

Mindfulness and acceptance therapies

Introduction

Mindfulness and acceptance therapies involve intentional and non-judgmental focus of one's attention on emotions, thoughts and sensations that are occurring in the present moment. The aim is to open awareness to present experiences, whether positive or negative, allowing thoughts and voices to come and go without reacting, and accepting oneself and the experience. This may help alleviate the distress associated with symptoms by focusing on how people relate and respond to their psychotic experiences, rather than identifying and directly challenging thoughts and beliefs about these experiences.

Method

We have included only systematic reviews (systematic literature search, detailed methodology with inclusion/exclusion criteria) published in full text, in English, from the year 2000 that report results separately for people with a diagnosis of schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, schizophreniform disorder or first episode schizophrenia. Reviews were identified by searching the databases MEDLINE, EMBASE, and PsycINFO. When multiple copies of review topics were found, only the most recent and/or comprehensive was included. Reviews with pooled data were prioritised for inclusion.

Review reporting assessment was guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) checklist that describes a preferred way to present a meta-analysis¹. Reviews reporting less than 50% of items have been excluded from the library. The PRISMA flow diagram is a suggested way of providing information about studies included and excluded with reasons for exclusion. Where no flow diagram has been presented by individual reviews, but identified studies have been described in the text, reviews have been checked for this item. Note that early reviews may have been guided by

less stringent reporting checklists than the PRISMA, and that some reviews may have been limited by journal guidelines.

Evidence was graded using the Grading of Recommendations Assessment, Development and Evaluation (GRADE) Working Group approach where high quality evidence such as that gained from randomised controlled trials (RCTs) may be downgraded to moderate or low if review and study quality is limited, if there is inconsistency in results, indirect comparisons, imprecise or sparse data and high probability of reporting bias. It may also be downgraded if risks associated with the intervention or other matter under review are high. Conversely, low quality evidence such as that gained from observational studies may be upgraded if effect sizes are large or if there is a dose dependent response. We have also taken into account sample size and whether results are consistent, precise and direct with low associated risks (see end of table for an explanation of these terms)². The resulting table represents an objective summary of the available evidence, although the conclusions are solely the opinion of staff of NeuRA (Neuroscience Research Australia).

Results

We found three systematic reviews that met our inclusion criteria³⁻⁵.

- Moderate quality evidence suggests a small effect of improved general symptoms with mindfulness or acceptance therapies when compared to treatment as usual, but not when compared to active control conditions. There were small effects for positive symptoms and small to medium-sized effects for negative and depression symptoms, social functioning, mindful awareness, and acceptance.

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Jansen JE, Gleeson J, Bendall S, Rice S, Alvarez-Jimenez M

Acceptance- and mindfulness-based interventions for persons with psychosis: A systematic review and meta-analysis

Schizophrenia Research 2019; 215: 25-37

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| Comparison | Acceptance and mindfulness-based interventions for people with psychosis vs. various control conditions. |
| Summary of evidence | Moderate to low quality evidence (medium to large samples, some inconsistency and imprecision, indirect) suggests acceptance and mindfulness-based treatments improve overall symptoms, particularly negative and depressive symptoms. They also improve social functioning, mindfulness, and acceptance. |
| Symptoms | |
| <p><i>Large effects of acceptance-and mindfulness-based treatments for improving overall symptoms;</i> 9 studies, N = 715, SMD = 0.80, 95%CI -1.31 to -0.29, $p = 0.002$, $I^2 = 89\%$ <i>The large effect remained for over 3 months;</i> 7 studies, N = 712, SMD = -1.10, 95%CI -2.09 to -0.10, $p < 0.001$, $I^2 = 97\%$ <i>Small to medium-sized effects of acceptance-and mindfulness-based treatments for improving;</i> Negative symptoms: 7 studies, N = 548, SMD = -0.24, 95%CI -0.44 to -0.03, $p = 0.02$, $I^2 = 23\%$ Positive symptoms: 9 studies, N = 658, SMD = -0.27, 95%CI -0.65 to 0.00, $p = 0.05$, $I^2 = 60\%$ Depressive symptoms: 3 studies, N = 146, SMD = -0.47, 95%CI -0.80 to -0.14, $p = 0.006$, $I^2 = 0\%$ <i>There was no significant difference in anxiety;</i> 3 studies, N = 167, SMD = 2.11, 95%CI -4.64 to 0.42, $p = 0.10$, $I^2 = 97\%$ There was a significant difference between the two types of interventions for negative and positive symptoms in favour of mindfulness-based interventions. There were no significant differences between acceptance or mindfulness-based interventions for other outcomes.</p> | |
| Other outcomes | |
| <p><i>Medium-sized effects of acceptance-and mindfulness-based treatments for improving other outcomes;</i> Social functioning: 7 studies, N = 705, SMD = -0.43, 95%CI -0.75 to -0.12, $p = 0.006$, $I^2 = 75\%$</p> | |

