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I graduated from CSU Stanislaus with my Masters in Social Work with distinction and honors. I was a student representative in the MSW Student Association and received the Dean's Award of Excellence. I'm currently employed with San Joaquin County Human Services Agency as a Child Welfare Social Worker in the Permanent Placement Program. I've worked as a social worker for the past seven years and I am passionate about creating change that will promote family engagement for the families we serve. I am excited to promote my research to support father engagement in child welfare.





PROMOTING FATHER ENGAGEMENT THROUGH “ALL DADS MATTER:” A QUANTITATIVE LOOK INTO MINDFULNESS

Fathers in Child Welfare Cases: Statement of Problem

Child welfare services have historically placed more focus on mothers and failed to adequately engage fathers and demonstrate their important roles within a family.

When fathers are involved in child welfare services it is important that efforts are made to engage them. Research suggests adult males with a fathering role in families can have positive impacts on child development and well-being. Father involvement has also been positively associated with benefits to children's social, emotional, and cognitive development, as well as the avoidance of risky or delinquent behaviors.

There have been promising research studies regarding the effects of mindfulness and wellness interventions. Research has continued to demonstrate how mindfulness and mindfulness interventions are beneficial. Families within the child welfare system may benefit from such programs to address stress, anxiety, depression and gain positive coping skills.

Statement of Purpose

- The purpose of my thesis is to explore the impact of a mindfulness-based intervention through Merced County's "All Dads Matter" program on fathers' stress, build coping skills, resiliency and overall enhanced well-being.
- This study was guided by the research questions: (a) Does a mindfulness intervention increase resiliency and positive coping skills? (b) Does providing curriculum to father's increase engagement of father-child relationship?



Statement of Significance

The significance of this study is to measure the efficacy of mindfulness and wellness, specifically through the intervention “tools for wellbeing”.



A mindfulness intervention can address the skills needed by families to reunify and prevent reentry into the foster care system. Mindfulness tools may provide fathers with the skills to enhance their wellbeing, create better coping skills and reduce the stress that impact the family unit.

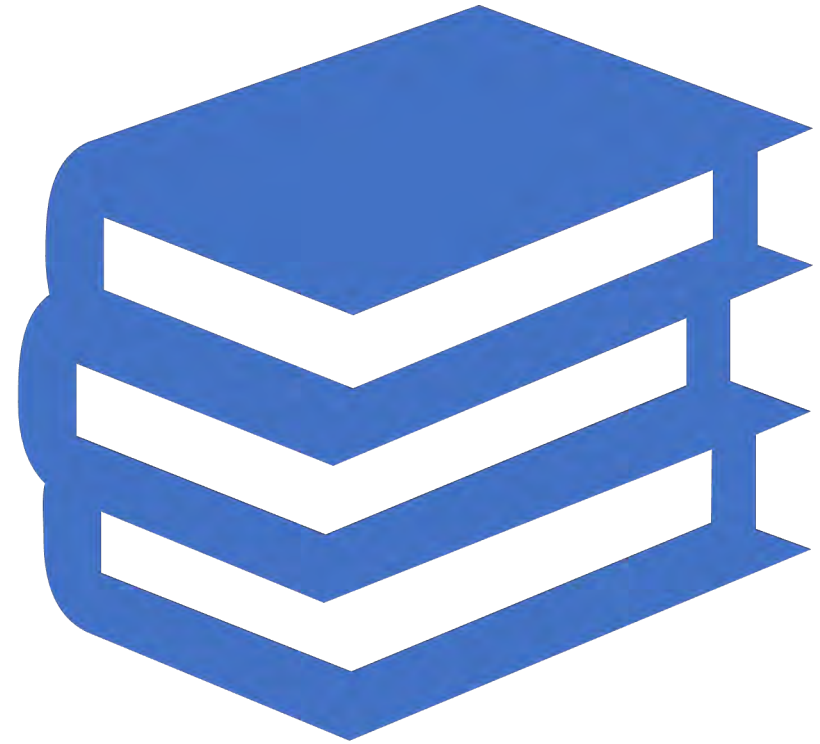


The intervention “tools for wellbeing” has the potential to address the need of families and continue to support the need for father engagement within child welfare.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is organized into four major sections:

