

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

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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my loved ones who made countless sacrifices to help me achieve my dreams.

First and foremost, I want to thank my beautiful children Julian, Adrian, Savannah, and Baby Chad. You four have been my biggest inspiration throughout this journey. Your unwavering love and support have made all the difference. I know it wasn't easy, and I appreciate every single sacrifice you made to help me get here. You've been my reason to never give up, and I promise to keep striving to be the best version of myself for you. Growing up, I didn't have any positive role models to look up to. That's why it was so important for me to show you all a better life and future. We've had our share of struggles and joyful moments, but through it all, we always had each other. This body of work is dedicated to you, my babies, and to the future we'll create together.

To my sister, Emily, you've been my rock since day one. Thank you for always answering my calls, for listening to me vent, and for reminding me of my worth. I honestly don't know where I'd be without you. And to my amazing family and friends thank you for sticking by my side through thick and thin. To everyone who provided love, guidance, and support over the past three years, thank you. I couldn't have done this without you.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to determine if a mindfulness-based intervention through Merced County's "All Dads Matter" program can support participants to reduce stress, build coping skills, resiliency and have an enhanced well-being. This is a quantitative study with a pre-test and post-test. For this study, participants received an evidence-based curriculum, "Tools for Well-Being." The curriculum was an eight-week intervention with trained facilitators who navigated the participants through the training. The study included 7 scales to measure stress, secondary trauma, emotional health, cognitive flexibility and overall well-being. 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. 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. As a matter of fact, the findings revealed a decrease from pretest to posttest in both areas. Implications for practice, policy and future research are included.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Problem

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is responsible for Federal programs that promote the economic and social well-being of families, children, individuals, and communities. Throughout the years, supportive services have increased based on needs within families. Social service programs include Child Welfare, Mental Health Services, and support programs to include financial assistance through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), food supports through Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), school readiness through Head Start programs, childcare assistance, foster care, home visiting, homeless assistance and much more. Programs are provided to support families during their most crucial time of need. While programs have been beneficial in creating positive changes and supporting families there have been some deficits as well.

In the United States, over 400,000 children and their families received child welfare services in 2018. Families involved in child welfare are coping with serious challenges like poverty, substance abuse, domestic violence, trauma or mental illness. Child welfare services place more focus and pressure on mother who are struggling with their own trauma and lack appropriate supports. This trauma impacts

families in various ways, such as familial supports, permanency, and recidivism.

Families that do not receive the appropriate supportive services are more likely to re-enter into the child welfare system. As a result, families with reentry into foster care are less likely to reunify which will impact permanency resulting in the youth remaining in foster care until they age out of the system.

Children in the foster care system are at risk of ongoing abuse and/or neglect. Foster youth have higher rates of mental health, behavioral problems, as well as lack of educational supports. Foster youth engage in risky behaviors to include the use of drugs, and unhealthy relationships. Research shows that exposure to abuse and to serious forms of family dysfunction activate the stress response, thus potentially disrupting developing nervous, immune and metabolic systems of children (Dube, Cook & Edwards, 2010). Medical professionals have examined the relationship between childhood abuse and adult's health risk behaviors and disease (Meade et. al, 2009). Many foster youths continue to perpetuate the cycle of abuse and have their own children removed from their care after they become parents themselves.

Child welfare is aimed to meet the needs of families: however, their policies and procedures focus more on the needs of the mother rather than the father (Baum, 2017). In 1994 the National Fathers Initiative was founded because of research demonstrating children within the United States suffering negative outcomes across an abundance of child well-being measures. On January 11, 2011,

the State of California Department of Social Services produced an all-county information notice for all counties to promote father engagement by implementing strategies to improve engagement between fathers who have children in child welfare. The State of California acknowledged the lack of child welfare engagement with fathers and adopted the father initiative in an effort to engage fathers and increase positive outcomes, reduce recidivism, and promote an overall wellbeing within families. Federal funding has since been implemented under the Responsible Fatherhood (RF) programs used to promote father involvement.

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. Children with repeated involvement with their biological fathers exhibit developmentally advanced symptoms, specifically in relation to behavioral facets.

