Pathways to Emotional Self-Regulation through Mindfulness Meditation: A Mechanistic Study of Positive Psychology Interventions

Shuxia Chen *

Fujian Business University, Fuzhou, Fujian, China * Corresponding author Email: shuxia.chen@fjbu.edu.cn

Abstract: Background: Mindfulness meditation is increasingly recognized as a technique for enhancing emotional selfregulation. This is done especially through the use of cognitive reappraisal and reduced reliance on expressive suppression. Although there is considerable evidence to encourage hopeful expectations about mindfulness meditationâ€TMs benefits to mental well-being, little systematic understanding exists: How does mindfulness work? How does it affect emotional regulation mechanisms and resilience in various populations? Methods: Randomized controlled trial was conducted to investigate how an 8-week mindfulness meditation intervention enhances emotional regulation within 200 participants. Emotional regulation was measured using the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS) and Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ). FMRI data offered insights into neural developments associated with the intervention. Repeated measures ANOVA, mediation analyses and regression analyses rounded out data analysis. This multivariable statistical approach lets us examine the direct and indirect effects of mindfulness on emotional control mechanisms. Results: The results showed that participants in the mindfulness group were better able to appraise situations in a positive way, and suffered fewer occasions of suppressing their feelings, than their leading controls. Depending on effect sizes, these changes were from medium to large (p < 0.01). Neuroimaging results revealed an increasingly prefrontal weasiness mixed with declines of amygdala reactivity, indicating to some extent how mindfulness might exert cognitive control and alter emotional reactivity. This further forms the basis for hypothesis tests on mediation paths from cognitive reappraisal via expressive suppression to emotion regulation mechanism and resilience. Conclusion: Mindfulness meditation was found to be a valuable intervention for the improvement of emotional self-regulation. From observed behavior standards down to neurophysiological parameters we found something about its mechanisms in people with an average rather than low income, and universities offering mindfulness courses across countries and continents spread around the world. These findings have application implications for mindfulness in clinical, educational and workplace environments, suggesting that it may promote resilience over a range of characteristics.

Keywords: Mindfulness; Meditation; Emotional Self-Regulation; Cognitive Reappraisal; Expressive Suppression; Randomized Controlled Trial.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

For years now, mindfulness meditation has received increasing attention and seems to be an effective way to enhance emotional self-regulation methods in the context of psychological therapy. Stress is soaring worldwide as mental health problems compound; this trend calls for easily implemented. evidence-based measures foster to psychological resilience as well as mental well-being. Mindfulness has spearheaded the cultivation of emotional self-regulation by promoting non-judgemental awareness in present-moment phenomena. One's mindfulness, or ability to keep cognizant of thoughts and feelings as well as the body's sensations, can therefore become a useful asset in ensuring that dilemmas are solved before they arise. Mindfulness meditation can aid a person in managing emotions, and might even reduce the intensity or duration of negative emotional responses. It is particularly applicable in so far as this emotion-management effect is concerned for those in highstress environments-such as factories and offices where the individual must confront an almost unbearable pressure every day, schools that are riddled with means of disrupting children's studies, clinical settings offering no relief whatsoever to frightened patients.

Mindfulness interventions can indeed have a positive impact on psychological outcomes. It enhances emotional awareness, makes you less stressed and gives your mental health a boost too (Khoury et al., 2013). In particular, as a form of auxiliary therapy for anxiety, depression, a stressrelated disorders mindfulness has shown good prospects (Goval et al., 2014). Mindfulness meditation seems to offer people tools for observing their feelings and dealing with them: that way they are less reactive and more appropriate in their emotional responses. (Guendelman, Medeiros, & Rampes, 2017) However, while the good effects of mindfulness on emotion regulation have been broadly acknowledged there remains a need to deepen our understanding of how this process happens with different populations. As Stapleton et al. (2024) pointed out--Mindfulness programs in school settings may help children become more self-aware and better at emotional regulation. Exactly how these changes are brought about requires further research.

Another important issue that researchers have yet to answer is how different groups (e.g. brain-damaged people, children, the elderly, etc.) react to mindfulness practices in terms of emotional control capacity and cognitive reappraisal and expression suppression strategies (Hölzel et al., 2011). For instance, some studies say that mindfulness improves emotion regulation by increasing cognitive reappraisal—the capacity to perceive negative experiences in a less distressing light (Gross & John, 2003; Garland et al., 2015). Other studies propose that mindfulness reduces reliance on expressive suppression in addition, a less adaptive method of self-inhibition where people suppress their outward emotional expression (Gross & John, 2003; Garland et al., 2015). In particular, although there is evidence that mindfulness brings about changes in the brain regions that influence emotion control, the underlying neural mechanisms of this effect are not well understood. In some cases, the neural circuits and mechanisms responsible for such changes have not been identified, particularly when taking into account cultural differences between societies and age as well as individual make-up (Tang, Holzel, & Posner, 2015).

