

# The Effect of Mindfulness Meditation on Life Satisfaction and Self-Esteem

Liam Hart Department of Psychology Grand Valley State University

## Introduction

Mindfulness meditation has seen a surge in popularity in recent years as a simple practice to improve mental health. As a result, there is an increasing amount of research studies being conducted to determine the actual psychological effects of mindfulness.

Mindfulness meditation has many advantages over other interventions. It is cost-effective, simple to practice, and convenient; it can be practiced at virtually any time and place. The purpose of meditation is to train a specific type of attention and way of thinking, called mindfulness.

Older adults have the highest rates of health care needs of any age group. Consequently, many are prescribed a large amount of pharmaceutical drugs which has only increased over time. Mindfulness meditation offers a non-pharmacological approach to treating psychological negative affect older adults.

## What is Mindfulness?

- Mindfulness is a way of thinking
- Originates from the teachings of Buddha and Eastern culture
- Defined as the awareness that arises through intentionally attending to one's moment-to-moment experience in a nonjudgmental and accepting way (Shapiro et al. 2008)
- An enhanced attention and awareness of the present moment (Brown & Ryan 2004)
- Meditation is the practice of cultivating mindfulness
- Simply noticing both internal and external sensations without judgement, openly noticing what is there
- Mindfulness-based programs for stress reduction and cognitive therapy are often used in research studies and for clinical applications



## Mindfulness-Based Programs

### Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

- 8 weeks of weekly 2.5 hour mindfulness training sessions with one 6-hour retreat
- Sessions include body scan, meditation, and yoga
- Moderately effective at reducing depression, stress, anxiety and pain (Khoury et al. 2015)

### Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)

- 8 weeks of weekly 2.5 hour mindfulness training sessions with one 6-hour retreat
- Sessions include cognitive behavioral therapy and mindfulness practices
- Effective at treating for anxiety (Helmes & Ward 2017) and preventing depressive relapses (White 2015)
- Aims to train participants to distance themselves from thoughts and emotions rather than being controlled by them

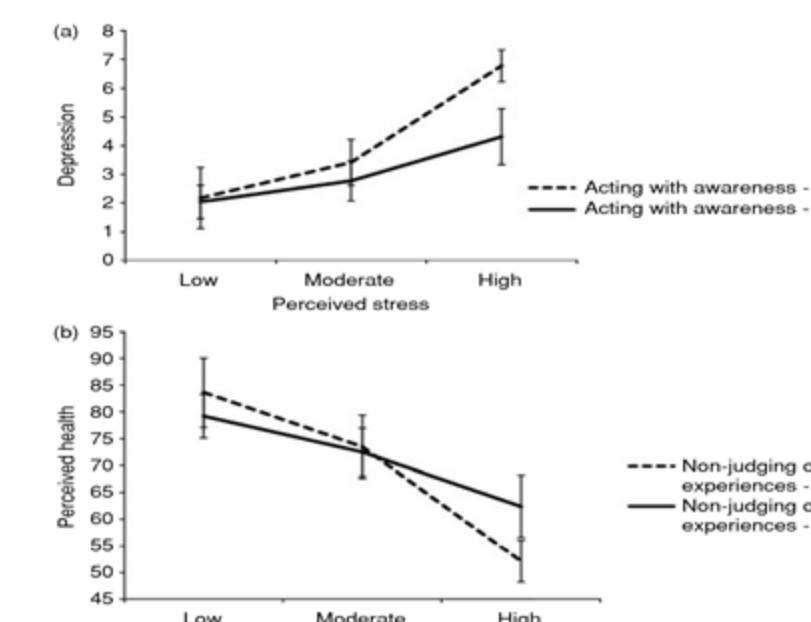
The cultivation of mindful awareness is the foundation for both programs

## Benefits of Mindfulness Meditation

### On Life Satisfaction and Self-Esteem in Younger Adults

There are not many studies focusing on life satisfaction and self-esteem in an aging population, so we had to generalize the results from studies on younger adults. Both MBSR and MBCT have been shown to be effective interventions to improve life satisfaction and self-esteem

Mindfulness was also found to be associated with lower neuroticism and higher self-esteem, life satisfaction, optimism, and self-actualization. This supports that the cultivation of mindfulness through meditation can increase life satisfaction and self-esteem. (Brown & Ryan 2003)



Large random sample (N=1000) of Swedish individuals aged 18-60. Increases in well-being and decreases in stress and anxiety showed strong associations with facets of mindfulness (Brantstrom et al. 2011)

MBCT was shown to increase life satisfaction in adolescents with suicidal ideation. Significant improvements were found in all measured psychological constructs (Raj et al. 2019)

VARIABLE	Pre-test Score		Post-test Score		$t_{(DF= 29)}$
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Life Satisfaction	11.85	1.03	31.86	2.06	28.15***
Life Orientation	7.59	1.08	21.40	1.52	39.87***
Depression	29.55	4.70	15.53	2.74	22.78***
Suicidal Ideation	19.23	1.19	6.73	0.89	44.81***

### On Anxiety, Depression, and Loneliness in Older Adults

Although there is limited research on the effects of meditation in older adults, especially in regard to life satisfaction and self-esteem, there are studies on psychological effects. Anxiety, depression, and loneliness are negatively correlated with measures of life satisfaction and self-esteem (Heady et al. 1993) (Pyszczynski et al. 2004) (Doyle & Forehand 1984)

