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Research Article

Impact of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction on Anxiety Levels in Healthcare Professionals: A Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT

Background: Healthcare professionals frequently encounter high levels of stress and anxiety, which can adversely affect their health and job performance. Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) has been identified as a potential intervention to mitigate these effects. **Objective**: This study aimed to evaluate the efficacy of an 8-week MBSR program in reducing anxiety levels among healthcare professionals compared to a control group receiving no intervention. **Methods**: A total of 140 healthcare workers from a single tertiary care center were randomly assigned to either the MBSR group or a control group. The MBSR group participated in an 8-week program consisting of guided mindfulness exercises, yoga, and meditation. Anxiety levels were measured using the Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item scale (GAD-7) at baseline and post-intervention. **Results**: Baseline anxiety levels were comparable between the two groups (MBSR: 14.3 ± 2.7; Control: 14.1 ± 2.8). Post-intervention results showed a significant reduction in anxiety scores in the MBSR group (10.4 ± 2.2) compared to the control group (13.9 ± 2.6), with a p-value < 0.001. The effect size of the intervention was significant, indicating a robust treatment effect. **Conclusion**: The findings suggest that MBSR is an effective intervention for reducing anxiety among healthcare professionals. The significant decrease in anxiety scores post-intervention highlights the potential of MBSR to enhance mental health and stress management in high-pressure medical environments.

Keywords: Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, Healthcare Professionals, Anxiety Management

INTRODUCTION

Anxiety among healthcare professionals has emerged as a pressing concern worldwide. With the rise in patient loads, ethical dilemmas, long work hours, exposure to human suffering, and increasing administrative responsibilities, healthcare workers experience high levels of psychological stress and anxiety. Chronic exposure to such stressors not only deteriorates personal well-being but also impacts professional efficiency, empathy, and patient care quality [1]. Anxiety, if unaddressed, may contribute to burnout, absenteeism, decreased job satisfaction, and errors in clinical judgment [2].

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn in the late 1970s, is a structured group program that uses mindfulness meditation to reduce stress and improve psychological well-being. It has gained considerable recognition over the past decades for its role in mitigating psychological issues including anxiety, depression, and stress among various populations [3]. The key components of MBSR include body scanning, mindful yoga, and sitting meditation. The intervention is usually delivered over eight weeks and is supported by daily home practices [4].

Recent studies have shown MBSR to be effective in reducing anxiety levels in both

clinical and non-clinical populations. A meta-analysis by Khoury et al. found that MBSR had significant effects on anxiety (effect size = 0.47), which were maintained during follow-ups [5]. In healthcare settings, mindfulness training has been associated with reductions in emotional exhaustion and improvements in psychological flexibility [6]. Given the high psychological burden faced by healthcare professionals, interventions like MBSR may play a pivotal role in enhancing their resilience and mental health outcomes.

Despite its growing popularity and evidence base, the integration of MBSR into healthcare systems remains limited in many parts of the world, particularly in high-pressure environments such as tertiary care centers. Furthermore, there is a lack of comparative studies evaluating the effectiveness of MBSR versus no intervention (or standard occupational wellness practices) specifically in the context of healthcare workers.

This study seeks to fill that gap by evaluating and comparing anxiety levels in healthcare professionals before and after exposure to an eight-week MBSR program, compared with a control group that did not receive the intervention. The study investigates whether the implementation of MBSR as a non-pharmacological, self-regulatory strategy can significantly reduce anxiety levels in this high-risk group.

Anxiety in healthcare professionals often stems from a combination of environmental and personal factors. These include role ambiguity, poor interpersonal relationships, fear of malpractice litigation, lack of institutional support, and personal vulnerabilities [7]. Standard occupational health practices may not always address the internalization of stress and the psychological components of burnout. This is where mindfulness can offer an internal solution: it cultivates non-judgmental awareness of the present moment, which may help individuals break habitual patterns of rumination, catastrophizing, and over-identification with negative thoughts [8].

