

A Qualitative Study of the Preliminary Impact of Mindful Action for Pain (MAP)

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Background

- Mindful Action for Pain (MAP) is an 8-week group intervention for chronic pain based on the psychological flexibility (PF) model being developed at the San Diego VA.
- A distinguishing feature of MAP compared to other ACT manuals for chronic pain is the emphasis on and in-session time allocated to formal concentration-based meditation practice.

Methods

- As part of treatment development, semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted at week 6 on a total of 13 participants across 3 groups.
- The purpose of these interviews was to: 1) obtain feedback on the utility of meditation practice; 2) ensure PF processes were being targeted; and 3) assess participants' comprehension of treatment methods.
- Thematic analysis was used to analyze interviews.

Results

- 1) Participants reported an association between meditation practice and change in how pain was experienced and improvement in function.
- 2) Participants articulated movement on PF processes.
- 3) Several instances of a control agenda were observed when participants provided feedback on treatment methods.

Conclusions

- The emphasis on formal meditation practice in MAP appears to be helpful for facilitating PF.
- The extent that some feedback reflects psychological inflexibility vs differences in language used between provider and participant is unclear.
- In future iterations of MAP, greater emphasis will be placed on clarifying the goal of formal meditation practice, and increased vigilance on misinterpretation of metaphors and exercises.

Feedback on Meditation Practice

Meditation and Change in Relationship to Pain

"Do your meditation and say, well I could do this. I want to be out, I want to go places and it has given me some strength there to say that this pain cannot hold you down."

Meditation and Broadening View

"It taught me that pain can be just like a thought in the meditation process...become aware of it but not necessarily focus on it and just get back to what is currently happening with my breath."

Greater Acceptance of Pain

"Don't let the pain run your life, you can still run your life with pain."
"...we can take the pain, label it, acknowledge it, and then just let it go, and for me, it's just been a godsend."

Defusing from Dirty Pain

"You take your mind off that pain, the thought which creates that pain, and the feeling, the emotion, of the pain that you get...if you're able to isolate that and move it into another folder somewhere, it's away from your body."

Tugging for War?

"...pain comes to you every day...and I'm trying to pull away...try to feel normal...that's what the tug of war was. So I want this comfort but the pain is saying no... I'm gonna tug as hard as I can and get that relief."

Meditation: The Pain Remover?

"I started trying this last week. When the pain would start, I tried to stop where I was going, if I could, and meditate, and it seems to take the pain away when I meditate."

Meditation and Functional Improvement

"I feel a little more comfortable to do the things that required energy from me before. I'm not as hesitant...I also have found that, how do I explain this? I think when I do meditate, I feel so much more energetic."

Meditation Linked with Values

"Meditation has lifted my spirit to say or give me the strength to say, don't let this hold you down and do what you want to do, go where you want to go and you know, be with friends and family, but, the pain sometimes wins."

Increased Present Moment Awareness

"I noticed that I'm able to be more in the moment and aware, I'm not allowing too many things to come into my head while I'm in the moment doing something or being with someone else."

Values-based Action

"I kind of got over the negative thoughts—just participate, you know, as much as I can and like I said if I can't play, I'm just going to go out and mingle and enjoy life in the company of other people."

Psychological Comfort?

"...you can't stop the pain, but if can you see through, then you can see your way through comfort. And I think I got—I'm on the right track for what he was explaining to us."

Meditation: The Negativity Remover?

"...mindfulness is a way to rid your mind of all the clutter and all of the negative thoughts that you may be having, whether it's about pain or some kind of emotional distress or anything like that."

Psychological Flexibility Processes

Treatment Methods Gone Astray?