

Personal meaning increases the efficacy of mindfulness

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Background and objectives: Mindfulness-based interventions are generally effective at improving cognitive and emotional skills and increasing quality of life. However, it is not yet fully discovered how it would be possible to make these practices even more effective. Recent empirical studies in the area of modern cognitive behavioral therapies suggest that working with one's personal values and meaning in life can be extremely beneficial for a therapeutic change. The aim of the present study is to experimentally assess whether the addition of personal meaning could enhance the efficacy of a classic mindfulness exercise (focused breathing exercise; FB, Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Methods: 63 healthy undergraduate students were randomly assigned to three conditions: (a) the original exercise (FB), (b) the exercise together with a protocol based on personal values and meaning (FB-M) and (c) Control. The study used a pre-post design with the following outcome measures: cognitive performance (Paced Auditory Serial Addition Task; PASAT-C) and self-reported mood levels. Results: An improved performance on the PASAT-C along with lower stress levels were observed in both mindfulness conditions, but not in Control. Additionally, FB-M was significantly better at enhancing performance on the cognitive task than FB. Discussion and conclusion: The results suggest that it is possible to enhance the efficacy of mindfulness introducing personal values and meaning. Most probably, the personal meaning component facilitated the motivation of practice and the extrapolation of the mindfulness exercise to other contexts, in this case to the cognitive performance. The findings showed that mindfulness together with meaningfulness may be considered more beneficial than mindfulness alone in the clinical practice.