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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MINDFULNESS MODULE TO REDUCE AGGRESSION AMONG PRISON INMATES

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to examine the positive effect of mindfulness among female prison inmates who are aggressive. Quantitative Quasi-experimental research methodology was used in this research where the empirical intervention was studied using purposive sampling. The sample consisted of 36 female inmates from one of the prisons in the Malaysian state. They were tested for mindfulness techniques and the measures were taken before and after intervention for six weeks. The research was conducted using survey questionnaires. Measurements were made using the “Mindful Attention Awareness Scale” for the measurement of mindfulness. Aggression questionnaire developed by Buss & Perry was used to measure aggression of inmates in terms of Physical Aggression (PA), Verbal Aggression (VA), Anger (A), and H (Hostility). The data collected were analyzed with SPSS version 25. The findings indicated that there is a correlation between mindfulness and aggression. The study also indicated that those who had practiced mindfulness showed less aggression, and built a strong bond with other participants in the group. There were

limitations to the prison environment due to security reasons. Thus, it is recommended that the study be conducted in a non-prison environment to further strengthen the findings.

Keywords

Mindfulness, Aggression, Self-control, Inmates, Correctional, Prison, MBSR

1. Introduction and Theory

The idea of mindfulness began from Eastern practices, from Hinduism to Buddhist practices. In Hinduism, the practice of Vedic and yoga meditation has similarities to mindfulness because meditation creates awareness of the present environment which is essentially being mindful. However, it was Buddhist practices which had strongly emphasized on mindfulness. This Eastern practice was introduced to the Western world by individuals namely, Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh who was also sometimes called the father of mindfulness. The expression "mindfulness" is deciphered from the early Buddhist practice. Mindfulness does not allude to recalling to memory three past occasions rather it focuses on all that is occurring right now (Siegel, Germer, & Olendzki, 2009; Wallace & Bodhi, 2006). The Western father of mindfulness, (Kabat-Zinn, 2003) has characterized mindfulness as "the mindfulness that rises through focusing intentionally, right now, and being non-judgmental to the experience that is happening minute-to-minute". Despite being in practice for so many years, mindfulness is becoming useful now with the modern life of stress and mental health. Recent studies conducted in the prison environment indicate that mindfulness interventions helped to reduce stress (BHuijbregts, S. C. J., Scholte, E., & Swaab, H., 2019).

Little research had been investigated regarding the relationship between mindfulness, self-control, and aggressive behaviors especially among prison inmates in Malaysia. Stress and mental health issues are apparent among prison inmates. In this research, mindfulness was studied in relation to aggression among female prison inmates. Since mindfulness focuses on reducing negative feelings, it is sensible to anticipate that mindfulness will lessen the relationship between aggressive triggers and aggression-related feelings, for example, outrage. Since aggressive feelings, contemplations, and behavioral inclinations are connected in memory (Victorson et al., 2015), mindfulness may even cut off the actuation of this connection. Thus, reducing aggressive feelings and aggressive actions. The study by Engin Deniz M., et al. (2015) shows that a person with high mindfulness will not panic and make decisions. This decision-making style indicates that self-control may have a role in deciding whether to be aggressive or not. The author explored the possibility of using a conceptual framework.

The conceptual framework of the study was as represented in figure 1. The intervention of mindfulness techniques on the test group inmates was predicted to reduce aggression. The author predicted self-control to act as a mediating factor in this model. It was predicted that when a participant becomes mindful, he is aware of himself and the environment he is present. Thus, if the situation was triggering aggression, he will be aware of it, and self-control will be able to prevent increased aggression or violence. In essence, mindfulness improves self-control while reducing aggression. However, the results indicated that mindfulness does not affect self-control. The mindfulness did have a direct relationship with aggression.

