



The Benefits of Mindfulness on Mental Health and Behavior



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Abstract

This study looked at how mindfulness can improve mental health and behavior. 21 participants completed a mindfulness video and pretest/posttest surveys. The hypothesis was supported, participants were calmer and more relaxed after the mindfulness activity. Mindfulness may be one way to help people deal with stress such as the COVID-19 pandemic and other daily challenges.

Introduction

Mindfulness is defined as active observing and awareness (Langer, 1989) during which people experience each moment with openness, curiosity and acceptance (Germer, 2005; Kabat-Zinn & Hanh, 2009; Kudesia & Nyima, 2014). Mindfulness can provide people with strategies to handle stress by developing an awareness of the moment (Khandelwal, 2020). Based on past research, we expect participants will feel more relaxed, less anxious, understand mindfulness better, and be more willing to use mindfulness in their daily lives after the mindfulness session than before.

Method

Participants

Twenty-one participants completed two surveys and a mindfulness video. Participants included eight students, six faculty, and seven staff. There were seventeen females and four males, with age ranges of 18 - 25 years (n = 7), 26 - 40 (n = 2), 41 - 65 (n = 11) and 66 and older (n = 1).

Materials

Participants completed a brief online SurveyMonkey survey asking them about their feelings and behaviors related to mindfulness before and after completing a 30-minute online mindfulness activity.

Procedure

The researchers sent an email to the PMC community explaining the general purpose of the study, consent form, and links to the survey and video. After agreeing to complete the study, participants answered several pretest questions related to their understanding of mindfulness, use of mindfulness or other relaxation techniques, and questions related to their level of anxiety, stress, relaxation, alertness, focus, and affect. They then completed a 30-minute guided mindfulness activity led by a certified trainer. After they completed the activity, they were asked to answer similar questions about their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors.

Results

Pre-Video vs. Post-Video

Participants answered the same eleven questions before and after completing the 30-minute mindfulness video. Because the prediction was that participants would feel more positive and relaxed after the activity, one-tailed paired-sample t-tests were conducted. Several questions were significantly different. Compared to before the mindfulness activity, after completing the mindfulness activity, participants felt calmer $t(20) = -3.16, p=.002$; more relaxed, $t(20) = -4.14, p<.001$; had a more positive about themselves, $t(20) = -3.29, p=.002$; were less anxious, $t(20) = 2.06, p=.026$; and were more in control of their emotions, $t(20) = -3.29, p=.002$. In addition, there was a marginally significant difference with participants feeling better able to concentrate and focus after the mindfulness activity ($M=3.86$) than before ($M=3.52$), $t(20) = -1.67, p=.055$ (see Table 1 for means).

Table 1: Mean Question Scores Before and After Mindfulness Activity

Question	Before	After
I am tense.	2.67	2.24
I am open to new experiences.	4.24	4.52
I feel calm.***	3.43	4.10
I feel that I am able to concentrate and focus.*	3.52	3.86
I feel: (sad – happy)	3.43	3.57
I feel so restless that it's hard to sit still.	2.29	2.14
I feel worried about things that don't matter.	2.33	2.38
I feel relaxed.****	3.00	4.05
I have a positive attitude towards myself.***	3.62	4.05
How anxious are you currently feeling:**	2.24	1.71
I feel in control of my emotions.***	3.86	4.29

Note. *Marginal significance, $p=.055$; ** $p <.05$; *** $p<.01$; **** $p<.001$. All questions, except for "I feel" and "How anxious are you currently feeling" were scored on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) scale. "I feel," was scored on a 1 (sad) to 5 (happy) scale; and "how anxious are you currently feeling" was scored on a 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely) scale.

Mindfulness Related Questions

Overall, participants felt positively about the mindfulness activity indicating they enjoyed the activity ($M=4.19, SD=.75$ on 5-point scale) and that mindfulness can help people decrease stress and anxiety ($M=4.52, SD=.60$ on a 5-point scale). A marginally significant difference was found with participants indicating higher likelihood of using mindfulness after completing the video.

Twice as many participants indicated they would consider using mindfulness two or more times per week after completing the video, $X^2(3)=6.98, p=.073$ (see Table 2 for percentages).

Table 2: Percentage of Using Mindfulness Before and After Watching Video

Question	Before (actual use)	After (intent)
never	10%	5%
a little bit (once/week)	52%	19%
moderate amount (2-3 times/week)	19%	52%
a lot (5-7 times/week)	19%	24%

Open-Ended Questions

Two open-ended questions appeared at the end of the second survey. One question asked participants how aware they were of their actions, thoughts, and feelings during the mindfulness activity. Ninety-one percent indicated they were aware of their actions, thoughts, and feelings during the mindfulness activity. The final question asked participants to comment on when and how they might use mindfulness in the future. Participants indicated mindfulness would be helpful in reducing stress and helping them become calmer and relaxed.

Discussion

We expected people would feel more positive and be more willing to use mindfulness in their daily lives after participating in a mindfulness session than before completing the session. Our hypothesis was supported. These results likely were due to some people never having tried mindfulness before, after which they were more receptive to trying new things and using mindfulness in the future. In the future, having more participants, especially males, would be helpful. We might have found stronger results if the mindfulness session was in-person rather than online, and if participants completed multiple mindfulness sessions. When someone is practicing mindfulness, they become self-aware, which lowers stress and leads to better reactions from people. Because mindfulness can help people control their negative emotions and stress (Donald et al., 2016), it could also help people deal with stressors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and other daily challenges, especially for college-aged students.