



Original Article

Being Mindful Affects Experiences and Treatment of Arthritis Patients: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

Arthritis, a common chronic disease, presents major difficulties to patients' functional abilities. Mindfulness therapies may help to compensate for the lack of positive health outcomes that arthritis symptoms cause in a patient's life. **Objective:** To describe the perceptions and experiences of the participants of mindfulness practices in Faisalabad, Pakistan, who have arthritis? It describes the attitudes towards mindfulness, its implementation and impact on the symptoms. **Methods:** There were 7 males and 7 females, and all were selected purposively, aged 31 to 51 years, interviewed by the researcher using semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis revealed following themes; awareness, benefits, challenges, ways of managing, and sources of support. **Results:** Some key issues were identified as elevation in the recognition of the body and mind associations, pain control, strengthening of the emotional aspects, and some issues like time limitations and cultural attitudes. Mindfulness was identified as an important aspect that enabled participants to regain control of their conditions; however, participants stressed the need to design the mindfulness-based interventions that are culturally appropriate or responsive to the informational needs of patients. The results highlight the feasibility of using mindfulness practices for enriching the quality of life of patients. **Conclusions:** However, the experience of implementation demonstrates that there are various types of barriers, educational needs, and practices as well as cultural beliefs in this sphere. Adapting mindfulness' intervention to the particular nature and circumstances of arthritis could potentially enhance the programs' application and acceptance in both clinical and community practicing environments.

INTRODUCTION

Millions of people worldwide are afflicted with arthritis, a common chronic ailment. Complementary therapies like mindfulness have drawn attention for their potential to enhance patients' quality of life, even while medical treatments are still essential for controlling arthritic symptoms. Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) is characterized by a steady, continuous deterioration of joints. The two primary pathogenic symptoms are pannus and synovitis. Consequently, the joint is damaged, leading to joint dysfunction. The global incidence of RA was estimated to be 0.24% [1]. Mindfulness include two elements. It centers awareness and attention on the experience of the present moment like physical sensations and emotional responses

[2, 3]. Mindfulness as a complementary therapy has shown beneficial effects on disease activity, depressive symptoms, psychological distress, and overall well-being in patients with rheumatoid arthritis. However, due to the low quality of evidence from the included studies in a systematic review, further robust clinical trials are needed to confirm its effectiveness in clinical practice [4]. Mind Body Therapies (MBTs), including meditation, yoga, and mindfulness, have shown various beneficial effects on patient-reported outcomes and disease activity markers in Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) patients. A systematic review highlights that mindfulness-based interventions particularly reduce subjective disease activity parameters

and are especially beneficial for RA patients with recurrent depression [5]. A meta-analysis of six randomized trials (337 participants) examined mindfulness therapies for rheumatoid arthritis, finding significant improvements in pain, mood, and symptoms compared to controls. Larger trials are needed for conclusive validation [6]. Another study (63 participants) assessed a Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program's impact on rheumatoid arthritis. While initial results at two months were not significant, improvements in psychological well-being were evident six months post-MBSR, suggesting potential benefits for patients' mental health [7]. Empirical data suggests Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs) enhance psychological well-being by improving emotional and cognitive responsiveness, which is crucial for chronic illnesses like Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) where emotional dysregulation and symptom burden are prominent [8-10]. A meta-analysis of five trials involving 399 RA patients found MBIs inconsistently impacted clinical outcomes like disease activity but consistently improved psychological measures such as self-efficacy, distress, and depressive symptoms [11]. While promising, more research is needed due to limited trial availability.

This study aimed to address the knowledge gap regarding arthritis patients' perspectives on mindfulness practices in Faisalabad, Pakistan. Arthritis significantly impacts quality of life, yet little research has explored how Pakistani patients might benefit from alternative therapies like mindfulness. Through qualitative interviews and thematic analysis, this study seeks to understand how arthritis patients perceive and engage with mindfulness, identifying benefits, barriers, coping strategies, and support needs. It aims to develop culturally sensitive interventions to enhance arthritis management and improve well-being by incorporating diverse patient viewpoints into comprehensive healthcare strategies. The Research Questions were: What are the experiences and perceptions of arthritis patients in Faisalabad, Pakistan, regarding mindfulness practices, what are the perceived benefits of mindfulness practices for managing arthritis symptoms among patients in Faisalabad, what are the barriers to adopting and practicing mindfulness among arthritis patients in Faisalabad, how do arthritis patients in Faisalabad cope with arthritis-related challenges through mindfulness practices and what support and resources are available and needed for arthritis patients in Faisalabad to engage effectively with mindfulness practices?

