

Mindfulness-based interventions for substance abuse disorders

Abstract

Substance abuse is a global public health concern. It is associated with various health care problems, increase in crime rates, and decrease in productivity. Despite utilizing various approaches for management of substance abuse worldwide, the substance abuse and relapse rates are still relatively high. This paper introduces a new approach for management of substance abuse disorder utilizing mindfulness-based intervention. This paper presents the positive outcomes associated with using mindfulness for management of substance abuse disorder and suggests utilizing this intervention in various populations.

Keywords: mindfulness, intervention, substance abuse, addiction

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Opinion

Recently, addiction is considered a global public health concern. In 2013, about 250 million people addicted harmful substances.¹ Substance abuse and addiction have devastating impacts on the health of individuals worldwide. In 2013, it is estimated that about 187,100 people worldwide died of addiction related consequences.¹ The National Institute on Drug Abuse, in 2015, reported that the consequences of addiction and substance abuse including health care problems, crime, and decrease in productivity at work cost more than 700 billion dollars yearly.²

There is a crucial need to find an effective management modality for addiction and substance abuse. Although a variety of interventions are available for people with substance abuse (e.g., CBT and motivational interviewing), the relapse rates are still high,³ and addiction on substances and other behaviors is increasing.⁴ Therefore, there is a need to develop an effective intervention to reduce the negative consequences of addiction and substance abuse and prevent relapse worldwide.

Mindfulness-based intervention is considered an innovative and promising approach for management of substance abuse related disorders.⁵ Mindfulness is defined as paying attention and maintaining a non-judgmental acceptance and awareness, moment-by-moment, of the current thoughts, emotions, physical sensations, and the environment.⁶ Mindfulness practice (e.g., mindful breathing) is associated with better physical and psychological health outcomes.^{7,8}

Mindfulness practice could manage addictive behaviors and relapse. Mindfulness encourages attention at the current moment which interrupts thought processes associated with substance seeking and provide an innovative coping strategy.^{9,10} It enhances attention toward the current daily life activities and diminishes attention toward substances abused.⁹ Further, mindfulness based interventions teach patients how to cope effectively with stress rather than seeking substances to alleviate stress.⁹

Mindfulness-based interventions could enhance non-judgmental responses to thoughts associated with the use of substances; thereby decrease the risk for relapse.^{11,12} Further, mindfulness-based interventions could help individuals redirect attention to the body sensations and the current experiences rather than focusing

on substances abused. There is a growing interest in examining the effectiveness of different types of mindfulness based interventions on substance abuse and relapse including mindful meditation, Mindfulness-Based Relapse Prevention, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, modified mindfulness training for smoking cessation, Mindfulness-Oriented Recovery Enhancement, and treatments combining mindfulness-based interventions with other interventions.⁹ Furthermore, there are different systematic reviews that supported the usefulness of mindfulness-based interventions to help people with substance abuse.^{13,14} However, the literature suggests that these studies included Western samples with little interest in conducting such studies in Eastern populations. Therefore, there is limited knowledge regarding the effectiveness of mindfulness-based interventions to support patients with substance abuse disorders in Eastern populations. Considering the increased evidences that mindfulness is helpful to support people with substance abuse, there is a need to conduct more studies about the mindfulness-based intervention to manage substance abuse in different populations. Furthermore, there is a need to identify the extent to which treatment effects are maintained after mindfulness-based interventions. Key to this work is how to develop culturally sensitive intervention utilizing mindfulness to be applied in Eastern countries.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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