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Mindfulness for Helping Professionals

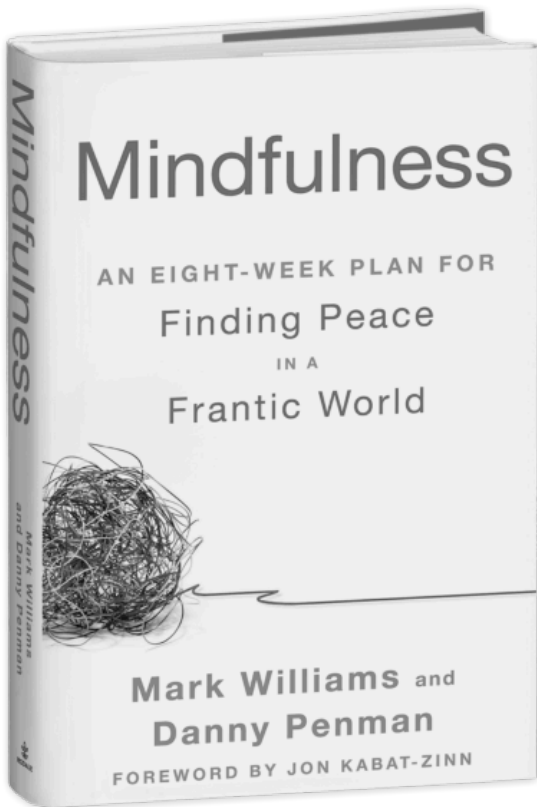
An evaluation of a live, online, 8-week
professional development program

“if we teach social work only in a conventional classroom environment, only those who have access to the classroom can benefit.” (2013, p. 394)

Pelech, W., Wulff, D., Perrault, E., Ayala, J., Baynton, M., Williams, M., Crowder, R., Shankar, J. (2013). Current challenges in social work distance education: Responses from the Elluminati, *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 33:4-5, 393-407, DOI: 10.1080/08841233.2013.834863.

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- To what extent does an on-line version of the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR-O) intervention ameliorate stress and prevent burnout in helping professionals?
 - Is there a significant measureable difference in participants' levels of decentering, perceived stress, burnout, compassion satisfaction, and secondary trauma before and after the MBSR-O program?
 - What are the participants' qualitative experiences of the MBSR-O program?

Purpose of the Study



- Eight-week mindfulness-based program offered one evening a week
- Live, online using WebEx video-enabled classroom
- Supported by a D2L course site with readings, audio meditations, book discussion area
- Optional practice partners via Skype (randomly assigned)

Program

Mixed methods

- Quantitative psychometric measures self-administered on-line, pre- and post-treatment
 - Analysis using SPSS: dependent samples t-tests, descriptive statistics
- Qualitative questions post-treatment to capture participants' experiences of the MBSR-O Program
 - First cycle coding: Structural, In Vivo, Descriptive
 - Second cycle coding: Pattern (Saldana, 2009)

Methodology

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- Convenience sample: self-referred ‘helping’ professionals (n=14) registered online via FSW University of Calgary, Centre for Professional Development (class size was 18)
 - All female
 - Between ages of 25-64 (most between 35-44 yrs)
 - Majority (78%) Caucasian/Canadian
 - All had post-secondary education, 57% with MSW, M Couns. Ed., M Coun. Psych., PhD SW– all in ‘clinical’ positions
 - 85% of participants (12 out of 14) had previous or current experience with mindfulness practices

Sample

Quantitative

- Perceived Stress Scale (PS)
- Experiences Questionnaire (EQ)
- Professional Quality of Life (ProQOL)

Qualitative

- Evaluation of MBSR-O program and beyond
 - Mindfulness instruction
 - Pedagogy
 - Home practice
 - Intentions for practice post-program
 - Future professional development in mindfulness

