



MINDFULNESS @ WORK

A MINDFULNESS-BASED APPROACH FOR WORKPLACE AND HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

Mindfulness – the ability to maintain a non-evaluative openness to all experiences arising in the present moment – has recently been recognised as an important psychological construct. Derived from the ancient buddhist practice of *'Satipatthana'*, psychologists and health practitioners are integrating some core concepts of mindfulness into intervention programmes, aiming at clinical and non-clinical populations. Evidence for the benefits of these approaches within health-care settings is increasing rapidly.

In addition – and arguably closer to its buddhist roots – mindfulness-based approaches are now also offered in other settings. At Liverpool John Moores University staff have the opportunity to take part in 'Mindfulness @ Work' courses as staff development programme. Furthermore, first attempts are made to offer tailor-made courses also to students on various programmes.

While the idea of introducing mindfulness in staff development and university curricula seems commendable, one should be aware that such interventions do not constitute a quick-fix catapulting participants out of a 'disliked' situation. It rather requires a profound vision and long-term commitment from participants.

Here we share some first experience and evaluation from introducing mindfulness in the academic setting.

What is Mindfulness?

Current mindfulness-based approaches that are applied within psychological and health care settings are derived from the centuries old buddhist principle of *sattipatthana*, a Pali term translated as *awareness* or *mindfulness*^[1, 2].

While *sattipatthana* is multi-faceted^[1, 3] the main meaning it takes within the context of these mindfulness-based approaches is ...

... the ability to maintain non-judgemental awareness of the present moment without getting caught up in habitual thoughts and automatic emotional responses.^[2]



The heightened clarity of ones moment-to-moment experiences combined with a "mental gap" that allows to perceive inner states with increasing mental freedom, is considered to have a positive impact on physical as well as psychological well-being.^[2, 4]

Mindfulness @ Work as Staff Development

- Part of the work-life balance programme at Liverpool John Moores University
- Has been running for three years
- So far around 130 colleagues participated, from all faculties and most service units (Finance, Personnel, Computing, Libraries, ...)

- 3 sessions à 2.5 hours, spread over 6 – 8 weeks
- Meanwhile participants have formed **mindfulness interest groups** and regularly meet for meditation practice and exchange
- Some feedback from the courses:

...full of warmth, respect and humour, ... totally appropriate

I found the event very enlightening ... persons present were allowed to focus on what their impressions of mindfulness were

... made me realise the importance of taking some enjoyment from everything we do however stressful ...

The wisdom of the teachings and a profound practical experience of meditation were particularly useful.

Mindfulness @ Work in Teacher Training

The Programme

- 6 week programme (6 x 1.5 hour group sessions)
- Focus on understanding the main concepts and principles of mindfulness
 - Non-judgemental moment-to-moment awareness
 - Mindfulness and stress
 - Fostering mindfulness through regular meditation practice
- Making participants *independent* in establishing and maintaining a mindful attitude towards their life
- Practical, experiential approach providing the required meditation methods as well as resources to take things further
- Subject to ongoing qualitative and quantitative evaluation