METHODS

Using purposive sampling, patients with arthritis were selected from Faisalabad hospitals. Participants may only be eligible if they were at least eighteen years old, had a diagnosis of arthritis and agreed to take part in interview.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 participants. Interviews were conducted in Urdu, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Ethical approval was sought from Research and Ethical Review Committee University Medical and Dental College Faisalabad with Ref.no. UMDC/RERC/2023/12. Data collection was done from May 8 to July 15, 2023. To find repeating themes and patterns in the interview data, thematic analysis was used. Two researchers coded the transcripts independently, and after some discussion, a consensus was established. A detailed organization of topics and subthemes was employed to fully capture the opinions of the participants.

RESULTS

The 14 arthritis patients in the study had an average age of 41 years, with 10 men and 4 females. The sample included patients with osteoarthritis, juvenile idiopathic arthritis, and rheumatoid arthritis. The participants' different educational and socioeconomic backgrounds reflected the wide range of demographics seen in Faisalabad. Restricted Knowledge: Although most of the people had heard of mindfulness, their understanding of its key principles and its possible benefits was unclear. Cultural Perceptions: The participants' ideas about mindfulness were molded by their cultural values and religious beliefs; a few of them were against or skeptical about it. Individual Experiences: They shared their own experiences and anecdotes, and thus participants stressed the importance of mindfulness in their daily lives.

Participant 1: I have heard about mindfulness, but I really don't know what it means. Some people say it's about focusing attention, but I don't know how it helps with my joint pain.

Participant 7: My cousin told me about mindfulness. They said it means being present in the moment and letting go of worries. But I don't believe it's for me. Stress Reduction: Most of the participants who took part in mindfulness activities said that they felt less tense and had better emotional health. Pain Management: Through the use of mindfulness practices, it was found that many people have reduced pain intensity and acquired better pain coping skills. Improved Quality of Life: Mindfulness was believed to be a catalyst in the improvements in mood, energy, and sleep quality as well as the general quality of life.

Participant 4: Mindfulness has changed my life. I used to be very stressed, but now I can better manage my pain and enjoy the small joys.

Participant 13: When I practice mindfulness, it feels like a burden has been lifted. It brings peace to my heart and helps me forget the pain. Time Restraints: The hectic schedules and the household chores were the reasons for the participants not to be able to practice the mindfulness.

Physical Limitations: The physical difficulties connected with the practice of mindfulness because of arthritis symptoms, such as pain and stiff joints, were its main reason for the satisfaction and disengagement. Lack of direction: To get started and continually practice mindfulness, participants emphasized the requirement for organized guidance and help from healthcare professionals. Participant 5: I don't have much time for mindfulness, but being occupied with work and family duties, it's impossible for me to save time for myself.

Participant 10: Because of the pain in my joints, sitting for long periods is difficult, so focusing is hard for me. Sometimes I feel worried that I can't do it like others.

Customized Practices: Participants used chair yoga and light stretching exercises as a means of modifying the mindfulness approaches to fit their physical abilities. **Integration into Daily Life:** As stress-relief for the arthritis-related symptoms and daily challenges, mindfulness exercises were added to the everyday routine of the participants.

Participant 8: I have seen a yoga class for people with arthritis. The instructor arranges poses that are easy on the joints. It has been very helpful.

Participant 2: I have started practicing mindfulness while cooking or cleaning. It helps me focus on these tasks and forget the pain. **Healthcare experts:** Study participants highlighted the importance of healthcare specialists being the one to give advice and guidance on mindfulness, for instance, rheumatologists and physiotherapists. **Family Support:** The participants were highly motivated to practice mindfulness and overcome the obstacles by the encouragement from the friends and family. My doctor recommended a mindfulness app that guides me through meditation exercises. It has improved my life. Participant 11: My husband sometimes practices mindfulness with me. It feels good to have his support, and we motivate each other to stay focused.

DISCUSSION

The main purpose of the study was to analyze the views and the encounters of the patients with arthritis living in Faisalabad on the mindfulness practices. The various opinions of the participants were shown through thematic analysis. Some of the people were aware of the mindfulness ideas, while others were not that much into them because of the cultural prejudices or the poor comprehension. The participants' stories and experiences proved that the Faisalabad arthritis patients' level of awareness and acceptance of mindfulness activities was diverse. The participants stressed on the various advantages of mindfulness in the treatment of the symptoms linked with arthritis. The conversation of stress reduction was started since many of the participants said