1. The four concepts that are the building blocks to the Tools for Wellbeing curriculum: Cognitive flexibility, emotional agility, mindfulness, and stress management.
2. Provides research on mindfulness interventions that include interventions that have benefitted families involved in child welfare.
3. Examines how providing interventions to address these concepts can increase father involvement, reduce recidivism, and improve overall wellbeing to the families served by child welfare agencies.
4. The research shows the ongoing need for curriculum such as the Tools for Wellbeing to families involved in social service programs.



Theoretical Framework

The Tools for Wellbeing intervention is anchored by four key concepts:

- **Emotional Agility-** Emotional agility, or the ability to effectively manage and regulate emotions, is associated with greater wellbeing
- **Mindfulness-** Mindfulness has been found to have a positive effect on emotion regulation, psychological flexibility, and behavior change
- **Cognitive Flexibility-** Cognitive flexibility is a vital life skill that can be used to adapt to changes and create positive outcomes. It allows us to take a holistic, long-term approach to problem solving, enabling us to form new ideas and ultimately creating opportunities to learn and grow.
- **Stress/Stress Management-** Stress is a natural part of life and one that can have a detrimental effect on our health if it is not managed properly. Research is showing that stress management is becoming increasingly important as our lives become more complex and demanding.



Mindfulness Interventions

- Mindfulness has been gaining traction in recent years as an intervention to improve mental health and wellbeing. In recent studies, interventions aimed at increasing mindfulness have been found to be beneficial for families involved in child welfare services in improving the mental and emotional health of all family members.
- The findings suggested that mindfulness interventions can be an effective tool for improving the psychological well-being of parents involved in child welfare and can lead to improved parenting practices, not just for parents but for foster parents as well.



Fathers in Child Welfare

Fathers play an important role in the family unit and their involvement in the child welfare system is paramount to success.

The involvement of fathers has historically been significantly underrepresented. Fathers' involvement in child protection services is influenced by personal factors such as parenting styles, family dynamics, and relationship quality.

Fathers play a critical role in the mental health of maltreated youths, as having a father figure has been associated with less depression and fewer behavioral problems. Studies have found that the quality of the relationship between the father and their child was also associated with better mental health outcomes.

Fathers can provide a stable and supportive home environment for their children, and their presence can help reduce rates of delinquency, drug use, and other negative outcomes. Fathers can also support the development of problem-solving skills, healthy relationships, and academic success.

Tools for Wellbeing



The Tools for Well-Being curriculum is informed by research regarding mindfulness positive psychology, compassion, gratitude and adult resilience literature. These strategies encompass a broad stroke of tools that research has found to improve well-being.



