

The Effects of a Mindfulness Based Compassionate Living Training On Anxiety and Depression in a Heterogeneous Sample of Psychiatric Outpatients: a Pilot Study

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Introduction: Compassion is the capacity to be sensitive to pain and suffering of ourselves and others, accompanied by the commitment to alleviate it. Self-compassion has a positive effect on mental health (stress reduction and preventing recurrence of depression) and increases with the practice of mindfulness. For the general population several loving-kindness and compassion training programmes have been studied with promising results. At our outpatient center for integrative psychiatry, a novel compassion-focused training was developed: Mindfulness Based Compassionate Living training (MBCL) for patients who already followed a mindfulness training. MBCL consists of explicit exercises in loving-kindness and compassion, so that patients can deepen their skills in mindfulness and particularly in self-compassion in a safe way.

Objectives: To examine the effects of MBCL training in a heterogeneous psychiatric outpatient population on levels of depression, anxiety, mindfulness and compassion.

Methods: The training consists of nine 1,5-hour sessions. Patients completed four questionnaires before and after the training (Beck Depression Inventory-II, Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale, Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire, Self Compassion Scale).

Results: Thirty-three patients participated in this pilot study (mean age 47,6 years; 82% female). MBCL training reduced levels of depression and anxiety, although results for anxiety were not significant. Levels of mindfulness and self-compassion increased significantly.

Conclusions: The outcome of this pilot study was judged very encouraging and MBCL training was therefore included in the treatment program of our center, enabling us to further investigate its effects as well as the underlying working mechanisms.