What Participants Said about the Programme

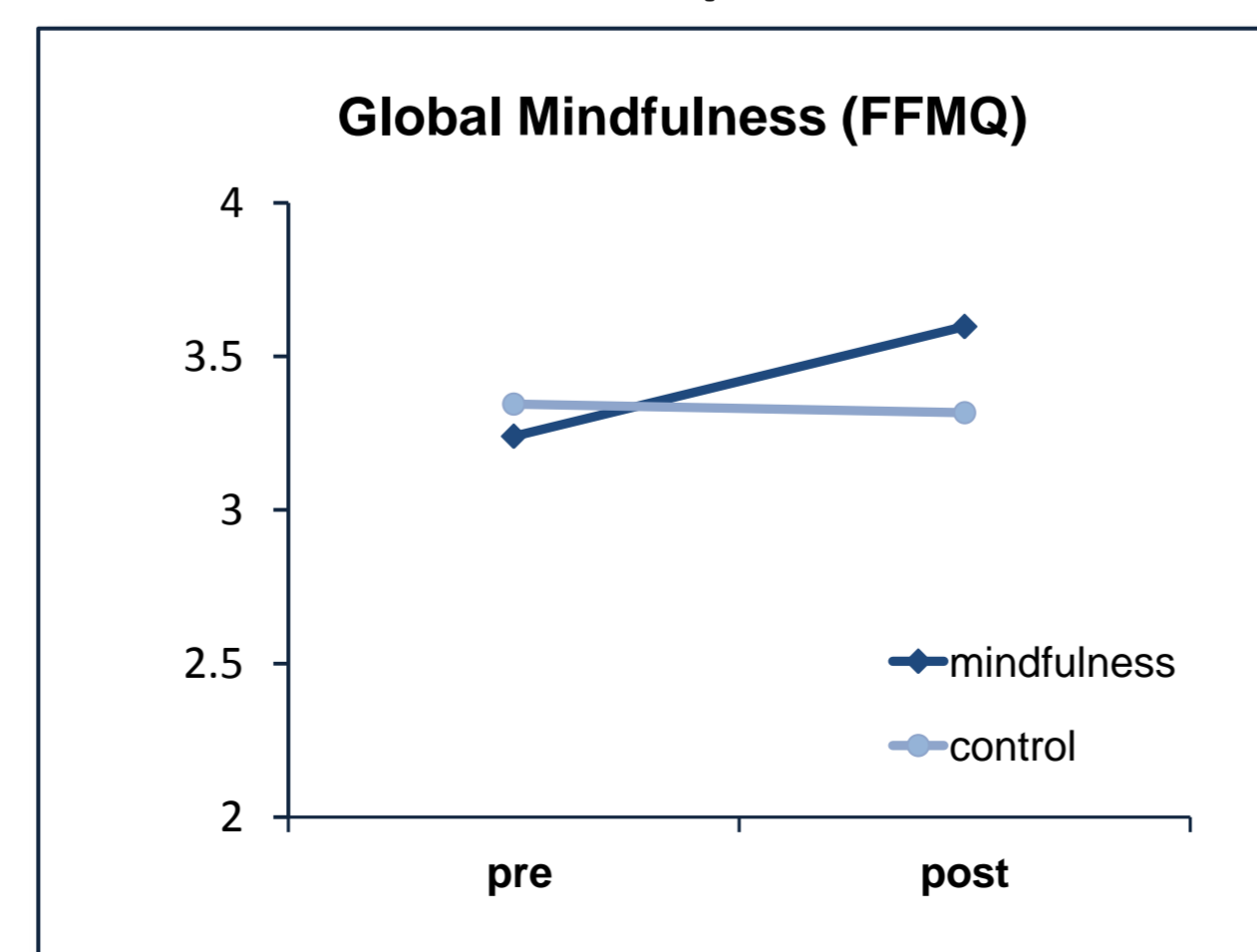
"I had so much going on that I felt as if a radio was in between stations in my head. The course helped to separate it and to put things away that I could call upon at more appropriate times."

"I really felt like I got an understanding of myself and stress. I worry about worrying! So if I'm not worrying I'm worrying why I'm not worrying. So it was an ideal course and I really enjoyed it. I felt because I get stressed out, I'm not getting the best out of myself."

"It just gave me the opportunity to sometimes just stop and de-stress, because we had lots of stressful times. Sometimes, just in the middle of a day, you know, that's what I learned really that you can do this at any time."

