

A Preliminary Quasi-Experimental Study of the Impact of Mindfulness Training on Emotion Dysregulation and Distress among Undergraduates in the U.S.

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Background and Objectives:

Numerous studies have shown mindfulness-based interventions reduce stress and anxiety in college students. However, less is known regarding specific facets of mindfulness and underlying mechanisms such as emotion regulation that may explain improvement in psychological functioning. Moreover, it is unclear whether a mindfulness practice may still be useful to students outside a controlled intervention. The aim of the current study was to determine whether brief mindfulness meditation, in conjunction with a personalized mindfulness plan, would improve mindfulness, emotion regulation, and psychological distress in college students.

Method:

Data were collected from 19 U.S. undergraduates enrolled in an upper-level psychology course on “Mindfulness in Clinical Psychology” that included didactic lectures, discussion, and writing assignments, as well as in-class experiential activities with mindfulness meditation (i.e., focused attention, open monitoring, loving-kindness), MBSR exercises (e.g., body scan), and yoga. Students engaged in a 3-minute meditation at the beginning and close of each 80 minute class session. In addition, participants implemented a personalized mindfulness plan. Confidential surveys were administered at the beginning and end of the course to assess facets of mindfulness (FFMQ), emotion dysregulation (DERS), experiential avoidance (AAQ), and distress (DASS-21).

Results:

In an average week, 57.9% of participants meditated 3 times or more; 84.3% reported session duration of at least 6-10 minutes; 68.4% reported they were somewhat to extremely likely to continue formal meditation after the course ended. Paired sample t-tests indicated significant improvement in experiential avoidance, emotion dysregulation, nonjudgment, nonreactivity, and describing experience (all p 's < .003, using Bonferroni correction). Controlling for initial distress, regression analyses indicated describing experience and nonjudgment predicted depression; nonjudgment predicted anxiety; and experiential avoidance predicted stress.

Discussion & Conclusion:

Regular, brief, classroom meditation in conjunction with personalized practice improved mindfulness, which improved depression and anxiety. Findings suggest a robust impact of mindfulness practice outside of protocols, and that flexible implementation of mindfulness is attractive to students. Conclusions are limited given the small sample, lack of control group, and failure to standardize or equate practices. However, preliminary results may encourage future investigation of an array of mindfulness-based practices to stimulate student interest and promote personalized routines.