Evidence Base: Mindfulness & Mental Health / Addictions

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Over the last 20 years or so, a significant number of research studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of mindfulness meditation and related practices in relation to mental health (particularly anxiety and depression) and addictions, through Mindfulness-Based Relapse Prevention and other specialized programs.

What follows is a sampling of these studies. Many more are available online.

Anxiety

   - Based on 39 studies, including 1,140 participants.
   - “Results suggest that mindfulness-based therapy is a promising intervention for treating anxiety and mood problems in clinical populations.”

   - “A previous study of 22 medical patients with DSM-III-R-defined anxiety disorders showed clinically and statistically significant improvements in subjective and objective symptoms of anxiety and panic following an 8-week outpatient physician-referred group stress reduction intervention based on mindfulness meditation.”
   - In the three-year follow up, researchers noted maintenance of the gains that had been reported previously.
   - “We conclude that an intensive but time-limited group stress reduction intervention based on mindfulness meditation can have long-term beneficial effects in the treatment of people diagnosed with anxiety disorders.”

(Over)

- 11 participants with a mean age of 49 completed the study.
- “MBCT may be an acceptable and potentially effective treatment for reducing anxiety and mood symptoms and increasing awareness of everyday experiences in patients with GAD”.

**Depression**


- 145 recovered recurrently depressed patients participated in either the study group or treatment as usual.
- “For patients with 3 or more previous episodes of depression (77% of the sample), MBCT significantly reduced risk of relapse/recurrence.”
- For patients with only two previous episodes, this was not the case.


- Individuals with lifetime mood disorders underwent an 8-week training in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction.
- The principal change anticipated was a reduction in ruminative tendencies.
- “Overall, the results suggest that MM (mindfulness meditation) practice primarily leads to decreases in ruminative thinking, even after controlling for reductions in affective symptoms and dysfunctional beliefs.”


- “We aimed to see whether MBCT with support to taper or discontinue antidepressant treatment (MBCT-TS) was superior to maintenance antidepressants for prevention of depressive relapse or recurrence over 24 months.”
- 212 patients were in the MBCT group, and 212 patients were in the maintenance antidepressant group.
- “The time to relapse or recurrence of depression did not differ between MBCT-TS and maintenance antidepressants over 24 months… nor did the number of serious adverse events.”
Addictions


   - 54 randomized controlled trials (2009 - 2017) involving mindfulness-based interventions for substance (e.g. smoking and alcohol) and behavioral (e.g. gambling) addictions were included in the development of a narrative synthesis.
   - “These treatments were successful for reducing dependence, craving, and other addiction-related symptoms by also improving mood state and emotion dysregulation.
   - “The revised literature shows support for the effectiveness of the MBIs. Future research should focus on longer follow-up assessments as well as on adolescence and young population…”


   - “The mindfulness practices in MBRP are intended to increase discriminative awareness, with a specific focus on acceptance of uncomfortable states or challenging situations without reacting ‘automatically.’”
   - “A recent efficacy trial found that those randomized to MBRP, as compared with those in a control group, demonstrated significantly lower rates of substance use and greater decreases in craving following treatment.
   - [Note: Co-author Sarah Bowen was co-author of the ground-breaking book, *Mindfulness-Based Relapse Prevention for Addictive Behaviors*]


   - This study compared mindfulness-based relapse prevention (MBRP) with standard relapse prevention (with cognitive behavioural therapy).
   - 105 women were referred by the criminal justice system.
   - “At 15-week follow up, regression analyses found women in MBRP, compared to RP, reported significantly fewer drug use days and fewer legal and medical problems.”