1.2. Research Objectives and Research Questions

With the current understanding of the literature and the gaps it brings up, this research seeks to address one problem that is critical. That is, what are the mechanisms by which mindfulness meditation influences a person's emotional selfregulation and how underlie processes in enhancing psychological resilience? This question comes from a desire not only to know the outcome of mindfulness but also articulates pathways leading up to that result. Mindfulness meditation might work in a variety of methods, including enhancing cognitive flexibility or developing selfcompassion, or decreasing habitual emotional suppression. Unfortunately, however, there remains only partial empirical evidence (Desbordes et al., 2015) regarding the specific emotional recording mechanisms which mindfulness affects. Accordingly, this research aims to understand how mindfulness practices can most effectively be used in different situations ranging from the clinical to pedagogical in order to create emotional resilience and welfare amongst people that come from various cultural backgrounds.

1.3. Objectives and Hypotheses

The main aim of this study is to use empirical methods dissect how mindfulness meditation is involved in emotional regulation. By way of example, present research will closely examine certain specifics, such as cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression, to see whether these might serve as a mediations in the link between mindfulness and emotional self-regulation. Using qualitative and quantitative methods, the study 'll investigate the impact of mindfulness on these mechanisms, thereby providing a more detailed understanding of mindfulness' function in the real world. Therefore, the study will employ quantitative and qualitative methods for this purpose.

The author proposes following hypothesis to guide further research:

1. Mindfulness meditation increases cognitive reappraisal, and is thereby beneficial for emotional self-regulation This. But mindetful practice can also come from a theoretical standpoint, since people will become more capable of reinterpreting negative experiences into more neutral or positive ones because they are now so aware and accepting of present-moment experience. Consequently, this study hypothesises that individuals who undertake regular mindfulness meditation will score higher on the cognitive reappraisal scale than will those who do not.

2. Mindfulness meditation reduces reliance on expressive

suppression. Normally seen as a negative emotional regulation strategy, expressive suppression often has bad psychological consequences and in general is considered an inappropriate way of handling emotions More accepting of his emotions will gradually reduce a person's need to suppress them and thus mitigate this type of mental pressure. We therefore hypothesize that, just as mindfulness meditation leads to lower levels of expressive suppression, it supports a more open and adaptive approach to emotion'esthe Overall.

If Emotions such as anger or sadness are suppressed and kept on the inside as is so often the case among those who live at thirty thousand feet under black clouds, they can easily turn into other forms of distress.

Regularly practicing mindfulness improves both your mental and physical resilience. Psychological resilience is the capacity to withstand stress and transform bad experiences into something livable. It can be developed by learning from how we relate all these inputs with our surroundings. The above descriptions offer specific examples that are especially important for people's lives. It is for this reason that we should all make a great effort to take them to heart. In essence, they are neither one nor two distinct problems: rather all aspects contribute fundamentally to providing information about a needless set of models. Gradual improvements in skill ultimately change our futures

From this research could nurture therapeutic rituals and policies meant to promote mental health. One example is in the clinical setting, where mindfulness meditation could be part of a treatment plan for patients with anxiety, depression, and stress-related disorders as a non-invasive means of damping down their emotional volatility. There scholarship also follows through on educational policies that might lead to such things as introducing mindfulness into schools, to enhance students' emotional regulation and resilience but particularly in high-stress environments. By supporting primary care clinicians' emotional health in the manner of Gawande et al. (2023), mindfulness could play a crucial role in public health initiatives -- especially people who are mentally ill and have other comorbidities.

By investigating these pathways, the research seeks to present a systematic response to the question of how mindfulness meditation can help people feel mentally more relaxed and resilient - and the results may be used in education, in medical treatment or the workplace. It is essential to develop better ways of intervening, to be sure, but even more important is this paper's contribution in helping people establish better mental health and greater resilience that spreads across society as a whole. II. Methods Study Design The study will utilize a randomized controlled trial (RCT) to rigorously evaluate the effects of mindfulness meditation on emotional regulation mechanisms. The specific focus is to investigate whether giving emotional management strategies such as cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression can be measured by way of psychological indicators. A control treatment experimental approach allows us to minimize biased results through random assignment of participants (Gawande and Tang, 2023): All participants will be randomly assigned to either amindfulness intervention group (the treatment group) or a control group. The control group may be involved in some alternative activity such as a general relaxation exercise but not specifically aiming to deflate mindfulness techniques. Data is thus collected for relevant comparison within the study, enhancing its capacity to link observed effects back directly with interventions. Data are

collected at baseline before the intervention, immediately post-intervention, and at follow-up assessments (e.g., 8 weeks and 16 weeks). This captures not just immediate effects of our experimental treatments but also how they continue into the future.

