

Peer Relationships as a Mediator Between Mindful Attention and Perceived Stress in Children

Courtney Thompson, Hongcui Du, Dr. Sara Hart, Dr. Callie Little
 Department of Psychology, College of Arts and Sciences, Florida State University



INTRODUCTION

Prior research suggests that higher levels of mindfulness are associated with more positive peer relationships and improved social functioning in youth. Additionally, mindfulness has been linked to lower perceived stress, indicating its potential role in promoting emotional well-being in school contexts. The present study examines the association between mindful attention and perceived stress in children and tests whether the quality of peer relationships mediates this relationship.

METHODS

Procedure

Participants (N = 662) from the National Project on Achievement in Twins (NatPAT) completed self-report questionnaires assessing mindfulness, perceived stress, and peer relationship variables.

MEASURES

Mindful Attention

Mindful attention was assessed using the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale for Children (MAAS-C). Responses were rated on a Likert scale (1 = almost always, 6 = almost never), with higher scores indicating greater levels of present-moment awareness.

Perceived Stress

Perceived stress was measured using a self-report stress scale, with higher scores indicating greater perceived stress.

Peer Relationships

Peer relationship quality was assessed using self-report measures of peer affiliation, with higher scores indicating more positive peer relationships.

Statistical Analysis

Pearson's correlations and linear regression analyses were conducted to examine relationships between mindful attention, peer relationships, and perceived stress.

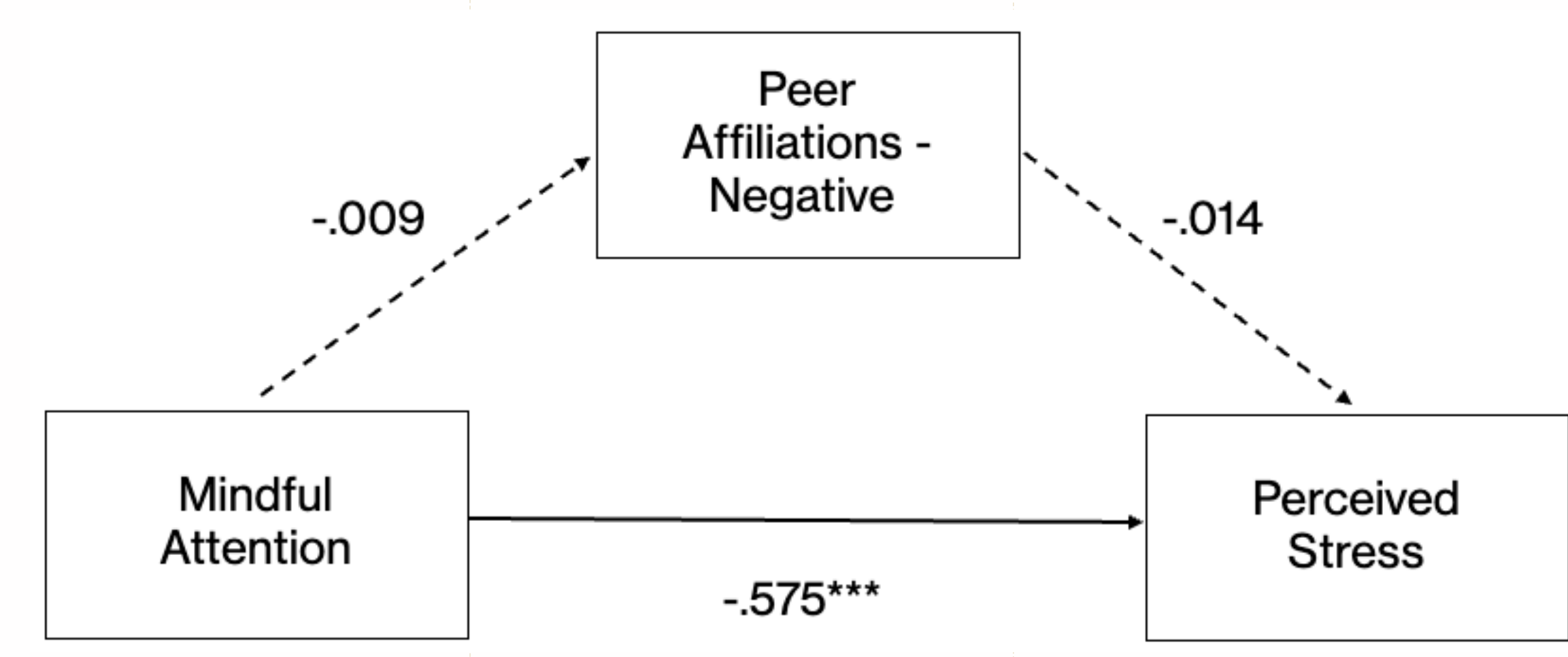
Table 1. Participant Demographics

Characteristic	n (%)
Total participants (grades 4-8)	662 (100)
Female	341 (51.5)
Male	321 (48.5)
White	591 (89.5)
Hispanic/Latino	44 (6.6)
Black/African American	25 (3.8)
Other Race	44 (6.7)

RESULTS

Mindful attention is **significantly negatively associated with perceived stress** ($r = -.575, p < .001$). Children with higher mindful attention **report lower stress levels**. Regression analysis shows that **mindful attention significantly predicts perceived stress** ($\beta = -.584, p < .001$), whereas positive and negative peer relationship variables **do not significantly predict stress**. The overall model explains **34% of the variance** in perceived stress.