Vogel et al. (2006) discovered that fathers might be particularly important for helping their children gain control over intense emotions that, if otherwise not addressed, could potentially lead to problem behaviors. When father involvement is not present it has been found to lead to similar and other negative behaviors. Jones and Benda (2004) found that without the ability to relate or attach to any kind of

father involvement, there was a predicted increase in alcohol use. Additionally, Dubowitz et al. (2000) found that young children who have positive involvement with men who play a fathering role have better perceived confidence, social acceptance, and cognitive scores than children who do not have positive relationships with such men.

Child welfare has historically failed to adequately engage fathers and demonstrate their important roles within a family. Fathers play a central role in the development of their children and influencing an array of critical outcomes in children and families (Guterman, et al., 2018). Many social workers have large caseloads and short timeframes which limits their availability to work with families. Many fathers of families that enter the child welfare system are no longer in the home and are more likely to be incarcerated. When a parent's whereabouts is unknown it was less likely the social worker made efforts to locate the parent. It is far more likely for the mother to care for a child than a father, resulting in child welfare workers focusing on mothers. When child welfare agencies focus on the need for engagement of all parents and create policies and procedures resulting in engagement of mothers and fathers, change can begin to take place.

Child welfare agencies have often emphasized the engagement of mothers over fathers and have provided more supportive programs to mothers. Fathers are not engaged at the rate of mothers which has resulted in fathers' relationship within the family and the outcomes of their children's overall wellbeing. Child Welfare is a

system run on evidence-based practices. At this time there have been limited studies involving father involvement in high-risk population, who have experienced or are at risk of maltreatment (Yoon, et. al., 2018). Research continues to demonstrate the need for evidence-based interventions that involve fathers in high risk populations, including those involved in child welfare.

There have been promising research studies regarding the effects of mindfulness and wellness interventions. Mindfulness has been shown to be effective in improving physical, mental and physiological health of adults. Mindfulness has shown to be an effective tool to address substance abuse, anxiety, stress, and depression (Creswell, 2017). In a study by Michael de Vibe, Ida Solhaug, Reidar Tyssen, Adam Hanley and Eric Garland in 2018, a long-term mindfulness training resulted in participants demonstrating more problem focused coping styles over time, and the individuals reported having an overall increase in wellbeing. 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 this study 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 involved a pre-test post-test assessment that quantitatively measured a set key variable to

include stress, secondary trauma, emotional health, cognitive flexibility and overall 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 fathers increase engagement of father-child relationship?

Following the completion of the mindfulness intervention we expected to find that participants would be able to demonstrate coping skills, have reduced stress and experience an overall sense of wellbeing.

Statement of Significance

The significance of this study is to measure the efficacy of mindfulness and wellness, specifically through the intervention “tools for wellbeing”. Families within child welfare experience trauma and have demonstrated poor coping skills, which has required intervention. Families are required to demonstrate a change in behaviors to reunify with their family. 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. Ongoing research is needed to demonstrate the efficacy of mindfulness interventions to continue to provide services, especially to fathers who are underrepresented and less likely to be successful. 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.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review is organized into four major sections. The first section focuses on four concepts that are the building blocks to the Tools for Wellbeing curriculum: Cognitive flexibility, emotional agility, mindfulness, and stress management. The research shows how cognitive flexibility, emotional agility, mindfulness and wellbeing create opportunities to adapt and learn to make positive changes. Next, the literature review provides research on mindfulness interventions that include interventions that have benefitted families involved in child welfare. The literature review then 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. Lastly, 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: cognitive flexibility, emotional agility, mindfulness and compassion, and stress management. This literature review examines these four key concepts.

Emotional Agility

Emotional agility, or the ability to effectively manage and regulate emotions, is associated with greater wellbeing (Orlov, 2017). Emotional agility is an approach to life and work that involves being open to our emotions, having the flexibility to adjust our behavior to changing circumstances, and facing our challenges with courage and compassion (David, 2016). This approach encourages us to pay attention to our emotions, reflect on our experiences, and take action in a way that aligns with our values (David & Congleton, 2013). The rewards of emotional agility are numerous, as it can help us to become more resilient, adaptable, and successful in our work and life (Orlov, 2017). Emotional agility requires time and practice to gain these skills and requires ongoing practice to gain these skills to thrive. By using this approach, we can become more aware of our emotions and the impact they have on our decisions and behavior to better understand our strengths and weaknesses.

