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An overview of mindfulness research in the field of psychological health

Mindfulness has been defined as learning to pay attention moment by moment, intentionally, and with curiosity and compassion. While mindfulness has been practiced for over 2000 years in Eastern religions, it has only recently become increasingly popular in the West. Mindfulness has been applied to psychological health in Western medical and mental health contexts since the 1970s when Jon Kabat-Zinn developed Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). In the West mindfulness is generally independent of a circumscribed religion, philosophy, ethical code or particular systems of practices. Various mindfulness-based interventions have been trialed in mental health and there is strong evidence for its efficacy in the treatment and prevention of depression and anxiety. There are currently several interventions commonly used in mental health that are based on mindfulness-related principles including, Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). In the current presentation, I will review the history of mindfulness research in mental health and discuss the empirical literature relating to the effects of mindfulness on mental health outcomes. I will discuss the impact of mindfulness practices on psychological processes likely to underline the beneficial effect of mindfulness practice on mental health, including increases in self-compassion, decreases in rumination, trait anxiety and self-perceived stress. I will also discuss the neurobiological effects of mindfulness practices likely to contribute to improved mental health, including decreases in physiological stress markers and changes in brain functionality.

Biography

Michaela Pascoe is a Researcher in the field of stress, inflammation, wellbeing and mental health. She has drawn attention to the impact of stress on mental health and cognitive outcomes and the mediating influence of non-pharmacological stress mediating interventions, such as diet, exercise and mindfulness on these outcomes. She has researched the impact of stress both in the context of chronic illness and young people in Australia experiencing chronic, normative stress related to their academic demands.

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