

# Psychiatry and Psychological Disorders

## Research Article

# A Multisystemic Psychoeducational Program to Promote Emotional and Relational Well-Being in University Students: An Experimental Pilot Study

Barbara Parisi<sup>1\*</sup>, Gianfranco Buffardi<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Professor, Department of Psychology and Nutrition, Temple University Rome Italy

<sup>2</sup>Istituto Scienze Umane ed Esistenziali, Napoli, Un. G. Fortunato, Benevento-82100, Italy

**\*Corresponding Author:** Barbara Parisi, Professor, Department of Psychology and Nutrition, Temple University Rome, Italy

**Received Date:** 02 March 2026; **Accepted Date:** 21 March 2026; **Published Date:** 28 March 2026

**Copyright:** © 2026 Barbara Parisi, this is an open-access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits use distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

## Abstract

This pilot study investigates the effectiveness of a multisystemic psychoeducational intervention designed to enhance relational competence and emotional well-being among university students.

The program integrates five educational components: nutrition awareness, physical movement, music-based expression, affective and sexual education, and life-skills development through mindfulness practices.

An experimental design was conducted with 48 university students (aged 18–21) divided into experimental and control groups. Preliminary descriptive findings suggested improvements in mindfulness, empathy, and perceived social support in the experimental group, accompanied by reductions in emotional and behavioral difficulties.

Qualitative analyses also revealed stronger group cohesion and relational awareness. The findings suggest the potential of multisystemic psychoeducational interventions as preventive strategies to promote psychological well-being among university students.

**Keywords:** Multisystemic education, Mindfulness, University students, Emotional wellbeing, Relational competence, Psycho-educational intervention.

## Introduction

University students increasingly report emotional distress, loneliness, and difficulties in relational functioning. Educational institutions therefore represent an important context for preventive psychological interventions. Programs that integrate mindfulness, socio-emotional learning, and experiential activities have shown promising results in promoting resilience and psychological well-being.

**Scientific Contribution:** The present study contributes to the literature by evaluating a multisystemic psychoeducational program integrating relational education, mindfulness practices, and experiential workshops within a university context. The study explores how these combined components may improve emotional awareness, empathy, and perceived social support.

Novelty of the program. A distinctive element of the intervention is its multisystemic design integrating embodied practice (nutrition awareness and movement), music-based meaning-making (lyric analysis and active engagement with personally meaningful songs), affective-relational education, and mindfulness-based life skills within a single structured curriculum. This integrated approach aims to address emotional awareness and relational competence through complementary experiential pathways.

## Method

### Participants

The study involved 48 undergraduate students aged 18–21 enrolled in a Summer Study Abroad Program in Rome. Par-

Participants were randomly assigned to either an experimental group (n = 24) or a control group (n = 24). Participants were drawn from four classes (approximately 12 students each) within the program. Inclusion criteria were: age ≥ 18 years, voluntary participation, and provision of informed consent.

### Design

A pre-test/post-test experimental design was adopted with two conditions (experimental vs. control). Baseline assessments (T0) were completed prior to the first session, and post-intervention assessments (T1) were completed immediately after the final session.

### Procedure

At baseline (T0), participants completed informed consent and a brief anamnesis form, followed by administration of standardized questionnaires. The intervention was delivered in weekly 2-hour sessions over six weeks, with one module delivered once per week. Each session concluded with a structured reflective phase consisting of brief diary writing followed by facilitated group discussion to consolidate learning and support transfer to daily life. At post-intervention (T1), the same standardized questionnaires were re-administered to both groups. A final guided group reflection/focus group was conducted to collect feedback on participants' experiences and perceived changes.

### Intervention: Module-by-Module Description

#### Module 1 – Nutrition Awareness and Mindful Eating (2 hours).

The module introduced foundational concepts of nutrition (macronutrients and micronutrients) and discussed how food production and consumption have changed since the industrial revolution, including the widespread availability of processed foods and potential losses in nutritional quality and food-related awareness. The session also addressed how patterns of food and alcohol consumption may become compulsive and, in some cases, resemble addictive behaviors. The final 30 minutes were dedicated to mindfulness practices related to consumption and eating, focusing on non-judgmental awareness of bodily signals, impulses, and automatic habits.

#### Module 2 – Body Movement and Emotional Awareness (2 hours).

This module emphasized the continuous interaction between physical and psychological well-being and introduced key notions of non-verbal communication and implicit interpersonal signaling. Participants learned to identify emotions through bodily cues and observable expressions (e.g., posture, facial expressions, muscle tension, breathing patterns) to support emotional literacy and relational attunement. The final 30 minutes consisted of guided stretching and body-awareness exercises aimed at reconnecting with emotions and recognizing what the body communicates in moments of stress or

activation.

