

# **Brief Mindfulness Intervention with College Students for the Reduction of Test Anxiety**

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**Background and Objectives:** The 2015 American College Health Assessment (ACHA) found 21.9% of students reported anxiety had affected their academic performance in the previous 12 months (i.e., receiving a lower grade on an exam or project, receiving an incomplete, or dropping a course). This represents an 18.2% increase from the 2008 ACHA findings. The 2015 study also found anxiety had surpassed depression as the leading mental health issue facing college students. A growing body of research has established that increases in mindfulness are associated with reductions in anxiety and stress among college students. Less common is research looking at the application of mindfulness interventions specifically for test anxiety. We conducted this pilot study to determine the efficacy of a brief mindfulness based intervention for the reduction of test anxiety in college students.

**Methods:** The pilot study was conducted with a sample of 9 undergraduate students (66.7% women) ages 18-30 (median 19) at a small rural northeastern college. Students were recruited in the Spring 2016 semester to take a 1-credit psychology course, Mindfulness for Test-Taking Anxiety. The study participants completed 5, 1-hour sessions of an intervention adapted from the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) 8-week curriculum.

**Results:** The difference between pre-intervention ( $m=3.2$ ;  $sd=1.6$ ) and post-intervention ( $m=2.4$ ,  $sd=0.47$ ) scores on the Westside Test Anxiety Scale was evaluated using a paired sample t-test. The one-tail test result indicated a statistically significant difference between the means ( $t=4.33$ ,  $df=8$ ,  $p=0.001$ ), indicating that test anxiety was lowered post-intervention. Of the 9 study participants, 8 reported a reduction in test anxiety, while 1 participant reported no change at post-intervention. Furthermore, 6 participants reported moderate to extremely high test anxiety at pre-intervention. Of these participants, 4 reported reductions that brought their scores into normal range.

**Discussion and Conclusion:** College student participants in the brief 5-session mindfulness based intervention reported significant reductions in test anxiety. The results of this pilot study suggest that a brief mindfulness based intervention could be used to reduce test anxiety in college students.