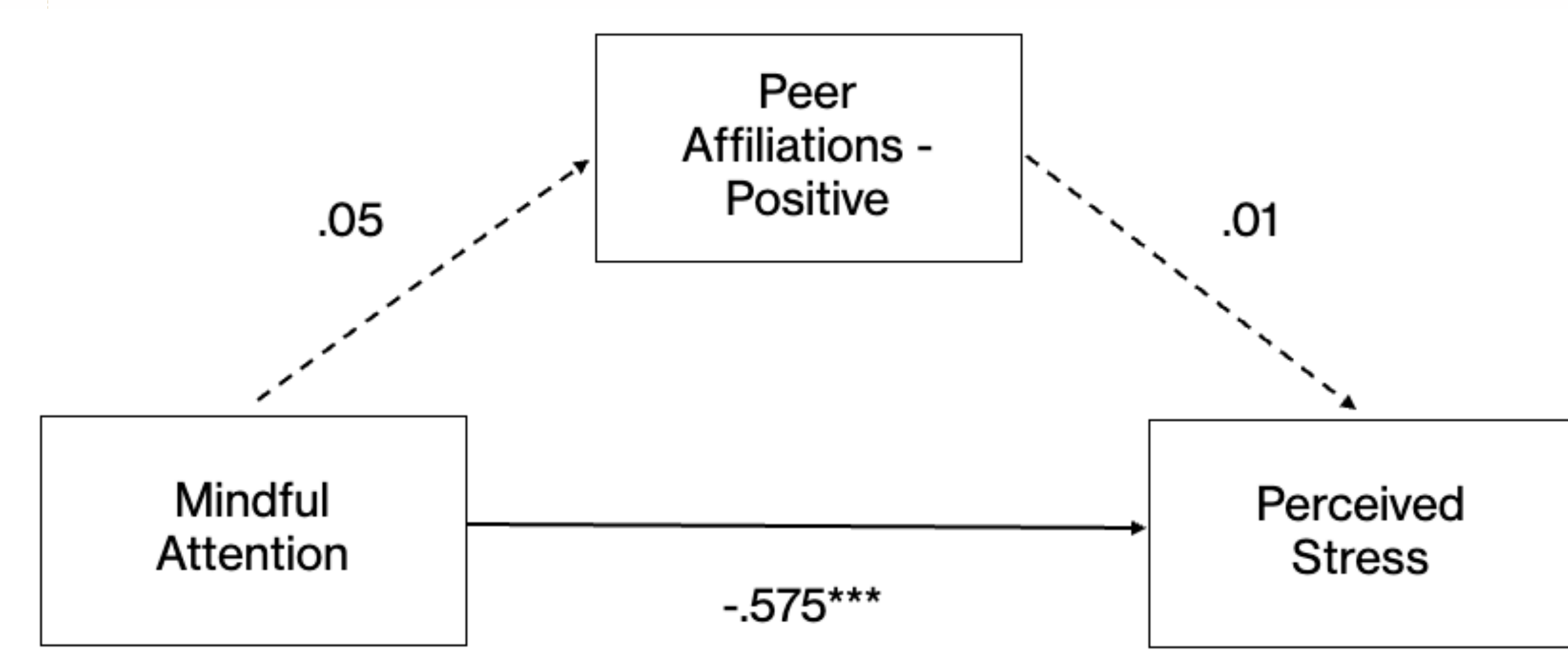
Figure 1. Negative Peer Relationships Model



* $P < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Negative peer relationships did not significantly mediate the relationship between mindful attention and perceived stress.

