MINDFULNESS, SUBJECTIVE WELL – BEING ANDTHERAPEUTIC INTERVENTIONS BASED ON MINDFULNESS: FROM A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

There is an increasing recognition of the importance of subjective well – being;heightened awareness of one's own emotional experiences, mindfulness; and the pursuit of internal harmony. Integrating mindfulness and subjective well-being therapeutic interventions has become particularly relevant today. The main aim is to theoretically explore, describe and comprehend the concepts of mindfulness and subjective well-being, as well as the therapeutic interventions based on mindfulness.This exploration involves distinguishing mindfulness from other overlapping psychological concepts, and clarifying the significance and consequencesof the absence of mindfulness. Furthermore, we emphasize the multidimensional nature of the subjective well – being and its profound impact when combined with mindfulness practices.

Key words: Mindfulness, Subjective well – being, Therapeutical interventions based on mindfulness.

INTRODUCTION

The big question of what makes life good has been around since ancient times. Many philosophical, spiritual and psychological traditions throughout history have emphasized happiness as the highest value. Today, in modern society, the need for happiness and optimal living, that is, subjective well-being, is also highlighted, especially due to the increasing occurrence of mental disorders that come as a result of modern living.In everyday life we are surrounded by messagesthat refer to our inner harmony, to our search for something more, to our happiness. This message reflects a universal human yearning – a desire to feel and become better, to attain personal development. This yearning seems to touch all people regardless of professional, religious or political orientations.

But despite the fact that we are constantly learning and finding out new things to improve our lives, we are once again "stuck" in our daily routine behaviors. Mindfulness improves the quality of life by encouraging us to recognize the conditions of happiness that are already present in our lives. Therefore, mindfulness is not a technique, but a way of being. Mindfulness is a new subfield in psychology that is increasingly being researched.

1. MINDFULNESS

UNDERSTANDING AND DEFINING MINDFULNESS

The concept of Mindfulness originates from Eastern meditative practices, specifically from Buddhism already 2500 years ago. Mindfulness is a term that comes from the Pali language, it is translated with the meaning of awareness, caution, discernment and restraint. But despite its roots in Buddhism, mindfulness is seen independently of religion.

The first definition comes from the Buddhist teacher Nyanaponika Thera (Nyanaponika Thera, 1972, according to Brown & Ryan, 2003, p. 822) who called mindfulness "pure and single-minded awareness of what happens to us and within us in successful moments of perception ".

Also, Hanh (Hanh, 1976, according to Brown & Ryan, 2003, p.822) similarly defined it as "maintaining alert awareness of the present reality".According to Black (Black, 2011), mindfulness is "a capacity for attention and awareness that is oriented toward the present and varies inter-individually and intra-individually and can be evaluated independently of the religious, spiritual or cultural beliefs" (p.1).

One of the most famous and widely used definitions of mindfulness comes from John Kabat-Zinn, one of the central inventors of mindfulness in science. Kabat-Zinn (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, according to Black, D.S., 2011, p. 1) definesmindfulness as "paying attention in a particular way: with intention, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally." This definition contains three components of mindfulness: deliberate attention; paying attention in the present moment and with a non-judgmental attitude.

Relationship and comparison of mindfulness with other psychological concepts

One of the concepts most associated with mindfulness and it is considered to have certain similarities is the construct "flow"; which according to Csikszentmihalyi (1990) represents "a state in which people are so involved in the activity that nothing else seems to matter at that moment" (p.4). Although awareness is highlighted in both constructs, they are still two different constructs. Primarily, mindfulness means having a wide-open awareness, that is, keeping in mind the several perspectives that exist in the context, while in the state of flow the awareness is focused on one thing, object or other. Then in a state of "flow" we lose the awareness of ourselves and of the time, while this is not the case with mindfulness.

Emotional intelligence has also been linked to mindfulness. According to Mayer and Salovey (according to Lopez, 2009, p. 310) emotional intelligence is conceptualized as "a set of mental abilities related to the perception, use, understanding, and management of emotions." It can be concluded that emotional intelligence means being aware of one's own emotional states, but in situations where there is an absence of mindfulness, emotions can appear outside of consciousness or behavior even before we consciously and clearly recognize and accept them.

According to Bishop (Bishop, et al., 2004), mindfulness was associated with other qualities such as patience (allowing things to happen in their own time), trust (belief in the ability to stay in touch with personal experience), non-reactivity (calmness -tranquility) and wisdom (self-knowledge). But these qualities are more outcomes that are acquired through the practice of mindfulness over time, and are not implicitly contained in the construct of mindfulness.

