Efficacy of a Internet-Based Mindfulness Intervention for Work-Family-School-Conflict
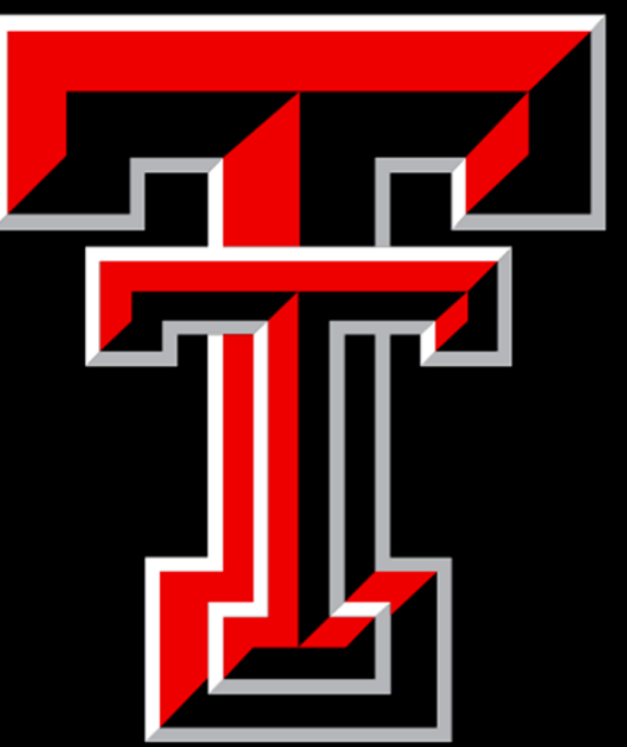
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Introduction

Work-Family-School Conflict

- Many college students today balance work, family, and school roles that can cause stress, depression, and academic difficulties (e.g. Ratelle, Vallerand, Senécal, & Provencher, 2005).

- Further, the presence of role conflict between work, family, and school has been shown to significantly impact domain satisfaction (Olsen, 2014).

- Ironically, rarely do students who face these challenges seek counseling services (Julal, 2016; Rosenthal & Wilson, 2008).

- How individuals manage conflict between these roles has been examined in adolescents and working-adults but scarcely in undergraduate students (Zimmer-Gembeck & Mortimer, 2006; Olsen, 2014).

Mindfulness Interventions

- Mindfulness can be defined as a receptive state of mind wherein awareness and attention, informed by what it is occurring at the moment, perceives internal and external events that are taking place at the present (Schultz & Ryan, 2015).

- Mindfulness-based stress reduction programs have shown steady benefits in the last decades, including online interventions (e.g., Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, & Walach, 2017).

- Studies have found that individuals with greater mindfulness report less work-family conflict (Allen & Kiburz, 2012).

- Brief mindfulness-based interventions have been shown to be effective in helping undergraduate students cope with anxiety, depression, and academic stress (e.g., Shearer, Hunt, Chowdhury, Nicol, 2016).

- However, the impact of mindfulness interventions on college students' work-family-school conflict (WFSC) has yet to be explored and could help college students cope with these confounding roles.

Purpose & Hypotheses

PURPOSE

Utilizing a randomized controlled trial, the present study examined the effect of an online mindfulness-based intervention (MB) compared to a online stress management (SM) intervention on the longitudinal change process of work-family-school conflict in college students.

Hypotheses

- H_1: Students assigned to the MB group will exhibit significant declines in WFSC over time.

- H_2: Compared with the SM group, students assigned to the MB group will exhibit greater gains over time in school-work-family balance.

Methods

PARTICIPANTS

- $N = 80$ undergraduate students

- **Gender**: 69% women; 31% men

- **Ages:** $M = 19.54$, $SD = 3.56$

- **Ethnicity**: White (58%), Hispanic (26%), African-American (10%), Multicultural (6%), & Asian (1%)

INSTRUMENTS

- ***Work-Family-School Conflict Scale*** (Olsen, 2014)

  ($\alpha = .87$, collegiate sample; Suchak, 2016)

Procedure

- Students were recruited through SONA.

- Longitudinal study with six time points over a two week period.

- At time point one, participants completed a pre-test survey and were randomly assigned to an intervention group (mindfulness, $n=41$; stress management, $n=39$).

- Participants received online-based intervention at time points one through five.

- At time point six participants completed a post test survey.

Results

Within Group Effect

- H_1: *Partially Supported*

  Within group comparisons of WFSC of any kind, including direction of conflict, form of conflict, and factors revealed significant differences in pre to post-tests scores within mindfulness intervention group in…

    - Direction of conflict within school-to-family domain ($F = 5.403$, $p = 0.025$)

    - Factors within school-to-family conflict: strain-based domain ($F = 5.911$, $p = 0.020$).

