

## **Mindfulness-based stress reduction intervention for elementary school teachers: too soft or a solution?**

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### **Background and objectives**

Nowadays, teachers' workload in primary education has reached unacceptable levels (Grinsven, 2016). Approximately 56% of the teachers experiences high levels of work stress, and teachers are more likely to drop out from work or to develop mental illnesses such as burn-out, compared to other professions (CBS, 2017). Because of the high levels of stress for teachers in primary education, 18% of the starting teachers chooses for another profession within 5 years (TNO and CBS, 2015). There is a strong need for interventions that may help reduce experienced levels of work pressure and stress among primary education teachers.

In this pilot study we examined the effects of a mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) intervention on experienced stress, self-compassion and mental health of primary school teachers.

### **Methods**

The MBSR intervention is based on the Kabat-Zinn mindfulness program (Kabat-Zinn, 2004) and consists of 8 weekly sessions of 2 hours and a day of silence. For this study, three groups consisting of 6-11 participants followed the intervention from September until November. We used the Perceived Stress Scale, Mental Health Continuum, Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire, and the Self Compassion Scale to examine effects of the intervention. In total, 25 participants (4 % male) received the MBSR-intervention.

### **Results**

Preliminary analyses of pilot data (paired-sample t-tests) show that after the intervention participants reported lower levels of perceived stress ( $t(21) = -2.42, p = .03$ ), more mindfulness skills related to mental health ( $t(21) = 3.85, p = .00$ ), higher levels of self-compassion ( $t(17) = 4.26, p = .00$ ), and higher levels of general experienced mental health ( $t(18) = 4.46, p = .00$ ).

### **Discussion**

The results indicate that the MBSR intervention has potential to contribute to positive mental health and stress reduction in primary school teachers. This may, in turn, help to reduce drop-out and workplace absenteeism of teachers in primary education. However, further research using a randomized controlled trial design is needed to confirm these findings.