

Effects of Mindfulness on Psychological Well-being: A Scoping Review

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Abstract

Mindfulness is a concept that positively affects many aspects of a person's well-being. The term means to be aware of the present moment or to be present in the "here-and-now". Meditation consists of several types, but the main focus of the study is on mindfulness meditation, which is necessary for a person in the hustle and bustle of life. The article delves deeper into mindfulness, its contribution to well-being, and its measurement. A few minutes of mindfulness meditation can calm our minds, relax our bodies, and restore lost energy to our bodies. Mindfulness meditation can be practiced by keeping certain key points in mind and following a few simple steps. Mindfulness is beneficial in many ways, such as in improving and balancing physical, social, emotional, professional, societal, and spiritual well-being.

Keywords: Mindfulness, Well-being, Meditation, Self-awareness, Non-judgemental

Introduction

Mindfulness is the practice of acknowledging what a person is feeling without judging the emotions or sensations as he/she is experiencing them. (Psych Hub, 2020). It is an old Buddhist practice that has gained importance in psychotherapy such as in Hakomi, cognitive therapy, or Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction. (Harrer, 2009). Hakomi is a form of mindfulness-centered psychotherapy for somatic disorders which was developed by Ron Kurtz in the 1970s. (Hakomi, 2018). Mindfulness was initially proposed as a treatment modality for psychological disorders, but now it is being promoted as a means of enhancing both therapist self-care and therapeutic efficacy. (Aggs & Bambling, 2010).

Mindfulness has its roots in an ancient spiritual tradition known as the Buddhist tradition which is around 2,550 years old. Research on mindfulness meditation began in the 1960s and the late 1970s mindfulness meditation began to be studied as an intervention to enhance psychological well-being. According to the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn, mindfulness meditation is useful in treating patients with chronic pain. (Keng, et al., 2011). It has many other beneficial effects which will be discussed further in the review. Some of the various types of mindfulness meditation include transcendental meditation, breath awareness meditation, body scan meditation, loving-kindness meditation, and observation-thought meditation. These are just a few of the types. There are many more such types that are highly effective for a person's well-being. Though mindfulness meditation has a lot of benefits, a recent research study also found that it has shortcomings too. According to Hafenbrack, et al., mindfulness meditation can have the side effect in the form of reducing guilt in an individual and, thus, decreasing motivation to make amends. Loving-kindness meditation can put a person into a state of mindfulness by

increasing his/her positive emotions, but at the same time, it refrains from withdrawing undue attention to oneself. (Hafenbrack, et al., 2022). Therefore, learning the proper ways and techniques of practicing mindfulness can reduce such side effects to an extent to build a healthy lifestyle.

The Concept and Importance of Mindfulness

According to the American Psychological Association (APA, 2012), mindfulness is defined as: "... a moment-to-moment awareness of one's experience without judgment. In this sense, mindfulness is a state and not a trait. While it might be promoted by certain practices or activities, such as meditation, it is not equivalent to or synonymous with them." (Moore, 2021). Another definition comes from Jon Kabat Zinn, in Purser (2015), who has an important reputation worldwide for his work on Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR): "The awareness that arises from paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally." (Moore, 2021). Mindfulness means focusing on the present moment and slowing down to realize what you are doing. It means being aware of your present moment or your surroundings. It is a state of being open-minded and observing your thoughts and feelings without judging them as good or bad.

Practicing mindfulness has an array of benefits; research reveals that mindfulness has improved the psychological, physical, and cognitive spheres of life. Psychologically there are two major benefits of mindfulness, first, it helps in stress reduction, mindfulness is a simple and also a cost-effective way to reduce stress, and anxiety (Steffen, Austin, DeBarros, 2016). Another study conducted on undergraduates found that those higher in mindfulness were less stressed in both physical and psychological domains. (Hicks, et al., 2020). Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) therapy is a program that mixes up elements of mindfulness and yoga to help people address their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, which might lead to feelings of stress. Mindfulness-based therapies were also found to reduce stress and be effective in the treatment of anxiety (Agetern, et al., 2021). Secondly, practicing mindfulness leads to happiness. A study conducted in 2015 shows that mindfulness is positively related to happiness (Shultz and Ryan, 2015). In a recent study, it was found that mindfulness training given to patients with diabetes, showed an increase in their happiness measures and better control of their glucose levels. (Zarifanaiey, et al., 2020). Another study found that mindfulness is linked with enhanced happiness, reduced anxiety, and depression symptoms, further it is also connected with increased sense of purpose in life (Crego, et al., 2021).

