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The effects of mindfulness practices on well-being

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Abstract. There is growing interest in psychological research into mindfulness practices and their association with aspects of psychological functioning and well-being. Therefore, we have carried out this research with the main purpose of reducing prejudices and limiting beliefs about mindfulness practices and to present the benefits of mindfulness practices on well-being, with its many benefits. Aiming to confirm and extend previous knowledge on this topic, we studied the relationships between well-being and the quality of mindfulness practices in a sample (N: 59), adopting a multidimensional conceptualization of mindfulness. To begin with, we performed a simple linear regression to determine whether the mindfulness variable predicts the individual's psychological well-being. The results, analyzed from a statistical point of view, show that 52.9% of the well-being of the respondents is influenced by the practice of mindfulness. Thus, the practice of mindfulness techniques influences and is an important predictor of psychological well-being. Then, we correlated the construct of mindfulness with that of well-being and all its facets: autonomy, mastery of the environment, personal growth, positive relationships with others, purpose in life and self-acceptance. For this, we used two questionnaires: the Five Facets Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) and the questionnaire that measures the well-being construct, the Ryff Scale. The results showed direct, strong correlations, both between mindfulness and the scores obtained for the well-being construct, as well as for the relationship between mindfulness practice and the subscales of the Ryff instrument: autonomy, mastery of the environment, personal growth, positive relationships with others and self-acceptance. The correlation between mindfulness and purpose in life is direct and average. This study supports the relationship between mindfulness and psychological well-being, with evidence that the practice of mindfulness can enhance an individual's well-being through various means.

Keywords. mindfulness meditation, mindfulness practices, well-being

Introduction
Mindfulness
In the last 20 years, mindfulness practices have attracted considerable attention from the clinical community, but also from researchers within scientific psychology. Mindfulness has been defined as a process that brings a specific quality of attention to present experience, following it moment by moment. The ability to evoke the state of mindfulness is developed using various meditation techniques originating from Buddhist spiritual practices, which claim that the constant practice of mindfulness meditation decreases suffering and cultivates positive qualities such as as well-being, insight, wisdom, openness, equanimity and compassion.
The very fact that a growing number of studies on mindfulness practices and its clinical applications are being funded and published suggests that this is an area of considerable interest today. This can be primarily determined by the fact that, through its exploration, new perspectives on mind/body interactions could be accumulated, as well as new dimensions of therapeutic benefit.

The term mindfulness has been defined and operationalized in a variety of different ways, with the unfortunate consequence that when one talks about mindfulness, the understanding of the concept is often unclear. This has led to the need to specify which aspect or component of mindfulness is being referred to, rather than using the broader term mindfulness (Dane, 2011). There is an ongoing debate between the scientific camp and the Buddhist camp, with the latter sometimes concerned that scientists are removing the true meaning of mindfulness through a reductionist approach that does not do justice to the practice of mindfulness. At the same time, debate about what mindfulness really is exists even in scientific circles.

The process of being mindful involves being instructed on how to focus our awareness. In clinical settings, there are two definitions of mindfulness processes that serve as guidelines for what we should do with our awareness: moment-to-moment awareness without judgment (Kabat Zinn, 1990) and awareness of present experience with acceptance (Germer et al., 2005). These process definitions suggest: Observe your experiences as they happen, moment by moment, and strive to do so with an attitude of acceptance.

Definitions of mindfulness processes are particularly valuable because they identify processes of change or mechanisms of action that may help particular patients. In therapy, mindfulness is viewed as a transformative process, composed of individual elements such as acceptance, present experience, and awareness. Depending on the patient, certain elements may be emphasized more than others. For instance, individuals who are self-critical may benefit most from focusing on acceptance, obsessive sufferers might be helped by focusing on present-moment sensations, and people with impulse control disorders might benefit from greater awareness – noticing precursors to behaviors problems such as drinking, gambling or overeating.