Between Group Effect

- H_2: *Partially Supported*

  Between group comparisons in WFSC between MB and SM groups revealed significant differences in pre to post-tests scores in…

    - Direction of conflict within work-to-school domain ($F = 4.693$, $p = 0.033$)
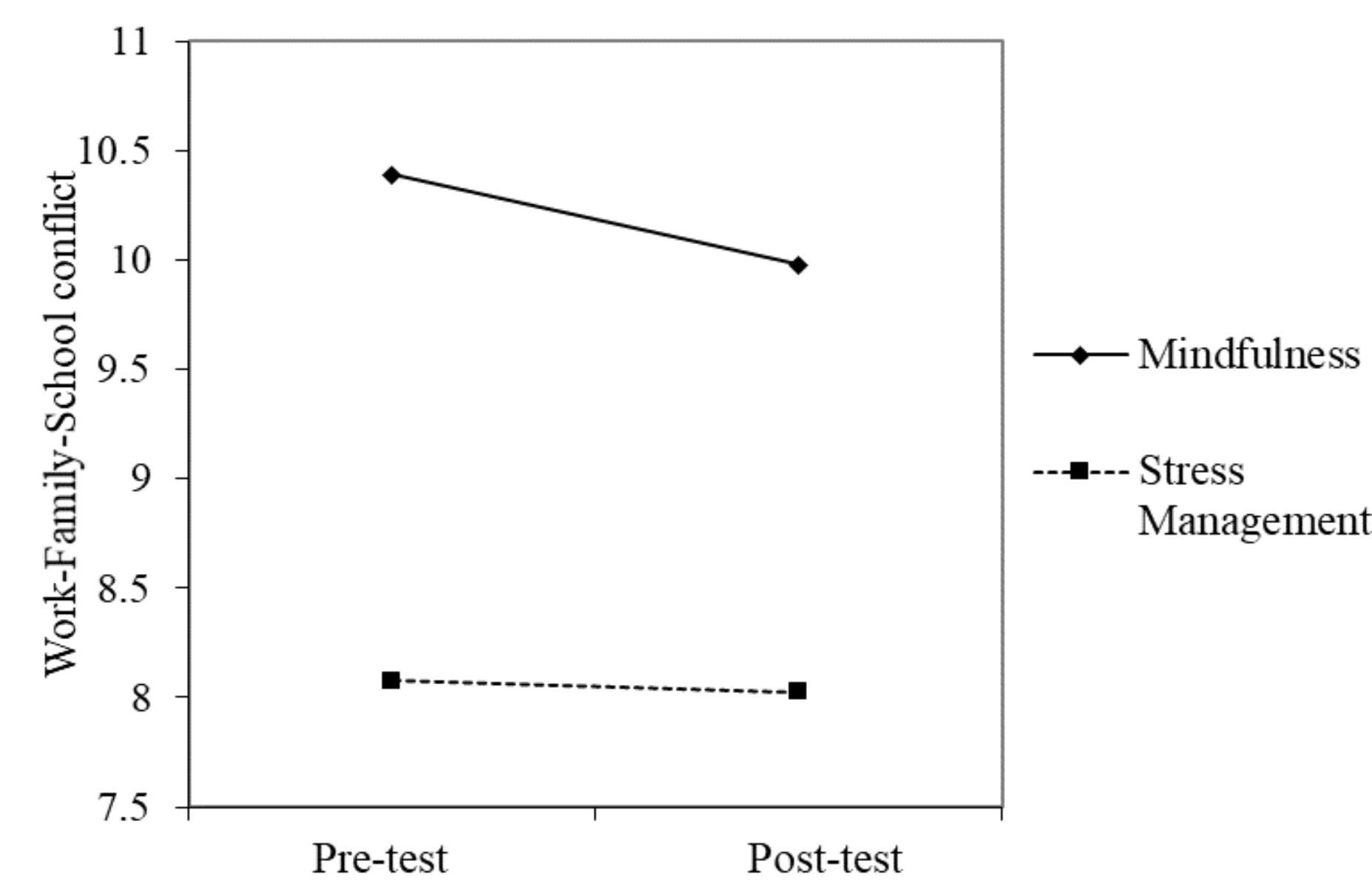
    - Factors within work-to-school conflict: time-based domain ($F = 5.436$, $p = 0.022$).
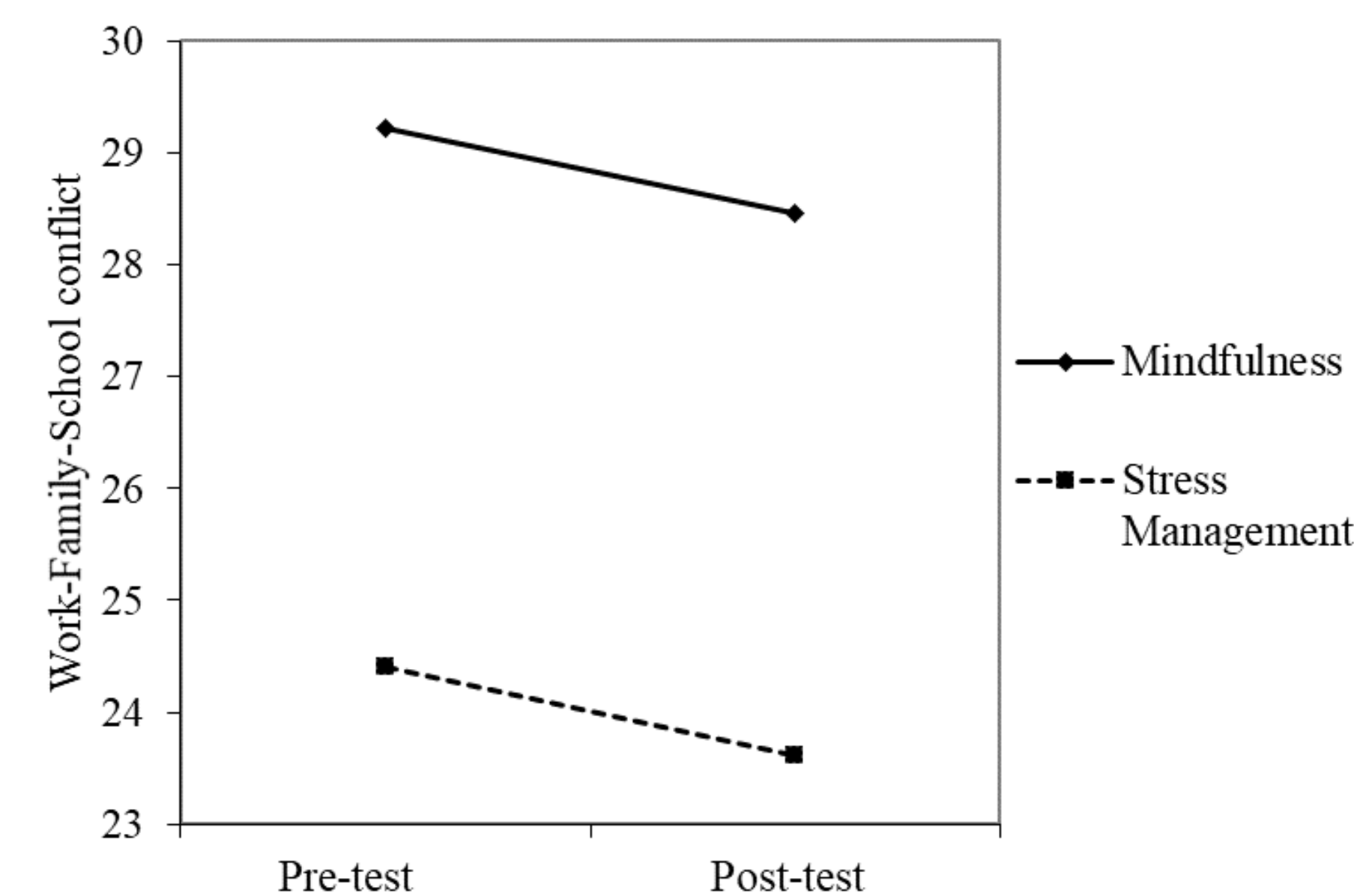
Discussion

- Findings suggest that mindfulness interventions can help college students cope with conflicts from school to family and specifically strain-based conflict from school to family (e.g., fatigue & irritability).

- In addition, findings suggest that mindfulness interventions are more effective in increasing work to school balance and specifically time-based balance from work to school than other interventions (i.e., stress management).

Practical Implication

- Employers could offer mindfulness interventions as an additional resource to try and help students alleviate the negative consequences that occur with WFSC.

- Employers may wish to be more accommodating of the potential conflict-inducing issues like school exams or projects in an attempt to reduce WFSC.

- Families can make sure adequate sleep cycles and health behaviors are met in family members to reduce family to school strain.

  - Sleep quality and vitality might mediate relationship between mindfulness and school to family balance (Allen & Kiburz, 2012).

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