Lack of mindfulness

Mindfulness is about being fully in touch and aware of the present moment, but also taking a non-judgmental approach to one's inner experience. For example, a constantly aware approach to one's inner experience is simple and spontaneousviewing of thoughts, perceiving them as "thoughts are thoughts," rather than judging them as positive or negative. Mindfulness is being in the present moment and being open to experiences as they come.

Germer (Germer, according to Dellbridge, 2009) points out that we are very rarely in a state of mindfulness, that most of the time we are consumed with thoughts that divert our attention or thinking about what is happening at the moment, the past or the future.
Often, we are not aware of our habitual behavior and automatic reactions and as a result we live a life that is not fully conscious. Brown and Ryan (Brown, K. & Ryan, R., 2003) explain the absence of mindfulness as something that limits awareness in various ways. Absence of mindfulness has fewer "wakeful" states that are habitual or automatic functioning and they believe this may be chronic for many individuals. Overthinking, focusing on the past, fantasizing or worrying about the future can distract us from what is happening in the moment. Lack of mindfulness can be maintained, i.e., be protectively motivated when the individual refuses to acknowledge or accept a thought, emotion, motive or object of perception.

In such a state we are insensitive to the stimuli around us and we are governed by categories that we have created in the past. Habits and automatic behavior govern us, and thus spontaneity is reduced and our reactions are frozen. We can often detect the lack of mindfulness in others but not in ourselves. Kabat-Zinn (1990, according to Teasdale, 1999 p.154) says that "the mere act of recognizing thoughts as thoughts can free us from the distorted reality they create and thus allow for clearer perception and a sense of control over our lives."

2. SUBJECTIVE WELL – BEING

The interest in subjective well-being comes as a result of the development of positive psychology, which focuses on human qualities, since research and theories were previously mainly focused on the study of psychopathology and negative states.

Happiness has always been a subject of interest since ancient times, with the thoughts of Plato, Aristotle, etc. Often times, subjective well-being is equated with the term "happiness", but researchers prefer the term subjective well-being because it reflects a multidimensional nature. Also, subjective well-being does not only represent satisfaction with life, because it reflects objective standards such as relative income, the working status of the person, etc., that is, it represents its cognitive component.

Subjective well-being examines the way in which people assess their own life, an assessment of the current state, and also an assessment that reflects a state that refers to a longer period of time. With the evaluation of the experiences, one gets an insight into the emotional states and moods related to the current events, and with the cognitive component, one gets a conclusion about the general satisfaction with life, but also the satisfaction with specific areas of life such as health, work, social relations, etc.

According to Tadič (Tadič, M., 2008), approaches to the research of subjective well-being can be categorized into two groups. The first group is the objective and subjective approach that explains the indicators of subjective well-being. The objective approach emphasizes the external environmental conditions that

contribute to the subjective well-being of people, and this includes living conditions (for example, social protection) and demographic characteristics (for example, gender, age, marital status), etc. The subjective approach is the most prevalent in the study of subjective well-being and is assessed based on indicators obtained by self-assessment. Although this approach is more complex, it is considered to show the relevant indicators of subjective well-being, starting from the assumption that each person can determine for himself how happy or satisfied he is.

The second group derives from the conceptualization of subjective well-being. The concept of subjective well-being falls within the "hedonic" perspective which defines well-being or happiness as maximizing pleasure and avoiding or minimizing pain. This differs from the eudaimonic perspective, which is concerned with living in accordance with one's diamon, or true self. This perspective focuses on the meaning of life and self-actualization and the extent to which a person is fully integrated in his life.

3. THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTIONS BASED ON MINDFULNESS

In the last 20 years there has been a lot of interest in mindfulness in psychology in clinical and educational settings, but there is also interest from society in mindfulness as a form of meditative practice. Previous psychological research on mindfulness has primarily focused on the effects of practicing mindfulness.

According to Stoops (Stoops, 2005), mindfulness was mostly known as a personal meditative practice that allowed the individual to live less limited, and to free himself from stress and worry.Theoretical writings on mindfulness (Gampopa, 2000; Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Walshe, 1987, according to Feldman, 2007, p.178) including ancient and contemporary, describe the practice of mindfulness as “a way to quiet the mind, to reduce suffering and to improve the quality of life."