One of the most widely recognized definitions of mindfulness in scientific research is the act of directing one’s attention in a specific manner: purposefully, in the present moment, and without being overly critical or judgmental (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). This is the conceptualization that underlies the MBSR program (Kabat-Zinn, 1994), the mindfulness training program that has received, by far, the most attention from a research point of view. The definition includes three components: attention, intention and attitude.

When a person is in contact with what is happening in the present moment, it leads to consciously keeping attention on the present moment, thus managing to avoid acting on automatic pilot (Baer et al., 2006).

In fact, it may be useful to understand mindfulness by contrasting it with mindlessness. For example, Reb and Narayanan (2013, p.4 apud Reb et al, 2014) stated that mindlessness can be defined as that moment in which you do not pay attention or are not aware of the activities you engage in or states and processes internal (e.g., emotions) that you experience. Examples of mindlessness include performing tasks on autopilot, daydreaming, or ruminating about the past or future (Brown et al., 2003 apud Reb et al., 2014). Dane (2011) noted the conceptual distinction between living in the present and living for the present, which could manifest as illusion, impulsivity, hedonism and fatalism.
Although it can be disturbing to notice how often we are mindless and how much of our life, our thoughts want to find an escape route, there is also good news: the state of presence can be cultivated. Just as regular exercise can enhance physical fitness, mindfulness can be developed through intentional mental training.

The Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hahn, one of the strongest promoters of mindfulness practices, presents a series of techniques that can improve everyday attention. For example, when you wash the dishes, be aware of the quality of the water, its sensation on the skin, the colors of the dish. Or while driving, try to appreciate the color and texture when the red headlights of another vehicle appear, as if you were watching a beautiful sunset. All these are called informal meditation practices.

Formal meditation practice involves time to access mental "gymnastics", accessing the meditation in silence. There are many types of meditation that can increase your state of presence. They initially involve choosing a focus of attention, such as the breath, and bringing attention back to that object of focus whenever the mind wanders. This develops a state of inner peace and calm that provides the window of opportunity to focus the mind on the chosen object. Once a certain focus is established, mindfulness meditation involves directing the mind to whatever begins to predominate in the mind - usually focusing on the way the event is experienced in the body. We can focus on physical sensations such as itching, sound or pain, emotional experiences as they manifest in the body, such as the tightness in the chest associated with anger or the lump in the throat that occurs when we are sad. Regardless of our chosen topic of attention, we practice being aware of our present experience with acceptance.

The first research in the field of mindfulness practices focused on the MBSR program (Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction) and the focus was on helping patients with chronic pain who had not found relief through conventional medical treatments (Kabat-Zinn, 1982 apud Creswell, 2017), demonstrating the interest long-term scientific research in the application of mindfulness interventions, in the treatment to improve physical health. There is growing interest in the potential of mindfulness interventions to promote physical health. By increasing awareness of bodily sensations and improving stress management and coping skills, mindfulness practices can enhance overall well-being and reduce the risk of disease.

Although the program was developed in a medical context, for patients, its success based on research results, made it attractive as a program for the general population. The point behind this is that most people are not in a state of perfect well-being and mindfulness. Instead, many of us suffer from varying degrees of stress, exhaustion and pain at one point or another.

MBSR combines mindfulness techniques into an 8-week training course in which participants are taught practices of focusing on the present moment for long periods of time (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Participants meet weekly for two- to three-hour sessions, plus one full-day session. In addition, they are assigned homework, where they are asked to practice the techniques on their own using guided meditations and course materials for about 45 to 60 minutes a day, six days a week. The program takes place in a group setting, but with individual feedback and support. The techniques focus on building awareness and examining patterns of thought and behavior through a systematic curriculum aimed at cultivating an observant, non-evaluative attitude towards mental, emotional and physiological sensations. Specifically, participants are equipped with formal mindfulness practices such as body scanning, breath-focused meditations that expand attention to limitless awareness.
Well-being

Defining happiness, well-being, and well-being has been an important goal for scientists in fields such as economics, politics, philosophy, and psychology. The intuitive appeal to constructs such as happiness, well-being, and quality of life are undeniable, but as a result of this appeal, an unusually large and diverse range of theories of well-being have evolved, each with different perspectives, underlying concepts, and goals. This is true, not only in terms of the social sciences and humanities, but also within psychology as a science.

