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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Mindfulness Training as an Intervention for Substance User Incarcerated Adolescents: A Pilot Grounded Theory Study

Sam Himelein¹, Stephen Saul², Alberto Garcia-Romeu³, and Daniel Pinedo⁴

¹Mind Body Awareness Project, Oakland, California, USA; ²Insights Program of Star Vista, East Palo Alto, California, USA; ³Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Michigan, USA; ⁴Department of Clinical Psychology, Sofia University, Oakland, California, USA

Mindfulness-based treatment for adolescents is a clinical and research field still in its infancy. Literature is needed to address specific subclinical populations to expand this growing field. Further, minimal literature addresses the process of teaching mindfulness to adolescents. The current study investigated how to effectively teach mindfulness to 10 incarcerated adolescent substance users ($N = 10$) in an urban California detention setting. A grounded theory approach was used to collect and analyze interview data over a 1-year period during 2011 and 2012 in order to develop an initial theory for teaching mindfulness to incarcerated adolescent substance users. Implications, limitations, and future research are discussed.

Keywords: mindfulness, substance abuse, incarcerated adolescents, juvenile offender, substance use, alcohol abuse

INTRODUCTION

There is a significant need for substance abuse¹ interventions for juvenile offenders. There were, for example, approximately 167,000 drug violations among juveniles in the United States in 2009 (Knox & Siskind, 2012). Furthermore, the number of cases placed on probation increased 27% from 1983 to 2009 (Lively, 2012) and the daily use of dual substances such as marijuana for 12th graders is 1 in 15, the highest recorded in the past 30 years (Johnson, O'Malley, Bachman, & Schulenberg, 2012).

There are some evidence-based interventions targeted toward juvenile offenders that have been shown to reduce recidivism, substance use, and behaviors associated with delinquency (Gentry, Kim, & Silver, 2008). Multisystemic family therapy (MFT; Liddle et al., 2001) targets substance-abusing adolescents and their families. Research on MFT² has been conducted since 1985 and suggests that the intervention significantly reduces substance use among adolescents (Liddle et al., 2001; Liddle, Dakof, Turner, Henderson, & Greenbaum, 2008; Rigger et al., 2013). Further, Multisystemic Therapy (MST; Henggeler, Schoenwald, Brondino, Rowland, & Cunningham, 2009), another evidence-based multiple system approach, has been shown to decrease substance use and behaviors often associated with substance use such as delinquency and incarceration (Henggeler et al., 2009; Schoenwald & Brondino, 2009). Although the above two interventions have a prolonged history of evidence, they require a substantial amount of resources (such as prolonged clinical training with nonclinical costs) that juvenile detention facilities and the families of incarcerated adolescents often do not have. Given the lack of financial resources, and because adolescent substance use interventions that do not require such resources (e.g., Motivational Interviewing) have shown limited and mixed efficacy with adolescents (Barnett, Sisson, Smith, Koldbach, & Sprague, 2002; Dine, Rigg, Langenbach, Oldham, & Brown, 2000; Mason, Palfrey, Zuckerman, & Speer, 2009), there is a strong need for efficacious substance use

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The journal's style follows the category *substance abuse* as a diagnostic category. Substances are used or inhaled; living organisms are and can be about; fatal is not.
Address correspondence to Dr. Sam Himelein, Mind Body Awareness Project, Oakland, CA, USA. E-mail: samhimelein@gmail.com

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are critical factors in treatment delivery within this population (Ginsburg, Mann, Rogers, & Winters, 2002).

The Current Study

The primary focus of the current study was to develop (1) a preliminary conceptual model for teaching mindfulness to incarcerated adolescent substance users and to conceptualize how the practice of mindfulness may affect the lives of the target population. This was done using a grounded theory approach, a qualitative methodology of developing theory based on participant opinions, perspectives, and experiences (Corbin & Strauss, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Our goal was to develop a conceptual framework culminating in two hypotheses that could be tested empirically in future research: (1) that mindfulness introduced with clear objects and a short period of time may increase client receptivity, and (2) that mindfulness-based interventions have the potential to reduce substance use and recidivism among substance using juvenile offenders. Further, we wanted to investigate effective teaching methodology in order to provide clinicians who work with justice-involved substance using adolescents and similar populations a framework for helping their clients via mindfulness practice.

