

Mindfulness and the quality of human motivation: A meta-analysis using self-determination theory

James N Donald¹, Baljinder K Sahdra², Emma Bradshaw², Geetanjali Basarkod², Jasper J Duineveld², Joseph Ciarrochi², and Richard M Ryan^{2,3}

1. University of Sydney Business School, Abercrombie Building (H70), Corner Abercrombie Street and Codrington Street, NSW, 2006, Australia

2. Institute for Positive Psychology and Education, Australian Catholic University, 25A Barker Rd, Strathfield, NSW, 2135, Australia

3. Professor of Psychology, Psychiatry & Education, 479 Meliora Hall, University of Rochester, NY, U.S.A.

Background and objectives: Studies of mindfulness and various forms of human motivation have proliferated in recent years, spanning many areas of human endeavour, and a disparate range of measures of motivation. This study sought to draw this emergent line of research together, using self-determination theory to explore the links between mindfulness and motivation, among both correlational and intervention studies.

Methods: A systematic review of the research literature identified 89 relevant studies, comprised of 104 independent datasets and 200 effect sizes. A total of 80 datasets reported correlations between mindfulness and motivation, while 24 datasets related to mindfulness intervention studies. Mixed effects structural equations modelling was used to conduct meta-analysis (Cheung, 2014).

Results: Among correlational studies, mindfulness was positively associated with autonomous forms of motivation and negatively associated with controlled forms of motivation, with medium-sized effects. Among intervention studies, randomized controlled mindfulness interventions predicted more autonomous motivation. Moderation analyses were conducted to probe heterogeneity in effects, including bias within studies.

Discussion and conclusions: Our findings show that mindfulness supports healthy and integrating forms of motivation, and suggest that mindfulness may be an important antidote to the pursuit of materialistic goals and values, across both age and gender lines. Future research of mindfulness interventions and motivation should seek to employ better quality study designs, and explore the differential effects of mindfulness on various forms of controlled motivation.