Indeed, there is a major dilemma regarding the theorization of the construct of well-being or well-being. On the one hand, the study of well-being has been hindered by the extremely large number of theories (Diener et al., 2003), leading to an unclear and overly broad definition of well-being.

The perspective of interest for this study is Ryff's approach to psychological well-being (Jayawickreme, 2012), and is one of the most well-known theories of well-being eudemonic. This eudaemonic conception contains six dimensions, which we classify as a need theory because these dimensions are considered to be important for well-being, whether a person wants them or not: Self-acceptance - maintaining positive attitudes toward oneself and others of the past life; Positive relationships with others - having warmth, trust in interpersonal relationships; Autonomy - having qualities such as: self-determination, independence, self-regulation of behavior and an internal place of evaluation; Mastery of the environment - having the ability to choose and/or create environments or conditions suitable for the psyche; Purpose in life - having beliefs that give the individual the idea that there is a purpose and meaning to life; Personal Growth - developing one's potential, growing and expanding as a person.

The objective of the paper: the general objective is to identify the relationship between mindfulness practice and the individual's well-being and a specific objective is to determine the role of mindfulness in predicting psychological well-being in the participants.

Assumption. It is assumed that there is a significant positive correlation between the quality scores of mindfulness meditation and well-being, including the subscales autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships with others; purpose in life and self-acceptance.

The group of participants:
This research was carried out through the study conducted on a sample consisting of 58 women and 1 man, aged between 19 and 65 years. They are mostly graduates of the 8-week Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction program, currently practitioners of forms of meditation to return to the present, both formal and informal practices, as well as accredited mindfulness instructors.

Work tools
The first questionnaire we will refer to is the Five Facets Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ). The Five Facets Mindfulness Questionnaire (Baer et al., 2008) is a self-well-known reporting and is used to measure mindfulness (state of presence).

The FFMQ items measure conscious attention as a general psychological construct with five main facets, named: Observation, the ability to observe stimuli (for example, tingling sensations or pain); Description, the ability to verbally describe those stimuli; Actaware, as a tendency to focus on the present moment (as opposed to mechanical or "automatic pilot" behavior); Non-judgment of inner experience or Non-judgment, as the ability not to judge a certain inner experience as good or bad; Nonreaction to inner experience, as the tendency not
to react immediately to an internal event and to step back to visualize and grasp another perspective.

The widespread use of the FFMQ can be attributed to the numerous international validations of the questionnaire (Lecuona et al., 2020).

Results consist of a mean total score and five mean subscales, with scores ranging on a 5-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating those individuals accessing mindfulness and presence in everyday life.

A second tool used in this research is the questionnaire that measures the well-being construct, the Ryff Scale. The Ryff scale, developed by Ryff in 1989, is a questionnaire that measures psychological well-being across six domains: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Both the long and medium versions of the questionnaire include statements related to these domains. Respondents are asked to rate their level of agreement with each statement on a scale from 1 to 6, where 1 represents strong disagreement and 6 represents strong agreement.

Ethics
The research was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the ethical code, the participants were assured of the confidentiality of the data provided, according to the General Data Protection Regulation and of the fact that they will be used only for the purpose of scientific research. The statistical processing of the data provided was analyzed at the sample level and will not be presented individually in any scientific publication.

Participation was requested, but with the mention of the fact that it is strictly voluntary. Also, the subject's decision to participate in the study, to answer the questions or to give up participation was respected.

The study participants were provided with information about the study’s objectives, given details for providing informed consent, and assured that their confidentiality would be maintained. Also, at the end, they were given a short debriefing.

Procedure
The research could be carried out with the help of a GoogleForms type document, where all the questionnaires mentioned above were uploaded online. This document was then distributed on various communication and social networks (Whatsapp, Facebook), on groups like Mindfulness communities, facilitated by internationally accredited guides and mentors, with the aim of completing them by the participants.