Methods

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- Perceived stress Scale (PSS) : 14 item
 - “the degree to which situations in one’s life are appraised as stressful” (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983, p. 385)
 - Experiences Questionnaire (EQ) : 20 items
 - Measures ‘decentering’ “the ability to observe one’s thoughts and feelings as temporary, objective events in the mind, as opposed to reflections of the self that are necessarily true” (Fresco et al., 2007, p. 234) – may indicate resilience to stress, depression
 - Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL) : 30 items
 - Consists of three subscales of **compassion satisfaction**, “the pleasure you derive from being able to do your work well,” (Stamm, 2009, p.17) **burnout** and **secondary trauma**

Instrumentation



Table 1 Means and Standard Deviations of Variables at Pre-treatment and Post-treatment

Measure	<i>n</i>	MBSR-O with Helping Professionals PRE		<i>n</i>	MBSR-O with Helping Professionals POST	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Perceived Stress Scale</i>						
Perceived Stress	14	14.8571	6.01098	13	12.7692	3.60911
<i>EQ</i>						
Decentering	14	37.2857	5.16540	13	41.0000	4.43471
<i>ProQOL</i>						
Compassion Satisfaction	13	40.3077	3.98716	13	43.0769	3.66200
Burnout	13	21.2308	4.91857	13	17.3077	3.35123
Secondary Traumatic Stress	13	19.6154	4.87405	13	18.5385	5.26965

Statistically significant changes in ‘compassion satisfaction’ $t(11) = 2.2.$, two-tailed and burnout $t(11) = 2.803$, two-tailed.

Quantitative Findings

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- Experiences of online format
 - Mindfulness pedagogy
 - Home practice requirements
 - Intention to continue mindfulness practice
 - Future professional development

Qualitative Findings

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- Mostly positive in spite of technical glitches
 - Appreciated accessibility, convenience, flexibility
 - Liked the peer support without the ‘dual relationship’
 - Most participants were taking it for self-interest, the continuing ed credits were a bonus
 - Online format did not seem to hamper majority of participants’ feeling ‘connected’ to instructor
 - Mixed feelings around feeling ‘connected’ to each other
 - Breakout rooms in dyads and groups, class photo gallery, on-camera chat, Skype partnerships

Online classroom

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- 8-week mindfulness based stress reduction/cognitive therapy format, 2 hour class, experiential and didactic
 - Mindfulness meditation and yoga, practice inquiry, theme/topic each week with discussion, homework assignment (usually 10-30min per day of practice, plus reading and/or written assignments, plus optional Skype partner)
 - Most appreciated the format, few found it challenging and too long after a full day at work
 - Appreciated the range of practices taught
 - Participants ‘loved’ the book that was used off-line on course website book discussion

Mindfulness Pedagogy

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- Recommended practice: 30-45 minutes per day, 6 days
 - Reality:
 - 6 X 25min < 7X 30min >
 - Between 2-7 days/wk
 - 8 practiced 4 or more times per week

“I found the homework practice requirements overwhelming at times, though the whole idea is that it is relevant to our collective & excessive busyness! I get it, but it is hard to commit all the same.”

Home Practice

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- Majority (12) of respondents said they would continue to practice mindfulness
 - Formal sitting, three minute breathing, body scan, lovingkindness, mindful eating
 - 9 stated specifically an intention to continue yoga or other mindful movement practices (e.g. tai chi)

Practice Intentions

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- All 10 respondents to this question were wanting to pursue further professional development in mindfulness
 - 4 interested in formal mindfulness teacher training
 - 3 wanting to integrate mindfulness into their clinical practice
 - 2 wanted another MBSR course
 - 2 intended to go on retreat
 - Formal yoga training
 - Certificate program / workshops

Professional Intentions

Emerson (1995) suggest that counsellor's participation in therapeutic groups has many positive affects such as

increased self awareness and ability to separate personal issues from client issues, an opportunity to see another therapist in action, better understanding of the change process itself, and some sense of how it feels to be a client. (p. 222)

However may resist doing so ...

Mindfulness pedagogy with 'helping' professionals

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- Benefits on a quantitative level of MBSR-O difficult to ascertain due to small n
 - Healthy group of individuals to start with, high level of previous meditation experience
 - Participants' positive bias towards group facilitator/researcher
 - Researcher bias

Limitations

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Thank you



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