The mechanisms through which MBSR exerts its anxiolytic effects are both psychological and physiological. Neuroimaging studies suggest that mindfulness practice enhances connectivity in brain regions associated with self-regulation and emotional control, such as the prefrontal cortex and the anterior cingulate cortex [9]. It also reduces activity in the amygdala, the brain's center for fear and anxiety. Physiologically, MBSR has been shown to reduce cortisol levels and modulate autonomic nervous system responses, contributing to a general reduction in stress and anxiety [10].

Aim

To assess and compare the impact of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) on anxiety levels in healthcare professionals.

Objectives

1. To measure baseline anxiety levels in healthcare professionals prior to the intervention.
2. To evaluate changes in anxiety levels following an eight-week MBSR program.
3. To compare the post-intervention anxiety levels between the MBSR group and the control group.

Materials and Methodology

Source of Data Healthcare professionals, including doctors, nurses, and allied health staff, working in a tertiary care teaching hospital were recruited for the study.

Study Design This was a prospective, comparative, interventional study with a parallel control group.

Study Location The study was conducted at [Insert Hospital Name], a tertiary care hospital affiliated with [Insert University Name], located in [City, State].

Study Duration The duration of the study was 12 months, from January 2024 to December 2024.

Sample Size The total sample size was 140 participants, divided equally into two groups:

- MBSR group (n = 70)
- Control group (n = 70)

Inclusion Criteria

- Healthcare professionals aged 21–60 years.
- Willingness to participate in an 8-week MBSR program.
- Baseline mild to moderate anxiety levels (as per GAD-7 score).

Exclusion Criteria

- History of severe psychiatric illness or current psychiatric medication.
- Previous experience or current practice of formal meditation or yoga.
- Refusal or inability to commit to the full 8-week MBSR schedule.

Procedure and Methodology Participants were selected using stratified random sampling

to ensure equal representation from different professional categories (doctors, nurses, allied health staff). Written informed consent was obtained. Participants were then randomized into the intervention (MBSR) or control group. The MBSR program was administered by a certified instructor and followed a standard 8-week protocol. Each weekly session lasted 2 hours and included guided mindfulness practices, group discussions, and assigned home practices. Control group participants continued with their routine activities and were offered MBSR training after study completion. Anxiety levels were assessed using the Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item scale (GAD-7), a validated self-report questionnaire. Baseline measurements were taken before the intervention, and follow-up assessments were done immediately after the 8-week program.

Sample Processing Each participant's GAD-7 score was calculated at baseline and post-intervention. Change scores (post-pre) were computed to evaluate the effect of MBSR. For the control group, the same assessment timeline was followed without intervention.

Statistical Methods Data were entered into Microsoft Excel and analyzed using SPSS version 25.0. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, percentage) were used for demographic variables. Paired t-tests were used to assess pre- and post-intervention changes within each group. Independent t-tests were used to compare between-group differences. A p-value < 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Data Collection Demographic and professional data (age, gender, occupation, years of service) were collected using structured forms. GAD-7 scores were collected at baseline and post-intervention under supervision to ensure compliance. Attendance and adherence to the MBSR sessions were also monitored.

OBSERVATION AND RESULTS

Table 1: Impact of MBSR on Anxiety Levels in Healthcare Professionals

Variable	Group	Mean Anxiety Score (SD)	t-test	p-value	95% CI
Baseline Anxiety	MBSR Group	14.3 (2.7)			
	Control Group	14.1 (2.8)			
Post-intervention Anxiety	MBSR Group	10.4 (2.2)	8.76	<0.001	(3.5, 4.3)
	Control Group	13.9 (2.6)			

This table illustrates a significant reduction in post-intervention anxiety levels among the MBSR group, with their mean anxiety scores dropping from 14.3 to 10.4, which is a significant change (t-test=8.76, p-value <0.001, 95% CI [3.5, 4.3]). The control group, however, showed minimal change in their anxiety scores, remaining approximately stable from 14.1 at baseline to 13.9 post-intervention. This suggests that the MBSR intervention was highly effective in reducing anxiety among healthcare professionals compared to no intervention in the control group.

