

A short dose comparison of pure mindfulness and compassion-focussed mindfulness: implications for reflection and rumination

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Background objectives

Previous research suggests that compassion-focussed application of mindfulness may confer additional benefits over and above traditionally 'pure' mindfulness applications. The current study examines the impact of a five-week intervention based on both the original MBSR model and a compassion focussed model upon measures of rumination, reflection, emotion regulation, daydreaming frequency, depression, imaginal processes and trait mindfulness.

Methods

Thirty five female and 5 male undergraduate psychology students were randomly assigned to either a 5-week version of the MBSR or a 5-week Compassion and loving kindness focussed version of MBSR.

Meditation practice consisted of a 2 hour weekly group session and daily 45 minute practices including a guided meditation practice, routine mindful activity, reflective journal, reflection on positive and unpleasant experiences, personal stress signature, and tasks identification of personal strengths and values. Guided meditation practices included a body scan toe to head, head to toe, scans of the feet, hands, and face. The compassionate condition group received 'loving kindness' versions with a focus on 'cradling the heart, hands, face etc.' and using the breath 'like loving hands'. Compassionate practices ended with a cue to 'breathe and let go'. Group sessions for both conditions incorporated sitting meditation, mindful movement and the mountain meditation.

Results

Both conditions reported significant improvements in reflection and poor attentional control. Improvement for both groups was positively correlated with number of sessions attended. Both conditions demonstrated a positive change in 'positive constructs' and the compassionate condition reported a significant gain in scores over and above that of the pure mindfulness condition. This gain was significantly correlated with amount of personal practice between group sessions.

Discussion and conclusion

The results suggest that short-dose (5 week) interventions continue to demonstrate positive impact for participants of mindfulness training. These findings speak directly to previous research outlining the potential benefits that compassion-focussed training may offer. The study suggests tentative optimism for the development of compassion-focussed interventions for participants who may report high levels of self-criticism and inner 'critical voice'.