

Exploring the efficacy of mindfulness-based interventions in reducing anxiety symptoms

Introduction

Mindfulness, rooted in ancient Buddhist teachings, refers to the moment-by-moment awareness of thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations and stimuli, all through a gentle, non-judgemental and nurturing lens¹⁰. Mindfulness can be practiced in a variety of ways in daily life, all with the aim of becoming fully present and aware, and is often used by people to ease symptoms of psychological or mental distress. The popularity of mindfulness is closely tied to the numerous academic journals that promote Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs). These interventions teach individuals how to cultivate mindfulness and incorporate it into their daily lives.

In this paper, I aim to explore the efficacy of Mindfulness-based interventions in the treatment of anxiety symptoms.

Statement of problem

According to a 2019 survey from The Global Burden of Disease Study, there has been a significant rise in the prevalence of anxiety disorders worldwide, making them the most common psychiatric disorder globally. The number has surged from 31.13 million in 1990 to 45.82 million in 2019, marking a staggering increase of 47.19%⁹. Symptoms of such disorders tend to be incredibly debilitating for those living with them, interfering with day-to-day tasks and responsibilities. This underscores the need for effective interventions to address the pervasive impact of anxiety on individuals and society at large.

To address this global anxiety epidemic, new treatment methods and therapies have emerged, including Mindfulness-Based Interventions. Recent research suggests that Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs) can be a cost-effective and holistic choice for reducing symptoms of anxiety- serving as a feasible option for the treatment of anxiety disorders².

Thesis

Mindfulness-Based Interventions work effectively in reducing anxiety-based symptoms.

Case Study 1: Efficacy of MBIs in alleviating pandemic anxiety amongst medical professionals

The medical field is known to be exceptionally demanding and rigorous, as any mistakes in decision-making can have severe consequences on patient care. The outbreak of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) posed a big challenge, making a previously arduous job even more gruelling. Medical professionals were especially vulnerable to anxiety during the pandemic, largely due to the increasing number of cases and deaths⁵. In order to help physicians cope healthily with anxiety and stress, Mindfulness-Based Interventions were used increasingly.

Virtual Mindfulness-Based Interventions were administered to physicians in order to reduce anxiety and stress. Physicians who participated in virtual MBIs showed significant improvements in their anxiety and depression scores⁵. In addition, there were improvements in the different facets of mindfulness, especially that of non-judging of internal experience⁷. The improvements in these five individual facets suggest an *overall improvement in the emotional well-being* of the physicians⁶. Conclusively, MBIs played an instrumental role in reducing anxiety and improving the psychological well-being of physicians.

Case Study 2: A comparison of the efficacy of MBIs with other treatment approaches

Despite the overwhelming success of MBIs, the scientific evidence supporting their efficacy is still inadequate. Therefore, research is currently underway to evaluate the efficacy of Mindfulness-Based Interventions in comparison to alternative forms of treatment.

Clinical trials have demonstrated that MBIs are effective in treating various illnesses and symptoms in individuals of all ages, surpassing evidence-based treatments⁴. Hoge and colleagues' studies comparing the effects of MBSR (a type of MBI) on a group of patients with Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD) found that MBIs are superior in *reducing anxiety symptoms*, displaying comparable results to *Cognitive Behavioural Therapy* (evidence-based treatment)⁸. These interventions can also have a positive impact on *compassion* and *working memory capacity*, improving overall well-being. Mindfulness-based interventions have also been recognised as a feasible method of treatment for Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD), especially when coupled with *Exposure therapy*- a type of evidence-based treatment¹¹. Additionally, MBIs have been incorporated as a part of broader evidence-based therapies, such as *Dialectical Behaviour Therapy* (DBT), *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy* (ACT), and more¹³.

Furthermore, results from clinical trials exhibit that MBIs also greatly outperform other non-evidence-based treatments in combatting anxiety-based conditions. MBIs outshine a plethora of treatments such as *waiting, psychoeducation, supportive psychotherapy, relaxation training, and imagery or suppression strategies* in terms of *lowering psychological and medical anxiety symptom severity*¹². MBIs have been consistently shown to have long-lasting effects, with an *average duration of 28 weeks* and a range of *three weeks to three years*. These findings demonstrate the efficacy and potential of MBIs in anxiety treatment.

Discussion/Conclusion

In this paper, we have discussed the efficiency of Mindfulness-based Interventions in palliating symptoms of anxiety. Even though clinical trials yield positive results, there are still numerous aspects of MBIs that need more investigation. Despite this, Mindfulness-Based Interventions appear to be a viable and economical option for anxiety treatment with a promising future.

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