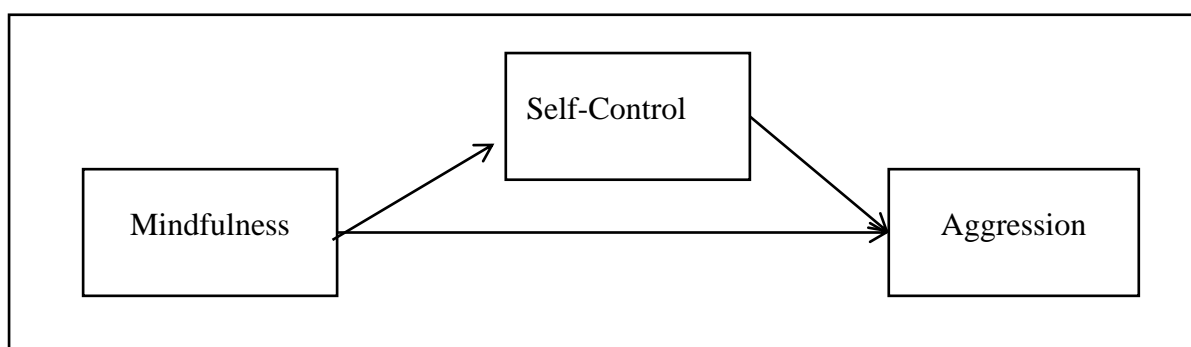


Figure 1: *Conceptual Framework*

2. Literature Review

2.1 Aggression

We are facing aggression every day in our lives and aggression seems to be the most common and sometimes dangerous factor especially when it is displayed in public.

It begins at home as physical or verbal aggression between couples, kin, or guardians who utilize it as a remedial measure towards children. In a recent study by Mariamdarani, S.D. (2016), findings indicate that there is a relationship between aggression, depression, and the ability to change. Further to that, findings reported by Mooney and Daffern (2015), stated that aggressive behaviors in prisons can be used to identify individuals at risk of aggression following release especially with repeated offenders.

In a recent study, Warburton, and Anderson, (2015) stated that the different definitions need to be standardized for meaningful comparison. Furthermore, they define aggression to have 3 key issues:

- Aggression is any behavior enacted with the intention to harm another person, who is motivated to avoid that harm (Shaffer, D. R., 2005).

- Aggression is equated with anger, hostility and competitiveness which are emotional states. Aggression should be behavioral instead of emotional.
- Aggression is interchanged with violence. Since not all aggressive behavior can result in violence, it is argued that violent behavior is aggression and not vice versa.

Currently, in many societies, a serious problem that prevails is aggression among inmates. Due to its seriousness, it has attained the attention of prevention experts, field persons, prison authorities, and media.

2.2 Mindfulness

A promising practice that is progressively being utilized in the fields of mental and behavioral treatment is mindfulness (Teasdale et al., 2000). Kabat-Zinn (2003) has characterized mindfulness as "the mindfulness that rises through focusing intentionally, right now, and being non-judgmental to the experience that is happening minute-to-minute" (Siegel, Germer & Olendzki, 2009). Considering the previously mentioned definition, Shapiro et al., (2006) subdivided mindfulness into three areas. First being focusing, second being intentional and the third is to be non-judgmental.

Dafoe, T., & Stermac, L (2013) explained that mindfulness was found to be successful in correctional settings for difficulties such as self-regulation. There is a developing enthusiasm for the utilization of practices based on mindfulness to prisoners (Dafoe, T., & Stermac, L, 2013). Instead of concentrating on the substance of musings and endeavoring to transform them, mindfulness stresses the way towards considering and getting them to be mindful of their considerations in a non-judgmental manner (Semple and Burke, 2012). Mindfulness encourages a mentality of acknowledgment and receptiveness to experience the present minute (Bishop, S.R, et al., 2004).

2.3 Self-Control

Self-control plays a significant role and is a major contributor that impact adolescent behaviors. It was also evident from a study on adolescent behavior by Winstok, Z (2009), that low level of self-control has a significant relation with aggressive behavior. Individuals whose self-control level is a low are usually self-centered, seek risky activities, and impulsive. It is also evident from the theory of Self-control that individuals whose self-control level is low have characteristics such as more anger, avoid complex tasks, self-centered, impulsive, and indulge themselves in risky activities, which may lead to aggression. Conversely, adolescents with high self-control levels tend to be least aggressive. More precisely, "self-control serves as a mechanism that inhibits the formation of negative behavior as it assists adolescents to resist temptations" (Ezinga et al., 2008).

