

Harnessing the Power of the Mind-Body Connection

for Chronic Pain Management

Nadine S. Johnson, OTS; Hanna Kobal, OTS; Arubah Mansoor, OTS; Sagda Ramadan, OTS
Faculty Advisor: Richard Sabel, MA, MPH, OTR, GCFP



DOWNSTATE
HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

Chronic pain is a prevalent issue causing disability and decreased quality of life, with significant financial costs (Breedon and Rowe, 2017; Lagueux et al., 2018). This study examines the effectiveness of integrating mindfulness approaches, with occupational therapy for managing chronic pain in adults. It aims to contribute to the growing body of evidence and provide valuable insight on the impact of mindfulness-based interventions on chronic pain management, within occupational therapy practice. Results indicate improvement in occupational well-being, demonstrating the program's efficacy in enhancing the overall quality of life for participants dealing with chronic pain.

Participant Feedback

What did you find helpful about the program?

"I am so much more aware of using my pelvis and rib cage together or separately. I feel it is making a difference. For example, opening a heavy door and pulling my grocery cart through the doorway (which I do all the time). Before I was twisting my body. Now, I stabilize my body and align the pelvis and upper body before opening the door and during the movement of rolling the cart through the doorway. Similarly, I am doing less exercises that involve twisting. Changing those movements has helped with my sciatica pain."

"Thoroughly enjoyed Richard's complete explanations and why we are doing such exercises. Beautiful presentations"

"I was introduced to thinking about body movements that I hadn't considered prior. It allowed me the opportunity to rethink my pain mgmt."

INTRODUCTION

Chronic pain is recognized as pain lasting longer than three months that persists beyond the healing time frame of a recovering injury (Paolucci et al., 2018). It is a prevalent issue that causes disability and restricts participation in daily activities and relationships, which results in decreased quality of life (Lagueux et al., 2018). Evidence shows that a multifaceted, biopsychosocial approach is most effective in addressing chronic pain. Within occupational therapy practice, mindfulness approaches – integrating biopsychosocial factors, can be used as a powerful tool for managing chronic pain by helping individuals develop a greater sense of control over their pain, reduce stress and anxiety, and improve overall well-being.

METHODS

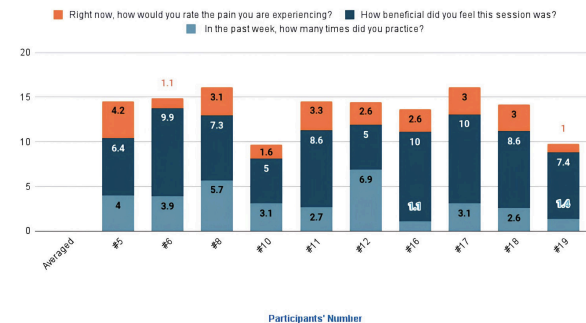
The Easy-Does-It Chronic Pain Program, conducted in collaboration with the Karpas Health Information Center enrolled 22 eligible participants initially, and concluded with 10 participants experiencing chronic pain. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling, voluntary enrollment, and provided informed consent. The study spanned eight 1.5-hour weekly sessions via Zoom, covering check-ins, education, mindfulness movement, and discussions. Participant anonymity was ensured through random number assignment for data collection. Data was analyzed through SPSS and organized through Google Statistics.

- **Inclusion criteria:** Ability to utilize and commit to Zoom-based sessions, intact cognitive functioning, and be 18+
- **Exclusion criteria:** Excluded severe neurological disorders, cognitive impairments, and acute pain.
- **Pre-tests Data Collection:** Brief Pain Inventory (BPI) and Personal Activity Selections (PAS) assessments were conducted via phone or email.
- **Weekly Data Collection:** Participants received weekly session videos, and research assistants conducted Weekly Check-Ins and administered post-program BPI and PAS assessments.
- **Post Study Data Collection:** Post-Study Interview Questions and post-study BPI and PAS assessments. Primary outcome measures included changes in pain intensity and anxiety levels pre-and post-intervention.

RESULTS

Based on the data collected from the **BPI**, it is evident that participants experienced a decrease in overall pain levels across various measures, including pain at its worst in the last week, pain at its least, average pain, and current pain levels. Moreover, participants demonstrated improvement in how pain interfered with their general activities and overall quality of life. Participants also provided **Weekly Feedback** questions, covering pain, session benefits (rated 1-10), and mindfulness practice frequency. Scores fluctuated over the 8 weeks due to injury, sickness, and unforeseen events.

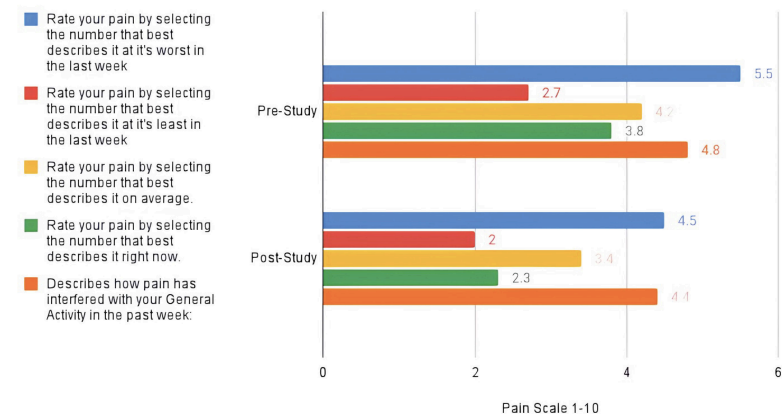
Averaged Participants' Weekly Check-in Results



DISCUSSION

Findings illuminate the positive impact of mindfulness-based approaches on chronic pain management. Data from BPI and PAS along with subjective feedback indicate a correlation between mindfulness-based approaches and pain alleviation, though some with severe chronic pain expressed dissatisfaction, indicating the need for tailored interventions. Notably, there were significant **performance** improvements but no changes in **satisfaction** levels for one meaningful activity. The findings suggest a need for further reflection into how mindfulness affects *subjective performance* and *satisfaction* across different functional activities, particularly those involving mobility and gait. Mindfulness-based approaches can enhance *perceived* performance and satisfaction in meaningful activities for individuals with chronic pain. Future research could focus on specific chronic pain subgroups and program delivery methods to refine interventions. Despite limitations, participants expressed satisfaction, highlighting the program's broader enhancement in well-being and underscoring the valuable contribution of mindfulness-based interventions in promoting holistic well-being among individuals with chronic pain.

Averaged Participants' BPI Per Question Results



CONCLUSION

Current evidence emphasizes the advantages of utilizing mindfulness techniques to manage chronic pain, a widespread issue in the United States that significantly impacts individuals' daily functioning and quality of life. Traditional treatments like medication offer only temporary relief, highlighting the need for alternative approaches. The Easy-Does-It Chronic Pain Program, utilized telehealth occupational therapy, group-based, mindfulness sessions, combined with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), which resulted in a decrease in participants' pain levels and improved their engagement in meaningful activities. This study suggests that integrating mindfulness into occupational therapy practice holds promise for supporting adults with chronic pain, urging further research in this area.