#### Module 3 – Music-Based Expression and Emotional Meaning-Making (2 hours).

This module leveraged music as a common daily experience and introduced a framework for how music can influence affective states and access implicit emotional processes. Participants analyzed the lyrics and themes of the songs they typically listen to and reflected on how cultural context and personal history shape emotional learning and beliefs about relationships through musical narratives. In the final 30 minutes, participants actively engaged with their preferred songs (e.g., singing or vocal participation) and discussed how music affected mood, bodily activation, and emotional meaning in the moment.

#### Module 4 – Integrated Affective–Sexual Education (2 hours).

This module framed affective–sexual education as a preventive component of relational well-being. It emphasized accurate, evidence-based information; respect for self and others; emotional and bodily awareness; and the development of healthy, consensual relationships free from coercion and power-based dynamics. The session highlighted how comprehensive affective–sexual education may support communication and affective self-determination and may contribute to prevention efforts related to gender-based violence and discriminatory bullying.

#### Module 5 – Mindfulness-Based Life Skills (2 hours).

This final module consolidated the competencies targeted across the program using the WHO life-skills framework. The session addressed ten key skills—self-awareness, empathy, critical thinking, creative thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, emotion regulation, stress management, communication, and interpersonal relationship skills—and discussed how systematic integration of these skills can support resilience, reduce risk behaviors, and improve relational climate.

### Measures

The following standardized instruments were administered at T0 and T1:

- Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale – Adolescents (MAAS-A), to assess present-moment awareness [3,16].
- Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), to evaluate emotional and behavioral difficulties [19].
- Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI), to assess cognitive and affective empathy [4,5,1].
- Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), to evaluate perceived social support [19,6].

### Qualitative Data and Analysis

Qualitative data were collected through participants' weekly reflective diaries and written reflections produced at the end

of each session, a final guided group reflection/focus group, and facilitator notes. Where available, teachers/tutors also completed brief observational notes regarding participation, peer relationships, and emotion regulation during the program.

A thematic analysis approach was used. Two researchers independently reviewed the materials, identified recurring meaning units, and developed an initial set of themes. Discrepancies were discussed until consensus was reached, and final themes were refined to capture the most frequent and salient patterns across participants.

### Ethical Considerations

The study followed the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Participation was voluntary and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Data were collected anonymously and used only for research purposes.

### Results

Descriptive pre–post patterns suggested improvements in several psychological dimensions for students in the experimental group. Increases were observed in mindfulness, empathy, and perceived social support, while emotional and behavioral difficulties decreased. Patterns in the control group appeared smaller.

Measure	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Change
Mindfulness (MAAS-A)	3.8	4.7	+0.9
Empathy (IRI)	2.9	3.6	+0.7
Social Support (MSPSS)	4.1	5.2	+1.1
Emotional Difficulties (SDQ)	14.5	11.0	-3.5

Table 1. Descriptive Pre–Post Means (Experimental Group)

Note. Values are descriptive. Full inferential statistics (standard deviations/standard errors, exact tests, p-values, confidence intervals, and effect sizes) should be reported once the complete dataset and/or statistical output tables are available. These descriptive values were extracted from archived summary outputs.

### Discussion

The preliminary descriptive findings suggest that multisystemic psychoeducational interventions integrating experiential and relational learning may contribute to improved emotional awareness and relational functioning among university students. Reported increases in perceived support and empathy are consistent with the program’s emphasis on group-based practice. These conclusions should be interpreted cautiously until the intervention is replicated with complete

quantitative datasets and formal inferential analyses.

### Limitations

Limitations include the relatively small sample size, the short duration of the intervention, and the specific context of students participating in an international university program. An additional limitation is that full individual-level data and complete statistical output tables were not available at the time of manuscript preparation, preventing the reporting of standard deviations, exact tests, p-values, confidence intervals, and effect sizes.

### Conclusions

The Nurturing Relationships Program demonstrates potential as a preventive psychoeducational model capable of promoting well-being and relational competence in young adults.

### Author Contributions

Conceptualization: Barbara Parisi, Gianfranco Buffardi.

Methodology: Barbara Parisi.

Writing – original draft: Barbara Parisi.

Writing – review and editing: Gianfranco Buffardi and Barbara Parisi.

Supervision: Gianfranco Buffardi.

### Acknowledgments

The authors thank Professor Dr. Paola Mamone and Professor Dr. Giulio Casini for their professional support during the sessions and for contributing to the facilitation of selected activities.

### Funding

This research received no external funding.

### Institutional Review Board Statement

Ethical review was waived/not required because the study was conducted as an educational program evaluation involving voluntary participation of consenting adults (all participants were ≥18 years old), so the study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

### Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the study.

