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Conceptualisation, comprehension and evaluation of mindfulness in children

Fabienne Lagueux, Julie Beauregard, Véronique Parent and Raphaëlle B-Lacroix
University of Sherbrooke, Canada

Statement of the Problem: In the past 20 years, a growing interest in the concept of mindfulness and its application, not only amongst adults, but also amongst children can be noted. However, it remains clear that this concept, given its multidimensional nature, is difficult to define. Moreover, most authors in this domain have conducted their research with adult populations. For this reason, mindfulness-based interventions used amongst children stem directly from interventions intended for adults. As such, the lack of developmental considerations in research on mindfulness is clearly highlighted and is illustrated, namely, by the limited number of studies on this concept as it relates to children and adolescents and its measurement within this population. The purpose of this study is to better understand the concept of mindfulness as it is operationalized in children, while considering inherent developmental characteristics.

Methodology & Theoretical Orientation: Using a descriptive and exploratory perspective, children aged 8 to 12 years old (n=14) participated in semi-structured interviews in order to explore how youth understand and describe the concept avec mindfulness in their own words.

Findings: Results derived from a thematic analysis highlight the complexity of the concept of mindfulness and the difficulties children may experience in understanding this concept clearly. Although most participants understood some elements of what mindfulness is (for example, paying attention to the present moment by being aware of one's surroundings and physical sensations), many wrongly associated this concept with other ideas, such as relaxation and thought suppression.

Conclusion & Significance: These results raise the importance of considering a developmental perspective when evaluating the concept of mindfulness with children. A more refined comprehension of the children's point of view will ultimately allow for the developmental of measures and interventions which are better adapted to this clientele.

Biography

Fabienne Lagueux, PhD is a Clinical Psychologist who has, for over 20 years, worked with Children, Adolescents and Adults and also acts as a Clinical Supervisor. Furthermore, she has been an Associate Professor at the University of Sherbrooke (Dept. of Psychology). During this time, she developed a keen interest for Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBCT) amongst youth and their parents. As such, she has co-developed with a colleague a mindfulness-based group intervention intended for children and their parents (inspired from a Belgian model) which have been implemented at the University Clinic. Her research, done in collaboration with Véronique parent and several doctorate students, are related to the measurement of concepts associated with mindfulness as well as the effects of MBCT-type interventions. She has accumulated several hours of teaching and has undertaken many communications in the domain of mindfulness to this day.

Fabienne.Lagueux@USherbrooke.ca

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