In a randomized controlled trial, MBCT was shown to improve anxiety symptoms for 52 older adults in residential care (Helmes & Ward 2017)

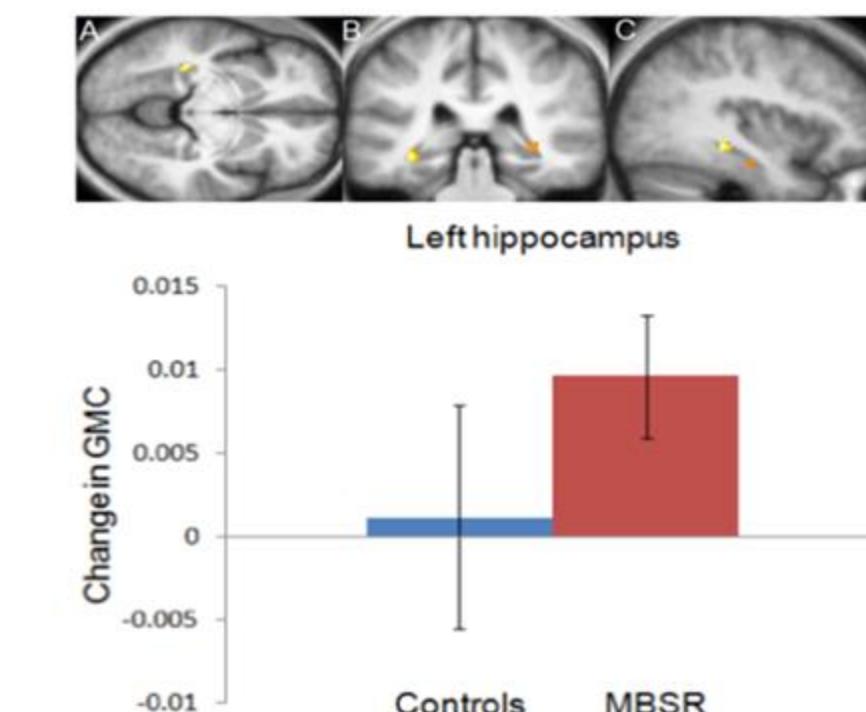
In a meta-analysis of mindfulness-based programs, MBCT was moderately effective in reducing depression in older people. MBSR was also found to reduce symptoms of worry, anxiety, stress, and chronic lower back pain (Kishita et al. 2017)

MBSR showed a significant decrease in loneliness for 40 older adults. Pro-inflammatory genes, which are increased in lonely adults and play a major role in the development of late-life diseases, were also shown to be down-regulated as a result of the meditation program (Creswell et al. 2012)

### Factors That Contribute to Life-Satisfaction and Self-esteem

Fredrickson et al. (2018) found that positive emotions increased with minutes of meditation per day in 339 middle-aged adults practicing mindfulness meditation and loving-kindness meditation. In-the-moment positive emotions have been shown to increase life satisfaction (Cohn et al. 2009).

Significant increase in hippocampus volume Scanned two weeks after MBSR intervention (Hozel et al. 2011). The hippocampus regulates emotions and depressed individuals have been shown to have reduced hippocampal volume (Videbæk & Ravnkilde 2004)



## Proposed Study: The Effect of Mindfulness Meditation on Life Satisfaction and Self-Esteem in Retirement Home Residents

### Rationale

- Limited studies on the effect of meditation in an aged population
- Less intensive and more accessible to retirement home residents than MBSR and MBCT

**Participants:** Residents at Lincoln Square Independent Living Center

### Pre-test

- Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS)
- Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)
- Mini-Mental Status Exam (MMSE): Participants with similar scores on the MMSE will be paired then randomly assigned to the experimental or control group

### Intervention

- Experimental group meets for 8 weeks with 3 weekly session consisting of a 10-minute guided meditation
- Daily meditation will be encouraged
- Control group will be told they are on a waitlist to receive the intervention at a later date

### Post-test

- Life satisfaction and self-esteem will be measured again at the end of the intervention with the SWLS and RSES
- Intervention group responses on pre- and post-tests will be compared to examine for significant changes in life-satisfaction and self-esteem
- Score differences will also be compared from the intervention group to the control group to assess the effectiveness of meditation as an intervention

## Implications of Pilot Study

- Adds to the growing research on mindfulness-based interventions
- Assess the effectiveness of a less intensive mindfulness program than MBSR and MBCT
- Experimental design to determine cause and effect relationship of meditation on life satisfaction and self-esteem, not correlational
- Quick guided meditation sessions could be a convenient, non-pharmacological and cost-effective treatment for retirement home residents that have anxiety, depression, or low self-esteem
- Potential to be implemented in any retirement home without much difficulty

## Future Studies

- Need for active control groups that receive clinical treatment
- More long term studies - most data is taken within 3 months (Chiesa & Serretti 2009)
- Larger sample sizes - most studies have small samples (n=~40)
- Long-term follow up assessments to examine whether the effects are transient or long-lasting
- Samples of experienced meditators
- Different types of meditation - Zen, loving-kindness, transcendental, and mindfulness are only a few of the many meditation techniques

## Contact Information

Liam Hart - [hartli@mail.gvsu.edu](mailto:hartli@mail.gvsu.edu) email me with any questions or for references