

The development of a mindfulness mobile app targeting people facing infertility

The MindfulSpot

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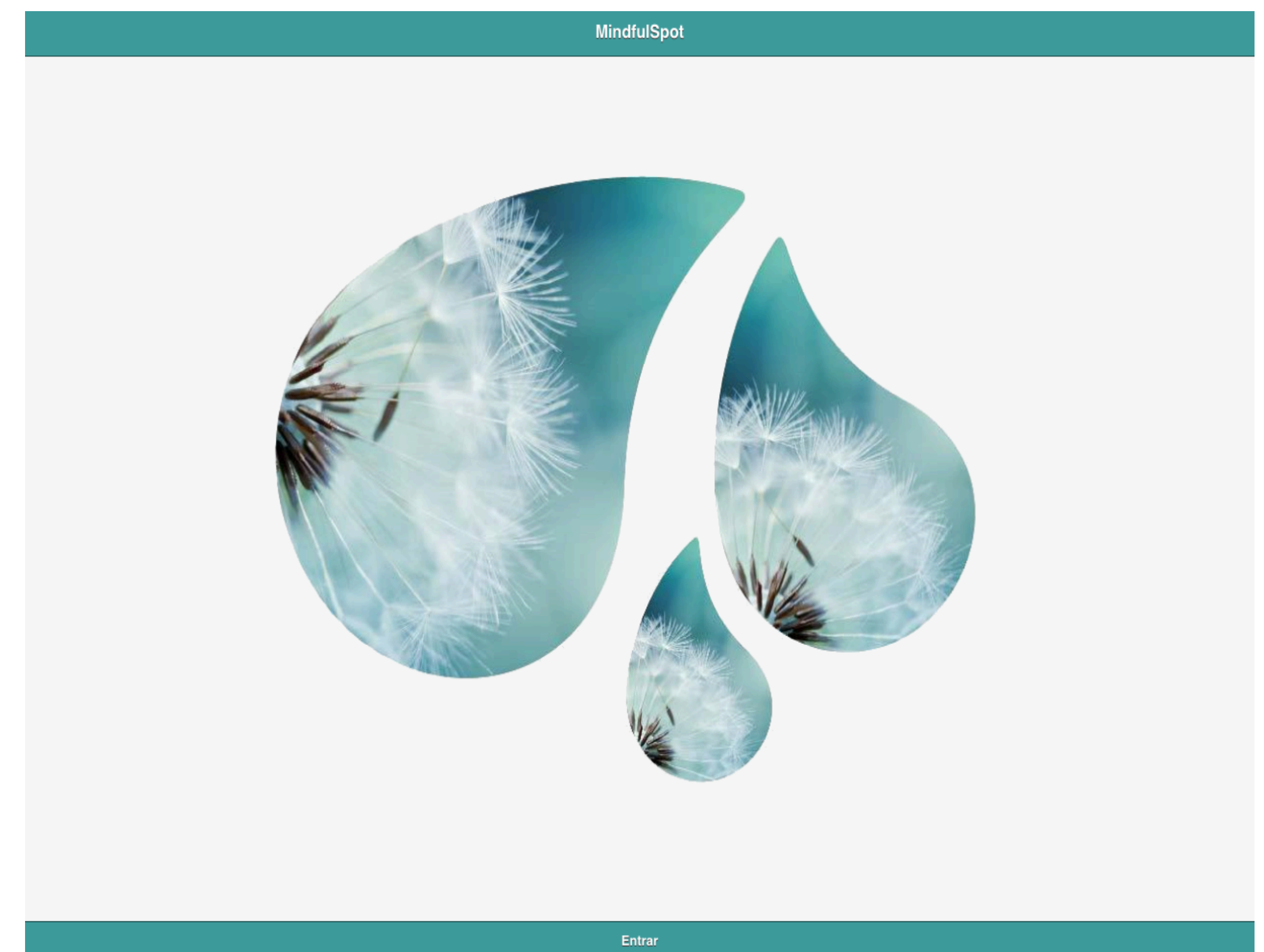
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INTRODUCTION

Infertility is a medical and social condition presenting numerous challenges including psychological burden. Although most couples facing fertility issues and the demands of medical treatment are able to adjust, some of them may show psychological difficulties with clinical relevance such as depression and anxiety (Verhaak, Lintsen, Evers & Braat, 2010). In the field of reproductive health psychology, specifically regarding infertility, the Mindfulness Based Program for Infertility (MBPI) (Galhardo, Cunha, & Pinto-Gouveia, 2013) has proved to decrease depressive symptoms, external and internal shame, entrapment and defeat. The MBPI also showed to improve mindfulness skills and the perception of self-efficacy to deal with infertility. This program is delivered in a group format of 15 participants and includes 10 weekly sessions of 2 hours each. Recently, preliminary data of a follow-up study revealed that MBPI benefits seem to persist over a 7-year period.

The MBPI intends to promote mindfulness and acceptance skills and was used as the starting point for the development of the MindfulSpot.

According to Harrison et al. (2011), smartphones are one of best tools for spreading information. These devices offer immediate accessibility and can be used whenever and wherever are needed. Acknowledging that new technologies can be useful tools within the psychological intervention scope, we considered the development of a mindfulness based App for people dealing with fertility problems as an innovative approach.



THE MINDFULSPOT

Offering the chance to practicing Mindfulness in a comfortable and accessible way, the MindfulSpot is a prototype mobile App developed specifically for people facing infertility. Previous studies have identified infertility as a stressful condition impacting on several life domains.

With the ambition of contributing to the development of acceptance skills regarding the experience of infertility and the demands of medical treatment, the MindfulSpot does not intend to replace infertility medical treatment. This app is expected to be used as an additional resource seeking the reduction of possible negative impact brought by infertility and its treatment. Smartphones, tablets, computers and smart TVs serve as examples of devices on which the MindfulSpot may be used.

Additionally to written information, the MindfulSpot encompasses audio instructions for mindfulness practice. These instructions were developed for formal mindfulness practice (body scan, mindfulness being in the present moment, mindfulness being where you are, sounds and thoughts meditation) but there are also audio contents suggesting informal practice (three minutes breathing space).

The App invites users to explore informative menus, unlocking the possibility to go beyond the mindfulness practices mentioned above. Emotional experiences more frequently associated with infertility diagnosis is one of the topics the users can find in the App. Furthermore, the psychological impact of infertility is addressed in terms of the individual, the couple and the familiar and professional areas. These informative menus focus on the normalization of adverse emotional consequences, helping the users to decrease feelings of isolation, guilt, shame (frequently experienced by people who find difficulties in conceiving) (Moura-Ramos, Canavarro, Soares & Santos, 2012; Verhaak et al., 2010).

This mobile App offers the opportunity for both members of the couple to use it when infertility is diagnosed.

CONCLUSION

The MindfulSpot was designed as a tool for the promotion of mindfulness and acceptance skills. Accordingly, it is expected that it can help people to become more conscious of their experience dealing with it with openness and curiosity instead of trying to suppress, avoid or modify it and consequently decrease emotional distress. To our knowledge it is the first mindfulness based App specifically designed to target people facing infertility.

Moreover, the MindfulSpot can be used as a support tool for people who attend the MBPI or as an independent tool for those who, for some reason, are no able to attend a more structured psychological intervention.

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