METHOD

Qualitative research methods are particularly well suited to uncover the meaning participants assign to their experiences (Polkinghorne, 1991). Qualitative methods are also effective for generating conceptual frameworks that can be used to develop theory, future research, and clinical interventions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Therefore, we chose to use the grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), a method that involves collecting interview data on a particular topic, developing initial codes, refining codes into themes (open coding), identifying a central phenomenon (axial coding), and developing a theoretical framework from which a process occurs (selective coding). The grounded theory approach was chosen given that no studies were found that explored the process of teaching mindfulness to youth, let alone incarcerated adolescent substance users. Further, we felt that an initial theory would be needed in order for it to be tested in future research.
This grounded theory approach was epistemologically rooted in the transformative research paradigm (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). The transformative paradigm pays particular attention to the multiple realities influenced by the experience of different cultures, marginalized, oppressed, and underserved populations. And although we chose a rigorous data analysis method not often associated with the transformative paradigm, we used because incarcerated adolescents are often treated with punishment-based treatments (i.e., culturally insensitive treatments that assign the accountability of the crime to the youth with-out reference to contextual factors such as poverty and oppression). A large portion of mindfulness researchers and practitioners teach mindfulness using methods that have

been researched with adults that may not be applicable to incarcerated adolescents. Thus, we felt it necessary to use this research as a platform to advocate for the perspectives and experiences of the participants themselves.

Participants

Research participants were recruited from a larger study investigating the efficacy of mindfulness on locus of control, impulsivity, and antisocial behavior (Himelein & Saul, 2012). Participants were incarcerated male adolescents at a California juvenile detention camp who were court-mandated to attend substance user treatment as a condition in which they received mindfulness training. The nature of the crime they committed, Participant criteria ranged from adolescent to seriously violent, and court criteria for mandated substance user treatment is determined by (a) being under the influence while committing a crime, and/or (b) in the future of the crime was drug-related. A total of 10 participants consented to take part in this grounded theory study. The participants ranged in age from 15 to 18 and self-identified ethnically as, Latino ($n = 4$), Pacific Islander ($n = 2$), Caucasian ($n = 2$), African American ($n = 1$), and Hispanic ($n = 1$).

Procedure

The adolescents who participated in this study were court-mandated to participate in the detention camp's drug and alcohol psychotherapeutic intervention. As part of the larger study (Himelein & Saul, 2012), participants were randomly assigned to either a treatment condition in which they received mindfulness training in individual therapy, or to a control condition in which they received therapy as usual without mindfulness training. Participants who agreed to participate in the study and who were randomly assigned to the treatment condition were asked prior to participation if they would be willing to be interviewed about their experiences learning mindfulness. The research ethics committee at Sofia University approved the current study. Because of the time of incarceration youth are work of the court, the court's presiding juvenile judge consented to the research. The adolescent participants' work at the facility, limited about the nature of the study and assent was obtained.

Mindfulness Meditation

Participants who consented to the study were taught 6 mindfulness-based exercises once a week for 10 to 15-week period. Only 10 to 15 weeks were allotted for treatment given the nature of the substance user program at the detention camp and the size at which sessions were released. These meditations included: (1) counting the breaths (2) mindfulness of the breath, (3) the body scan, (4) deep breathing, (5) a body scan in which participants were asked not to move, and (6) an informal, cognitive-based, acronym mindfulness technique entitled S.T.I.C. (i.e., g. steps take a breath, imagine the future-consequences, and choose). Mindfulness exercises lasted from 2 to 20 min and participants were encouraged but not mandated to practice between sessions. Mindfulness sessions were taught by two facilitators each with 150 or more

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TABLE 1. Mindfulness exercise protocol

Session	Mindfulness Exercise	Main instruction (in brief)
1	Introduction to the practice of mindfulness in the detention camp	Mindfulness of the breath: 3 to 5 min.

years of meditative experience (including daily meditation practice and numerous silent retreats). Table 1 summarizes the order and duration in which mindfulness techniques were presented and practiced.

Data Collection

Data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews. Some structured interviews were conducted upon completion of the mindfulness training and ranged in time from approximately 10 to 20 min. Two central research questions guided data collection:
1. What are the most effective methods for teaching mindfulness meditation to incarcerated adolescent substance users?
2. What is the impact of mindfulness meditation on the lives of incarcerated adolescent substance users?