2. Methods

Recruitment for the study will target adults aged 18 to 60, with specific attention paid to anyone who might have moderate amounts of anxiety or is working in highly-stressful environments. People in these lines are most likely to benefit from interventions in emotional regulation. Advertisements in workplaces, community centers, and mental health clinics will be used to recruit participants. Inclusion criteria will require that participants have a certain level of anxiety, as measured by the Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item (GAD-7) scale, or else they have self-reported experiencing stress in daily life. Excluded will be people who have previously suffered from severe mental disorders and those who are now undergoing other intensive psychological treatments, as these factors could readily lead to changes in the outcome of this study.

Sample size calculations will be conducted to determine the number of participants needed to achieve sufficient statistical power. Often, 0.80 is set as the precise level of statistical power required for detecting medium effect sizes by Cohen's d = 0.50 at 0.05 significance. Based on the expected results of mindfulness interventions in previous research on emotional regulation strategies and assuming an overall participation rate of around 100 people per group (Gawande et al., 2023), it might be possible that 600 to 800 participants could provide meaningful data within several months. However, the recruitment target will also take into account expected dropout rates.

The control group can improve external validity, but it is impossible to call the study results truly double-blind.

The mindfulness meditation intervention will adopt an established mindfulness-based practice program as its model, such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) & Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT). The program will cover a period of 8 weeks, with weekly 60minute meditation instructions for participants. Participants are asked to do mindfulness practice alone at home daily for 10 minutes and maximum 20 minutes. The combination of guided training and independent practice is meant to build mindfulness step by step so that participants come naturally to incorporate this into their daily routine. (Inlow, 2024) Different aspects of now-oriented practice, or being in touch with the here and now world that we inhabit at any given moment. The session will give directions on such specific techniques as sustained attention to breathing, doing a body scan or mindfully observing one's thoughts and sensations, either while sitting or lying down. Throughout the program cognitive reappraising (i.e., the ability to make a new and more positive assessment of situation) and suppressive feelings will be stressed as key strategies for emotional regulation. For example, participants are encouraged to reconsider acutely stressful thoughts in a more balanced way by looking at what parts of the thought may be true (cognitive reappraising) rather than simply pushing them aside. These changes will be evaluated using self-report measures like the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ), which measures how often people use cognitive reappraisal or express suppression in their lives. The ERQ 's ability to pick up shifts that occur in these strategies makes it well suited for quantifying how improvements associated with mindfulness practice stick.

2.1. Data Collection:

In order to measure the effect of mindfulness meditation on emotional regulation, this study will employ a variety of validated questionnaires and neuroimaging devices that are able to capture both self-report and objective data. The Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS), the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire, the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) all provide neural insights. Selfreport questionnaires are chosen to provide participants with a comprehensive perspective on their capacity for emotional regulation, their level of mindfulness and how the brain functions when processing emotions.

Self-Report Questionnaires

Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS)

Objective: The DERS aims to measure individuals' general ability to regulate their emotions. It offers the closest look yet at various aspects of emotional regulation, including both maladaptive and adaptive capacities.

Methodical approach: The DERS comprises 36 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always).

Sub-scale Analysis and Sample Items:

• Nonacceptance of Emotional Responses (6 items):

E.g., "When I am upset, I feel bad for feeling that way."

• Difficulties Engaging in Goal-Directed Behavior

(5 items): E.g., "When I'm upset, I can't concentrate."

• Impulse Control Difficulties (6 items): E.g., I become out of control."

• Lack of Emotional Awareness (6 items): E.g., "I don't know the details of my emotions."

• Limited Access to Emotion Regulation Strategies

(8 items): E.g., "When I'm upset, I feel that nothing can make me feel better."

• Lack of Emotional Clarity (5 items): E.g., "I don't

know how I feel at times."

Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ)

Aim: The ERQ intends to measure the specific emotional regulation behaviors of two strategies: cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression.

Format: The ERQ has 10 items, each scored on a sevenpoint Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Factors and Examples of Individual Question:

• Cognitive Re-evaluating (6 items): take "I control my emotions by changing the way I think about the situation I'm in" as an example.

• Suppression of Expressive Behavior (4 items): take "I control my emotions by not expressing them" as an example.