3. Objectives of this Study

- To investigate the relationship between mindfulness and aggression among female inmates.
- To determine the relationship between self-control and aggression among female inmates.
- To investigate the relationship between mindfulness and self-control.

In a recent study by Mariamdaran S.D & Ishak, N. A. (2014), findings indicated that there is a relationship between aggression, depression, and the ability to change. Mindfulness relates to the ability to change. Further to that, previous findings reported by Mooney and Daffern (2015), stated that aggressive behaviours in prisons can be used to identify individuals at risk of aggression following release especially with repeated offenders. Little research had been investigated regarding the relationship between mindfulness, self-control, and aggressive behaviors especially among prison inmates in Malaysia. Dafoe, Terra, and Lana Stermac (2013) studied mindfulness as an additional treatment in clinical groups in prison to treat psychosis and relapse in substance abuse. Traditionally, these were treated using cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and Relapse prevention (RP). Structured mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) and Mindfulness-based Relapse prevention (MBRP) is making inroads into correctional settings for treatment. The researcher is using only females in this study because there is no difference in aggression level between females and males as mentioned by Mariamdaran, S. D. (2014) in her study. In another recent study by Mariamdaran, S.D. (2014), findings indicate that there is a relationship between aggression, depression, and the ability to change. Thus, the researcher relates mindfulness to change.

4. Methodology

4.1 Participants

The sampling count of those who participated in this study consists of 32 adult female inmates from a prison in the Northern state of Malaysia. They were filtered out using Aggression Questionnaire by Buss & Perry as shown in figure 2. Each question was explained in the language they can comprehend, and illiterate participants were guided individually to answer the questionnaire. Selection was based on those with total aggression of more than 60. Some participants were excluded due to prison security requirements and due to their mental state of mind.

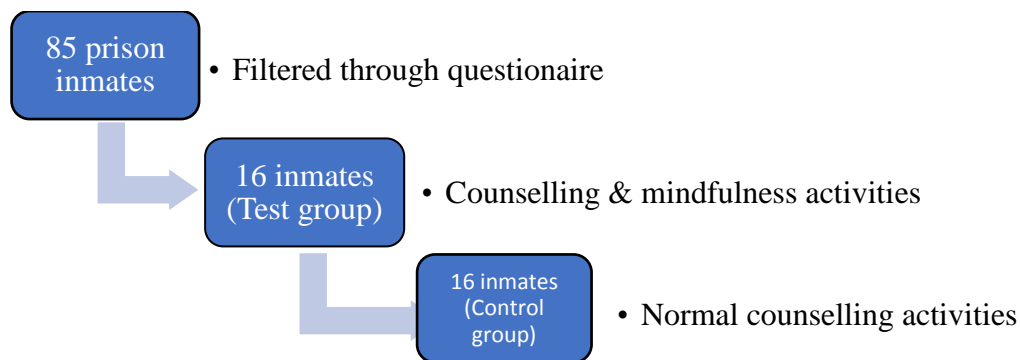


Figure 2: Participant Filtration Process

Five foreign and 27 Malaysian inmates participated. Half of them were Muslims and the others were Buddhist, Christians or Hindus. They were between 18 years to 58 years old. 31% were single and another 31% were married; whilst the others were either separated or divorced. Their educational background varied from no education to one person with a degree. A majority of 13 inmates had completed their SPM which is equivalent to G.C.E. O'Level. Only 5 of them did not have any education at all. The female inmates had varying degrees of aggression which they admitted to during the counselling sessions. The following is a simple aggression profile of the 16 inmates who were in the test group:

