

# PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS FROM NORTH KERALA ABOUT AN INDIAN MINDFULNESS-BASED INTERVENTION (MLM- MINDFUL LIFE MANAGEMENT) FOLLOWING A ONE DAY INTRODUCTORY WORKSHOP

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## ABSTRACT

### BACKGROUND

Mindfulness, a concept with origin in the eastern meditation traditions, is finding increased ways of application in medical, educational and management settings. Research has shown that mindful individuals are not distracted by external or internal stimuli and are better able to pay attention to tasks. Mindfulness has been shown to have effects on enhancing focus and emotional control.

**Aims and Objectives-** The aim of the study was to explore the perceptions of teachers from 4 different districts in the state of Kerala about the perceptions of teachers on usefulness of a structured program of Mindful Life Management (MLM) among school children. The intervention was the brief structured module of Mindful Life Management.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

This descriptive cross-sectional study done on teachers in the four districts of Kannur, Kozhikode, Kottayam and Thrissur. All the teachers who attended a one day workshop on MLM conducted at Kannur, Kozhikode, Kottayam and Thrissur, were selected as sample. None of the teachers had any previous experiences with mindfulness. 94% of the teachers were hearing the word mindfulness for the first time during this workshop.

### RESULTS

Significant proportion of Teachers reported that MLM could be useful for both adults and children. Significant number of teachers who participated in the study harbour negative emotions. Many teachers opined that MLM program is practical and could be delivered to students, teachers and parents through a one-day workshop. Teachers also opined that mindfulness intervention delivered through MLM program could be useful in improving attention and emotional regulation in children. Problem of time restraint and doubts relating to applying the program for teachers who faced differently abled children were left for further discussions and improvement. Teachers expressed that MLM program enhanced their enthusiasm for teaching. Overall, the teachers had positive attitudes and perceptions regarding implementation of MLM in their regular school curriculum.

### CONCLUSION

The perception study of teachers shows that MLM could be used as a tool for enhancing focus and attention and also for enabling better emotional regulation among teachers, parents and students.

### KEYWORDS

Mindfulness, Mindful Life Management, School Health, Teachers, Stress, Attention, Emotion Regulation.

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### BACKGROUND

Mindfulness is an awareness which emerges by paying attention to the present moment, nonjudgmentally. Experts opine that mindfulness can be cultivated by the techniques of yoga and meditation. It is portrayed as having an origin

in the Eastern meditation practices. Various authors have defined the concept of mindfulness in different ways. Mindfulness has been described as "bringing one's complete attention to the present experience on a moment-to-moment basis"<sup>1</sup> and as "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment and nonjudgmentally."<sup>2</sup> Mindfulness is finding increased ways of application in medical, educational and management settings. Research has shown that mindful individuals are not distracted by external or internal stimuli and are better able to pay attention to tasks. Emerging evidence in relation to use of mindfulness practices in children have suggested that these programs are beneficial for empowering children and adolescents.<sup>3</sup> The practice of mindfulness has been shown

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to enable individuals to regulate negative emotions and stressful situations.<sup>4</sup>

Many school children experience difficulties in academic, psychological and cognitive domains. The pressure engendered by these difficulties may lead to anger, violent behaviour, conduct disorder and various types of anxiety and depression, all of which can negatively impact student's school performance. There is an increase in interest in the utility of mindfulness practices for children and adolescents.<sup>5</sup>

Various school mindfulness programs have been developed to address children's management of stress. Stress has been shown to have a negative impact on children and may reveal itself in the form of complaints, anger, anxiety, depression and inability to focus and concentrate during classroom activities.<sup>6</sup>

Teachers play an important role in the implementation of mindfulness programs in schools by evaluating the benefits of the practice for their student's academic development. It has been argued that school administrators and others concerned with education related reforms must consider the teacher's perceptions of the benefits for their students.<sup>7</sup> It has also been suggested that teachers should have personal knowledge of new programs such as mindfulness before implementation in classrooms.<sup>8</sup>

