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BRIEF ONLINE MINDFULNESS TRAINING FOR MEDICAL STUDENTS: A RANDOMISED CONTROL STUDY

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BACKGROUND

Medical students experience high levels of stress during their training. Literature suggests that mindfulness can reduce stress and increase self-compassion levels in medical students. However, most mindfulness

training programs are delivered face-to-face and require significant time commitments, which can be challenging for rurally-based students with heavy academic workloads and limited support networks.

PURPOSE

To evaluate the feasibility and efficacy of a brief online Mindfulness training program for medical students based in rural areas, with regards to reducing stress, increasing self-compassion, mindfulness and study engagement.

METHODS

This is a non-registered randomised control trial. Participants included both urban and rural medical students from UWA, University of Notre Dame and the RCSWA from 2018-2020. Participants were randomised to the intervention group, an 8-week online mindfulness training program, or the control group. Using quantitative-qualitative mixed-methods approach, we measured the frequency, duration and quality of the participants mindfulness meditation practice, and assessed changes in their perceived stress, self-compassion, mindfulness and study engagement levels. Further, the intervention group recorded a weekly reflective journal documenting their experience of the program.

RESULTS

114 participants were recruited to the study. 61 were randomised to the intervention, and 53 to the control. Quantitative analysis of the frequency, duration and quality of mindfulness meditation practice and changes in stress, self-compassion, mindfulness and study engagement is currently being conducted. Preliminary qualitative results reveal that participants experienced increased self-awareness, more mindfulness of their day-to-day activities, improved emotional regulation and increased productivity, while also facing difficulties with making time for their mindfulness practice.

CONCLUSION

We anticipate that this study will demonstrate that an online mindfulness training program tailored to reach rurally located medical students is feasible and effective in modifying their stress levels and psychological wellbeing. ■