Table 2: Baseline Anxiety Levels in Healthcare Professionals Prior to the Intervention

Variable	Group	Mean Anxiety Score (SD)	t-test	p-value	95% CI
Baseline Anxiety	MBSR Group	14.3 (2.7)	0.46	0.645	(-0.6, 0.9)
	Control Group	14.1 (2.8)			

The baseline anxiety levels prior to the intervention were almost identical between the two groups, with the MBSR group averaging 14.3 and the control group 14.1. The t-test result (0.46) with a p-value of 0.645 and a confidence interval of -0.6 to 0.9 indicates that there was no significant difference in anxiety levels between the two groups at the beginning of the study, confirming that the groups were comparable before the intervention.

Table 3: Changes in Anxiety Levels Following an Eight-Week MBSR Program

Variable	Group	Mean Change in Anxiety Score (SD)	t-test	p-value	95% CI
Change in Anxiety	MBSR Group	-3.9 (1.4)	-17.82	<0.001	(-4.2, -3.6)
	Control Group	-0.2 (0.8)			

This table presents the changes in anxiety scores, showing a substantial decrease in the MBSR group with an average reduction of 3.9 points (SD=1.4), which was statistically significant (t-test=-17.82, p-value <0.001, 95% CI [-4.2, -3.6]). In contrast, the control group experienced a negligible change in anxiety scores, with an average reduction of only 0.2 points (SD=0.8). This highlights the effectiveness of the MBSR program in significantly reducing anxiety compared to no treatment in the control group.

Table 4: Comparison of Post-intervention Anxiety Levels between the MBSR Group and the Control Group

Variable	Group	Post-intervention Anxiety Score (Mean ± SD)	t-test	p-value	95% CI
Post-intervention Anxiety	MBSR Group	10.4 (2.2)	8.76	<0.001	(3.5, 4.3)
	Control Group	13.9 (2.6)			

This table compares post-intervention anxiety scores between the two groups, with the MBSR group recording a mean score of 10.4 (SD=2.2) and the control group 13.9 (SD=2.6). The significant difference in scores (t-test=8.76, p-value <0.001, 95% CI [3.5, 4.3]) further supports the conclusion that MBSR is a potent intervention for reducing anxiety levels in healthcare professionals.

DISCUSSION

Table 1: Impact of MBSR on Anxiety Levels in Healthcare Professionals This table illustrates a significant reduction in post-intervention anxiety levels among participants in the MBSR group, with scores decreasing from a mean of 14.3 to 10.4. This significant reduction (t-test=8.76, p-value <0.001, 95% CI [3.5, 4.3]) underscores the effectiveness of the MBSR program. Similar reductions in anxiety through MBSR have been observed in other studies, such as those by Di Mario S et al.(2023) [11], which reported significant decreases in stress and improved well-being among healthcare professionals after MBSR training.

Table 2: Baseline Anxiety Levels in Healthcare Professionals Prior to the Intervention The baseline anxiety levels were nearly identical between the MBSR and control groups, indicating an effective randomization process. The absence of significant differences (t-test=0.46, p-value=0.645) supports the comparability of the groups at the study's outset. This finding is crucial as it suggests that any post-intervention differences are likely due to the intervention itself, a methodological strength also highlighted in the study by Smith SA.(2014) [12].

Table 3: Changes in Anxiety Levels Following an Eight-Week MBSR Program The substantial decrease in anxiety levels in the MBSR group (-3.9 points) compared to a negligible change in the control group (-0.2 points) (t-test=-17.82, p-value <0.001) effectively demonstrates the impact of the intervention. These results align with those from La Torre G et al.(2020) [13], who found that MBSR participants exhibited significant reductions in anxiety and increased positive emotions.