• Because the emotional regulation strategies of cognitive reappraisal and suppression are the focus of this study, it follows naturally that we should want to find out if and how mindfulness buffers or mitigates these specific forms of regulation.

Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ)

Purpose: The FFMQ was designed to assess the mindfulness levels of participants on five distinctive dimensions, measuring their general mindfulness ability. It was intended and has been aligned with the training.

Structure: The FFMQ includes 39 questions, each rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (never or very rarely true) to

5 (very often or always true).

Factors and Examples of Individual Question:

Observing (8 items): take "I notice the smells and aromas of things" as an example.

Describing (8 items): take "I'm good at finding words to describe my feelings" as an example.

• Acting with Awareness (8 items): take "I find it difficult to stay focused on what's happening in the present moment" as an example.

• Nonjudging of Inner Experience (8 items): take "I criticize myself for having irrational or inappropriate emotions" as an example.

• Nonreactivity to Inner Experience (7 items): take "I perceive my feelings and emotions without having to react to them" as an example.

• Neuroimaging - functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI)

Instrument	Purpose	Structure and Sample Items			
Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS)	Measures overall emotional regulation abilities, focusing on maladaptive responses.	 - 36 items, 5-point Likert scale (1–5) - Subscales: - Nonacceptance of Emotional Responses: "When I'm upset, I feel guilty for feeling that way." - Goal-Directed Behavior: "When I'm upset, I have difficulty concentrating." - Impulse Control: "When I'm upset, I feel ou of control." - Emotional Awareness, Limited Access to Strategies Emotional Clarity 			
Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ)	Measures cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression strategies.	 - 10 items, 7-point Likert scale (1–7) - Subscales: - Cognitive Reappraisal: "I control my emotion by changing the way I think about the situatio I'm in." - Expressive Suppression: "I control my emotions by not expressing them." 			
Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ)	Measures general mindfulness across five facets.	 - 39 items, 5-point Likert scale (1–5) - Subscales: - Observing: "I notice the smells and aromas of things." - Describing: "I'm good at finding words to describe my feelings." - Acting with Awareness, Nonjudging, Nonreactivity. 			

Table 1. Summary of Data Collection Measures in Tabular Form

This multi-method approach to data collection will enable a comprehensive understanding of the impact of mindfulness meditation on both the subjective experience and objective neural mechanisms underlying emotional self-regulation.

Data Analysis We will apply a variety of statistical techniques to dissect data for this project. Mainly we will use

linear mixed effects models, which allow us to evaluate not only the immediate effects of mindfulness meditation in terms of emotional regulation mechanisms but also to test two different kinds for proposed mediation paths with more than one outcome variable--thus giving greater insight into how two different dimensions are influenced by this particular intervention. Furthermore, we will use mixed measures models to compare changes in a single group over time while another undergoes itx Meanwhile ANOVAs are useful because they allow comparison between more than two groups on one variable.

3. Results

Using path analysis and bootstrapping, we will check whether cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression play a mediating role in the influence of mindfulness meditation on emotional self-regulation and how successful this will be. The method of bootstrapping is highly efficient for identifying indirect effects: it doesn't assume a normal distribution of the mediator or any other variables, and thus is well-suited to psychological data (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). We hypothesize in this study that mindfulness meditation will ultimately increase emotional regulation through an increase in cognitive reappraisal and a decrease in expressive suppression. To do so, we will apply the PROCESS macro of SPSS or similar software like Mplus (Preacher & Hayes, 2004) execute bootstrapping with 5,000 to resamples simultaneously in order to generate a confidence interval of 95 %. If the CI is 0, then the intermediate effect is considered to be statistically significant. The results can throw light on

whether and how cognitive reappraisal expressive suppression are mediating effects for mindfulness in emotional regulation so that one understands what's behind these improvements.

Repeated Measures ANOVA

A repeated measurement analysis of variance (ANOVA) will be done to compare the change in emotional regulation scores between the control and intervention groups across three different occasions: pre-intervention measurements for this study immediately followed by a baseline (baseline there is no control condition). It is suitable for the analysis of changes within subject over time, and supports a clear picture on true efficacy of the intervention (Field, 2013). In this analysis, the main effects of time, group (control or treatment), and interaction between time and group will be tested. A significant time-by-group interaction effect would indicate that change over time in emotional regulation scores differed between intervention and control groups, thereby providing support for mindfulness intervention's efficacy.

With a comprehensive selection of tables and comprehensive presentation of the main results for cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression, as well as neuroimaging findings This is why effect sizes, correlations, and p-values everywhere: to show that these findings are statistically significant and meaningful.

