



Impacts of Micro-aggressions and Implicit Bias on the Mental Health of First-Generation Minority College Students

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Abstract

- The first-generation college student population, defined as students whose parents did not complete a 4-year college degree, is rapidly growing. These students are more likely to identify with a racial or ethnic minority group.
- Minority first-generation college students often face barriers and discrimination that majority groups do not face, and these barriers can impede academic and mental well-being.
- These students often face discriminatory behaviors such as micro-aggressions and implicit biases, leading to diminished mental health. Implicit bias, a stereotypical perception that one may not be consciously aware of against someone or something, is a stressor that marginalized groups face more often than others.
- Studies have shown that implicit bias as well as micro-aggression, the everyday intended or unintended derogatory behaviors that target the marginalized, is associated with increased stress, depression, and negative academic performance.
- Possible ways to mitigate the effects of these discriminatory behaviors include mindfulness, the act of focusing on one's awareness and being present, and social support in the form of friends and family.
- These concepts have been associated with creating more positive attitudes and decreasing implicit bias and have been correlated with a positive increase in mental health among minority students.
- The purpose of this project is to examine how implicit bias affects the mental health of marginalized groups such as first-generation college students and determine how mindfulness and social support can be used to reduce the negative impact of implicit bias on mental health.

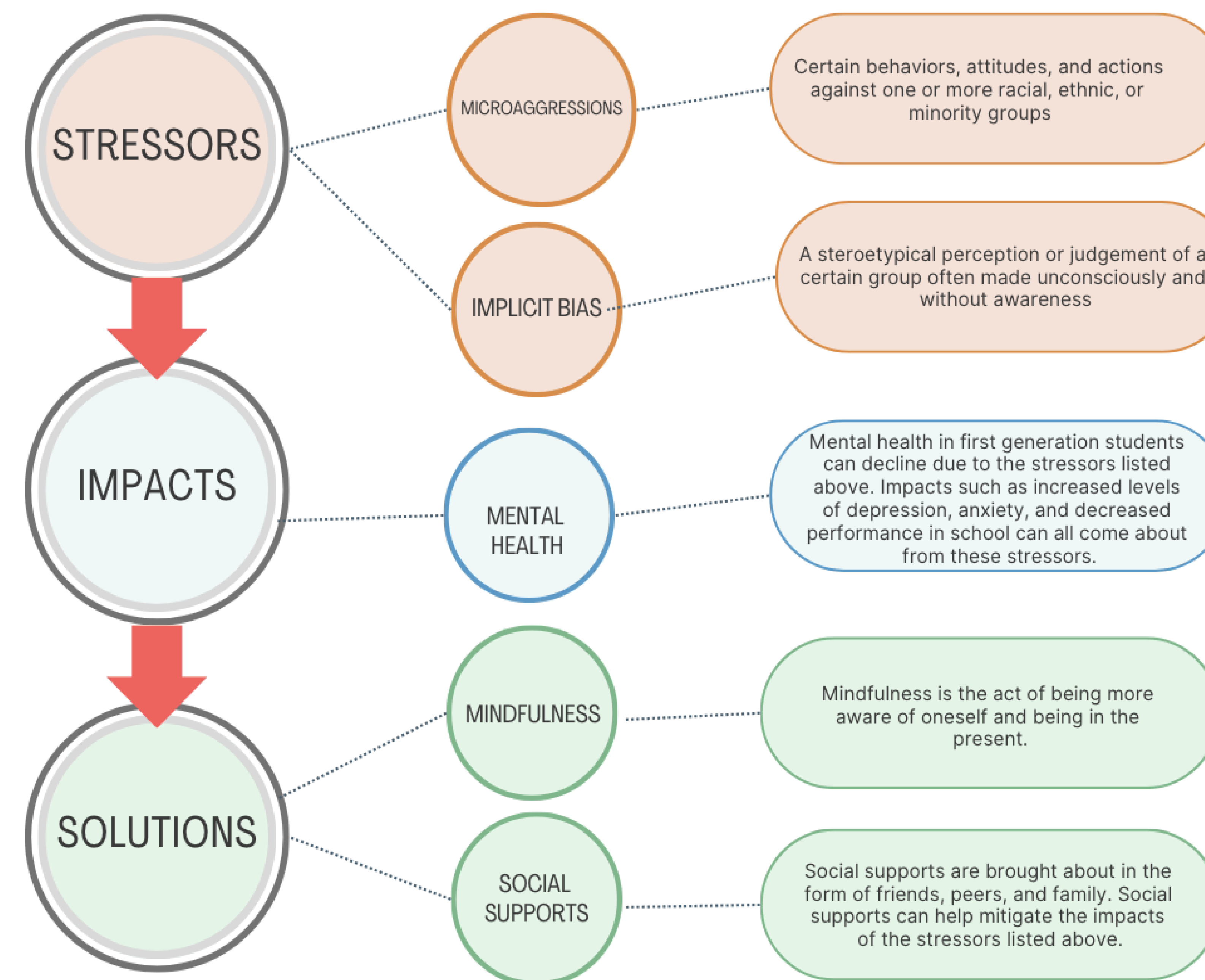
Introduction

- First-generation college students are one of the most rapidly growing student populations at 56% of undergraduates in the United States (Forbus et al., 2011; National Association of Student Personnel Administration (NASPA), 2019).
- First-generation racial/ethnic minority college students with low SES are more likely to experience social isolation and are more likely to have mental health issues such as depressive symptoms (Hefner & Eisenburg, 2009).
- These major stressors impact first-generation racial/ethnic minority college students adversely affect mental health by increasing the symptoms of distress and depression (Williams, 2017).
- Another stressor, implicit bias, is the unconscious stereotyping of someone or something that influences decisions, behaviors, and judgments heavily impacts these students (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995).