- C1: She was unable to control her anger and resorts to self-harm or destruction of objects around her. She is also addicted to drugs and had attempted suicide twice.
- C2: She becomes stressed and verbally abuses of those around her. Her imprisonment is due to criminal breach of trust and not aggression.
- C3: She was unable to control her anger and resorts to destruction of objects around. Remanded because was in the house of a trafficker.
- C4: She was unable to control anger and resorted to self-harm and had harmed those around her. She was drugged and raped by her employer. She became a tomboy to disguise her gender.
- C5: She was unable to control and resorts to either self-harm (if alone) or harm those around. Cuts herself to reduce her anger and if provoked will harm the person provoking without hesitation.
- C6: Client was reserved and is unable to control her anger. Since she is afraid to display or harm others, resorts to self-harm to release her aggression.
- C7: Client was not able to control and destroys everything without hesitation. Realisation comes much later.
- C8: Client is unable to control and resorts to self-harm.

- C9: Client was unable to control and resorts to verbal abuse and harms those around.
- C10: Client was able to control but is worried that she will not be able to do so anymore.
- C11: Client feels that she is unable to control. She attempted to kill her husband when she was angry with him by driving towards him and he was injured in the incident. She regretted after the event. However, still unable to control her anger.
- C12: Client was able to control but wishes to reduce her anger level.
- C13: Client was unable to control and boxed the prison wall to release her anger. Her knuckles were injured. She said she was not aware that she boxed the wall. The realisation came after the event.
- C14: Client was able to control but wanted to be able to control better.
- C15: Client was able to control but previously had lost her control and destroyed the things around her.
- C16: She has a very aggressive personality and was very hostile towards those whom she did not like. She was remanded for murder.

All clients were very cooperative and responsive to the activities. Any misbehaviour in the prison would mean extension of the sentence and isolation from the others without food. The participants with aggressive behaviour were isolated frequently and it was not something they liked. Thus, some of them welcomed the chance to be able to change.

4.2 Instruments

Three instruments were used in this study to measure aggression, mindfulness awareness and self-control of each participant.

4.2.1 Aggression questionnaire developed by Buss & Perry (1992).

This questionnaire was divided into four parts: manual aggression, vocal aggression, anger, and hostility. Total of 29 items indicated the aggression level of the participant. By using the 5-point Likert-scale each participant was asked to indicate how precisely each item of the questionnaire was developed and drag to the respondent in the right direction of his/her feelings during anger or aggression. Through empirical evidences it had been reported that instrument reliability is satisfactory for all dimensions ($\alpha=.80, .76, .72, .72, .80$).

4.2.2 Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS: Brown & Ryan 2003)

The MAAS is a comprehensive instrument to measure mindfulness. There are 15 items for evaluating the state of being in the current situation in day-to-day life with the help of 6-point Likert-scale (1 to 6 Almost always to Almost never). The reversed items in the measurement were maintained by the researcher. The reliability of the instrument has been assured from the previous studies and perfect for both students as well as adult populations (α

= .82 and .87, respectively). This instrument also has discriminant and convergent validity with several variables of psychosomatic well-being (Brown & Ryan, 2003). One of the most important benefit of MAAS is that the higher MAAS scores were also connected to (1) a smaller amount of reactivity to intimidating demonstrative incentives as designated by mutual amygdale reaction and prefrontal cortical stimulation (Creswell, Eisenberger, Way, & Lieberman, 2007), and (2) minimum self-reported violence (Buss & Perry's, 1992) in equally undergraduate students (Heppner et al., 2008), mature people (Borders et al., 2010).

4.2.3 Brief Self-Control Scale (Tangney, Baumeister, & Boone, 2004)

This study has employed Brief Self-Control Scale for the measurement of self-control. This SC Sare the cruces of previous studies that was conducted on self-control. The scale was established through extensive studies based on published studies on self-control. The SCS has covered all possible aspects of self-control. This scale consists of 36 items which includes complete control on feelings, full emotional control, instinct control, and presentation guideline. Most of the time, in previous studies they used old traditional 5-point Likert-scale (1 to 5, Not at all to Very much). Previous empirical studies showed satisfactory reliability ($\alpha = .83$ to $.85$) and retest reliability ($\beta = .87$).

