The Evaluation of Four Mind/Body Intervention Strategies to Reduce Perceived Stress Among College Students

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INTRODUCTION
The challenges of balancing academic pressures, personal issues, time management, and dealing with the social pressures of their newfound freedom can lead to stress-related problems for students (Dyson & Renk, 2006; Misra, McKean, West & Russo, 2000).

Studies on the college student population have found an impact of stress on anxiety and depression (Sergin, 1999), suicidal tendencies and hopelessness (Dixon et al., 1992) and various health-related issues such as headaches and sleep disturbances (Ginsberg, 2007).

PURPOSES
This study broadened the mind/body stress intervention techniques in Deckro et al. (2002). It represents the first study in Canada to measure the impact of four mind/body interventions on psychological distress, anxiety, and the perception of stress among college students living in a major urban centre in western Canada.

The four models of intervention included the following: physical exercise in the form of aerobic exercise and strength training; nutrition education; relaxation response technique; and cognitive behaviour therapy.

METHODS
Outcome Measures
Five outcome measures were used to observe changes in the perceived levels of stress, anxiety, and health-promoting behaviours.

The measures included:
- Global Severity Index (GSI) of the Symptom Checklist-90-R (SCL-90-R)
- Spielberger State-Trait Anxiety Index (STAI)
- The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-14)
- Health–Promoting Lifestyle Profile II (HPLPII)
- Demographics and Health Habits Survey

Subjects
91 participants were randomly assigned to one of the four interventions or to the control condition.

71 (78%) of the original participants completed at least four sessions and the pre/post assessments. 56 (78.9%) were female and 15 (21.1%) were male.

Intervention
All four intervention strategies were approximately 60-minutes in length and included the following procedures:
- Lecture/presentation of a weekly stress management module
- Discussion and demonstration of a new aspect of the intervention modality
- Engagement in the weekly activity pertaining to mind/body relaxation skills
- A brief summary of the session

Participants were encouraged to practice the skills a minimum of 2-3 times each week. All students were provided with a binder comprised of literature on stress and the college student, weekly information handouts, and a Personal Reflective Journal, which was offered as an optional educational tool. Participants were invited to submit their daily logs or summary at the end of the 6 weeks.

RESULTS

• 71 participants (13 in the control group; 58 in the intervention groups) completed the pre and post-assessment measures.
• Pre-assessment Measures: Mean scores between the intervention groups and control group did not vary significantly.
• Post-assessment Measures: Mean score differences were generally greater for the intervention groups than the control group.
• All interventions produced a positive significant change in alleviating student stress on one or more of the outcome measures as compared to the control group which had no changes across any of the four scales from the pre to post-assessment period.
• Overall, the qualitative feedback from the respondents in the four intervention groups was very positive.

CONCLUSIONS
The 6-week mind/body intervention program had a positive impact on reducing self-reported psychological distress, anxiety, and perceptions of stress as well as a positive influence on health-promoting lifestyle behaviour among a group of Canadian college students.

RECOMMENDATIONS
Replication and expansion of the present study will lead to a clearer understanding of stress interventions for college/university students.

Post-secondary institutions can significantly support their students through programming and fostering the development of stress management skills and those related to coping effectively with the demands of school. Preventative measures are implemented to improve and promote the physical and psychological health of students attending post-secondary institutions.

Such strategies could lead to significant wellness impact on student success, their future workplaces and on our health care system.

REFERENCES