

The efficacy of an adapted MBCT program on stress reduction in prison personnel

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Working in correctional facilities is highly stressful. Long-term stress has a detrimental effect on physical and mental wellbeing of prison personnel and decreases their job efficiency. However, they have low motivation for participating in stress reduction programs due to fear of stigma. Additionally, the correctional system itself has strict regulations regarding program implementation. Therefore it is important to develop an effective, but also acceptable, program for stress reduction and burnout prevention. Mindfulness-based programs showed encouraging results in decreasing depression, anxiety and stress.

The aim of this study was to adapt the Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy program developed by Segal, Williams & Teasdale to be applicable for people who are experiencing high levels of stress – MBCT-S - and evaluate its clinical outcomes.

An 8-week MBCT-S was conducted in four different correctional institutions in Croatia with 49 members of prison staff, mostly professionals providing treatment and police officers. Measures of work related stress, anxiety, depression, general psychopathology and mindfulness were obtained at baseline, right after program completion and at two months follow-up.

MANOVA yielded a significant reduction in stress, anxiety, depression and general psychopathology and a significant increase in three of five mindfulness facets (observe, non-judge and non-react) right after the program. The outcomes were stable at two months follow-up. Although participants reported low outcome expectations at the beginning, they reported high subjective satisfaction at the end of the program.

Results suggest that MBCT-S is an acceptable program for prison staff and may be effective for reduction of work-related stress.