



Umbrella Summary

Mindfulness

A Summary of Workforce Research Evidence Relevant to the Child Welfare Field

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is described as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 22). Instead of being on autopilot and reacting in reflexive and mindless ways, perhaps with a focus on the past or the future, it is about being fully aware of and present in the moments of our lives. The nonjudgmental aspect is about not leaping to “likes and dislikes, opinions and prejudices, projections and expectations” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 23) and instead observing without evaluating. Mindfulness is considered both a trait and a state. Trait mindfulness refers to individual differences in the tendency to be mindful (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Mesmer-Magnus, Manapragada, Viswesvaran, & Allen, 2017), whereas state mindfulness refers to more temporary experiences of mindfulness at a given time (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2017).

There are at least 10 measures that assess trait mindfulness (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2017), some of which treat mindfulness as unidimensional and others as multidimensional. One of the most comprehensive and frequently used measures is the 39-item Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ). As the name implies, the FFMQ assesses five factors: (a) observing internal and external experiences (e.g., “I notice the smells and aromas of things”), (b) describing internal experiences with words (e.g., “Even when I’m feeling terribly upset, I can find a way to put it into words”), (c) acting with awareness of the present moment (e.g., “I do jobs or tasks automatically, without being aware of what I’m doing”), (d) being nonjudgmental of internal experiences (e.g., “I tell myself that I shouldn’t be feeling the way I’m feeling”), and (e) being nonreactive to thoughts and feelings (e.g., “I watch my feelings without getting lost in them”) (Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006). Though many of the trait measures are also used to assess changes in mindfulness states and habits, there are other measures that are more focused on immediate experiences of mindfulness, through items such as “I was open to taking notice of anything that might come up” (Lau et al., 2006) and “I found myself doing things without paying attention” (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

Why is mindfulness important?

Mindfulness is important because it has connections with various job attitudes, stress indicators, and behaviors. Specifically, trait mindfulness is associated with (a) lower burnout, job stress, and work withdrawal, (b) positive interpersonal relationships, and (c) higher job satisfaction, effort, and job performance (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2017). Though these

relationships do not indicate a causal connection between mindfulness and work outcomes, there is preliminary evidence that when personal outcomes such as stress, distress, and well-being are improved through mindfulness interventions, the changes can be attributed to changes in mindfulness (Bartlett et al., 2019). More research is needed to test whether mindfulness is the mechanism through which mindfulness interventions affect workplace outcomes.

How can mindfulness be increased?

Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) are designed to improve mindfulness states, skills, and habits through training. Such interventions were originally developed in the 1970s for clinical settings, to treat mental and physical health conditions such as chronic pain, depression, and substance abuse (Baer, 2003). They began making their way into the workplace in approximately the last 15 years (Gelles, 2015), but most of the controlled studies have only been conducted in the last five to eight years.

MBIs vary widely in length, method, and content. Of the programs that have been studied, they vary from 1 to 16 weeks in overall duration, with daily sessions being as short as 15 minutes to as long as 6 hours (Bartlett et al., 2017; Vonderlin, Biermann, Bohus, & Lyssenko, 2020). On average, the overall duration is 7.5 weeks, and the average total number of hours is around 17 (Vonderlin et al., 2020). Most programs are delivered face to face, though some are done online, through audio, or using a combination of methods; daily homework and practice is also a common ingredient, regardless of other methods (Bartlett et al., 2017; Vonderlin et al., 2020). Common training content includes mindfulness theory, stress physiology, body scan technique, breath meditation, walking meditation, open monitoring meditation, journaling, and yoga (Bartlett et al., 2017).

Through randomized control trials, it has been established that MBIs result in improvements in mindfulness, especially among employees with more work experience and when the program includes more hours. MBIs also cause improvements in a variety of stress-related experiences (e.g., anxiety, distress, well-being, sleep), resilience, burnout, work engagement, job satisfaction, and productivity (Vonderlin et al., 2020). When studies have included follow-up assessments, the results show sustained impact for at least three months (Vonderlin et al., 2020). Again, more research is needed to test whether and to what extent MBIs (a) affect workplace outcomes through their effects on mindfulness or (b) have direct effects on outcomes that are independent of changes in mindfulness. In either case, MBIs cause measurable changes, and the results continue after the programs end (Vonderlin et al., 2020).

QIC-WD Takeaways

- ▶ Mindfulness is considered both a trait and a state.
- ▶ Trait mindfulness is associated with (a) lower burnout, job stress, and work withdrawal, (b) positive interpersonal relationships, and (c) higher job satisfaction, effort, and job performance.
- ▶ Mindfulness-based interventions were originally developed to improve mental and physical health conditions in clinical settings. Adapted versions have more recently made their way into the workplace.
- ▶ Mindfulness-based interventions vary widely in length and method. Common training content includes mindfulness theory, stress physiology, body scan technique, breath meditation, walking meditation, open monitoring meditation, journaling, and yoga.
- ▶ Through randomized control trials, it has been established that MBIs result in improvements in mindfulness, especially among employees with more work experience and when the program includes more hours.
- ▶ MBIs also cause improvements in a variety of stress-related experiences (e.g., anxiety, distress, well-being, sleep), resilience, burnout, work engagement, job satisfaction, and productivity.
- ▶ Practitioners or researchers who would like to assess mindfulness should consider the *Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire*.

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