While there are benefits to being emotionally agile, there are limitations to gaining these skills. Limitations include the reality that there is limited research in regards to emotional agility and the longer-term benefits particularly with families in the Child Welfare System. The research outlines emotional agility as a form of mindfulness; however, there has been little research regarding the connection between the two (Orlov, 2017). Additionally, there are limited resources on how to

gain skills in becoming emotionally agile. In order to gain experience and insight it will take time, effort and ongoing training yet there are limited resources to do so.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness has been linked to improved psychological functioning, such as stress reduction and increased emotional resilience (Kriakous et al., 2020).

Mindfulness has been found to have a positive effect on emotion regulation, psychological flexibility, and behavior change (Garland et al., 2015). Mindfulness can help to reduce stress and increase the ability to adapt to challenging situations.

Mindfulness is the practice of being completely aware of one's present emotions and experiences, with an attitude of non-judgment and acceptance (Grossman &

Van Dam, 2011). Research has indicated that mindfulness can be beneficial in facilitating positive changes in individuals, as it can help to reduce stress and worry, improve decision-making skills and increase self-awareness (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

Additionally, mindfulness can assist in developing healthier responses to difficult emotions and experiences, such as sadness and anger (Grossman & Van Dam, 2011).

It can also help to shift one's focus away from negative thoughts and behaviors, and towards more positive ones (Hölzel et al., 2011). Furthermore, mindfulness has been

found to increase one's sense of self-compassion and empathy for others (Good et

al., 2016). All of these positive changes can help individuals to feel more in control of their lives and more connected to their communities. Mindfulness is, therefore, a

useful tool for facilitating positive change in oneself and in one's environment.

Research has demonstrated the efficacy of mindfulness in promoting positive change and well-being in a variety of areas, such as physical and psychological health (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Mindfulness practice has been found to reduce stress, improve cognitive function, and improve physiological functioning (Good et al., 2016). In terms of psychological health, mindfulness has been associated with increased self-compassion, increased positive emotion, improved emotion regulation, and increased social connectedness (Good et al., 2016). Moreover, mindfulness practice has been linked to improved relationships, increased empathy, and decreased aggression (Grossman & Van Dam, 2011). Thus, the evidence from research suggests that mindfulness can be an effective tool in facilitating positive change and improving well-being.

While mindfulness is a positive effective tool in facilitating positive change, it is not a simple practice to learn. Mindfulness is a way of being that takes ongoing effort to develop and refine (Kabat-Zinn 2003). Additionally, mindfulness may impede on goal setting and future outcomes (Good et al., 2016). Individuals who are mindful are also less likely to respond to negative responses to feedback regarding goals, as they are less emotional and self-criticizing due to their skills gained. There is insufficient research to determine if mindfulness impacts long term goals. Gaining mindfulness is a long-term journey that requires dedication. The process to teach mindfulness can be difficult and intimidating, as you are unable to solely rely on personal experiences and require ongoing, learning, and adaptability.

Cognitive Flexibility

Cognitive flexibility allows us to actively think about different perspectives, adapt our thinking and behavior, and increase our general problem-solving capabilities. Emotional agility is the ability to identify, understand, and manage our emotions in order to remain resilient in difficult situations. Mindfulness is the ability to be present in the moment, without judgement and without attachment to outcomes. Lastly, wellbeing is the state of being comfortable, healthy, and happy. Consequently, cognitive flexibility, emotional agility, mindfulness, and wellbeing are important for adapting and achieving positive change in life.

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. Cognitive flexibility allows us to stay open minded and use problem solving skills. By utilizing this skill, we can create a better future that can benefit ourselves, our children and our families. According to a study by Moore and Malinowski (2009) cognitive flexibility is a key factor in achieving positive growth. The study suggests that it is possible to cultivate cognitive flexibility through adaptive learning, which is an important factor in psychological resilience. Adaptive learning helps us to recognize and respond to changing circumstances, allowing us to better manage our emotions and behavior. It also enables us to develop skills that

are essential for successful problem-solving and decision-making (Laureiro-Martínez and Brusoni, 2018).