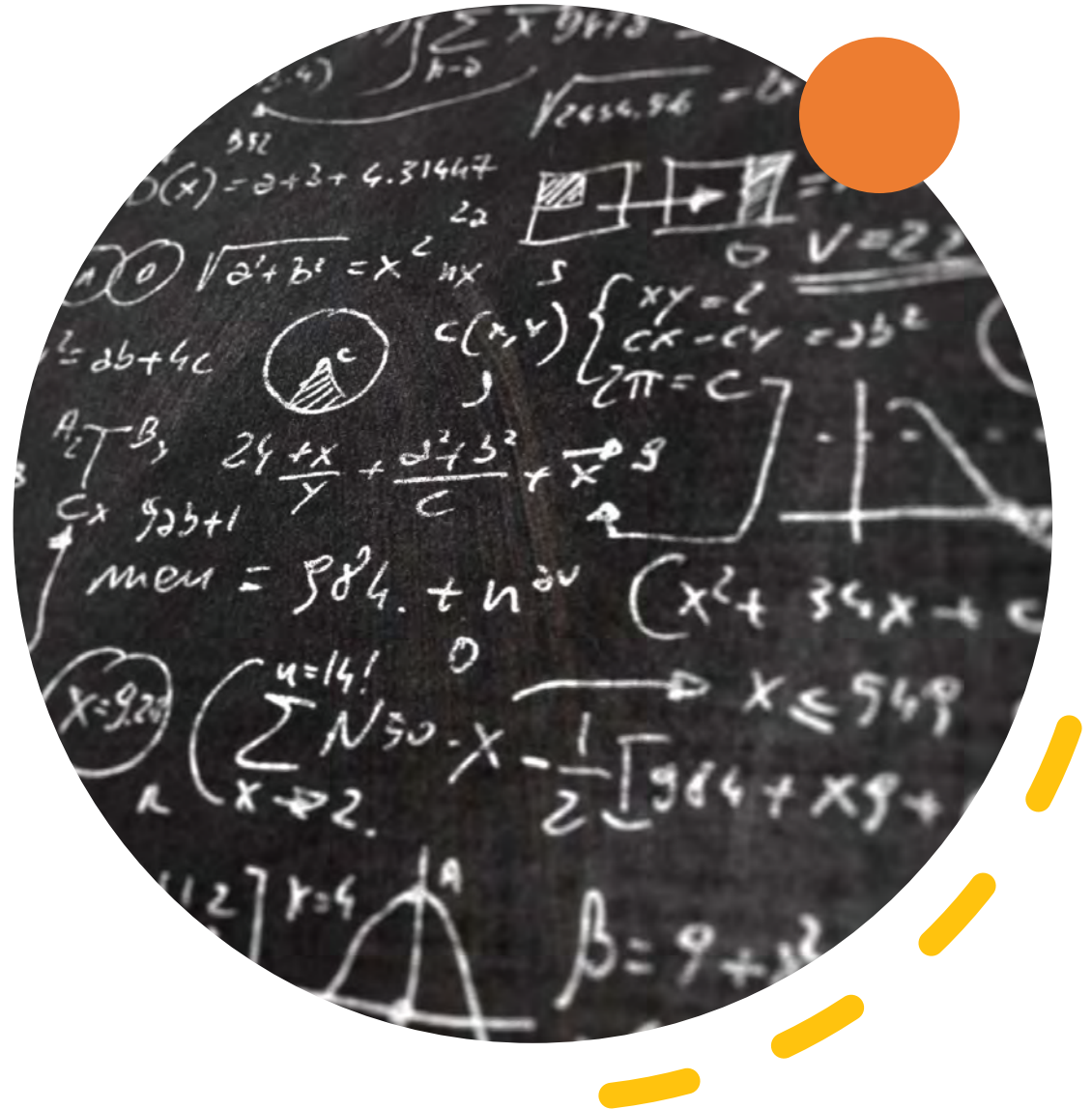
The Tools for Wellbeing is mindfulness-based curriculum provided over an 8-week period. The curriculum has been piloted in Merced County since October of 2016 throughout various programs.



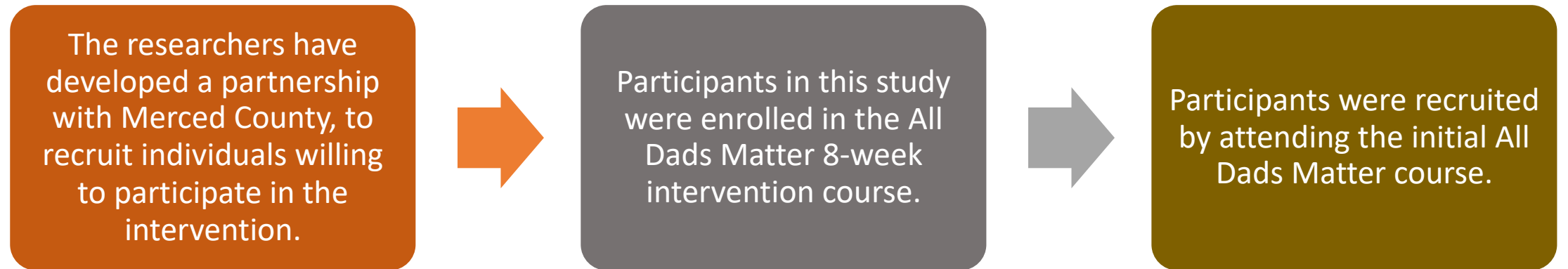
The Tools for Wellbeing uses evidence-based research such as Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Positive Psychology to practice mindfulness, compassion, gratitude, and resilience with participants who engage in their curriculum.

