

A study exploring the impact of mindfulness training for doctoral students in psychology starting a clinical internship.

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Learning how to become a good psychologist is, in most university programs, based on gaining knowledge (to know) and getting to know how to use techniques (to know how). Little is taught about how to be. The reason for this is probably because of the abstract nature of the “knowing how to be” related to attitudinal aspects rather than behaviors or techniques. According to researchers (Gockel et al, 2013) this is problematic because of the importance of learning these attitudes, such as the therapeutic presence (Solhaug, 2016).

Interestingly, dimensions related to therapeutic presence, such as awareness of self and the client, concentration on the present moment without judgments are very similar to a mindfulness practice (Hemanth & Fisher, 2015). This analysis suggests that students in clinical training would benefit from learning mindfulness.

Objectives and method

This presentation will reveal the results of a study conducted with doctoral psychology students who participated in an 8-week mindfulness program (n=8). The impact of such program was evaluated (pre, post and 6-week follow-up) with a mixed evaluation protocol: the quantitative measures used were the French versions of the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (Baer et al, 2006) measuring mindfulness and the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI-Y) (Spielberger, 1983) measuring anxiety. Students also had to answer qualitative questions aiming to evaluate how the program had benefits or not on 1. Their own well-being; 2. The clients' well-being and 3. The therapeutic relationship.

Results and discussion

Quantitative results show that participating in a meditation group has a significant impact on mindfulness at posttest ($p < 0.01$) and at 8 week follow-up ($p = 0.11$). No significant differences were found for anxiety scores between pretest and the posttest and follow-up measure. Qualitative results reveal that students benefit the most at a personal level (self-compassion, less self-criticism). In a lesser degree, they saw benefits for the client (acceptance, empathy) and for the therapeutic relationship (tolerance of silences, concentration on present moment). We will discuss these results by referring to the complexity of learning mindfulness, the process of transferring personal gains to the clinical setting and the highly stressful context in which doctoral students live.