The scores obtained after completing the questionnaires were statistically analyzed with the help of EXCEL and SPSS programs, version 24.

Verification of assumption
In order to achieve one of the specific objectives of this research, a simple linear regression was performed to determine if the mindfulness variable predicts the individual's psychological well-being.

The results, analyzed from a statistical point of view show that $R=0.733$, which means that there is a strong correlation between the two variables and $\text{sig}=0.000$, which means that our results are very unlikely due to a sampling error. From the analysis of the adjusted coefficient of determination score (adjusted $R$ square), we find that 52.9% of the respondents' well-being is influenced by the practice of mindfulness.
The closer the points are to the regression line, the higher the correlation coefficient and the better the regression analysis results. As can be seen from figure 1, the responses of the research participants are concentrated against the regression line, which confirms to us that mindfulness techniques lead to an increase in the well-being of the research participants.

Therefore, the results of the study show that the practice of mindfulness techniques influences and is an important predictor of psychological well-being. Becoming aware of the present moment brings more joy in relation to the world around us and helps us see ourselves for who we truly are. When we are in the present moment, we get to experience the things we take for granted. Mindfulness makes us more aware of the flow of thoughts and emotions that we experience and notice the way in which we can get involved in that flow.

Bringing awareness over and over to the breath or the soles of the feet calms the mind. This allows us to step back from our thoughts and begin to notice cognitive patterns. Gradually, we can train ourselves to notice when our thoughts take over and realize that they are simply mental events that do not need to control us.

Mindfulness practices also bring profound psychological changes because they bring with them three important insights: suffering occurs in everyone's souls; our sensations, thoughts, and emotions are transitory; and the fact that the Self is a process, not a state, being a construct in motion (Morgan et al., 2016).

These deep awarenesses become what stands between the stimulus and our usual reactivity. The moment we integrate the fact that suffering is universal (all beings suffer), the chances of it overwhelming us are significantly reduced. When we understand that our emotions, thoughts and sensations are transient phenomena in their entirety, we gain the ability to more easily let go of them and focus on the quality of our present life. Finally, if we can detach ourselves from the conviction of a rigid Self, we will more easily come out of rumination and be less self-absorbed. These insights are not just intellectual concepts, but real psychological transformations that help us support our ability to be present here and now.

Knowing all this, it seems natural that 52.9% of the well-being of the participants in this study is influenced by the practice of mindfulness. When we aim to be present and attentive in an open, unreserved way, without surrendering to our conditioning of likes and dislikes, opinions and prejudices, expectations and projections, we open ourselves to new possibilities and to the chance to become free from one's own straitjacket of unconsciousness.
The tendency and habit of ignoring our present moments (in favor of others, which we do not hope will come) leads to a complete lack of awareness of the fabric of life in which we are engaged. This dramatically limits our view of what it means to be human and how we are connected to each other and the world around us.

So the influence, in such a large percentage, of the practice of mindfulness, on the well-being of the individual, raises extremely important questions: how alive are we in our own lives? Is it worth being inactive in the face of time pressure, meditating, to become more alive than we are now? Can stopping make the flow of life clearer, more articulate, richer?

The answer to these questions will be highlighted during the analysis of the research results.

**Assumption.** *It is assumed that there is a significant positive correlation between the quality scores of mindfulness meditation and well-being, including the subscales autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships with others; purpose in life and self-acceptance.*

The results, analyzed from a statistical point of view, are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mindfulness</th>
<th>Autonomy</th>
<th>Correlation Coefficient</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collection</td>
<td></td>
<td>.652**</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mindfulness</th>
<th>Personal growth</th>
<th>Correlation Coefficient</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collection</td>
<td></td>
<td>.606**</td>
<td>.000</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mindfulness</th>
<th>Self-acceptance</th>
<th>Correlation Coefficient</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collection</td>
<td></td>
<td>.636**</td>
<td>.000</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mindfulness</th>
<th>Positive relationships with others</th>
<th>Correlation Coefficient</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collection</td>
<td></td>
<td>.647**</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mindfulness</th>
<th>Environmental mastery</th>
<th>Correlation Coefficient</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Collection</td>
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<td>.633**</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Mindfulness</th>
<th>Purpose in life</th>
<th>Correlation Coefficient</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collection</td>
<td></td>
<td>.487**</td>
<td>.000</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in the table above, the statistical significance of the correlations is high, being significant at a probability of error of p=.000, less than the significance threshold of p=.05. This indicates that our hypothesis is scientifically validated.
Discussion

Our research supports the results of studies existing up to this moment in the specialized literature. Indeed, a number of studies have shown the strong link between mindfulness practices and well-being (e.g., Baer et al., 2012).