Figure 2. Positive Peer Relationships Model



* $P < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

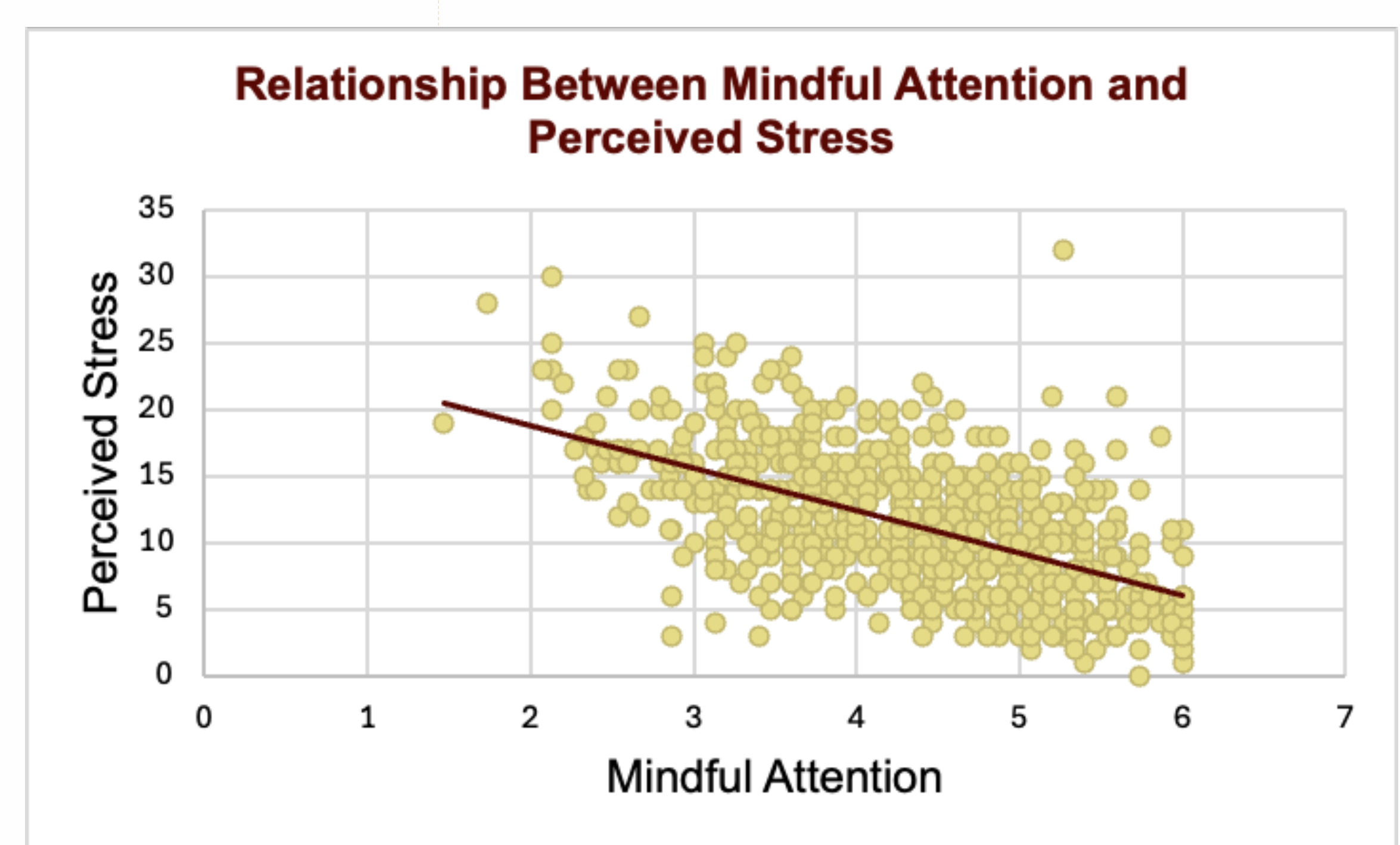
Positive peer relationships did not significantly mediate the relationship between mindful attention and perceived stress.

Table 2. Correlations Among Study Variables

Measure	1	2	3
1. Mindful Attention	—	-.575***	—
2. Perceived Stress		—	—
3. Peer Relationships			—

* $P < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Figure 3. Mindfulness and Perceived Stress



Linear regression displaying the relationship between mindful attention and perceived stress. Higher mindful attention is associated with lower perceived stress in children.

CONCLUSIONS

Mindful attention **significantly predicts perceived stress** in children, suggesting that mindfulness may play a vital role in regulating stress. When controlling for peer relationships, these variables **do not significantly predict stress and do not mediate the relationship** between mindfulness and perceived stress. These findings indicate that mindful attention may directly influence children's stress levels independent of peer relationship quality. Because the data are cross-sectional, causal relationships cannot be determined.

REFERENCES

Brown, K. W., West, A. M., Loverich, T. M., & Biegel, G. M. (2011). Assessing adolescent mindfulness: Validation of an adapted Mindful Attention Awareness Scale in adolescent normative and psychiatric populations. *Psychological Assessment, 23*(4), 1023–1033.
 Zoogman, S., Goldberg, S. B., Hoyt, W. T., & Miller, L. (2015). Mindfulness interventions with youth: A meta-analysis. *Mindfulness, 6*(2), 290–302.
 Hart, S. A., Little, C. W., & van Bergen, E. (2019). Nurture might be nature: Cautionary tales and proposed solutions. *npj Science of Learning, 4*(1), 2.