According to Brown & Ryan's MAAS (2003) the higher scores of SCS was related with higher trait of mindfulness, moreover it also covers the idealistic relationship (Barnes et al., 2007) and amid regular student speculators (Lakey et al., 2007).

4.3 Mindfulness Module

The intervention for mindfulness was conducted in groups. They were selected to join the sessions after a pre-test was completed to identify their aggression levels. They were selected based on the high aggression level which was measured using Aggression Questionnaire (Buss & Perry, 1992). The client's demographic details were obtained via 'Client Information Form' which was distributed during registration. The statistical analysis was done using SPSS version 25 software for Windows. The female inmates were divided into two groups. The test group and the control group were each with 16 members. Both the groups were counselled but the test group was given interventions on mindfulness. The interventions were done in a span of six weeks. All activities were conducted at the recreational centre at the prison. After the intervention was completed, all the participants were brought to the recreation centre again. They were given the same three questionnaires. The participants were briefed again, and each question was read and explained for their understanding. All participants answered the questionnaires. They were debriefed and

dismissed after the first session. A total of 6 sessions were conducted and each session was for 2 hours. The activities are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of activities

Session	Registration	1	2	3	4	5	6
Objectives	1. To register participants 2. To administer tests 3. To filter participants 4. To create awareness on counselling and drugs	1. To 'break the ice' 2. Create universality 3. To identify inter-generational aggression 4. To introduce mindfulness intervention	1. To create universality 2. To create awareness on aggression 3. To enhance mindfulness 4 To introduce mindfulness intervention	1. To create awareness on mindfulness 2. To understand challenges to be mindful 3. To enhance mindfulness 4. To monitor progress	1. To eliminate obstacles to mindfulness 2. To enhance mindfulness 3. To monitor progress	1. To enhance mindfulness 2. To introduce another coping skill - Guided visualisation 3. To monitor progress	1. To terminate 2. To enhance mindfulness 3. To inspire to excel 4. To create camaraderie
Time	2 hours	2 hours	2 hours	2 hours	2 hours	2 hours	2 hours
Activities	1. Registration of participants 2. Presentation on counselling & drug 3. Questionnaires Administration -Aggression -Self-control -Mindfulness 4. Debrief and dismiss	1. Structuring - ground rules, Norms, policies, Consent 2. Individual Master piece 3. Icebreaking 4. Brief group goals by facilitator & Individual goals by members 4. Members sharing of aggression. 5. Genogram 6. Box Breathing. 7. Facilitator to summarise	1. Structuring. 2. Members sharing on box breathing technique 3. Presentation on aggression 4. Colouring 5. Daily Log 6. Body Scan 7. Summarise	1. Structuring 2. Members sharing on daily log 3. Presentation on Mindfulness 4. Origami 5. Mindfulness based on sensory organs 6. Facilitator to summarise	1. Structuring 2. Review of personal goals 3. Sharing of mindfulness experiences. 4. Video 5. Negativity 6. Positivity 7. Facilitator to summarise	1. Structuring 2. Worry Time 3. Sharing 4. Fountain of Youth 5. Guided Visualisation 6. Summarise	1. Structuring 2. Forgive and Bless 3. Suryanamaskar 4. Post test for aggression, selfcontrol and mindfulness 5. Sharing and feedback 6. Termination 7. Members networking & party 8. Movie

Table 2: Interventions

No	Interventions
1	Box breathing technique
3	Body scan technique
4	Sensory organs mindfulness
5	Negative and positive
6	Worry time
7	Guided visualisation

Seven interventions were used to enhance the participants mindfulness. Table 2 shows the different interventions used during the mindful sessions. The inmates, mind set and ability to follow the program was considered for the selection of the interventions. The inmates were able to adapt well to the program. Breathing technique is simple and easy to

follow. Inmates were automatically introduced to mindfulness with the first technique. Their fears on mindfulness being difficult was allayed with the first technique. Similarly, the remaining interventions were introduced progressively to increase the level of mindfulness.