Another study by Laureiro-Martínez and Brusoni (2018) shows that by developing cognitive flexibility, we can become better equipped to handle a variety of situations and be more successful in our day-to-day lives. This can lead to improved relationships, better communication, and more effective interactions with others. Moore and Malinowski (2009) argue that cognitive flexibility can be defined as the ability to shift attention between different sources of information. This concept is especially relevant when it comes to positive life changes, as it allows individuals to adapt to changes in their environment and to process information in a more efficient manner. Practicing cognitive flexibility can provide numerous benefits to individuals attempting to enact positive life changes.

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. Studies have revealed that stress can have a negative effect on both mental and physical health, leading to a variety of issues such as depression, anxiety, impaired cognitive functioning, physical pain, and weakened immune system functioning (Marin, et.al, 2011). One form of stress management that has been studied is mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR). MBSR is an evidence-based

approach that combines mindfulness meditation and yoga as a form of stress reduction (Grossman et al., 2004). Additionally, MBSR has been found to be effective in reducing stress-related symptoms such as fatigue and emotional distress (Grossman et al., 2004).

Stress management has become increasingly important in today's world due to the emergence of numerous stress-inducing factors. This has been supported by a recent study conducted by Yasmin, Khalil, and Mazhar which demonstrated that stress can be managed through a variety of methods (Yasmin et al., 2020). Stress management can be beneficial in numerous ways, including reducing the risk of mental and physical illness, improving mood and productivity, and increasing overall quality of life. The study found that individuals who practiced stress-management techniques experienced a significant reduction in their levels of stress, with a positive impact on physical, psychological, and social health (Yasmin et al., 2020).

Screening for posttraumatic stress symptoms is an invaluable tool in helping to better comprehend the effects of stress and allows for the early identification of individuals at risk for developing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and has been shown to have a positive effect on understanding and managing stress (Wade et. al, 2019). Screening for PTSS can result in an increase in the individual's awareness of their own reactions to stressful situations, as well as their ability to identify and utilize appropriate coping strategies. As a result, individuals who had received PTSS screenings are more likely to seek help when they were feeling overwhelmed or

distressed (Wade et. al, 2019). This research indicates that screening for PTSS is an effective way to better understand and manage stress, as it allows individuals to become more aware of their own reactions to stress and to identify and use appropriate coping strategies. One study explored the benefits of screening for posttraumatic stress symptoms, primarily in the context of military psychology (Escolas et al., 2013). The research found that screening for posttraumatic stress symptoms had numerous benefits, including the ability to better identify those suffering from mental health issues, which may have otherwise gone unnoticed or untreated. In addition, the research found that screening for posttraumatic stress symptoms helped to provide a better understanding of the type of stress that individuals are exposed to, and how it can affect them in different ways (Escolas et al., 2013). If a person is able to successfully manage stress through the use of therapeutic measures (such as exercise, healthy diet, and relaxation), they can greatly reduce their risk of facing such health issues in the future. Overall, effective stress management is an important factor in promoting physical and mental health and overall wellbeing.

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. This literature review explores how the research on mindfulness interventions have positively impacted families, including those involved in child welfare.

According to a study conducted by Carsley, Khoury, and Heath (2017), mindfulness interventions have been found to be effective in promoting mental health and wellbeing. The study examined the effects of mindfulness interventions provided to elementary and high school classrooms. The results of the study indicate that mindfulness interventions can reduce stress and anxiety, improve mood, and increase self-awareness. Furthermore, the study found that mindfulness interventions can also increase positive emotions, reduce negative thoughts, worry, and improve overall mental health and wellbeing. This is an important finding as it provides evidence that mindfulness interventions are an effective and beneficial way of improving mental health and wellbeing, as well as how the environment plays a role in the intervention. Limitations to the study demonstrated there was an impact on who provided the education, and the findings suggested participants have a better response from a facilitator they were familiar with. Additional limitations for this study included intervention design, as well as consideration towards, age, and gender (Carsley, Khoury, & Heath, 2017).