Mindfulness practices also have a positive impact on memory, a study conducted in 2016 revealed that a three-minute session improves memory performances (Lloyd, et al. 2016). The result of a study showed that mindfulness practices reduce proactive interference and improve short-term memory during memory tests (Elkin-Frankston, et al. 2018).

Research shows that mindfulness also has physical benefits, one of the studies found a connection between mindfulness and improvements in lower back pain, rheumatoid arthritis, psoriasis, Type-2 diabetes, and fibromyalgia (Cash, et al., 2015). A review conducted on studies consisting of patients with clinical conditions (such as heart disease, cancer, and chronic pain patients) and another group of non-clinical stressed patients found that Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Therapy (MBSR) has improved the overall features of coping with distress in everyday life. (Grossman, et al., 2004).

Mindfulness training has been shown to improve the condition of cancer patients. A study was conducted on early-stage breast cancer patients and it was found that mindfulness not only reduced their stress, fatigue, and sleep disturbances but also enhanced their immune system (Janusek, Tell, & Mathews, 2019).

Defining Well-being

Well-being refers to the feeling or experience of health, wealth, and happiness that consists of good mental health, high life satisfaction, and a sense of meaning or purpose. Well-being, as a concept, is broad. It arises from our thoughts, actions, and experiences, most of which we can control. For example, when we think positively, we may be prone to greater emotional well-being. Finding meaningful relationships leads to better social well-being. When a person loses his/her job or doesn't like the job, he/she tends to have less well-being in the workplace. The followings are six main types of well-being:

Table 1: Six Types of Well-being (Drevitch, 2019)

Emotional Well-being	It is the ability to practice relaxation exercises, become resilient, develop self-care practices, and generate emotions that lead to positive feelings.
Physical Well-Being	It is the ability to improve the functioning of our bodies through healthy and good living exercise habits.
Social Well-being	It is the ability to communicate, build meaningful relationships with others, and maintain a support network that helps us to be social.
Workplace Well-being	It is the ability to pursue our interests, values, and purpose in life to achieve happiness and professional enrichment.
Societal Well-being	It is the ability to actively participate in a wealthy community, culture, and environment.
Spiritual Well-being	It is the ability to experience and integrate the meaning and purpose of life through a person's connection to himself and others or a power greater than himself. It is about our inner life and its relationship to the world, in general.

We need to make sure that all of these six types of wellness are functioning in a balanced way to build our overall well-being. If the level of even one type of well-being is too high or too low in comparison to the other types of well-being, then there will be an imbalance and our whole body and mind will be in the process of disfunction just like a machine when one of its parts gets damaged the whole machine becomes of no use and it requires to be repaired. All these well-being types are interlinked with one another. A person can increase their physical well-being by eating healthy and with proper physical activity. This helps our body and mind to freshen up which makes the person feel good. Feeling good, taking out time for oneself and others leads to both social and emotional well-being. As we all know, a human being is a social animal and engaging with people with a positive attitude and kindness will reduce the amount of loneliness one can feel when socially withdrawn. Sharing thoughts and feelings with our loved ones and spending time with them is a very important practice for a healthy mind and body. Workplace and societal well-being are equally important in a person's life. If a person is unhappy and dissatisfied professionally, it will also hamper a great deal on their personal, emotional and social

life. (Drevitch, 2019). And lastly, spiritual well-being helps a person enhance the overall quality of life (Akbari & Hossaini, 2018).