As can be seen, the correlation coefficient between mindfulness and autonomy is .652, which proves that it is a strong positive (direct) correlation. Because mindfulness refers to the individual's ability to orient openly to current internal and external experiences, it enables and supports the self-understanding and self-reflection needed to ensure that one's values are in line with one's behavior. Moreover, it builds a framework that helps connect that particular behavior with the values that are already part of the self.

This awareness is an important substrate of integration and therefore a critical ingredient for the development of autonomy (Deci et al., 1985 apud Schultz et al., 2015). In other words, the individual can be highly autonomous when he is clearly aware of his objective values and thus, is able to engage in behaviors that are congruent with the true self, free from external pressures or internal distortions and judgments.

Focused attention and awareness also promote autonomous behavior because they can help people free themselves from the control of external and internal forces that are foreign to the authentic self (Brown et al., 2007 apud Schultz et al., 2015). As Hodgins and Knee (2002, p. 89 apud Schultz et al., 2015) put it: Autonomously functioning individuals ... respond to reality rather than ego-invested preconceived notions. Conscious individuals have an observant attitude toward experience, rather than a cognitive-reflective attitude that constantly informs thoughts about the self. In other words, they recognize the Self as a process of integration and assimilation and not as a product of self-evaluations.

In conclusion, we can say that mindfulness is postulated as a particularly important intra-individual resource that supports autonomy.

The correlation between mindfulness and personal growth is .606, which proves that it is a strong positive (direct) correlation. Indeed, the impact of mindfulness practice on the inner growth of the individual has been addressed by several qualitative studies. Goldman-Schuyler and collaborators (2017 apud Urrila, 2022) found that mindfulness practice improved awareness of their personal experience in several ways: it intensified sensory experiences, feelings and thoughts connected to the body and brought a sense of connection, safety, appreciation and gratitude.

Regarding the correlation between mindfulness and self-acceptance, it is positive, direct and strong. Self-acceptance involves positive attitudes and emotions towards oneself, which come from the accurate perception of one's own motivations, actions, and feelings; this includes recognizing and accepting multiple aspects of the self, including qualities and flaws (Voci et al., 2019). Prigerson et al. (2008 apud Xu et al., 2014) stated that self-acceptance is the emotional calm that accompanies giving up the struggle to recover what has been lost or taken. Consequently, when a person does not judge himself, but accepts himself instead of blaming or criticizing his thoughts and emotions, it becomes easier to maintain emotional balance and a sense of inner peace.

Neff (2003 apud Voci et al., 2019) observed that self-compassion has a mediating role in the relationship between mindfulness and self-acceptance: one of the elements of self-compassion is self-kindness, which is a gentle attitude towards oneself, built on accepting one's own failures and limitations.

Self-acceptance in mindfulness is based on a recent theory supported by empirical evidence, which indicates that attempts to control or avoid experience, whether internal or
external, can exacerbate the problem and lead to maladaptive responses (Hayes et al., 1999 apud Carruthers et al., 2011). Thus, mindfulness encourages a radically different relationship to unwanted experience – one of acceptance, allowing and letting it be (Segal et al., 2002, p. 219).

So, we can say that this intentional cultivation of acceptance leads to the willingness to see things as they are, to be with the present reality, without trying to change it. What the concept of mindfulness conveys is the fact that acceptance is not about passivity or giving up, but is an act of courage in the process of being able to be in real contact with yourself.

The statistical relationship between mindfulness and positive relationships with others is direct and strong, with a correlation coefficient of .647.