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| <p>Mindfulness: 5 studies, N = 133, SMD = -0.51, 95%CI -0.97 to -0.05, $p = 0.03$, $I^2 = 37\%$ Acceptance: 5 studies, N = 217, SMD = -0.78, 95%CI -1.44 to -0.12, $p = 0.02$, $I^2 = 78\%$ Quality of life: 2 studies, N = 78, SMD = -0.43, 95%CI -0.88 to 0.02, $p = 0.06$, $I^2 = 0\%$</p> <p>There was a significant difference between the two types of interventions for social functioning in favour of mindfulness-based interventions. There were no significant differences between acceptance- or mindfulness-based interventions for other outcomes.</p> | |
| Risks | No serious adverse events were reported. |
| Consistency in results[‡] | Inconsistent, apart from depressive symptoms, negative symptoms, mindfulness, and quality of life. |
| Precision in results[§] | Precise, apart from overall symptoms, anxiety, and acceptance. |
| Directness of results | Indirect; mixed control conditions. |

Louise S, Fitzpatrick M, Strauss C, Rossell SL, Thomas N

Mindfulness- and acceptance-based interventions for psychosis: Our current understanding and a meta-analysis

Schizophrenia Research 2018; 192: 57-63

[View review abstract online](#)

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|----------------------------|--|
| Comparison | Mindfulness and acceptance-based interventions for people with psychosis vs. various control conditions. |
| Summary of evidence | Moderate quality evidence (medium-sized samples, consistent, precise, indirect) suggests a small effect of improved general symptoms with mindfulness or acceptance therapies when compared to treatment as usual, but not when compared to active control conditions (psychoeducation, integrated rehabilitation or befriending). There was also a small effect for depression symptoms, and a medium-sized effect for mindful awareness, but no effects for individual positive or negative symptoms, hallucination-related distress, or functioning and disability. There was also no effect of individual acceptance therapies when analysed separately to group mindfulness therapies. |
| Symptoms | |



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Significant, small effect of improved general symptoms with mindfulness/acceptance therapies;

8 studies, N = 476, $g = 0.29$, 95%CI 0.04 to 0.54, $p = 0.02$, $I^2 = 37\%$

Subgroup analyses revealed significant effects only in studies with treatment as usual or waitlist controls, and not active controls (psychoeducation, integrated rehabilitation, or befriending), and in studies with group mindfulness therapies, and not with individual acceptance therapies.

Significant, small effect of improved depression symptoms with mindfulness/acceptance therapies;

3 studies, N = 175, $g = 0.39$, 95%CI 0.09 to 0.69, $p = 0.01$, $I^2 = 0\%$

There were no significant effects of mindfulness/acceptance therapies on individual positive or negative symptoms.

Other outcomes

Significant, medium-sized effect of improved mindful awareness with mindfulness/acceptance therapies;

4 studies, $g = 0.56$, 95%CI 0.15 to 0.97, $p = 0.01$, $I^2 = 39\%$

There were no significant differences in hallucination-related distress, functioning and disability, or acceptance.

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|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Consistency in results | Consistent |
| Precision in results | Precise |
| Directness of results | Indirect; mixed control conditions. |

Sabe M, Sentissi O, Kaiser S

Meditation-based mind-body therapies for negative symptoms of schizophrenia: Systematic review of randomized controlled trials and meta-analysis

Schizophrenia Research 2019; 212: 15-25

[View review abstract online](#)

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|----------------------------|---|
| Comparison | 8-26 weeks of mindfulness therapies vs. treatment as usual. |
| Summary of evidence | Moderate to low quality evidence (medium-sized sample, consistent, precise, direct) finds a medium-sized effect of improved negative, but not positive symptoms with mindfulness therapy. |

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| <p><i>A medium-sized effect of improved negative symptoms with mindfulness therapies; 3 studies, N = 317, SMD = -0.45, 95%CI -0.67 to -0.23, p < 0.0001, I² = 0%, p = 0.54</i></p> <p><i>There were no significant differences in positive symptoms; 3 studies, N = 317, SMD = -0.16, 95%CI -0.54 to 0.22, p = 0.41, I² = 51%, p = 0.13</i></p> | |
| Risks | Not reported |
| Consistency in results | Consistent |
| Precision in results | Precise |
| Directness of results | Direct |

Explanation of acronyms

CI = confidence interval, *g* = Hedges' *g* = standardised mean differences, I² = the percentage of the variability in effect estimates that is due to heterogeneity rather than sampling error (chance), N = number of participants, *p* = statistical probability of obtaining that result (*p* < 0.05 generally regarded as significant), SMD = standardised mean difference, vs. = versus

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Explanation of technical terms

* Bias has the potential to affect reviews of both RCT and observational studies. Forms of bias include; reporting bias – selective reporting of results; publication bias - trials that are not formally published tend to show less effect than published trials, further if there are statistically significant differences between groups in a trial, these trial results tend to get published before those of trials without significant differences; language bias – only including English language reports; funding bias - source of funding for the primary research with selective reporting of results within primary studies; outcome variable selection bias; database bias - including reports from some databases and not others; citation bias - preferential citation of authors. Trials can also be subject to bias when evaluators are not blind to treatment condition and selection bias of participants if trial samples are small⁶.