Relationship between Mindfulness and Well-being

We devote a lot of time on planning, problem-solving, daydreaming, or having negative or random thoughts that can be stressful. Because of this, we are more likely to experience stress, anxiety, and symptoms of depression. We can put in a little time each day practicing mindfulness exercises to divert our attention from this type of thinking and to engage with the world around us. Mindfulness is an essential part of well-being and is the need of the hour in dealing with today's stressful life situations. Therefore, the study aims to focus on the importance of mindfulness and its contribution to improving the well-being of an individual, which is very important for the population in coping with the circumstances of daily living. This review tries to highlight the main areas of the topic in detail with the sole aim of understanding and gaining more knowledge and spreading awareness of the application of mindfulness in the practical world.

When we are aware of the present moment, we can enjoy the world around us more and understand ourselves better. With mindfulness, we automatically give way to attitudes that contribute to a satisfying life. Mindfulness makes it easier for us to enjoy the joys in life when they arise, helps us focus fully on what we enjoy doing, and creates a better ability to deal with adverse events. Mindfulness has an ample of benefits and generates well-being by reducing the levels of anxiety, depression and pain of individuals (Behan, 2020). A review study found that people with health conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, or cancer had a significant reduction in blood pressure when they practiced mindfulness-based stress reduction (Intarakamhang, et al., 2020). Brief mindfulness meditation improves mood, reduces fatigue and also improves visuo-spatial processing, working memory and executive functioning. It enhances the ability to sustain attention (Zeidan, 2010). A study found that higher mindfulness leads to fewer negative emotions. This further leads to better sleep quality of individuals (Ding, et al., 2020).

Measurement of Mindfulness

Measuring mindfulness seems like an impossible, as the question of how does one measure awareness of their own thoughts and feelings arises. There are two aspects of mindfulness that should be addressed before attempting to measure it, i.e., state mindfulness and trait mindfulness. State refers to a flexible condition which is fluid in nature and one can move in and out of it voluntarily. It influences the perception of the world. Traits on the other hand are permanent in nature and are persistent characteristics of personality based on the genetics. Trait is a central part of one's personality and it is the unique description of a person. State mindfulness refers to a temporary state of awareness in which the participant has the ability to stay present and withstand distractions while being mindful of their thoughts and feelings. Trait mindfulness on the other hand is permanent in nature, it is the ability to enter a mindful perspective at willingly, in this the individual is focused on being present and accepts their thoughts and feelings without any judgement (Ackerman, 2017).

In the recent years research on mindfulness treatments for education, health, and mental health has increased to a great extent. (Farias & Wikholm 2016). A lack of a standard operational definition for mindfulness is a common problem. (Lutz, 2015). There are several challenges to measuring both state

and trait mindfulness. It is impossible to measure mindfulness while the subject is practicing it, post-measurement is not reliable as the subject's account is based on their ability to recall the experience. This is also a challenge in the self-report measures along with the subject's report being affected by social desirability, i.e., our tendency to give socially acceptable answers.

One of the most popular scales for measuring mindfulness is The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) developed by Kirk Warren Brown and Richard M. Ryan in 2003. It uses two cognitive components, i.e., attention and awareness. It measures the tendency to be mindful or mindless over cognitive, emotional, physical, and other general domains using 15 questions. The participant's response is measured on a scale of 1-6, one = almost always, six = almost never. High overall score indicates a high level of dispositional mindfulness. Lower reactions to stress situations are linked with higher levels of trait mindfulness (Weinstein, 2009) and improved mental health outcomes (Shapiro, 2011).

MAAS is validated among different groups, including college students, community adults, and cancer patients. Around five different translations are available for this scale. It has further integrated adolescent and child perspectives with the increasing research in the area of childhood interventions in mindfulness practice (Brown, 2011). Its validation has contributed in carrying out research and in the development of positive psychology interventions.