Positive relationships with others involve cultivating warm and trusting interpersonal relationships and having the ability to feel empathy, compassion and affection towards those close to you and towards people in general (Voci et al., 2019).

We propose that people who are engaged in the present are more inclined to be considerate, to respond calmly in the presence of negative emotions. One implication of mindful relating is that it should result in increased tolerance for negative emotions and reduced impulsive reactivity despite aversive circumstances. For example, behaviors such as rumination and continuous negative appraisal may perpetuate and intensify reactivity, whereas perspective-broadening activity would tend to diminish impulsive responses. A number of studies have also observed a particular association between high levels of hostility and aggression and avoidant coping styles (Nagtegaal & Rassin, 2004; Vandervoort, 2006 apud Wachs et al., 2007).

Environmental mastery, which is closely linked to mindfulness, refers to the capability to select and create environments that are in line with one’s psychological needs and values. This involves feeling competent in managing one’s surroundings and external activities.

Sanoveriana et al. (2016) found that among the FFMQ subscales, in addition to describing and acting with awareness, nonjudgment of inner experience also played a significant role in predicting psychological well-being, namely the environmental mastery subscale. Nonjudgment of inner experience is defined as one’s ability to project a non-evaluative attitude towards one’s inner thoughts (Baer et al., 2006 apud Sanoveriana et al., 2016). This finding supported those of Baer, Lykins, and Peters (2012 apud Sanoveriana et al., 2016), who reported nonjudgmental inner experience as a predictor of psychological well-being.

The correlation coefficient of .487, between mindfulness and purpose in life demonstrates the fact that it is a medium positive (direct) correlation. The variable purpose in life it implies a clear understanding of the purpose of life, a knowledge of direction, all of which build the feeling that life has meaning (Voci et al., 2019).

Shapiro and collaborators (2006 apud Voci et al., 2019) noted that mindfulness practices are effective because they help shift perspective that allows individuals to observe their experiences without being overwhelmed by them. There are four mechanisms that influence well-being, namely: emotional self-regulation, clear identification of values, cognitive and behavioral adaptability and flexibility, and exposure (the ability not to avoid stress and negative emotional states). Some studies tested this empirically (Brown et al. 2015; Pearson et al. 2015 apud Voci et al., 2019), through what they called decentering (Fresco et al. 2007). The findings indicate that decentering may serve as a cognitive intermediary between mindfulness and two aspects of psychological well-being: purpose in life and environmental mastery.
Conclusions

Mindfulness-type practice can become one of the important tools in clinical processes, as well as psychotherapeutic ones, as an adjunct in increasing the generalized well-being of the individual, and I wanted this research to discover the relationship between mindfulness-type practices, namely, the permanent return to the state of presence and the multiple facets of well-being.

This study has several limitations. First of all, the use of self-report questionnaires can influence the sincerity of the answers and implicitly, the results of the statistical analysis of the data. Second, the generalizability of these results is limited by the recruitment of a sample consisting exclusively of mindfulness practitioners. Another possible problem is the fact that personality characteristics (for example, openness to experience) to which some of the variables examined in the present study may be related (such as mindfulness) were not taken into account. Also, the broad grouping of contemplative practices can lead to a lack of precision in measuring engagement in mindfulness practice. Contemplative practices promote mindfulness in a more direct manner (eg, sitting meditation vs. yoga), and that specific practices may more directly target specific dimensions of well-being (eg, vipassana vs. loving-kindness). Such clarification is needed regarding the relationship between mindfulness and well-being, in terms of the differential degree of focus of attention, relative to the type of practice.

However, this study supports the relationship between mindfulness and psychological well-being, with evidence that mindfulness practice can enhance an individual's well-being through various means. Considering that people come to the psychologist with a general goal, that of feeling better, we consider mindfulness practices as important tools, deceptively simple, but adjuncts worthy of consideration in the clinical and psychotherapeutic approach. Mindfulness training increases the chance of compassion and wisdom, qualities that naturally lead to psychological freedom.

References