† Different effect measures are reported by different reviews.

Prevalence refers to how many existing cases there are at a particular point in time. Incidence refers to how many new cases there are per population in a specified time period. Incidence is usually reported as the number of new cases per 100,000 people per year. Alternatively some studies present the number of new cases that have accumulated over several years against a person-years denominator. This denominator is the sum of individual units of time that the persons in the population are at risk of becoming a case. It takes into account the size of the underlying population sample and its age structure over the duration of observation.

Reliability and validity refers to how accurate the instrument is. Sensitivity is the proportion

of actual positives that are correctly identified (100% sensitivity = correct identification of all actual positives) and specificity is the proportion of negatives that are correctly identified (100% specificity = not identifying anyone as positive if they are truly not).

Mean difference scores refer to mean differences between treatment and comparison groups after treatment (or occasionally pre to post treatment) and in a randomised trial there is an assumption that both groups are comparable on this measure prior to treatment. Standardised mean differences are divided by the pooled standard deviation (or the standard deviation of one group when groups are homogenous) which allows results from different scales to be combined and compared. Each study's mean difference is then given a weighting depending on the size of the sample and the variability in the data. Less than 0.4 represents a small effect, around 0.5 a medium effect, and over 0.8 represents a large effect⁶.

Relative risk (RR) refers to the probability of a reduction (< 1) or an increase (> 1) in a particular outcome in a treatment group, or a group exposed to a risk factor, relative to the comparison group. For example, a RR of 0.75 translates to a reduction in risk of an outcome of 25% relative to those not receiving the treatment or not exposed to the risk factor. Conversely, a RR of 1.25 translates to an increased risk of 25% relative to those not receiving treatment or not having been exposed to a risk factor. A RR of 1.00 means there is no difference between groups. A medium effect is considered if $RR > 2$ or < 0.5 and a large effect if $RR > 5$ or < 0.2 ⁷. Odds ratios (ORs) are similar to RRs, but they are based on the probability of an event occurring divided by the probability of that event not occurring. ORs and RRs are similar in size when the event is rare, such as with schizophrenia. InOR stands for logarithmic



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OR where a lnOR of 0 shows no difference between groups. Hazard ratios (HRs) measure the effect of an explanatory variable on the hazard or risk of an event.

Correlation coefficients (eg, r) indicate the strength of association or relationship between variables. They can provide an indirect indication of prediction, but do not confirm causality due to possible and often unforeseen confounding variables. An r of 0.10 represents a weak association, 0.25 a medium association and 0.40 and over represents a strong association. Unstandardised (b) regression coefficients indicate the average change in the dependent variable associated with a 1 unit change in the independent variable, statistically controlling for the other independent variables. Standardised regression coefficients represent the change being in units of standard deviations to allow comparison across different scales.

‡ Inconsistency refers to differing estimates of effect across studies (i.e. heterogeneity or variability in results) that is not explained by subgroup analyses and therefore reduces confidence in the effect estimate. I^2 is the percentage of the variability in effect estimates that is due to heterogeneity rather than sampling error (chance) - 0% to 40%: heterogeneity might not be important, 30% to 60%: may represent moderate heterogeneity, 50% to 90%: may represent considerable heterogeneity and over this is considerable heterogeneity. I^2 can be calculated from Q (chi-square) for the test of heterogeneity with the following formula⁶;

$$I^2 = \left(\frac{Q - df}{Q} \right) \times 100\%$$

§ Imprecision refers to wide confidence intervals indicating a lack of confidence in the effect estimate. Based on GRADE recommendations, a result for continuous data (standardised mean differences, not weighted mean differences) is considered imprecise if the upper or lower confidence limit crosses an effect size of 0.5 in either direction, and for binary and correlation data, an effect size of 0.25. GRADE also recommends downgrading the evidence when sample size is smaller than 300 (for binary data) and 400 (for continuous data), although for some topics, these criteria should be relaxed⁸.

|| Indirectness of comparison occurs when a comparison of intervention A versus B is not available but A was compared with C and B was compared with C that allows indirect comparisons of the magnitude of effect of A versus B. Indirectness of population, comparator and/or outcome can also occur when the available evidence regarding a particular population, intervention, comparator, or outcome is not available and is therefore inferred from available evidence. These inferred treatment effect sizes are of lower quality than those gained from head-to-head comparisons of A and B.

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