Studies have shown that when teachers learn mindfulness, they gain both personal benefits like reduced stress and burnout and they benefit the students of the school to improve.<sup>9,10,11,12</sup> In some of the randomised controlled trials, teachers who learned mindfulness reported greater efficacy in doing their jobs.<sup>11</sup>

It was also found that mindful teachers also had more emotionally supportive classrooms and better classroom organisations.<sup>11,13</sup> Studies have reported that the Teacher's sense of efficacy, stress and self-compassion improved significantly from pre- to post-tests on course surveys.<sup>14</sup> Teachers are expected to be more keenly aware of their student's social, emotional development and to have effective methods for dealing with social-emotional challenges.<sup>15</sup>

Teachers' personal beliefs about children's learning has been suggested to influence their teaching practices and interaction with children.<sup>16</sup> It has also been noted that teacher's beliefs and perceptions regarding their role in the classroom are significant in implementation of mindfulness practices. Given the increasing popularity and importance of mindfulness practices among the child and adolescent population and paucity of data from our part of the country, it becomes important to learn about the perceptions of teachers about mindfulness practices among teachers from our part of the country. The current qualitative interview study endeavoured to gain a better understanding of elementary school teacher's perceptions of the mindfulness program at their schools.

### **Mindful Life Management (MLM)**

MLM is an experiential educational stress management program developed by the Holistic and Psychosomatic Clinic of the Department of Psychiatry, Government Medical College, Thiruvananthapuram in 2009. The major components of MLM include mindfulness meditations, mindful yoga, mindful movements, life skills awareness and psycho-education on stress. The program has been functioning in the Department of Psychiatry since the past 8 years. The program is offered as two-day workshop and as eight-week program with one 2.5 hours session every week on a fixed day. The participants are encouraged to spend a minimum of 30 - 45 minutes per day at home for self-practice. The package can be useful for children and adolescents with minor changes in the time duration. For younger children, weekly sessions are of one-hour duration and the daily practice sessions are of 5 - 10 minutes duration.

### **Aims and Objectives**

The aim of the study was to explore the perceptions of teachers from 4 Different Districts in the state of Kerala about the usefulness of a structured program of Mindful Life Management (MLM) among school children.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This descriptive cross-sectional study with pre-post assessment was done on teachers in the four districts of Kannoor, Kozhikode, Kottayam and Thrissur. All the teachers who attended a one-day workshop on MLM conducted at Kannoor, Kozhikode, Kottayam and Thrissur, were selected as sample. None of the teachers had any previous experiences with mindfulness. 94% of the teachers were hearing the word mindfulness for the first time.

The intervention was based on the brief structured module of Mindful Life Management. The training included sharing the concept of mindfulness with the participants both theoretically and practically. The concept of Mindfulness included the following interrelated mental skills:

1. Directing attention on purpose on the here and now.
2. Perceiving each moment in a calm, clear and receptive manner.
3. Sustaining the attention.
4. Perceiving the present moment in a non-judgemental way.
5. Shifting of attention.

These concepts were shared using the conventional methods of mindfulness meditation (both guided and unguided), raisin exercise, body scan meditation and mindful movements. The tool for data collection included a semi-structured questionnaire comprising of both open and closed ended questions, which could be completed within a period of 15 minutes. Questions focused on the following areas:

1. How the teachers perceived mindfulness session for themselves?
2. Will they recommend it to other teachers?
3. Did they feel that it was practical?

4. Their perception about implementing mindfulness practices in their classrooms, and
5. Their perceptions of the benefits of mindfulness practices from their students and themselves.