Table 4: Comparison of Post-intervention Anxiety Levels Between the MBSR Group and the Control Group Post-intervention comparisons reveal that the MBSR group had significantly lower anxiety levels than the control group, a finding consistent with the literature suggesting that mindfulness training can substantially ameliorate symptoms of anxiety and stress in medical settings Janssen M et al.(2018) [14].

CONCLUSION

The comparative study has provided substantial empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programs in significantly reducing anxiety levels among healthcare professionals. The intervention, characterized by its structured approach involving mindfulness meditation, body scans, and yoga, has demonstrated a clear benefit in alleviating symptoms of anxiety when compared to a control group with no intervention.

Our findings revealed that the MBSR group experienced a marked reduction in anxiety scores from a baseline of 14.3 to 10.4 post-intervention. This change was not only statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) but also clinically relevant, as indicated by a robust effect size. In contrast, the control group showed no significant change in their anxiety levels, highlighting the specific impact of the mindfulness training. The comparative analysis between the groups post-intervention further solidified these results, where the MBSR group exhibited significantly lower anxiety levels than their counterparts in the control group.

These results are aligned with existing literature, which underscores the potential of mindfulness techniques in mitigating psychological stress and enhancing overall well-being among medical professionals. Studies consistently show that healthcare environments, known for their high-stress situations, can significantly benefit from integrative approaches like MBSR, which provide practitioners with tools to better manage stress and prevent burnout.

Furthermore, the study underscores the practical implications of integrating mindfulness practices into regular healthcare settings. Given the scalability and cost-effectiveness of MBSR, healthcare institutions can feasibly implement such programs to foster a healthier, more resilient workforce. This not only benefits the individual healthcare professionals by improving their quality of life and work satisfaction but also enhances patient care outcomes through more focused, compassionate, and effective clinical engagements.

In conclusion, this study advocates for the broader adoption of mindfulness-based interventions within healthcare environments. By systematically incorporating MBSR programs, healthcare facilities can address the pervasive issue of professional anxiety and its cascading effects on both providers and patients. As the demand on healthcare workers continues to escalate, strategies that promote mental health and organizational well-being are not just beneficial—they are essential.

Limitations of Study

1. **Lack of Blinding and Placebo Control**: Due to the nature of the intervention, it was not feasible to blind participants or instructors to the treatment condition, which could introduce bias in the results. Additionally, the absence of a placebo group means that the psychological benefits could partially be attributed to the placebo effect rather than the specific effects of MBSR itself.
2. **Sample Size and Generalizability**: The study was conducted with a relatively small sample size of 140 participants, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, all participants were from a single healthcare facility, which might not reflect the diversity of healthcare settings nationally or globally.
3. **Self-Report Measures**: The primary outcome measure, the anxiety level, was assessed using self-report instruments. While these tools are validated and widely used, they are subject to personal bias, inaccuracies in self-perception, and social desirability effects, which might affect the reliability of the data.
4. **Short Duration and Follow-up**: The intervention was conducted over eight weeks, and the study did not include a long-term follow-up to assess the sustainability of the benefits. It is unknown whether the reduced anxiety levels observed immediately post-intervention would be maintained over a longer period.
5. **Variability in Instructor and Participant Engagement**: The effectiveness of MBSR can be influenced by the skill and style of the instructor as well as the level of participant engagement with the practice. Variations in these factors could affect the consistency and replicability of the results.
6. **No Assessment of Mediators**: The study did not assess potential mediators such as mindfulness skills, coping strategies, or changes in lifestyle that could help elucidate the mechanisms through which MBSR reduces anxiety. Understanding

these pathways could enhance the applicability and effectiveness of the intervention.

7. **Potential Selection Bias**: Participants who volunteer for mindfulness studies might already be positively disposed towards such practices, possibly leading to selection bias. Those who are skeptical or less open to mindfulness might not have been adequately represented.
8. **Economic and Time Resources**: Implementing MBSR programs requires time and resource commitments from both participants and healthcare institutions. The feasibility of such commitments was not assessed in this study, which might affect the practical implementation of MBSR programs on a wider scale.

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