Next is the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) which is a trait mindfulness measure, developed by Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, and Toney in 2006. It was originally called the Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills (KIMS), it was first developed to measure mindfulness in Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) participants, some of the terms used in this measure are similar to the terms used by DBT therapists (Baer, 2004). The FFMQ that tests whether there is a correlation between mindfulness and the decrease in clinical symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. It also measures the effectiveness of other mindfulness strategies such as Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy and Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Therapy. (Baer, et al. 2006). FFMQ measures five factors: observing, describing, acting with awareness, non-judging of inner experience, and non-reactivity to inner experience (Baer, 2008). The respondents answer to 39 questions and their responses are measured on a 5-point Likert scale, and the summation of the direct and reverse-scored items give the total score. This scale is considered reliable by other researchers and this measure was found to correlate highly with the related constructs of openness to experience, emotional intelligence, and self-compassion (Baer, et al., 2006).

One of the earliest mindfulness scales based on mindfulness as a state is the Toronto Mindfulness Scale (TMS) developed by Lau in 2006. The TMS consists of two subscales - the curiosity subscale, and the decentring subscale. Decentring is the ability to step back from negative thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations that arise during a meditation exercise. In a later version of the Toronto Mindfulness Scale questions that measure trait mindfulness were included (Davis, 2009).

Other measures of mindfulness include The Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale which measures trait mindfulness and it was first developed in 2005 by Kumar, Feldman, and Hayes, The Solloway Mindfulness Survey (SMS) developed by Solloway and Fisher, Jr. in 2007 to track the progress of

mindfulness in students after they learn and engage in mindfulness practice, The Philadelphia Mindfulness Scale was developed in 2008 by researchers Cardaciotto, Herbert, Forman, Moitra, and Farrow. It measures mindfulness as a bi-dimensional construct, composed of present-moment awareness and acceptance of the present state. Lastly, The State Mindfulness Scale (SMS) was designed by Tanay and Bernstein in 2013 to address the lack of state mindfulness measurements in psychological literature. It influenced by a combination of the traditional Buddhist perspective and the modern mindfulness perspective, which views mindfulness as a trait.

Understanding and Quantification of Mindfulness Meditation

Mindfulness meditation refers to a mental training practice in which we learn to slow down our racing thoughts, let go of negativity, and calm both our mind and body. As a state of mind, it implies that we concentrate fully on the “here-and-now” so that we can recognize and accept our thoughts, feelings, and sensations without judgment. There are three key elements of mindfulness: conscious awareness (paying attention to purpose); non-judging (not seeing things as good or bad or looking through the filter of personal judgments based on past conditioning, but seeing things as they are); and not being reactive (reacting is automatic which means there is no choice and may not necessarily be best for you or others). In Full Catastrophe Living (1990), Jon Kabat-Zinn described seven specific traits, qualities, or attitudes that form a basis for mindfulness. These apply directly as we cultivate and deepen mindfulness.

Table 2: The attributes of Mindfulness (Baumgardner & Crothers, 2019)

Non-judging	We must be able to recognize the judgments we make automatically and be aware of them so that we can begin to reduce them.
Patience	We should not worry too much about the future as the events of our lives unfold over time. We must understand and accept this with patience.
Beginner’s Mind	In life, each one of us is unique with unique possibilities, and things keep on changing. Therefore, we should start having a beginner’s mind and never stop learning. Learning is an ongoing process.
Trust	We can get peace if we start trusting ourselves, our beliefs, and our intuition, and let our ideals guide us in life.
Non-striving	It is the practice of recognizing and embracing who we are, and not striving to be different or better.
Acceptance	We should learn to accept the way things are instead of complaining about them.
Letting Go	We must practice how to free ourselves of worry, and focus on the present to be mindful.

Mindfulness helps us to distinguish between reality and illusion – between the world as experienced through our self-generated thoughts and the world as it is. It is a way to observe the processes of our mind from a perspective similar to that of outside, non-judgmental observer. Techniques of mindfulness meditation can vary, but in general, it involves deep breathing and awareness of the body and mind. To start, all we need is a comfortable place to sit, three to five minutes of free time, and a judgment-free mindset.

Practicing Mindfulness Meditation

Practicing mindfulness meditation is a simple task that does not require much space, time, or effort. It can be done anywhere and any time the person wishes to practice. If you devote only 5 minutes of mindfulness meditation every day to your busy life schedule, it becomes a very important habit of our mind and body to relax and experience a calming effect. It helps to regain and restore lost energy, which enables us to do our work calmly and effortlessly and to cope with any type of stressful event without much difficulty.