5. Analysis

The relationship between mindfulness (Mean_MF), aggression (Mean_AG) and self-control (Mean_SC) was analysed using Pearson correlations. The SPSS output is shown in Table 3. Table 3 shows that the significance (2-tailed) is .000 for mindfulness and aggression. However, for aggression and self-control it is .951 and .543 for self-control and mindfulness. When there was an increase in mindfulness, it showed a decrease in aggression indicating that there was a negative correlation between mindfulness and aggression.

Table 3: Pearson Correlations

Source	Dependent Variable		MEAN_AG	MEAN_MF	MEAN_SC
ID	MEAN_AG	Correlation	1	-0.597	0.011
		Significance (2-tailed)	.	0	0.951
		Df	0	29	29
	MEAN_MF	Correlation	-0.597	1	0.113
		Significance (2-tailed)	0	.	0.543
		Df	29	0	29
	MEAN_SC	Correlation	0.011	0.113	1
		Significance (2-tailed)	0.951	0.543	.
		Df	29	29	0

6. Conclusion and Discussion

The findings showed that there was a negative relationship between mindfulness and aggression. An increase in mindfulness indicated a lower aggression level. The study by Garofalo, C., Gillespie, S. M., & Velotti, P., (2020) on emotion and aggressive behaviour indicate lower aggression when mindfulness was practised and confirmed the findings of this study. Inmates of this study had informed that they became calmer and were not very aggressive as compared to before the study. The results of the Buss & Perry questionnaire showed lower aggression in the group. Interestingly, the inmates in the group were found to have formed a close rapport and supported each other in whatever they could. The strong bond indirectly reduced aggression because they were able to forgive and forget when there was an issue. This was remarkable because it prevented brawls or aggression.

Studies by Sarala Devi, M., & Azniza, I.N. (2014) indicated that the psychoanalysis and positive psychology Intervention (PPPI) was able to reduce the aggression level in young

inmates. This study reinforces PPPI studies with the use of positive approach in mindfulness for reducing aggression.

There are very few studies that have been done which analyse the impact of mindfulness and aggression in Malaysia. Much of the research focused on aggression and other variables. Saralah Devi Mariamdarani (2014) focused on aggression and ability changes, Kamaluddin, et al. (2016) focused on aggression and low self-control Studies and he agrees that there are very few studies in Asean countries.

Empirical studies show that the behaviour and relationship of the mindfulness and aggression varies from country to country environment. Hence this study fulfils the research gap in mindfulness and aggression jointly focusing on female inmates in Penang state of Malaysia. There is a possibility of prison policy change and incorporation of mindfulness interventions into counselling sessions to reduce aggression in prisons. The researcher hopes that further studies will be conducted on the following for a comprehensive understanding:

- Impact of mindfulness on aggression outside prison environment when the inmates are released.
- Impact of mindfulness on aggression among school children.
- Mindfulness activities among prison inmates by categorising different levels of aggression.
- The findings indicated that:
- There is significant correlation between aggression and mindfulness.
- There is no significant correlation between self-control and mindfulness.

The prison environment is highly controlled due to security reasons. The researcher was not able to conduct the mindfulness activities freely. Some activities such as those related to sense of taste could not be completed because inmates are only given food from the prison kitchen at specific mealtimes. Inmates do not have access to pen and paper and some of the homework they were asked to complete were done based on memory instead of writing on a piece of paper. It is recommended that the mindful activities be conducted in non-prison environment. It will widen the scope of this research and the findings may give the true relationship between mindfulness and aggression.

This research is a quantitative study and the method was purely based on questionnaires. Thus, the true-life experiences in which some of the respondents had feedback to the researcher were not captured. A qualitative study on this study is recommended for this purpose.

This study has provided evidence in the Malaysian context among female prison inmates. This insight will help counsellors, psychologists, psychotherapists, and policy makers in the ministry to have alternative interventions for the rehabilitation programs and policies.

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