Quantitative Evaluation

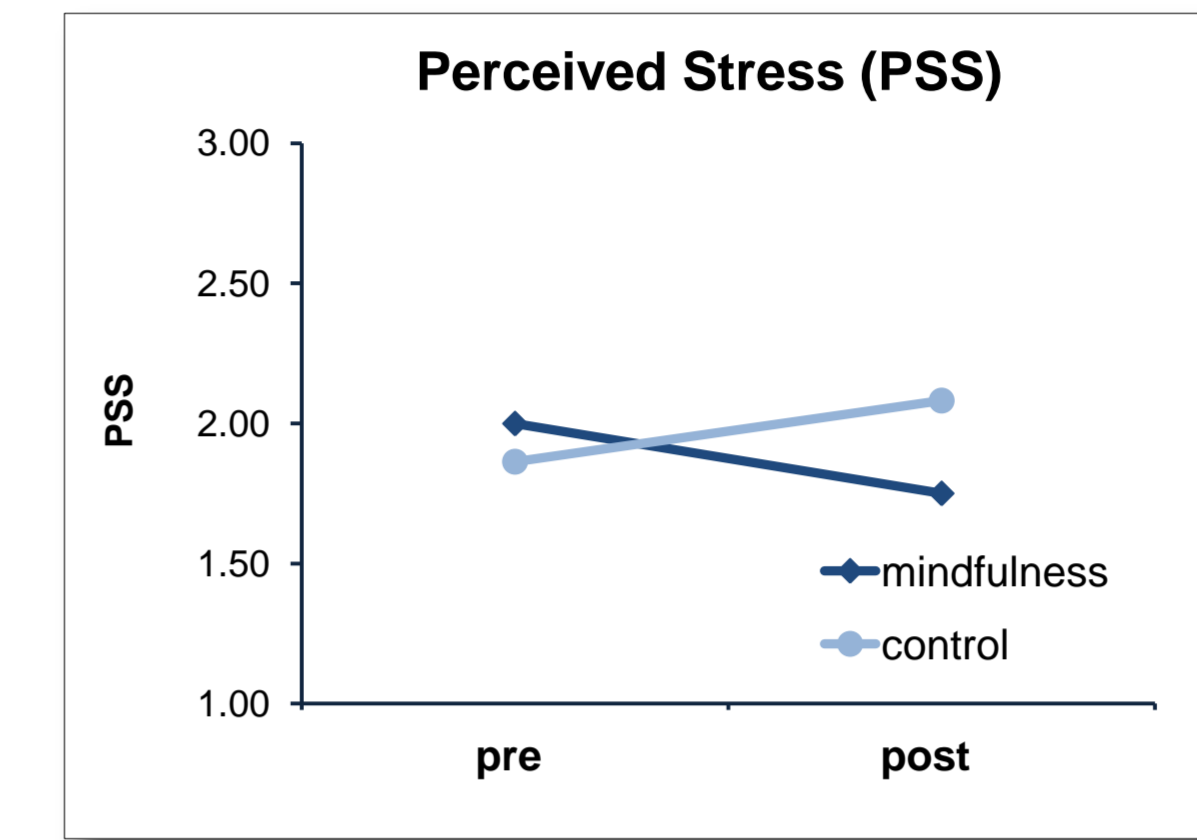
Does mindfulness improve?



- 2 groups with overall 20 participants
- Teacher-training for life-long learning and established teachers
- Control group (N=11)
- Questionnaires before (pre) and after participation in the programme

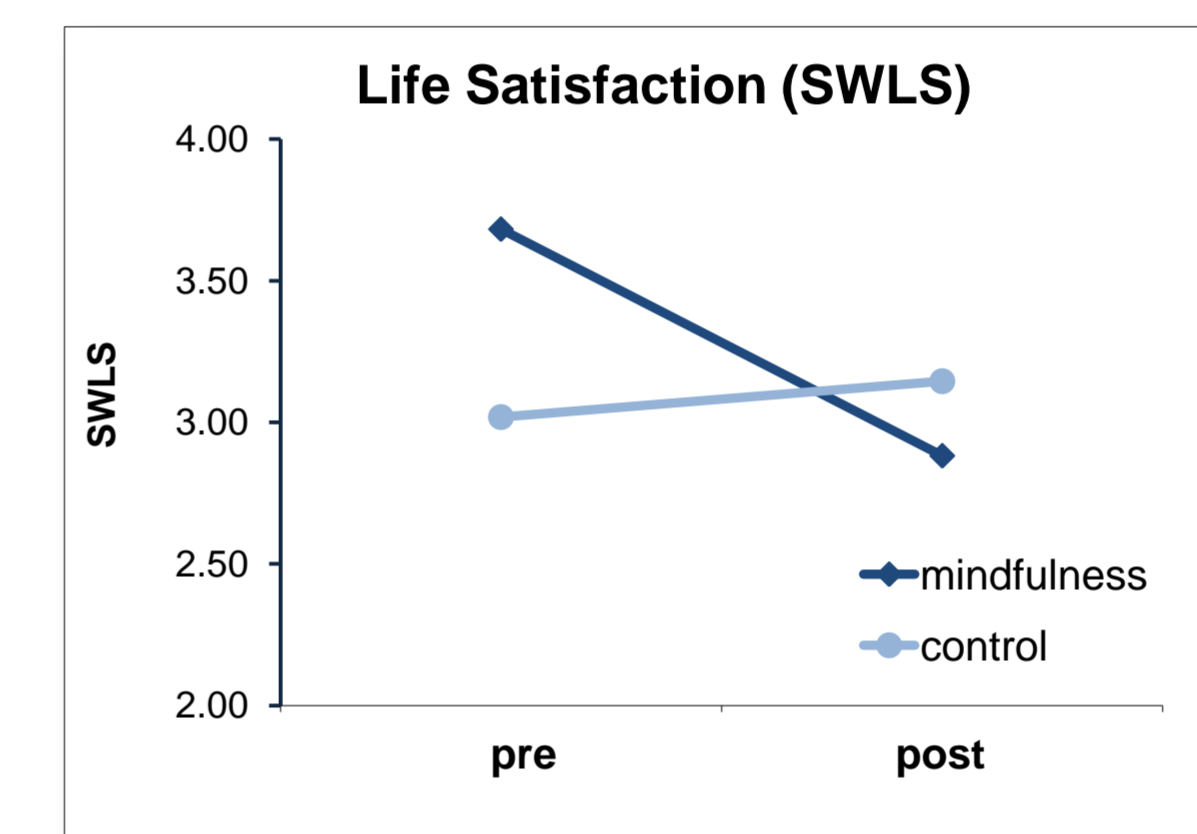
- A global measure of mindfulness (FFMQ^[5]) increased in participants:
- F(1,26)= 9.42, p<0.01

