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The effects of a brief meditation intervention in a university setting

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Statement of the Problem: Stress is linked to chronic disease, psychological disorders, and premature death. Recent studies show stress can undermine evidence-based treatments and contribute to low self-efficacy, affecting health behaviors through underutilization of health services. Mindfulness meditation has been shown to reduce stress and improve health and well-being. Emotional intelligence has been shown to increase with mindfulness meditation leading to the development of alternative emotional responses and behaviors, which can aid in health behavior change. Studies examining the relationship between Vipassana meditation (VM), perceived stress, emotional intelligence, and self-efficacy are lacking.

Methodology: Using a quasi-experimental design, participants were divided into two groups: treatment (n=14) and comparison (n=14). Participants were college graduate students. Pre/Post test data were collected before and after the three-week intervention regarding perceived stress (Perceived Stress Scale), emotional intelligence (Assessing Emotions Scale), and self-efficacy (Self-Efficacy Scale). Participants in the treatment group attended two trainings in VM during weeks one and two, and were asked to meditate 20 minutes per day for three weeks.

Results: Perceived Stress: Treatment group, a significant difference was observed between the PSS scores, $t(12) = -3.29$, $p = 0.006$, demonstrating perceived stress was reduced after treatment. Comparison group, there were no significant differences. Emotional Intelligence: Treatment group, there were significant differences in AES total scores, $t(12) = 5.09$, $p < 0.001$, before and after treatment. Comparison group, no significant differences. Self-Efficacy: In both the treatment and comparison groups, there were no significant differences before and after treatment.

Conclusion & Significance: Vipassana meditation can provide immediate changes in perceived stress and emotional intelligence. As stress (low) and emotional intelligence (high) influence health behavior, VM could be used in conjunction with other intervention strategies to promote positive health behavior change while continuing to explore the relationship between increased dosages of VM on self-efficacy.

Biography

Ryan L Santens earned his Master of Public Health (MPH) and Master of Social Work (MSW) degrees from George Warren Brown School of Social Work at Washington University in St. Louis, and is currently a PhD Candidate in Community Health in the Department of Kinesiology and Community Health at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He is an advanced Mindfulness Instructor having led several mindfulness based cognitive therapy (MBCT)/mindfulness based stress reduction (MBSR) groups, retreats and seminars for diverse target audiences across multiple practice settings. He has completed multiple professional trainings and silent mindfulness meditation retreats including five days MBCT Instructor Training, five day advanced training for MBSR and MBCT, and individual (one-on-one) MBCT training. His research interests focus on adapting mindfulness-based interventions for diverse audiences to enhance emotional intelligence, self-efficacy and a positive functioning construct of psychological well-being in community-based settings to support health behavior change.

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