### Data Availability Statement

The dataset and statistical output tables supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to privacy and institutional requirements.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## References

1. Albiero, P. A. O. L. O., S. O. N. I. A. Ingoglia, and Alida Lo Coco. "Contributo all'adattamento italiano dell'Interpersonal Reactivity Index." *Testing Psicometria Metodologia* 13, no. 2 (2006): 107-125.
2. Bluth, Karen, and Priscilla W. Blanton. "Mindfulness and self-compassion: Exploring pathways to adolescent emotional well-being." *Journal of child and family studies* 23, no. 7 (2014): 1298-1309.
3. Brown, Kirk Warren, Angela Marie West, Tamara M. Loverich, and Gina M. Biegel. "Assessing adolescent mindfulness: validation of an adapted Mindful Attention Awareness Scale in adolescent normative and psychiatric populations." *Psychological assessment* 23, no. 4 (2011): 1023.
4. Davis, M. H. (1980). A multidimensional approach to individual differences in empathy. *JSAS Catalog of Selected Documents in Psychology*, 10, 85.
5. Davis, Mark H. "Measuring individual differences in empathy: Evidence for a multidimensional approach." *Journal of personality and social psychology* 44, no. 1 (1983): 113.
6. Di Fabio, A., & Busoni, L. (2008). Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS): Proprietà psicometriche della MSPSS in studenti universitari italiani. *Risorsa Uomo*, 3, 339–350.
7. Durlak, Joseph A., Roger P. Weissberg, Allison B. Dymnicki, Rebecca D. Taylor, and Kriston B. Schellinger. "The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions." *Child development* 82, no. 1 (2011): 405-432.
8. Felver, Joshua C., Jessica M. Tipsord, Maxwell J. Morris, Kristina Hiatt Racer, and Thomas J. Dishion. "The effects of mindfulness-based intervention on children's attention regulation." *Journal of attention disorders* 21, no. 10 (2017): 872-881.
9. Goodman, Robert, Howard Meltzer, and Veira Bailey. "The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire: A pilot study on the validity of the self-report version." *European child & adolescent psychiatry* 7, no. 3 (1998): 125-130.
10. Hallam, Susan. "The power of music: Its impact on the intellectual, social and personal development of children and young people." *International journal of music education* 28, no. 3 (2010): 269-289.
11. Khalsa, S. B. S., Butzer, B., Shorter, S. M., Reinhardt, K. M., & Cope, S. (2018). Yoga reduces perceived stress and improves self-regulation in high school students. *Mindfulness*, 9(2), 620–62. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-017-0804-5>
12. Kristeller, Jean L., and Ruth Q. Wolever. "Mindfulness-based eating awareness training for treating binge eating disorder: the conceptual foundation." *Eating Disorders and Mindfulness* (2014): 93-105.
13. Lubans, D. R., Plotnikoff, R. C., & Lubans, N. J. (2016). A systematic review of the impact of physical activity programs on social and emotional well-being in at-risk youth. *Preventive Medicine*, 87, 40–49. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2016.02.009>
14. Neff, Kristin. "Self-compassion: An alternative conceptualization of a healthy attitude toward oneself." *Self and identity* 2, no. 2 (2003): 85-101.
15. Ratey, J. J. (2008). *Spark: The revolutionary new science of exercise and the brain*. Little, Brown.
16. Rossi, E., Melchiorri, E., Panzera, A., Ristè, N., Carloni, V., & Romitelli, M. (2015). Validation study of the Italian version of the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale for Adolescents (MAAS-A) [Poster presentation]. ACBS World Conference, Berlin.
17. UNESCO. (2018). International technical guidance on sexuality education: An evidence-informed approach. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000260770>
18. World Health Organization. (1997). Life skills education for children and adolescents in schools (WHO/MNH/PSF/93.7A Rev. 2). <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/63552>
19. Zimet, Gregory D., Nancy W. Dahlem, Sara G. Zimet, and Gordon K. Farley. "The multidimensional scale of perceived social support." *Journal of personality assessment* 52, no. 1 (1988): 30-41.
20. Zullig, Keith J., and Rebecca J. White. "Physical activity, life satisfaction, and self-rated health of middle school students." *Applied research in quality of life* 6, no. 3 (2011): 277-289.

**Citation:** Barbara Parisi, Gianfranco Buffardi . A Multisystemic Psychoeducational Program to Promote Emotional and Relational Well-Being in University Students: An Experimental Pilot Study. *J. Psychiatry. Psychiatr. Disord.* Vol. 5 Iss. 1. (2026) DOI: 10.58489/2836-3558/040