



Navigating anxiety and stress through mindfulness

Martha Traverso-Yepe, PhD
Division of Community Health and
Humanities, Faculty of Medicine,
MUN

Andrew Safer,
Mindfulness Instructor and
workshop facilitator

*Psychiatry Annual Research and Awards
June 24th, 2016*



Evaluation of five series of the program *Navigating anxiety and stress through mindfulness*

Presentation Outline

- Current increase in various expressions of psychological suffering
- Brief description of the mindfulness approach of this program
- Evaluation aim and pre-post evaluation process
- What the evaluation process showed
- Final considerations



Increase in chronic expressions of psychological suffering

- Different forms of anxiety and difficulty in dealing with stress
 - 23% of Canadians older than 15 years old and 30% in the age range of 35 to 54 years of age (Stats Canada, 2014)
- Impact (Crompton, 2011):
 - On the health care system
 - On the economy (reduced work output, absenteeism, disability claims)
 - On the lives and well-being of these individuals and their families



Efficacy of mindfulness interventions in clinical settings

- Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) is the most common form of clinical intervention (Kabat-Zinn, 2013)
- Publications on clinical applications on the rise, from 100 in 2005 to 1,500 in 2015, including systematic reviews (Baer, 2003; Grossman et al. 2004; Chiesa & Serreti, 2009; Hoffman et al. 2010; Fjorback et al. 2011)
- Mindfulness-based therapeutic approaches typically being used for different health issues (i.e. cancer treatment, heart and other chronic health conditions)
- Mainly to reduce symptoms of anxiety, stress, and depression frequently associated with these conditions



The
mindfulness
approach of
this program
and its
delivery...

Intervention in a
non-clinical setting



Program

- 8 weeks, 2.5-hr weekly sessions
- Community-based facility
- Modest fee
- Self-referred and clinician referred
- No clinician involvement
- Mindfulness instruction and guidance
- Practice, Discussion, PowerPoint, Readings, Worksheets



Program Outline

- Introduction to Mindfulness
- Mindfulness and Awareness
Meditation and Anxiety / Stress
- Anxiety and Worry: Imagination vs.
Reality
- Attention: Our Precious Resource
- Stress: Reacting vs. Responding
- Fear and Fearlessness
- Basic Goodness: A Breath of Fresh Air

Key aspects of the intervention

- Development of self-knowledge through mindfulness practices
- Grounding (a present-moment orientation)
- Relationship with thoughts: recognition and non-dwelling
- Relationship with feelings / emotions and discomfort: accepting and non-reactive
- Non-judgmental attitude
- Kindness towards oneself





The pre-post program evaluation

- **Aim:**

To assess the process and participants' perceived outcomes from this intervention

Quantitative Evaluation (1)

Group #	Number of Participants Who Completed	Average Pre-Intervention Score	Average Post-Intervention Score	Average Improvement
1	8	38.9	52.6	13.7
2	11	37.4	56.5	19.1
3	7	42.0	61.0	19.0
4	9	47.1	59.1	12.0
5	5	35.9	53.6	17.7
Combined	40	40.3	56.6	16.3

Number of participants and average improvement score by group and combined (40%)

Quantitative Evaluation (2)

Evaluation Statement	Average improvement for participants
I get stuck with the storylines that can make me feel anxious and I don't know how to pause or interrupt this pattern	1.6
I think over and over about things that have already happened	1.45
My storylines keep the everyday stress rolling and pull me out of the present moment	1.4
This pattern of not being fully present in my immediate experience is normal for me	1.3
I have difficulty accepting things as they are	1.25

Evaluation statements with the highest change

Qualitative evaluation (1)

What are some of the main points you remember about mindfulness?

Categories	Frequency
Increased awareness of thoughts/of what is happening around me/ being present in the moment	22
Relation of thoughts to emotions and recognizing negative thoughts before they escalate	8
Recognizing and breaking away from habitual patterns/interrupting storylines	8
Living in the present/seeing the bigger picture/being more connected	7
Accepting discomfort	6
Trying not to be judgmental	3

Qualitative evaluation (2)


How helpful has this workshop series been for helping you deal with anxiety and stress?

Extremely helpful = 12
Very helpful = 14
Somewhat helpful = 14

<i>In what ways has this workshop series been helpful?</i> Categories	Frequency
Learning a new technique and practicing a new way to deal with anxiety and stress	14
Allowing negative thoughts and emotions to arise and dissolve	8
Being more open and less depressed/pausing more/being more mindful in the present/ being OK with emptiness	6
Realizing that not controlling things makes me anxious (security pattern is threatened)	5
Not resisting change and accepting what comes (pleasant or unpleasant)/we don't control everything	5

Final Considerations

- Participants began the program hoping to “get rid of” anxiety and stress
- Instead: “turning towards” their experience, whether it is pleasant or unpleasant made a difference
- Basic shift: relating to “what is” rather than what might be, and the development of a non-judgmental attitude towards one’s experience
- Appreciation of learning in a collegial environment, where “the problem” was not the focus.



“[Mindfulness] has helped me with shifting perspective. For example, it’s OK to let the feeling be. I’m really believing now that there are times when you accept things as they are.”

Thank you!

Acknowledgment: To Julie Huntington, B.Sc., Jeff Doucet, MSW, RSW and Joshua Bragg, B.Sc. for transcribing, categorizing, and tabulating portions of the qualitative and quantitative evaluation data.

Contact information:

mtraverso@mun.ca

andrew@safermindfulness.com

www.safermindfulness.com