

The Impact of a Mindfulness Based Intervention with Women in Prison A Feasibility Study

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Objectives

- **Discuss sources of stress for women in prison**
- **Describe the 12 week Path to Freedom Program specifically designed for people in prisons**
- **Discuss challenges encountered conducting research in correctional facilities**

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Background

- Over 200,000 women are in prisons and jails annually with more than 1,000,000 under criminal justice supervision or parole
- 2/3 of women in prison have committed nonviolent crimes (drug and property offenses)
- Nearly 2/3 are mothers and 70% provided most of their children's daily care
- Economically marginalized, single, and disproportionately of racial minority

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Background

- **Women in prison are largely in their 30's and 40's**
- **Significant histories of physical, sexual and emotional abuse**
- **Histories of depression, anxiety and PTSD**
- **Higher incidence of chronic diseases than the general population**

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Stressors of Prison Life

Routine



Boredom



Crowding



Stressors of Prison Life

- **Separation from children**
- **Strip searches**
- **Lack of privacy (mail, journals, etc.); noise**
- **Nutritional constraints**
- **Limited items purchased through canteens**
- **Witnessing other prisoners bullied**
- **Ever changing cell mates**

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Stressors of Prison Life



Loss



Trapped



Booking

Stressors of Prison Life

- It is estimated that up to 40% of prisoners seek medical consultation for sleep problems
- Frequent visits to the health clinic for persistent insomnia, requests to see the physician and/or psychiatrists often lead to prescribed psychotropic medications, particularly hypnotics (Elger, 2007)

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Meditation

- **Approximately 30 well documented studies on the use of meditation as an intervention strategy in prison settings (Himmelstein, 2011)**
- **400 articles have been published on the psychophys physiologic changes that occur during meditative practice, including a decrease in anxiety and stress, and an improvement in mood (Sumter, Monk-Turner, Turner, 2007)**

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Background



Recruitment

- **Posted description of the program and sign up sheet on the bulletin board**
- **Reviewed names with clinical social worker**
- **Met with each woman to discuss research and obtained informed consent**

Research Design

- **Pre-post quasi experimental design**
- **Administer four instruments 1-2 weeks before, 2 weeks after and one month after program**

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Instruments

- **Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)**
- **Center for Epidemiologic Studies Short Depression Scale (CESD-10)**
- **Strait Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI)**
- **Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI)**

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Program

- **12 week structured program**
- **1 ½ hrs. once a week**
- **Same facilitator for all sessions; experienced and certified**
- **Workbook**
- **CD player with CD (18 selections)**

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Path of Freedom

Workbook Developed by Kate Crisp

Prison Dharma Project

Focus of Session

- **Exploring Who You Are**
- **Self Acceptance**
- **Remaining Calm When Triggered**
- **The Drama Triangle**
- **Choice**
- **Responsibility**
- **Moving Away from Blaming**
- **Forgiveness**
- **Working with Anxiety**

Meditations

- **Basic Meditation Instruction**
- **Basic Breath Awareness and breathe counting**
- **Deep Belly Breathing**
- **Meditations for Panic**
- **Listening**
- **Being Still, Tense and Relax**
- **Change the Channel**
- **Director's cut**
- **Meditations for Anxiety**



Path of Freedom

Focus of Session

- **Dealing with Conflict**
- **Pain and Forgiveness**
- **Nonviolent Communication**
- **Empowerment**
- **Making It Real**

Meditations

- **Compassion Meditation**
- **Dealing with Pain**
- **Empathy and Respect**
- **Confidence Raising Meditation**



Assumptions

- **Meditation and mindfulness practice are powerful tools that can create peace and calm**
- **Meditation trains your mind to be peaceful**
- **A Meditation practice can provide choices to act or not act from a strong, clear place**

Demographics of First Group of 18 Women

- **Age: N = 18**
 - 20 to 53 years old
 - M = 34.50, SD = 10.52
- **Ethnicity:**
 - 11 (61.1%) White
 - 2 (11.1%) PR
 - 2 (11.1%) SP
 - 3 (16.7%) AA
- **Marital Status**
 - 0 (0%) married
 - 13 (72.2%) single
 - 3 (16.7%) divorced
 - 1 (5.6%) widowed
 - 1 (5.6%) missing data

- **Prison history**
 - 10 (55.6%) had been in prison before
 - 8 (44.4%) had not been in prison before
- **Medications**
 - 11 women (61.1%) were taking medications
 - 7 (38.9%) were not

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Psychiatric Diagnosis

- **Psychiatric Diagnosis:**
 - 14 (77.8%) had a psychiatric diagnosis
 - 4 (22.2%) did not
- **15 (83.3%) had 2 to 3 psychiatric diagnoses**
- **Diagnoses**
 - 11 (61.1%) had depression
 - 9 (50%) had anxiety
 - 5 (27.8%) Bipolar Disorder
 - 3 (16.7%) PTSD
 - 1 (5.5%) Panic attacks
 - 1 (5.5%) ADD
 - 1 (5.5%) OCD

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Medical Diagnoses

- **Medical diagnoses**
 - 8 women (44.4%) had one or more medical diagnoses
 - 10 women (55.6%) did not have a medical diagnosis
- **Medical diagnoses:**
diabetes, asthma, HTN, RA, arthritis, osteoporosis, epilepsy, cardiac issues

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Results

- Following the intervention, scores were significantly lower for the women's:
 - Stress [$t(17) = 2.805, p = .012$]
 - Anxiety [$t(17) = 4.079, p = .001$]
 - Depression [$t(17) = 4.228, p = .001$]
- Sleep quality scores, however, were also decreased between the pre-test and the post-test period [$t(14) = 3.574, p = .003$]

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Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)

- Women experienced significantly less stress following the intervention ($M = 20.83$, $SE = 1.48$) compared to before the intervention ($M = 24.61$, $SE = .95$), $t(17) = 2.805$, $p = .012$.

State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI)

- Women experienced significantly less anxiety following the intervention ($M = 43.11$, $SE = 1.46$) compared to before the intervention ($M = 55.44$, $SE = 2.45$), $t(17) = 4.079$, $p = .001$.

Center for Epidemiologic Studies Short Depression Scale (CESD-10)

- Women experienced significantly less depression following the intervention ($M = 13.56$, $SE = 1.17$) compared to before the intervention ($M = 17.78$, $SE = 1.20$), $t(17) = 4.228$, $p = .001$.

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Pittsburg Sleep Quality Index (PSQI)

- However, women also had significantly lower sleep quality scores following the intervention ($M = 9.80$, $SE = 1.07$) compared to before the intervention ($M = 12.80$, $SE = .92$), $t(14) = 3.574$, $p = .003$.

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Challenges

- **Space**
- **Consistency in attendance (court, etc.)**
- **Unexpected lock down**
- **Distractions (noise, interruptions)**
- **Batteries**
- **Unexpected Events**

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Conclusions

- **Given the results, this intervention has the potential to improve negative health outcomes**
- **This is a cost effective intervention that can be easily replicated in other correctional facilities**
- **More research is indicated**

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