Methodology: Design

- An Explanatory Design was used to measure perceived benefits of a Wellness intervention intended to reduce symptoms of stress and enhance one's feelings of well-being as it relates to one's psychological and emotional health.
- This is a quantitative study with a pre-test and post-test. Participants engaged in an eight-week curriculum with facilitators who are trained and accredited to facilitate the groups. The research included 7 scales to measure stress, secondary trauma, emotional health, cognitive flexibility and overall well-being.



Methodology: Sampling



Methodology: Instrumentation

- Participants willing to participate in this study were asked to complete a pre-test survey prior to completing the evidence-based "Tools for Well-Being" curriculum. Following the completion of the curriculum participants were asked to complete a post-test survey. This study included seven measurement tools along with the evidence-based curriculum.
 - **The Screen for Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms (SPTSS)**
 - **Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ)**
 - **Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS)**
 - **Coping Self-Efficacy Scale (CSE)**
 - **Self-Compassion Scale-Short Form (SCS-SF)**
 - **Cognitive Flexibility Inventory (CFI)**
 - **Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)**

RESULTS



This quantitative study was originally conceptualized to examine change that occurred on seven dependent variables as participants were exposed to training surrounding enhancing mindfulness and improving overall wellbeing.



The guiding research questions were: (a) Does a mindfulness intervention increase resiliency and positive coping skills? (b) Does providing curriculum to father's increase engagement of father-child relationship?



Due to a host of issues (notably the COVID 19 pandemic), only 3 participants completed the intervention, and only one participant completed the pretest/posttest instrumentation. As such, this study was converted to resemble more of a quantitative case study focused on the sole participant.



Mindfulness Resilience: Coping with Stress

The research study hypothesized the fathers who participated in the study would have a reduction in stress following the mindfulness intervention. The SPTSS consists of 17 items which measure stress responses over the past two weeks.

At pretest the participant had a total SPTSS Score of 19 with an average score of 1.12 on each item of the scale. Following the sessions, the participant had a total SPTSS score of 14 with an average score of .82 on each item, concluding slight reduction in stress, supporting the hypothesis.

Mindfulness Resilience: Emotion Regulation



The researcher hypothesized fathers who participated in the mindfulness intervention would have a positive increase in emotion regulation following the mindfulness intervention.

The ten ERQ scale items were broken into two categories of emotion regulation; Cognitive Reappraisal (6) and Expressive Suppression (4).



At pretest the participant had a total ERQ Score of 50 with an average score of 5. Following the sessions, the participant had a total ERQ score of 56 with an average score of 5.6, which can be indicative of an increase of emotional control.



The researcher hypothesized the participant would have an increase in emotion regulation for both categories, which was overall conclusive based on the responses. However, when breaking down the findings, it was apparent the participant demonstrated an overall higher increase of Cognitive Reappraisal compared to expressive suppression following the intervention.

Mindfulness Awareness

- The research study hypothesized the fathers who participated in the study would have an increase in mindfulness awareness following the mindfulness intervention.
- At pretest the participant had a total MAAS Score of 64 with an average score of 4.26. Following the sessions, the participant had a total MAAS score of 49 with an average score of 3.26.
- While it was hypothesized the participants in the mindfulness sessions would have an increased score for mindfulness, the participants score demonstrated a strong decrease of mindfulness following the mindfulness intervention.