## RESULTS

A total of 179 teachers participated in the one-day brief Mindful Life Management (MLM) workshop conducted at

Kannoor, Kozhikode, Kottayam and Thrissur. The teachers included 127 females and 52 males. All the teachers were teaching in English medium schools. The age, educational qualification and experience of the teachers is given in the table below-

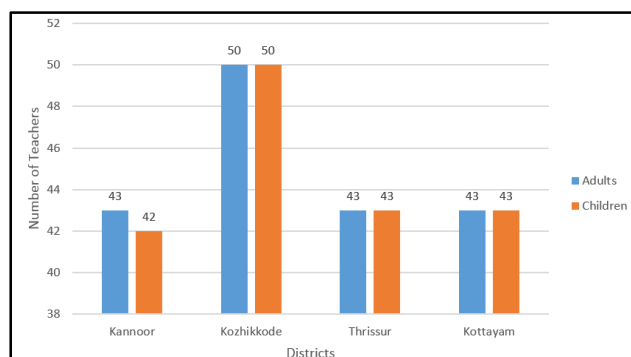
	Thrissur	Kozhikode	Kottayam	Kannur
<b>Number of Teachers</b>	43	50	43	43
<b>Age (Mean)</b>	47.3	42.98	46.84	44.58
<b>Years of Experience (Mean)</b>	20.72	14.20	16.56	16.14
<b>Education</b>	B.Ed. – 33 MEd = 8	B.Ed. – 38 MEd - 03	B.Ed. - 27 MEd – 1	B.Ed. – 30 MEd - 1
Other teachers had qualifications like MA and BSc.				

### Usefulness of the Mindful Life Management Program

Teachers who participated in the study opined that the common problems, which the students face during their academic years are reduced ability to attend and difficulties with emotional regulation. Teachers opined that MLM could be useful for improving focus and attention, emotional regulation, reduce impulsivity and enhance compassion for coping with stress and reducing anxiety and depression which many students face during the school years. Various other studies have also shown that mindfulness-based interventions are useful for enhancing attention,<sup>17,18</sup> producing better performance on objective tasks which measure attention,<sup>19</sup> emotion regulation,<sup>20</sup> reducing the reaction patterns allowing students to respond,<sup>21</sup> better ability to engage in tasks even when emotions are activated,<sup>22</sup> producing more self and other related compassion,<sup>23,24</sup> stress reduction<sup>17</sup> and working more effectively in a stressful social situation.<sup>25</sup>

### Usefulness of the MLM Program

Significant proportion of Teachers reported that MLM could be useful for both adults and children (Fig. 1). Because they felt that behaviour of children is significantly influenced by the behaviour of parents and teachers, many teachers suggested that MLM program should be conducted for parents also.



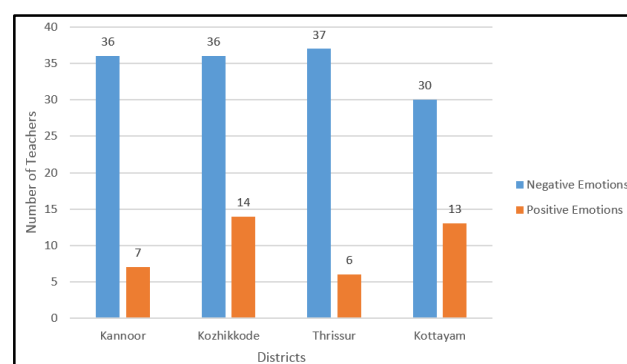
**Figure 1. Teacher's Opinion about Usefulness of MLM Program for Adults and Children**

### Recommendation of MLM Program to other Teachers

Teachers as a group are highly prone to stress. The common factors causing stress in teachers include personal factors, family stress and work related factors. In addition to this teachers are also prone to vicarious stress, i.e. stress due to stressful events about which they come to be aware about. It was found that a significant number of teachers are harbouring negative emotions mostly.