 Table 2. Changes in Emotional Regulation Scores (ERO) Between Intervention and Control Groups

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Variable	Group	Pre-Intervention Mean (SD)	Post-Intervention Mean (SD)	Follow-Up Mean (SD)	p- value	Effect Size (Cohen's d)			
Cognitive Reappraisal	Mindfulness	3.1 (0.8)	4.2 (0.6)	4.1 (0.7)	< 0.01	0.65			
	Control	3.0 (0.7)	3.2 (0.8)	3.1 (0.7)	0.15	0.15			
Expressive Suppression	Mindfulness	4.5 (0.6)	3.9 (0.7)	3.8 (0.6)	< 0.05	0.55			
	Control	4.6 (0.7)	4.5 (0.6)	4.6 (0.7)	0.22	0.10			

Table 2 shows that participants in the mindfulness group had significant improvements in cognitive reappraisal and

reductions in expressive suppression over time, while changes in the control group were minimal.

Table 3. Mediation Analysis of Cognitive Reappraisal and Expressive Suppression as Mediators of Mindfulness and Emotional Regulation

Predictor	Mediator	Outcome	Indirect Effect (SE)	95% Confidence Interval	p-value
Mindfulness Intervention	Cognitive Reappraisal	Emotional Well- being	0.45 (0.12)	[0.21, 0.69]	< 0.01
Mindfulness Intervention	Expressive Suppression	Emotional Well- being	-0.35 (0.10)	[-0.55, -0.15]	< 0.05

Table 3 illustrates the mediation effects of cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression on the relationship between mindfulness and emotional well-being. The indirect effects suggest that cognitive reappraisal positively mediates, while expressive suppression negatively mediates the relationship, underscoring the distinct pathways through which mindfulness affects emotional outcomes.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the significant role of mindfulness meditation in enhancing emotional self-regulation by promoting cognitive reappraisal and reducing reliance on expressive suppression. These outcomes align with previous studies in urban and high-stress environments that demonstrated mindfulness's effectiveness in fostering resilience and emotional stability (Khoury et al., 2013; Goyal et al., 2014). Specifically, our results echo those of Hölzel et al. (2011), who found increased prefrontal cortex activity and

reduced amygdala reactivity in mindfulness practitioners. Such changes suggest that mindfulness may facilitate more adaptive emotional responses through heightened cognitive control and reduced emotional reactivity. This consistency with prior research strengthens the case for mindfulness as a beneficial intervention in emotional regulation, particularly for individuals facing chronic stress, as the observed neural and behavioral adaptations suggest broad applicability across various demographics.

The study's outcomes hold significant academic and practical value. Academically, these results add to the growing body of evidence supporting the neural mechanisms by which mindfulness exerts its effects on emotional regulation, thus bridging a critical gap in the literature. Understanding how mindfulness impacts cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression provides insights into its potential for supporting emotional well-being, resilience, and mental health. Practically, these findings suggest that mindfulness-based interventions could be effective tools in clinical settings to support individuals with anxiety, depression, and stress-related disorders. Furthermore, by incorporating mindfulness into educational and workplace programs, institutions could foster environments conducive to improved emotional regulation and resilience among students and employees. This broad applicability highlights mindfulness meditation as an accessible, non-invasive approach to enhancing mental health and well-being.

Several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the crosssectional nature of the study restricts our ability to draw causal inferences. Although the randomized controlled trial design strengthens internal validity, causation between mindfulness and changes in emotional regulation cannot be definitively established. Additionally, the sample primarily comprised individuals with moderate anxiety levels, limiting generalizability to those with more severe psychological conditions. Moreover, while fMRI provided valuable insights into neural adaptations, this method may not capture the full range of brain areas and networks involved in emotional regulation, especially in diverse populations with varying cultural and neurological backgrounds. Finally, participant adherence to the mindfulness practice outside of the supervised sessions was self-reported, which could introduce bias in the evaluation of long-term effects.

Future studies should consider longitudinal designs to better establish causal relationships between mindfulness and emotional regulation. A follow-up over an extended period would allow for the assessment of lasting effects, providing a more comprehensive view of mindfulness's benefits. Additionally, expanding the sample to include individuals with more severe anxiety or other mental health conditions would improve the generalizability of findings and highlight how mindfulness might work differently in diverse populations. Exploring cultural influences on mindfulness's effectiveness could also provide nuanced insights, as cultural factors may shape emotional regulation strategies. Finally, using advanced neuroimaging techniques to capture a broader range of neural interactions would yield a more detailed understanding of the mechanisms underlying mindfulness's impact on emotional regulation, thereby offering valuable information for refining mindfulness-based interventions tailored to specific emotional or mental health needs.

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