Mindfulness and Coping



The research study hypothesized the fathers who participated in the study would have an increase in coping skills following the mindfulness intervention.



The participants results were supported by the hypothesis as the participant had an increase score following the intervention.

Mindfulness: Self-Compassion



The research study hypothesized the fathers who participated in the study would have an increase in Self Compassion following the mindfulness intervention.



The participants results were supported by the hypothesis as the participant had a significant decreased negative score and a slight increase in the positive score following the intervention.

Cognitive Flexibility



The research study hypothesized the fathers who participated in the study would have an increase in cognitive flexibility following the mindfulness intervention.



The participants results were supported by the hypothesis as the participant had a slight increase in cognitive flexibility.

Subjective Well-Being

The research study hypothesized the fathers who participated in the study would have an increased satisfaction with life following the wellness intervention.

The participants responses indicated a decrease increase of satisfaction with life, which did not support the hypothesis.

Following the intervention, the participant indicated he agreed that most ways of his life were ideal. Yet despite this answer the participant indicated he disagreed with the condition of is life and being dissatisfied with his life.



Overview of Major Findings

The results of this study produced two major findings:

The first major finding connected to the first guiding research question is that the intervention does appear to increase resiliency and positive coping skills. Specifically, the data from the study revealed a positive increase in stress management, emotion regulation, self-compassion, and cognitive flexibility, all which are contributing factors connected to resilience and coping.

While there are positive outcomes related to the study, there was also one major finding that suggests that the intervention did not achieve its intended impact. The second major finding revealed that the participant's mindfulness and satisfaction with life did not increase as a result of participating in the intervention.

Limitations

Limitations to this study included the small sample size and instrumentation. The goal for this study was to have 20 fathers involved in child welfare complete the mindfulness intervention, as well as the pretest/posttest. The small sample size may have been linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, lack of recruitment by Merced County HSA, and potentially the lack of engagement with fathers in child welfare.

Only three participants completed the intervention with only one participant was willing to complete the pretest/posttest instrumentation.

The research goal was to involve fathers in child welfare; however, the sole participant was not involved in child welfare and has not previously been involved in child welfare. Therefore, the participants' experiences may differ from those who have participated in child welfare cases.


An additional limitation included the sample group's lack of understanding of language used in the seven items. The participant indicated he was a high school graduate but failed to comprehend some of the statements and vocabulary used. During the posttest the participant asked the researcher for clarity. Future studies would have to consider the language used and the population for the study.

Implications of Major Findings

The involvement of fathers in the child welfare process is important for families and systemic reform efforts. However, there are challenges in identifying and locating fathers:

- ✓ Agencies need to standardize processes for collecting data on fathers and assessing their ability to support their children.
- ✓ Educating fathers on their rights, roles, and navigating the child welfare system is critical.
- ✓ Removing harmful stereotypes.
- ✓ Capturing the narratives of fathers can improve outcomes for children, and collaborative efforts can lead to increased home placements, academic success, and improved socio-emotional outcomes.





Implications of Major Findings cont.

- There is an ongoing need for policy-level strategies to increase paternal involvement in child welfare. Fathers' positive involvement in child protection services can have a significant impact on the well-being and development of children. The lack of effective strategies to engage fathers in child welfare services, such as targeted engagement strategies, improved access to services, and better collaboration between service providers and fathers has been identified as a challenge. Effective strategies that are needed include improving information systems and cross-system collaboration, providing staff development for working with fathers, and engaging the whole family in treatment planning. Additionally, it would be beneficial to develop an assessment system that is common or linked across social services systems and change the decision-making structure so that all family members are involved.

Questions?

A special thanks to Stanislaus State University, Merced County All Dads Matter, San Joaquin County HSA and CCASSC for giving me this opportunity to share my research