Participants were queried about their experiences with the mindfulness activities, if they thought they were beneficial, and aspects of the mindfulness meditations that may shed light on how to approach meditation with the target population. Table 2 summarizes the semi-structured interview protocol.

Interviews were audio-recorded and stored on the lead author's computer in a password-protected file for security purposes. All interviews were assigned participant numbers and stripped of any identifying information prior to transcription. The first, third, and fourth authors transcribed all interview verbatim. Upon completion of transcription, our research team met for data analysis.

Data Analysis

Keeping in alignment with Corbin and Strauss's (2007) grounded theory approach, we analyzed our data through three distinct methods of coding: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. First, each author was sent verbatim transcripts of all of the interviews and developed initial codes, refined those codes, and grouped those codes

into themes to identify the major categories in the data (i.e., open coding). Our research team constructed a number of codes to compare and contrast our codes and themes until we came to a group consensus of the major categories that represented the participants' experiences with learning and practicing mindfulness meditation. Next, each author identified a central phenomenon, a major theme or group of themes from which the majority of the data seemed to gravitate around (i.e., axial coding). Finally, our research team constructed and constructed "any" and flow chart of the underlying processes of the central phenomenon (i.e., selective coding). From this we were able to derive a pilot theory of an effective methodology for teaching mindfulness and how it may be beneficial to incarcerated adolescent substance users.

RESULTS

Results of this study include major themes from the open coding, the identified central phenomenon from axial coding, and the major pivot points associated with teaching mindfulness to incarcerated adolescents from selective coding.

Open Coding: Major Themes

Five major themes were identified from the data. These included enhanced psychological mindfulness and well-being, development of worldview, novel experiences, challenging experiences, and future use of mindfulness. Table 3 illustrates the five major categories and subcategories that comprise each category.

Because our research questions focused primarily on the process of how to teach mindfulness and secondarily on the experience and impact it had on participants' lives, full quotes for each major category and subcategory are not presented in this manuscript. Rather, the quotes were collated around the initial theory developed within this research, which is presented in the section on selective coding.

Axial Coding: Central Phenomenon

After identifying the major themes within the data, it became clear that participants most often referenced the major theme of enhanced psychological mindfulness and well-being. Most data revolved around this theme in some form. We identified this theme as the central phenomenon, with causal conditions influencing the phenomenon of enhanced psychological mindfulness and well-being, and the

TABLE 2. Questions asked during semi-structured interview with incarcerated adolescents

1. Who was your overall experience with the mindfulness meditations you learned? Were they helpful? Not helpful? If so, how?
2. How long do you think is a good amount of time to teach mindfulness meditation to incarcerated youth?
3. How would you explain what mindfulness is to other youth in the detention camp?
4. Do you feel that mindfulness could help you obtain from sleep and/or help you stay out of jail once released? If so, be specific.
5. What stands out most about your experience learning and practicing mindfulness?
6. Is there anything else about your experience I haven't covered with these interview questions that you'd like to add about your experience? If yes, what?

“ REFERENCE ENTRY information including journal, volume, author(s), affiliations, DOI, and page range is often available at the top of the article. Check database generated entries with an APA guide.

TITLE

- Acts as a description of the work
- Tells the reader what the researcher(s) investigated

ABSTRACT

- Summarizes the major sections of the article
- Helps readers determine if the article is appropriate for an assignment and/or likely to help them answer their research question(s)

INTRODUCTION

- Explains the relevance of the topic
- Summarizes the field's current understanding of the problem being investigated
- Identifies gaps in the current understanding and indicates which of these the study tried to fill
- Notes the general approach the author(s) took and gives a rationale for the approach
- Often includes a statement of purpose noting what the researcher(s) hoped to discover
- Sometimes includes a hypothesis identifying what the researchers thought they would find

METHODS

- Expands on the general approach identified in the introduction
- Explains how the study was carried out
- FREQUENTLY ANSWERS:

- Who were the subjects in the study?
- When and where did the study take place?
- What occurred during the study?
- What data was collected?
- How was data collected?
- How was the data analyzed?

RESULTS

- Reports the findings or results of the study