There is a new generation of psychotherapeutic interventions that are based on mindfulness such as Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction-MBSR,Mindfulness Based Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (MBCT), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT).According to Thompson and Waltz (Thompson, L., B., Waltz, J., 2007) two psychotherapeutic interventions are particularly significant, namely "Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Therapy- MBSR by Kabat-Zinn and Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy-MBCT by Segal. Both therapies include the practice of walking and sitting meditation as well as yoga practices. These interventions consist of a concentrated practice of constant awareness where the participant focuses his attention for a certain period on a certain stimulus, for example, on breathing, body sensations, etc.

The notion of mindfulness is considered to have been popularized in psychology by John Kabat-Zinn when he introduced his Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Therapy (MBSR). More specifically, his therapy is a course that lasts from 8 to 10 weeks and includes a maximum of 30 participants in a group that meets once a week for two or three hours. During that course, mindfulness techniques are taught. An example of a technique used in mindfulness-based stress reduction therapy is "body scanning", i.e., participants focus their attention and awareness to various parts of their body. Individuals practice maintaining attention and awareness on a particular focus, most often on somatic experiences during the process of inhaling and exhaling. With this meditation, experiences of calmness and tranquility are encouraged. It is during these moments of stillness that the mind is allowed to develop a heightened state of awareness or insight. In the context of therapy, insight serves to increase awareness of personal habits or habitual behaviors and to understand the ways in which these automatic behaviors should be avoided in the future. Meditation enhances the potential for active and

conscious observation of one's own experiences and for insight into the nature of mental life and individual behavior. For all mindfulness exercises, participants are encouraged to accept and non-judge the stimuli that arise when focusing on a specific goal such as emotions, sensations or cognitions. When the mind stops following the designated focus, participants are encouraged to bring their focus back to the present moment. Other techniques include hatha yoga, diaphragmatic breathing, etc. These practices help maintain daily constant awareness.

Engaging in mindfulness practice has been associated with numerous positive enhancements, notably in the treatment of individuals with anxiety (Kabat-Zinn, et al. 1992; Miller, Fletcher, & Kabat-Zinn, 1995), depression (Ramel, Goldin, & Carmona, 2004; Teasdale, et al. 2000) and psychotherapeutic treatment for women with breast cancer (Carlson, Speca, Patel, &Goodey, 2004; Tacon, according to Stoops, 2005).

Mindfulness-based stress reduction therapy has been shown to reduce panic attacks (Miller, Fletcher, & Kabat-Zinn, 1995), excessive binge eating episodes associated with eating disorders (Kriesteller& Hallett, 1999), and chronic pain (Kabat-Zinn et al. 1985, 1987, according to Bishop, et al., 2004).Several researchers (Ma & Teasdale, 2004; Scherer-Dickson, 2004, according to Stoops, 2005) point out that mindfulness-based cognitive therapy designed for depression relapse prevention in those in recovery has also been shown to very effective. According to Bishop (Bishop, et al., 2004) dialectical psychotherapy reduces self-aggression and suicidal behavior, most likely by helping patients build a tolerance for experiences.The concept of constant awareness also exists in Western schools of psychology, especially in Gestalt psychotherapy. The main goal of Gestalt is to develop greater awareness of oneself and one's own experiences. It is directed at the present moment "here and now".

4. CONCLUSION

Researchers are continually exploring the effects of mindfulness-based clinical interventions and their influence on subjective well-being. The benefits of mindfulness include enhanced subjective well-being, stopping the automatic negative thoughts, reducing the automatic functioning in everyday life, reducing panic attacks, chronic pain, etc. These interventions encourage individuals to be more attuned to their emotions by being open to the inner experiences, more mindful of their behaviors and and better focused on fulfilling their fundamental psychological needs that are in the core of the subjective well-being.

In the process of cultivating awareness skills through these therapeutic interventions, the attention is not exclusively towards positive experiences of the individual. Instead, the primary focus is on the awareness itself, acknowledging and embracing all emotions and experiences that arise, whether they are positive or negative in nature.Mindfulnessin this context, demonstrates a greater impact in decreasing negative experiences, surpassing its general influence on subjective well-being.

These therapeutical interventions based on mindfulness are increasingly vital in our daily stressful living. It is widely recognized that our perceptions shape our lives, and the absence of mindfulnessemerges as a significant contributor to human suffering.Now, a growing number of therapists and counselors incorporates mindfulness as a complementary technique in their educational and therapeutical practices.

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