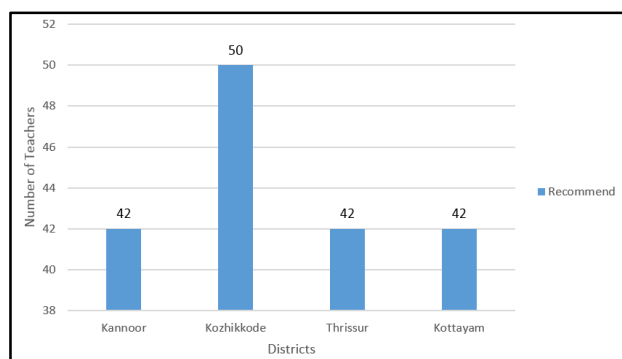
### Predominant Emotion Experienced by Teachers during the Preceding Two Months

The current study observed that a significant percentage of teachers from the four districts are harbouring predominantly negative emotions (Fig. 2); 36 teachers from Kannoor (83.72%), 36 teachers from Kozhikode (72%), 37 teachers from Thrissur (86.04%) and 30 teachers from Kottayam (69.77%) were found to have predominant negative emotions (sadness, anger, anxiety and confusion) during the preceding two months.



**Figure 2. Predominant Emotion Experienced by Teachers during the Preceding Two Months**

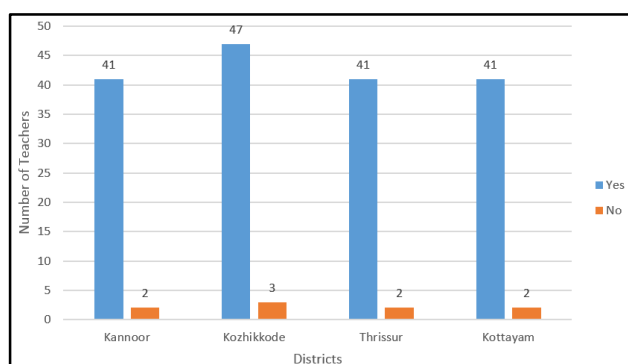
A significant proportion of teachers reported that they will recommend MLM program for other teachers (Fig. 3). 97.67% of teachers from Kannoor (N= 42), 100% of teachers from Kozhikode (N= 50), 97.67% of teachers from Kottayam (N= 42) and 97.67% of teachers from Kannur (N= 42) reported that they will recommend the MLM program for other teachers.



**Figure 3. Teacher's Recommendation of MLM Program for other Teachers**

### The Practicality of the MLM Program

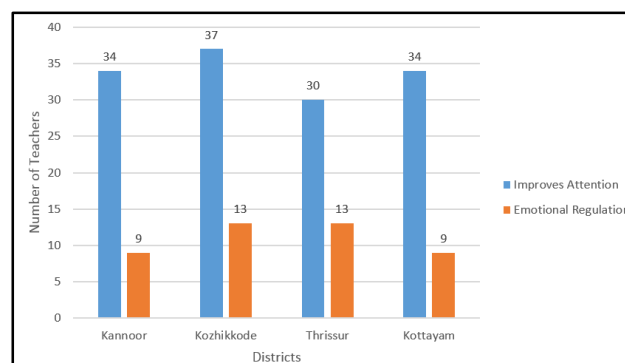
A significant proportion of the teachers were of opinion that MLM program is practical and could be delivered to students, teachers and parents through a one-day workshop. (Fig. 4) 95.35% of teachers from Thrissur (N= 41), 94% of the teachers from Kozhikkode (N= 47), 95.35% of teachers from Kottayam (N= 41) and 95.35% of teachers from Kannoor (N= 41) opined that MLM program is practical.



