's well-being and productivity within the day-to-day workplace, that is, the work environment of Dubai. To address this gap, the research used a mixed methods approach, which combined quantitative analysis with qualitative thematic exploration, producing a balanced notion of how mindful eating behaviors influence workplace outcomes. Even though the quantitative results showed no statistically significant correlation between mindful eating and employee productivity or well-being, this was because the sample size was small and workplace performance can be attributed to many things. The study did find strong positive correlations, which suggest the possibility of some meaningful trends. Further qualitative insights that complement findings show that employees began using mindful eating habits that helped them regulate their emotions, manage stress, increase energy levels, gain clarity of thought, etc.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study advances current knowledge on mindful eating as a distinct, influential subset of mindfulness with refinement of the conceptual understanding of mindful eating. It brings to one's attention the interconnectivity of dietary behaviors and mental focus, emotional resilience, and overall workplace performance. Also, this supports the notion that workplace wellness behaviors need to be examined in context, given cultural diversity, organizational support, and understanding of the totality of employee wellness. Through this study, then, the existing academic discourse has been expanded by theorising the meaningfulness of mindful eating both in terms of broader wellness frameworks and ongoing research on these connections.

The overall implications for practice are practical because they suggest that, in practice, mindful eating will not likely lead to the immediate or measurable increases in productivity, but mindful eating does support a supportive role in enhancing employees' emotional stability and workplace engagement. Mindful eating as a stand-alone solution can be helpful, especially in subcultural conditions of culturally diverse and high-pressure environments like Dubai, but should not be viewed as an organization's sole solution to wellness. Mindful eating can be better enhanced with other interventions like mental health support programs, Employee training initiatives, or flexible working arrangements, which in turn will lead to better changes in both Employee Satisfaction and organizational outcomes.

The study further notes that wellness programs should be tailored to suit cultural and demographic realities. Generic interventions, however, may not speak to every member of a multicultural workforce in the same way. Thus, organizations should develop flexible and inclusive mindful eating programmes made for diverse diet traditions, religious practices, and personal preferences. Technology such as mobile apps and virtual workshops can further expand the access and sustainability of these initiatives, leveraging them.

Though there are limitations to the study, namely the small sample size, which lowers the power of the quantitative analysis, this study nonetheless contained useful preliminary evidence that mindfulness eating could be integrated into a more comprehensive health and wellness strategy. The aim of future research should be to increase sample size, use longitudinal study designs, and assess other mediating variables that could add to the explanation of the connection between mindful eating, well-being, and productivity.

The practice of mindful eating, therefore, has some exciting potential as a culturally palatable way of promoting employee health, emotional resilience, and workplace focus. On the

condition that it is embedded within a holistic, evidence-based, wellness framework, it can still make a valuable contribution to healthier, more engaged, and ultimately more productive organizational environments.

Recommendations

Based on study's findings and insights, it recommended that organizations across UAE should formalize mindful eating practices within their wellness programs framework by running awareness campaigns and conducting workshops. Secondly, employees must be encouraged through digital content to be mindful in their meals for effective stress management. Although, productivity is not solely dependent on mindful eating, so organizations should address other areas of improvement i.e. workplace culture, workload etc. beside mindfulness. However, this study entails few limitations, which can be addressed by future studies. First, the study has limited sample size in quantitative analysis, which affected the generalizability of findings. Secondly, study's geographic and cultural scope has been restricted to UAE, which may limit the applicability of findings to other regions. The UAE have unique cultural, social, and workplace dynamics, which may influence perceptions of wellbeing, eating behaviors, and productivity differently as compared to other countries. Thus, study's findings are not generalizable to employees in different cultures and economic settings. Third, the study has not investigated the potential impact of mediator or moderating variables that could influence relationship between mindful eating, employee wellbeing and productivity. Therefore, it suggested that future researchers should extend this study by considering a large sample size and consider other geographic regions or countries. Additionally, future studies should also consider the impact of moderating or mediating variables such as organizational support, emotional intelligence, or job satisfaction to shape how mindful eating practices impact workplace outcomes.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

In theoretical perspective, this study has significantly contributed to literature on mindful eating practices and its impacts on employees by offering qualitative link between mindful eating, psychological and workplace outcomes. Secondly, it has highlighted the integrated nature of wellness behaviors such as stress, focus, eating etc. in modern work environments, especially in UAE work environment with diverse workforce. It has suggested that mindful eating is a subset of mindfulness, and relation between individual's health behavior and organizational performance can be more nuanced and context-specific. In practical context, this study has suggested that mindful eating may support organizational wellness initiatives but they should not solely rely on promoting mindful eating practices to maximize employee productivity. Organizations should adopt more holistic approach, which must combine mindful eating with other workplace interventions i.e. mental health support, employee trainings. Moreover, the study has encouraged HR managers and policy makers to focus on evaluation of wellness programs for not increasing only productivity but also employee engagement, job satisfaction and employee retention.

Furthermore, the findings of this study highlight the need for cultural adaptability when workplace wellness initiatives. In other words, mindful eating programs need to be culturally diverse, where the workforce consists of highly multinational and culturally diverse individuals, such as in Dubai, mindful eating programs need to be sensitized to different dietary habits, food culture, and work-life expectations. The results of this research suggest that one

size does not fit all in supporting wellness in diverse settings. Consequently, mindful eating interventions should be tailored to meet cultural norms, religious practices, and work schedules so that engagement, and thereby effectiveness of such interventions, is maximized. Moreover, the integration of digital platforms into future interventions that help initiate and sustain mindful eating habits among employees is especially needed as we enter in hybrid and remote work trends. Promotion of personalized, inclusive wellness strategies helps businesses build healthier, more resilient workforces that not only contribute to increased individual performance but also to broader organizational success in a competitive and globalized environment.

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