

# Mindful art therapy: Promoting employee well-being

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## Abstract

This research describes a pilot exploratory case study of mindful art therapy applied as a positive workplace intervention for promoting employee well-being. Six weekly one-on-one sessions were conducted with two professional female participants. Themed sessions incorporated check-in, mindful breathing practice, psychoeducation, art interventions, reflections and 'homework'. A combination of quantitative measures and qualitative data assessed outcomes. A weekly Adult Outcome Rating Scale and pre- and post-evaluations, the Perceived Stress Scale, and the WHO (Five) Well-being Index were all employed. Participants experienced clinically significant improvements in subjective well-being and reductions in perceived stress levels. Further studies are necessary to assess the validity of results across a wider target population.

## Keywords

Art therapy, well-being, creativity, mindfulness, positive workplace intervention, stress reduction

## Introduction

Rising rates of stress and decreasing levels of well-being in the workplace (APS, 2015; Buck Consultants, 2015; Dollard, Bailey, McLinton, Richards, McTernan, Taylor, & Bond, 2012; Safe Work Australia, 2013) are leading organisations to focus on mental health and illness prevention (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2015; Robertson & Cooper, 2011; Russell, 2008; Siegel, 2009). Evidence suggests that the programs that are most effective at promoting well-being for individuals are cognitive behaviour therapy, followed by mindfulness, relaxation, and meditation (Bhui, Dinos, Stansfeld, & White, 2012; Joyce, Modini, Christensen, Mykletun, Bryant, Mitchell, & Harvey, 2016; Richardson & Rothstein, 2008; Tan, Wang, Modini, Joyce, Mykletun, Christensen, & Harvey, 2014; van der Klink, Blonk, Schene, & van Dijk, 2001). Workplace interventions promoting well-being have a better return on investment, but are not widely used (Bupa, 2015; Cotton, 2014; Czabala & Charzynska, 2014; Enns, Holmqvist, Wener, Halas, Rothney, Schultz, Goertzen, & Katz, 2016; Kilfedder & Litchfield, 2014; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2010).

While mindfulness and art therapy can improve individuals' stress response, the application of, and evidence for, mindful art therapy as an effective preventive strategy are scarce (Burkewitz, 2014). This research project, an exploratory case study of mindful art therapy to promote individual well-being, posed three questions:

1. How do functioning professional women benefit from mindful art therapy?
2. How does mindful art therapy affect levels of perceived stress?
3. Does mindful art therapy improve participants' well-being?

The study used an AB design with quantitative and qualitative measures to evaluate the outcomes for two professional women (Kazdin, 1982; Rosal, 1989). The use of quantitative measures ensures that the research can be replicated in the future with a wider sample size.

## Literature review

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as "a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can

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