

Older Adults' Engagement in Mindfulness Practices



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Abstract

There is substantial evidence to suggest that mindfulness practices positively affect older adults' physical, emotional, and cognitive wellbeing. However, there is still little information available about the interest and inclination among older adults for performing mindfulness-related exercises. We conducted a survey study aimed at exploring the prevalence of older adults engaged in such activities. Data were collected from 174 older adults (Males:48; Females:126) who responded using a self-constructed survey and analyzed using SPSS. Results indicate that almost two-thirds of older adult respondents engage in at least one mindfulness practice and almost a third engage in more than one, with meditation, deep breathing, and yoga being the most prevalent.

Introduction

There is substantial evidence to suggest that mindfulness practices and exercises positively affect older adults' physical, emotional, and cognitive wellbeing. Research has shown that older adults experience calmness, inner joy, reduced anxiety and depression levels as a result of performing mindfulness practice [1-5] However, despite these strong positive findings, there is still not much known about the level of engagement of older adults in these practices. Therefore, the present study addresses this issue by exploring the prevalence of older adults performing these practices.

Benefits of mindfulness practices

A meta-analysis involving 42 studies found that yoga asanas based heterogeneous interventions reduced evening cortisol, waking cortisol, ambulatory systolic blood pressure, resting heart rate, high-frequency heart rate variability, fasting blood glucose, cholesterol, and low-density lipoprotein, and improved regulation of the sympathetic nervous system and hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal system in various populations [6].

In another study, the Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Approach for Seniors (MBCAS) was found effective in inducing a positive and accepting approach towards life and aging-related challenges in reasonably healthy older adults [7]. In their retrospective analysis-based study, [8] also found that eight weeks of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction training helpful in alleviating stress and promoting vitality among 141 adults aged 65 years and older.

Results

Almost three-quarters (72.4%) of the 174 survey respondents were females and more than two-thirds were Caucasian (67.9%). More than half (57.5%) had attended college or university. Two-thirds owned their own home and more than half (56.4%) lived alone. Almost half (46.6%) had annual incomes of more than \$30,000. About half (49.3%) had immigrated to Canada but nearly all had lived there for more than 20 years. Almost all (91.4%) were retired with more than three-quarters (77.6%) not working at all.

Almost two-thirds (62.6%) of older adult respondents engaged in at least one mindfulness practice, while almost one-third (30.5%) engaged in more than one practice. The two most popular practices were meditation (30.3%) and deep breathing (30.5%), followed by Yoga (20.7%).

Discussion

Through this survey study, we found that a large proportion of older adults are interested in pursuing mindfulness practices and perform them frequently. The main types of mindfulness practices engaged in are meditation, deep breathing, and yoga. It is interesting to note that almost two-thirds engage in at least one practice and almost a third engage in two or more practices.

Related research evidence shows that mindfulness practices are beneficial for enhancing the quality of life experiences of older adults in terms of their physiological, psychological, and

emotional dimensions. In line with such findings, the present research reflects the popularity of general mindfulness practices among older adults. It is noteworthy that with the growing number of baby boomers and the pandemic scenario, the need for designing, developing, and conducting mindfulness exercises has greatly increased. As reflected from our analysis, most of the older adults who participated in this study were already engaged in mindfulness techniques. Further research now needs to be done to evaluate the impacts of these mindfulness practices on the wellbeing and happiness of older adults.

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