“Mindfulness in the justice system”

Day: Friday 13th July 2018
Time: 9:00 – 10:15 am
Track: Mindfulness in Society

The first presenter is Machteld Hoeve. She will talk about a study examining the effect of mindfulness training on stress, coping styles, and wellbeing of police officers.

Next, Nelleke van Zessen and Nienke Bouw will collectively share the results of two mixed methods pilot studies investigating Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction for inmates in Dutch prisons.

The final presenter is Christina Spinelli. She will discuss a study that seeks to quantitatively examine the social and clinical effects of an 8-week mindfulness and yoga training program for forensic inpatients.

Symposium overview

**Presenter 1**  
Machteld Hoeve - Effects of mindfulness training in police officers

**Presenter 2**  
Nelleke van Zessen - Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction for Inmates in Dutch prisons: Results of a mixed Methods pilot study

**Presenter 3**  
Nienke Bouw - Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction for Inmates in Dutch prisons

**Presenter 4**  
Christina Spinelli - Mindfulness and yoga training as adjunctive therapies in forensic patient treatment

**Chair:**  
Machteld Hoeve
Effects of mindfulness training in police officers

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Background and objectives. The work of police officers is considered to be one of the most stressful occupations. Police officers are confronted with stressful events or even life threatening situations, which elevates the risk of psychological and physical problems. Research has shown that officers reported higher levels of depression and post-traumatic stress symptoms than the general population. These symptoms may be explained by the use of inadequate coping styles. For example, officers are more likely to apply avoidant coping styles, while anti-avoidant strategies of mindfulness, acceptance, and emotional awareness are more effective in dealing with stress and promote mental health. A mindfulness training might be beneficial for police officers. Therefore, we examined the effect of mindfulness training on stress, coping styles, and wellbeing of police officers.

Methods. A trade union of police officers in the Netherlands (Nederlandse Politiebond) recruited members and provided access to the training. Participants received seven weekly mindfulness group trainings at academic treatment center UvA Minds You. Six groups with a maximum of 20 participants are trained. The study adopts a quasi-experimental design, with data measurements seven weeks before the start (waiting list), at pretest, posttest, and seven weeks after the training (follow-up). Data is collected by validated self-report questionnaires and analyzed by multilevel analysis. The study has been approved by the local Ethics Committee of the University of Amsterdam.

Results. Preliminary results of analyses of data of the first four training groups showed several significant improvements after the training. Police officers are more self-aware and report higher levels of self-compassion and attention. They report lower levels of work-related stress, less intrusions and avoidance of shocking events. They feel less stressed, more positive and happy, and report less sleeping problems. Further, they report that they are less preoccupied by problems and more actively address problems. As expected, changes were found during and after the training, but not before the training.

Discussion and conclusion. Mindfulness training in police officers seems promising in reducing stress-related problems and promoting well-being, based on preliminary findings. At the conference, the final results based on all training groups will be presented and discussed.
Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction for Inmates in Dutch prisons: Results of two mixed methods pilot studies

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Pilot study 1 – Nelleke van Zessen

Background: Severe stress and a poor capacity of handling stress combined with a lack of self-regulation can be seen as a major factor that leads to incarceration. Once in prison the stress of detention adds to this. Former research on the effects of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction in prisons in the United States points to positive effects of improving self-esteem and emotion regulation and reducing recidivism. However, the situation in the Netherlands has never been investigated.

Aim: We examined whether Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction might be a feasible and effective intervention for inmates in the Dutch Prison System.

Design: Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction is a training in which mindfulness practices are combined with psycho-education to help participants cope with distress. In this mixed methods pilot study, questionnaires on psychic and physical wellbeing (BSI), aggression (SDAS) and self-compassion (SF-SCS) were administered before and directly after the training. By asking the inmates to fill in an evaluation form in combination with interviews we gathered qualitative data.

Setting/participants: Inmates were recruited in 4 different penitential institutions in the Netherlands. A total of 80 inmates participated in 9 Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction trainings given by 3 different mindfulness trainers.

Results: 65 inmates completed the training. The dropout rate was determined for 40% by transfers to other prisons. Those who completed the training showed a mean presence of 91%. This rate was partly dependent on the efforts made by the trainers to reduce organizational and psychological burdens. The Brief Symptom Inventory and Aggression questionnaires showed significant improvements as well as the subscale ‘common humanity’ of the compassion-scale. The qualitative analysis reveal a noteworthy change in the consciousness of the inmates. They report less being carried away by strong emotions and more tranquility.

Conclusions: This pilot study shows that the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction training has been feasible and effective for inmates. Even so, many obstacles were met in this specific setting, both in the psychology of the participants and the repressive environment, which need more exploration. Succeeding depth qualitative investigation could provide us working hypotheses on the ‘working mechanism’ in this target group.
Pilot study 2 – Nienke Bouw

Introduction. Mindfulness is proven to be successful in the reduction of stress and to improve physical and mental health. The present study is a pilot study to investigate Mindfulness training in the context of prisons. Two aims leaded the study: the level of satisfaction with the Mindfulness based stress reduction (MBSR) training and the existence of bottlenecks (process evaluation), as well as outcomes after the training (effect evaluation).

Method. Mindfulness based stress reduction (MBSR) training was performed in five Dutch prisons. 25 inmates, 10 prison staff members and four MBSR instructors were interviewed. The interviews addressed process evaluation topics and outcomes of the training, including stress responsivity, coping style, inhibitory control, aggression and self-esteem.

Results. Inmates reported improvements in all these domains and expressed satisfaction with the training, so did instructors and other prison staff. Bottlenecks were mainly identified in practical issues regarding the organization of the training sessions.

Discussion. The results of this pilot study suggest potential benefits of mindfulness training in detention. New studies should investigate Mindfulness in longitudinal randomly controlled design studies, should strive for a multi-method approach, and distinguish between inmates regarding personality characteristics and intellectual abilities.
Mindfulness and yoga training as adjunctive therapies in forensic patient treatment

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Forensic in-patients (i.e. individuals found not responsible for a crime on account of mental illness) are often marginalized and difficult-to-treat which has led to the need for effective interventions. One proposed adjunctive therapy is mindfulness and yoga training as recent studies have shown their effectiveness with similar populations (ex. incarcerated and psychiatric groups). Currently, the Philippe-Pinel Institute (Canadian institution that treats forensic in-patients) runs an 8-week mindfulness and yoga training program. Anecdotal evidence suggests patients experience reduced stress and anxiety, better sleep, as well as higher self-esteem, emotional regulation, self-compassion, acceptance, and hope. The current study seeks to quantitatively examine the social and clinical effects of this program.

Methods: Participants of the training program (N = 7; Male = 5; ongoing recruitment) completed baseline, post-training, and three-month follow-up questionnaires. A wide breadth of measures was selected in order to examine many facets related to well-being. These include: trait mindfulness, global distress, anxiety, depression, stress, aggression, sleep quality, self-esteem, self-compassion, emotion regulation, and hope. All measures were chosen based on their availability in both French and English as well as their previous use with similar populations.

Results: To examine whether participants experienced significant and prolonged changes in their well-being, a multivariate analysis of variance will be used. It is predicted that changes will be most profound at follow-up.

Discussion/Conclusions: This literature mindfulness and yoga as adjunctive therapies is still in its infancy; especially for forensic in-patients. The current study addresses this gap and can inform other clinicians on developing similar mindfulness and yoga training programs at international institutions. Furthermore, this study can inform other researchers on the difficulties to be faced when studying this population and on mitigation strategies. This will open avenues for researching and supporting this vulnerable population.