

Principles of Clarity—Effects of a novel mindfulness workshop on improving mental well-being

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Background: In recent years, there has been much attention to the positive effects of mindfulness on mental well-being. To date, much of the focus has been on the effects of meditation, with studies showing that meditation improves self-reports of mindfulness, compassion and overall well-being. However, meditation does not appeal to everyone, especially because it is often viewed as being too time consuming. As such, we have been focusing on novel approaches for delivering mindfulness to people of all ages, with the goal of producing “transformative” effects in a short amount of time. To this end, we studied the effectiveness of an intensive and interactive workshop called “Principles of Clarity” (POC), created by Professor Dobkins at UC San Diego. This workshop incorporates principles from neuroscience, Buddhism, cognitive behavioral therapy, and positive psychology, and is led as either an 8- or 16-hour course. Most importantly, the focus is on getting clarity, which requires going straight to the heart of a matter, rather than clinging to the complicated “story” we typically tell about our situations. We asked whether 1) improvements in well-being can be seen from this short intervention, 2) effects depend on age, 3) effects are seen in both western (USA) and eastern (Hong Kong) cultures.

Methods: Participants who enrolled in the POC workshop filled out a variety of psychological questionnaires before and after taking the workshop. In the USA, data were collected from 108 participants, across three age groups (mean ages: 21, 35 and 72 years). In Hong Kong, data were collected from 37 participants (mean age = 29).

Results: Using general linear models, our findings show that the POC workshop enhances psychological well-being (i.e., self-acceptance, environmental mastery, and positive relations with others), increases feelings of hope, as well as the skills targeted in the POC workshop, and these effects are seen in both the USA and Hong Kong participants. In addition, the largest improvements are for the youngest age group tested.

Discussion: These results indicate that novel interactive workshops can be an effective approach in delivering mindfulness-based interventions to the community.