that practicing mindfulness had made them feel less stressed and better emotionally. The participants' life quality was improved in general along with their mood, energy and sleep quality which was a result of the better coping mechanisms and a decrease in the pain intensity. The results of this study prove the possible benefits of mindfulness in improving the different kinds of wellbeing of the arthritis people. The study that investigated the online mindfulness and gratitude intervention on arthritis self-management revealed that the patients' health status improved in pain anxiety, interference of pain, pain intensity, fear to move, and self-efficiency in handling pain. This pilot study provides support for gratitude and mindfulness interventions for physical health conditions and shows the feasibility of online delivery of such health interventions [12]. In a research of physical activity and exercise for PsA, the levels of sleep quality and individual concern in anxiety and symptoms of depression were higher among the participants using an MBI for PsA. Meditation as well was indicated to be related directly with sleep efficiency and their functioning during the daytime and the capacity to act more mindfully [13]. In a realistically designed small pilot trial, MBSR was provided for RA patients under good inflammation control but with nasty perceived symptoms. The results showed that the intervention had positive effects on anxiety, depression, sleep and function up to 12 months after the treatment, while pain and disease activity indices were not affected. There is a need for a power standing studies, with more significant samples, in order to ascertain the impacts of MBSR on RA related pain and PGA [14]. Thence, majority of the people found it difficult to accept and implement the practice of mindfulness although, they were aware of its benefits. Having a mindfulness practice on a regular basis was hard because of time limitations that were caused by the busy schedules and the household chores. The restrictions put forth by the pain and stiffness of arthritis were the obstacles that also caused challenges. The participants stressed the requirement of formal teaching and healthcare experts to refute the myths and to make the mindfulness practice better. This shows that the value of overcoming these obstacles and the promotion of mindfulness as a treatment of arthritis should not be ignored. Our participants managed the challenges with arthritis while practicing the particular exercises according to their physical capabilities during the mindfulness training therapy. The way those activities were advised was very special because they were personalized and included attention through mindfulness methods that guided us to find a suitable choice that fits individual likes and dislikes. A randomized controlled trial compared the efficacy of online Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

for rheumatoid arthritis, finding that a history of recurrent depression moderated treatment outcomes, particularly in pain interference and psychological well-being [15]. A clinical trial comparing CBT and MBSR for rheumatoid arthritis found both interventions significantly improved sleep quality, chronic fatigue, and executive function, but not disease activity, compared to the control group [16]. A study in same city demonstrated that quality of life significantly mediated the relationship between perceived stress and sleep quality among RA patients, indicating that interventions to reduce stress and enhance quality of life could improve sleep and overall well-being [17]. Peer support groups as well as medical personnel receive great recognition by the participants for their role in enhancing mindfulness activity. Research has found that without the talking, philosophical discussions, and planned events, people are less likely to get where they need to in the mindfulness journey. The participants, including physiotherapists and rheumatologists, played a major role as the dominant engine in the popularization of mindfulness program and public acknowledgement. Apart from the counseling or guidance being provided by the trained professionals, friends and family members are your biggest advocates who support and help individuals overcome challenges and achieving peace of mind. These existing support group and resources can be leveraged for better and wider mindfulness-based treatments of arthritis in patients of Faisalabad. In a study where the researcher attempted to establish the roles of the pro-inflammatory cytokines, trait mindfulness and psychological well-being among RA patients, the study indicated that there was a strong connection between those RA patients with high trait mindfulness and enhanced PWB besides noting that prescriptive mindfulness had negative correlation with depressive symptomatology. Higher IL-6 was associated with higher depression, pointing to the possible efficiency of mindfulness approaches for decreasing depressive signs and levels of proinflammatory cytokines in RA patients [18]. One research has discovered that integrating MBSR with Intensive education reduced the patients' symptoms, anxieties, depressive rates, coping ability, quality of life and cortisol levels if they are diagnosed with both diabetes and arthritis. Also, the rate of patient satisfaction and awareness was greater than those groups who received only intensive education [19]. A review demonstrates that psychological interventions like CBT, emotional disclosure, group therapy, mindfulness, patient education, and relaxation significantly benefit RA management. The analyzed meta-analyses reveal moderate to large overall positive impact and therefore it can be concluded that they should be incorporated into the routine treatment. However, further large sample size, high quality RCTs are

necessary to substantiate these findings [20]. Healthcare professionals need to realize the specific requirements and possible cultural backgrounds that influence the arthritis patients when they teach various mindfulness techniques. Patients of arthritis in Faisalabad require specialized treatments that brings cultural impact and at the same time assistfulness for the therapy to be embraced and sustained. Not only the implementation of mindfulness-based therapy that makes it more effective and also accessible but also the partnership with the peer support groups and community resources is also helpful.

CONCLUSIONS

Current study offers in-depth insights on the mindfulness methods used by Pakistani arthritis patients in Faisalabad. The study sheds insight on the complex viewpoints, perceived advantages, obstacles, coping mechanisms, and support requirements associated with mindfulness among arthritis patients by answering the research topics. These results highlight the significance of tailored and culturally aware methods for fostering mindfulness in the treatment of arthritis. Healthcare professionals may improve the incorporation of mindfulness into holistic arthritis care by resolving obstacles and utilizing support networks, which will ultimately improve patients' quality of life.

Authors Contribution

Conceptualization: MM, ZKJ, KM, MAK, ALA

Methodology: MM, ZKJ, KM, MAK, KP

Formal analysis: MM, ZKJ, KM, ALA

Writing, review and editing: MM, ZKJ, KM, MAK, KP

All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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