Table 3: Six Steps to Mindfulness Meditation (Miller, 2015)

Choose a Comfortable Place	Choose a quiet place where you will not be disturbed. It can be a room in your home where you can be alone and in peace.
Position Yourself	You can sit cross-legged on a low pillow on the floor or upright in a chair. Some people prefer to lie down and meditate.
Relax	Slowly close your eyes, set a timer for five minutes if you are a beginner, and take a few deep, clean breaths first. Breathe deeply (but naturally) in through your nose and out through your nose or mouth – however you feel comfortable. Make sure the breaths flow into your abdomen.
Pay Attention to Your Breathing	Pay attention to the sound of your breath as you breathe in and out. Feel that as you breathe in, you breathe in all the peaceful, happy, and positive things around you, and as you breathe out, you are releasing your mind and body from all the stress, toxins, and negativity that has been bothering you. Let your mind be fascinated by the rhythmic pattern of your breathing.
Observe, Acknowledge and Centre Your Thoughts	It is normal for your mind to be distracted from your breaths. All you have to do is notice and acknowledge the thoughts to bring your focus back to the centre, back to your breaths, in the immediate vicinity. What sounds do you hear? How do you feel right now, at this present moment? Try, as much as possible, not to repeatedly think about the past or worry about the future, but be present in this pure moment.
Practice Regularly	Meditation takes practice just like exercise. The more we practice, the better we get and the stronger the mindfulness muscle becomes. Only about five to ten minutes of meditation per day has been shown to make an enormous difference to well-being after just eight weeks of practice.

These steps are easy to follow and will be able to provide positive results to a person who sincerely practices mindfulness meditation to gain a better quality of life.

Discussion

Mindfulness is a concept that refers to purposely focusing our attention on or being aware of the present moment and accepting it without judgment. Much scientific research has been conducted on mindfulness and it is a key element in stress reduction and overall happiness. Mindfulness originated in the East, especially in Buddhism, but most religions include some type of prayer or meditation technique that helps shift our thoughts away from our usual preoccupations toward an appreciation of the moment and

a larger perspective on life. It is now borrowed by the West and is a popular concept practiced there. (Selva, 2017). Mindfulness meditation helps to reduce the number of symptoms of different mental illnesses, and therefore, enhance the mental health and overall well-being of an individual.

Professor Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder and former director of the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical Centre, brought the practice of mindfulness meditation into mainstream medicine and demonstrated that practicing mindfulness can bring improvements in both physical and psychological symptoms as well as positive changes in health, attitudes, and behaviours of people. By being mindful, we can experience and enjoy the pleasures in life as they occur and become fully engaged in activities, creating a greater capacity to deal with adverse events. People practicing mindfulness focus on the “here-and-now” and are less likely to get caught up in worries about the future or regrets over the past. They are less preoccupied with concerns about success and self-esteem and are better able to form deep connections with others which helps them lead a prosperous and healthy life. (HelpGuide.org, n.d.).

It is important to note here that mindfulness is not a therapy, but can be an essential part of therapy. It cannot cure mental disorders or their physical and psychological symptoms but can help in reducing them and, thus, enhance the overall well-being of a person. Therefore, this practice should not be used as the one-and-all or sole technique for treatment purposes. Another limitation is that this technique cannot be used for individuals / clients / patients who lose the touch or connection with reality (For example, with schizophrenic patients). Mindfulness can only be practiced by people who have a touch with reality. However, mindfulness meditation can be practiced regularly even by a layperson by taking out a few minutes of his/her daily busy schedule to keep a balance between all the various aspects of well-being and living a healthy lifestyle.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to study the importance of mindfulness and its contribution to well-being with the purpose of understanding and gaining knowledge on how to apply it in our practical life. Thus, it can be concluded from the research that mindfulness is very effective and beneficial for improving and enhancing the well-being of an individual if practiced regularly even for just 5 to 10 minutes a day. To lead a happy, healthy, and stress-free life, mindfulness practice can be one of the simple, measurable and best technique for an individual.

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