Mindfulness interventions have become increasingly popular in the field of mental health in recent decades, particularly amongst those seeking to reduce stress, improve emotional regulation, or alleviate psychological distress (Zhang et al.,

2021). Research has indicated that mindfulness-based interventions can be effective in reducing symptoms of depression, stress, insomnia, anxiety, and other mental health issues (Zhang et al., 2021). The analysis showed the mindfulness intervention was particularly effective for at risk samples, such as those living in stressful situations. This suggests that mindfulness interventions can play an important role in improving mental health outcomes, as they can help individuals reduce stress, improve emotional regulation, and enhance psychological well-being. While there were positive focuses, there were limitations due to the sample size, costs associated with the intervention, inconsistent terminology, and measurement tools. The research suggests that future mindfulness interventions need to be more cost effective.

Another study investigated the impact of mindfulness interventions on families involved in child welfare (Brown & Bellamy, 2017). In particular, the research focused on how mindfulness may affect the psychological well-being of parents as well as the parenting practices they use. To do so, the study used a randomized control trial design which included both a mindfulness intervention group and a control group. The results of the study suggest that mindfulness interventions can have a significant positive impact on parents (Brown & Bellamy, 2017). Specifically, the intervention group had significantly higher scores on measures of psychological well-being, such as reduced stress levels and increased self-compassion. Furthermore, the intervention group also showed an increase in

positive parenting practices such as increased parental involvement, improved communication, and better problem-solving skills. Brown and Bellamy's study also assessed how mindfulness interventions can improve family functioning, including parent-child relationships, parenting stress, and family functioning. It was found that the mindfulness intervention was beneficial for families, as there were positive results in improved parent-child relationships, decreased parenting stress, and improved family functioning. While the findings supported the feasibility and acceptability of the intervention, the impact of the intervention varied with regard to improving weekly coping among participants. The implications for the integration of mindfulness into child welfare practice as a trauma-informed approach was undetermined and required further discussion.

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. One study found that a mindfulness-based intervention helped foster parents develop better attachment relationships with their foster children, which in turn led to improved family functioning (Shoemaker et al., 2019). Additionally, another study found that a mindfulness-based intervention helped reduce parenting stress and increased parental confidence (Chaplin et al., 2021). The findings illustrated the potential of mindfulness interventions to help families involved with child welfare and could have profound implications for social workers

and other professionals working with these families. Furthermore, the families improved their problem-solving capabilities, better regulate emotions, and were able to build stronger connections with their children.

The literature review findings have indicated that mindfulness interventions have been beneficial for families involved in child welfare. These interventions have been shown to reduce parental stress, improve parent-child relationships, and decrease family conflict. Additionally, the interventions have helped to promote overall family well-being and improved the physical and mental health of both the parents and their children. As such, it can be concluded that mindfulness interventions may be an effective resource for families dealing with challenging situations and that further research should be conducted to assess the efficacy of these interventions.

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. There have been multiple studies that demonstrate the important role a father plays in a child's life, the home and the family unit as a whole. Yet despite the acknowledgement of this, there has been limited interactions with fathers historically in child welfare programs.

The involvement of fathers has historically been significantly underrepresented (Campbell et al., 2015). Numerous studies have indicated that positive involvement of fathers has a positive impact on the well-being of children

and a lack of involvement can lead to negative outcomes (O'Donnell et al., 2005). Fathers' involvement in child protection services is influenced by personal factors such as parenting styles, family dynamics, and relationship quality; system-level factors such as policy and practice, cultural context, and service provider attitudes; and community-level factors such as social norms and resources (Gordon et al., 2012). Engaging fathers in this process can lead to greater stability for the child, as well as improved outcomes (Campbell et al., 2015). Fathers are often overlooked in the child welfare system which can have long-term negative effects on the children, as well as on the fathers themselves (O'Donnell et al., 2005). Fathers who are involved in the child welfare system process can help ensure that their children have access to resources, such as proper nutrition, healthcare, and education (Campbell et al., 2015). Fathers play a critical role in the well-being and development of their children (Gordon et al., 2012). Additionally, fathers can also support the development of problem-solving skills, healthy relationships, and academic success, as well as reduce rates of delinquency, drug use, and other negative outcomes (Maxwell et al., 2012). Furthermore, engaging fathers can also reduce the risk of reentry into foster care and provide a sense of security for the children (Campbell et al., 2015).

