Mindfulness for Left-behind Children in China


A randomized controlled trial published in *Child: Care, Health and Development* examined whether a mindfulness training program was beneficial to left-behind students in China, who stayed in their hometown with extended family members because their parents left to work in other cities.

Sixty-three left-behind children who agreed to participate in this study were screened from a sample of 320 grade 5 to 6 students from a primary school in an urban area in Nanjing. Thirty students were randomly allocated to a mindfulness training group, where they participated in an eight-week mindfulness training program that emphasized focusing on the present and practicing non-judgmental awareness. The program consisted of one-hour group sessions once a week. Thirty-three students were allocated to a control group.

Students completed a pre-test before participating in the trainings and a post-test after the eight-week training which included scales measuring their mindfulness, social anxiety, suicide ideation, and self-esteem. However, nine students in the mindfulness training group and three students in the control group did not complete the post-test. The findings were as follows:

- Social anxiety was found negatively correlated with mindfulness and positively correlated with suicide ideation in the pre-test.
- Compared with the control group, students who received the 8-week mindfulness training program improved significantly in level of mindfulness and showed reduced social anxiety and suicide ideation.
- However, improvement in self-esteem was not significant.

The authors suggested that the promising findings of this pilot intervention study support further study of mindfulness training among left-behind children, remarking, however, that the present results should not be generalized to all left-behind children in China.