Reduced Stress?



- A significant decrease in self-reported stress (Perceived Stress Scale) after the programme
- F(1,26)= 4.35, p<0.05

Increased Well-being?

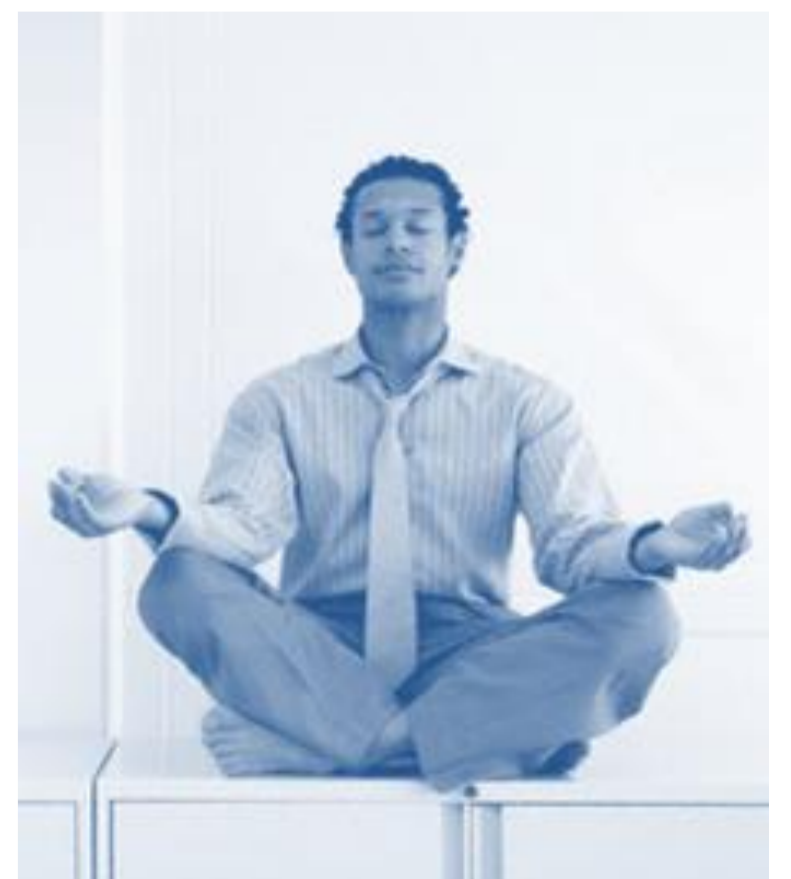


- A significant *decrease* in Life Satisfaction (Satisfaction with Life Scale) after the programme
- F(1,26)= 10.82, p<0.001
- Unexpected and not in line with the general feedback and experience participants reported
- May reflect an increased awareness of ones inner mental states and a recognition that more satisfying states are possible

Summary

Here we share first experiences with our mindfulness @work programme:

- The uptake of the staff-development programme at our university is impressive and the participants provide overwhelmingly positive feedback.
- The evaluation of a more extensive version of the programme for students in teacher training as well as established teachers in HE provides first promising results.



- There may be an issue with using the SWLS as outcome measure, as a mindfulness course may lead to a shift in ones interpretation of the questionnaire items.

References

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