

Kelly Beck – Abstract

“Feasibility of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction for Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder”

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) is a standardized 8-week group intervention that has robust, lasting effects on improving quality of life, life satisfaction, anxiety, and stress in various disability populations. MBSR teaches individuals to attend to present experiences and develop inner resources to cope with life's challenges. Recent research has also found that mindfulness meditation improves attentional control and emotional regulation. Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) report lower quality of life (QOL) and well-being than those without ASD. Further, individuals with ASD can experience limitations in abstraction, emotion regulation, and attention, all of which complicate responding to life stressors. Despite reported benefits in applicable areas of challenges, MBSR has never been utilized with an ASD population. Self-report assessment outcomes can also be a challenge for the ASD population due to limitations in abstraction and awareness, and very few self-report assessments are validated with this population. This poses challenges for researchers when evaluating the impact of interventions on psychosocial outcomes for the ASD population. Thus, this research project included two feasibility studies that (1) examined selected self-report QOL and mindfulness outcome measures and (2) a Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction group intervention with adults diagnosed with ASD. Twenty-two subjects participated in a cognitive interview and reliability cross-sectional study to evaluate selected self-report measures with ASD. Subjects completed the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), Child Adolescent Mindfulness Measure (CAMM), WHOQOL-BREF, and WHOQOL-DIS at two time points with a two-week washout period. A subset of participants (n=8) completed cognitive interviews with a trained counselor to evaluate the understanding of each item on the selected scales. Results support use of the SWLS and CAMM with adults with ASD, as both demonstrated good internal consistency, test-retest reliability, and item understanding. The WHOQOL-BREF and WHOQOL-DIS did not demonstrate adequate internal consistency or item understanding. Based on this evidence, researchers may want to consider alternative QOL scales prior to utilizing these measures. In the subsequent quasi-experimental feasibility trial, twelve adults with ASD completed an 8-week group MBSR intervention. Feasibility standards were met for retention, understanding of material, participation. Intervention fidelity standards were also met. Participants reported high satisfaction with the intervention, as measured by the CSQ-8 (M = 27.92, SD = 3.5). Participants completed an assessment battery at three time points, pre, mid, and post. Estimates of effect sizes were calculated and results indicated large effects in improved positive outlook (d = 2.12), satisfaction with life (d = 1.08), and mindfulness (d = 1.10). Changes in anxiety were small (d = .38) but participants did not endorse elevated anxiety symptoms at baseline. This project established feasibility and acceptability of a group MBSR intervention for adults with ASD. The study suggests that MBSR may be an efficacious intervention for improving the lives of adults with ASD.