The Effect of a Mindfulness-Based Intervention Course on Perceived Stress, Dispositional Mindfulness, and the Cultivation of Therapeutic Use of Self in Doctorate of Occupational Therapy Students at Belmont University

Jane Owen Robbins, OTD/S, Elmo Shade, & Dr. Christine Manville EdD, OTR/L
Belmont University School of Occupational Therapy

Abstract

The purpose of this mixed-method study was: 1) to investigate the effectiveness of a mindfulness-based intervention (MBI) course for decreasing perceived stress and increasing dispositional mindfulness in 13 2nd year Doctorate of Occupational Therapy (OTD) Students, and 2) to explore the relevance of mindfulness in their lives as occupational therapy students, and future occupational therapy practitioners. It was hypothesized that, following an 8-week MBI course, perceived stress would decrease and dispositional mindfulness would increase in the experimental group, when compared to the control group. Quantitative data was derived from the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), which were administered as Pre-, Mid-, and Post-course measures. Qualitative data was gathered from open-ended questions found on the Mid- and Post-course questionnaires. Linear regressions were used to test for differences in perceived stress and dispositional mindfulness from Pre-to-Post-course measures, between the experimental and control groups. There was a significant increase in dispositional mindfulness for the experimental group, when compared to the control group (t = 2.99, p = 0.014). No significant change in perceived stress was found. The perceived relevance of mindfulness was coded into themes of “occupational therapy student” and “future occupational therapy practitioner.” This research demonstrated the effectiveness of an MBI course for increasing mindfulness and promoting the cultivation of therapeutic use of self for OTD students. Future research should consider using a longitudinal research design to track the impact of mindfulness training on academic and therapeutic outcomes, for occupational therapy students across their academic careers.

Research Questions

Is an 8-week mindfulness-based intervention course effective in decreasing perceived stress and increasing dispositional mindfulness in a group of Doctorate of Occupational Therapy Students at Belmont University? What relevance, do occupational therapy students report that mindfulness has in their lives as students, and future occupational therapy practitioners?

Method

Participants
• 13 participants: 5 experimental; 8 control
• 2 men, 11 women
• Age range 23-25 years

Procedure
Experimental Group
• Consent and Demographic forms
• Pre-course questionnaire
• 8-week MBI course
• Mid-course questionnaire (Week 4)
• Post-course questionnaire (Week 8)

Control Group
• Consent and Demographic forms
• Pre-course questionnaire
• Mid-course questionnaire (Week 4)
• Post-course questionnaire (Week 8)

Results - Quantitative

Linear Regressions

Perceived Stress: After controlling for pre-course values, no statistically significant difference in changes of perceived stress were found in the experimental group when compared to the control group (t = 1.28, p = 0.229).

Dispositional Mindfulness: After controlling for pre-course values, the increase in dispositional mindfulness in experimental group was greater than that observed in the control group (t = 2.99, p = 0.014).

Summary of Mindfulness Attention Awareness (MAAS) Scale Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Group</th>
<th>N=13</th>
<th>Pre-course MAAS Scale</th>
<th>Post-course MAAS Scale</th>
<th>Change in Pre-Post MAAS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>(Min, Max)</td>
<td>3.96 (2.9, 5.2)</td>
<td>4.11 (2.5, 5.4)</td>
<td>0.25 (0.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>(Min, Max)</td>
<td>3.43 (3.0, 4.2)</td>
<td>4.43 (1.6, 4.7)</td>
<td>1.0 (0.12)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Test statistic (t-value) = 2.99

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constant in Pre-course MAAS</th>
<th>0.185</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Results - Qualitative

Frequency of Reported Themes and Subcategories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Frequency (f)</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Occupational Therapy Student</td>
<td>Coping with Stress</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enhanced Awareness</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Occupational Therapy Practitioner</td>
<td>Continued Use of Mindfulness Practices</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Therapeutic Use of Self</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample Participant Responses

• Coping with Stress: Participant 32: “As a student, mindfulness has been a new, innovative way to identify and cope with the daily stressors of OT school.”

• Enhanced Awareness: Participant 13: “This practice has allowed me to practice first looking inward and coming to an understanding of how I think and feel before beginning to understand how others think and feel. By learning more about myself, I can then be more compassionate, mindful, appreciative, and understanding of others.”

• Continued Use of Mindfulness Practices: Participant 13: “As a future OT, these same techniques will be important to keep my work life and my personal life separate, as well as not make mountains out of mole hills.”

• Therapeutic Use of Self: Participant 31: “I think we will be able to get along with everyone, to understand what they’re really saying to us (in terms of what their words are, and what they really mean), just empathize with them better. With mindfulness I’m realizing that all of us have so much in common, but instead we tend to focus on our differences. Mindfulness can be a tool to help us feel connected to each other. I think that is at the center of good OT practice. And it would certainly help build rapport with a client, which in turn leads to better outcomes.”

Discussion

Limitations
• Sample size
• Time of MBI course
• Methodological error

Future Research
• Longitudinal research
• Impact of mindfulness on specific academic outcome indicators
• Impact of mindfulness on therapeutic rapport during Level II fieldwork rotations

Implications
• Need for self-care initiatives for students enrolled in occupational therapy education
• Student advising

References


The negative impact of stress on physical and psychological functioning in the lives of health care professionals and students has been cited in research for several years (Gura, 2010). Self-care in Graduate School Education: Barriers to healthcare and wellness interventions for graduate students have been identified, indicating the relevance of self-care interventions (El-Ghoroury, Galper, Sawadghi, & Bufka, 2012). Researchers contend that the context of higher education settings provides an optimal opportunity for addressing mental health prevention and promotion in the lives of graduate students (Conley, Durlik, & Dickson, 2013). Mindfulness-based Intervention (MBI) for Self-Care in Graduate Students: Previous research has demonstrated the positive impact that an MBI can have on cognitive and affective domains of functioning for students in health care professions (Barbosa et al., 2013; Shapiro, Brown, & Biegel, 2007). MBI with Occupational Therapy (OT) Students: In previous research, OT students have identified a positive relationship between mindfulness practice, self-care, and enhanced care of clients (Stev, 2011).