**Figure 4. Teacher's Opinion about whether MLM Program is Practical**

### Teacher's Perceptions of the Benefits of Mindfulness Practices in their Classrooms

A significant number of teachers opined that mindfulness intervention delivered through MLM program could be useful in improving attention and emotional regulation in children (Fig. 5). 79.06% of the teachers from Kannoor (N= 34), 74% of teachers from Kozhikkode (N= 37), 69.77% of teachers from Thrissur (N= 30) and 79.07% of teachers from Kottayam (N= 34) opined that MLM could be useful in improving attention. 20.93% of teachers from Kannoor (N=9), 26% of teachers from Kozhikkode (N= 13), 30.23% of teachers from Thrissur (13) and 20.93% of teachers from Kottayam (N= 9) perceived MLM program as having good ability to regulate emotion. Difficulties with emotional regulation was one of the major difficulties reported by teachers, as they faced when dealing with children of adolescent age group.



**Figure 5. Teacher's Perception of other Benefits of Mindfulness Practices in their Classrooms**

### Limitations Suggested by Teachers

Though the overall opinion of teachers was in favour of implementing MLM program in schools, few limitations of the program were also suggested. The first was the time constraint. The 8-week program of Mindful Life Management was given to teachers over a period of 1 day. The second query was whether the program could be given to teachers who face difficulties when dealing with children of different age groups and/or differently abled children.

Despite the challenges, the teachers expressed that MLM program had several advantages over their school's existing programs. Only 10 schools had any regular programs for enhancing the benefits for which MLM program was being considered. Teacher's expressed that the program enhanced their enthusiasm for teaching. Overall, the teachers had positive attitudes and perceptions regarding implementation of MLM in their regular school curriculum.

### DISCUSSION

The present study was the first attempt to study the perception of teachers to a structured stress management program based on the concept of mindfulness developed in India. It was found that all the 179 teachers, who participated in the program had reasonably good experience in the teaching profession and were adept in handling various issues of children.

It is worth noting that though parents are worried about the ability of the children to study or score marks, teachers who participated in the study opined that the common problems faced by them is the student's inability to attend to what they do or learn and emotional regulation. Teachers were of opinion that the MLM program may be useful for improving focus and attention, emotional regulation, reduce impulsivity and enhance compassion, for coping with stress and reducing anxiety and depression which many students face during the school years. The same facts have been reported by studies conducted in different parts of the world using various mindfulness based interventions (17-25), in mindful schools.

The study also showed that a significant proportion of teachers perceived MLM to be useful for both adults and children. Studies all over has shown similar benefits for adults, especially in management of stress, enhancing

attention and coping with emotions. Major studies in relation to children are on the way.

The study also showed that significant percentage of teachers harbour predominantly negative emotions. Not many studies from this part of the country have demonstrated a similar finding. This finding is especially important at a period where we have started acknowledging the infectious nature of emotions. Negative emotions in the teachers are likely to get transferred to children whom they teach. May be because of this awareness that many teachers recommended MLM program for other teachers.

One of the most important aspect of the MLM training was the simple and pragmatic nature. This can be seen from the finding that a significant proportion of teachers opined that MLM program is practical and could be delivered to students, teachers and parents through workshop formats either as a group or in separate groups. Teachers also opined that mindfulness intervention delivered could be useful in improving attention and emotional regulation in children.

An additional finding in the study that only 5 out of 26 schools had any means for managing stress of teachers. Of the 5 schools, 2 had regular yoga sessions once a month, one had meditation and relaxation session and 2 had various programs like music, dance, recreation facilities, etc. Many of the teachers opined that if at all their school conducted yoga programs, it was by guest teachers and were not even useful for motivating children for regular practice.

Considering all these factors, it can reliably be considered that MLM program could be a practical and simple alternative for handling the various problems faced by teachers, public and administrators while dealing with children.

## CONCLUSION

The current study was a pilot study to know about the perceptions of teachers to mindfulness through Mindful Life Management, a stress management program developed by the Holistic and Psychosomatic Clinic of the Department of Psychiatry, Government Medical College, Thiruvananthapuram. As per the reports of the teachers, Mindful Life Management could be used as a tool for enhancing focus and attention and also for enabling better emotional regulation among teachers, parents and students.

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