- Microaggression, intentional or unintentional derogatory behaviors, and insults targeted at marginalized groups, also negatively affect the psychological well-being of marginalized college students in which the cultural mistrust triggered by racial microaggressions creates mental burdens (Kim et al., 2017; Kanter et al., 2020).
- Mindfulness can be defined by four core elements: awareness and attention, focus on the present, being aware of events occurring outside the body, and cultivation (Nicol & France, 2018).
- Mindfulness helps with emotional regulation and has the potential to reverse effects created by the stereotype threat (Young-Brice & Dreifurst, 2019).

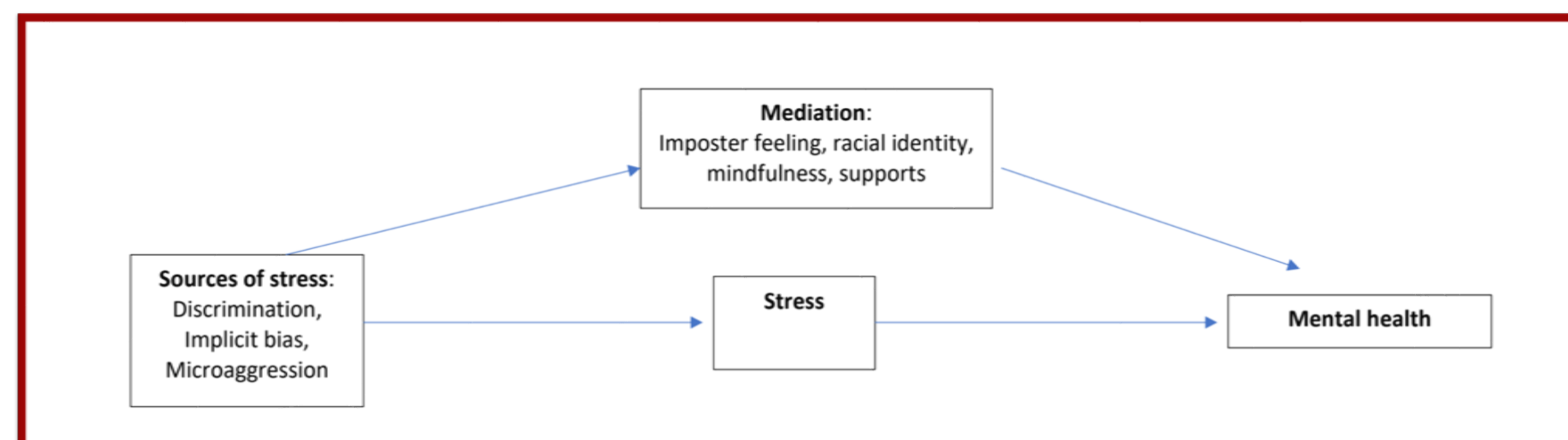
Methods

This investigation into the correlations between implicit bias, microaggressions, and the mental health of first-generation college students was conducted through a comprehensive literature review. The primary aim was to collect and analyze existing knowledge and identify gaps in pre-existing research. This established knowledge to further conduct the study. Credible databases were used to find sources based on specific keywords. After collecting numerous sources for each topic, a list of measures was organized based on what was used in the literature collected in terms of topic, creator, reliability, and validity. This was used to compare each of the measures used in the literature review and determine which were the most effective and reliable for the future study. Additions to this list are still being made to create the most reliable study.

Main Themes



Research Framework



Results/Conclusion

- The literature review has concluded that first-generation racial/ethnic minority college students with low SES are facing stressors such as implicit bias and microaggressions. These stressors have been shown to increase mental health issues such as depression symptoms and anxiety.
- Mindfulness has been proven to help with these symptoms and aid in reversing the effects of stereotyping.
- The information found through the literature review has bridged the knowledge between implicit bias and mindfulness but has not explicitly studied the relationship between the impact of these stressors on first-generation low-SES college students and how mindfulness can be used to mitigate them.
- The measures collected through the literature review will be used in the future to study this gap in the research and provide knowledge on how mindfulness can help reverse the impacts of implicit bias and microaggressions on these students.

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