In one study, caseworkers acknowledge barriers to engaging fathers in child welfare were due to the difficulty in locating them and their lack of involvement in the lives of their children prior to child welfare intervention (O'Donnell et al., 2005).

Another study found that fathers involved in the child welfare system, such as child protection, adoption, and other court proceedings, showed a lack of effective strategies to engage fathers in child welfare services (Maxwell et al., 2012). In these studies fathers reported they often felt disconnected from the child welfare system due to a lack of knowledge about services, limited access to services, and a lack of social support. The research suggested that there is a need for further initiatives to facilitate fathers' involvement in child welfare services, such as targeted engagement strategies, improved access to services, and better collaboration between service providers and fathers (Maxwell et al., 2012). Ultimately, the research highlights the importance of engaging fathers in child welfare services to create more positive outcomes for children and families.

A study completed in England investigated the role of fathers in the child protection process, uncovering the challenges of working relationships between fathers and social workers. The study concluded that, in many cases, fathers are not included in the process, with social workers assuming that mothers will be solely responsible for the child's welfare (Philip et al., 2019). The findings indicated consideration for the father's role was compounded by a lack of time and resources, creating tension between social workers and fathers, ultimately hindering the process for the child (Philip et al., 2019). Furthermore, the authors found that the gendered thinking of social workers reinforced the view that fathers were not an integral part of the process and were often not taken seriously. The study suggested

this thought process was due to predominantly female social workers and their lack of understanding the needs of fathers. Fathers reported feelings of frustration and disrespect, which led to a breakdown of communication between social workers and fathers (Philip et al., 2019). The lack of communication potentially had a detrimental effect on the child's welfare. The study demonstrated the need for more consideration as to the role of fathers in the child protection process, and that gendered thinking must be addressed to ensure that fathers are respected and involved in a meaningful way (Philip et al., 2019).

The concept of "manufacturing ghost fathers" is a phenomenon relevant to the child welfare system, as it addresses the paradox of father presence and absence in the lives of children in foster care (Brown et al., 2009). The paradox is described as the simultaneous presence and absence of fathers in the lives of children in care, a unique situation that results from the complicated dynamics of family, legal, and child welfare systems. This study argues the services provided to children in foster care, although intended to assist with the eventual reunification of the family, actually created a new form of father absence (Brown et al., 2009). This was due to services focusing on the mother-child relationship and failed to recognize the importance of the father-child relationship. The findings in this study argued that to address this issue, the child welfare system should be more inclusive of fathers and incorporate them into more aspects of service delivery. By doing so, the child

welfare system can ensure that all children in care benefit from the presence of both parents in their lives (Brown et al., 2009).

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 (Ayer et al., 2016). Studies have found that the quality of the relationship between the father and their child was also associated with better mental health outcomes (O'Donnell et al., 2005). A positive and supportive relationship between the father and their child was associated with fewer depressive symptoms and fewer behavioral problems (Ayer et al., 2016). It has also been found that the presence of a father figure was associated with better mental health outcomes even when the father was not the primary caregiver, indicating that even if the father is not the main caregiver, he can still have a substantial positive impact on their child's mental health (Ayer et al., 2016). Therefore, research suggests that fathers play a critical role in the mental health of their children, and that their presence and support are associated with better mental health outcomes.

Father involvement can have a significant influence on the permanency outcomes of children in the child welfare system (Coakley, 2013). By analyzing secondary data, Coakley was able to explore the effect of father involvement on the long-term permanency of children in the child welfare system. The results of the study showed that father involvement had a positive effect on the permanency outcomes of children in the system, both in terms of timely permanency and the

overall quality of life for the child. Furthermore, the study showed that father involvement could increase the likelihood of reunification with the family of origin and reduce the risk of re-entry into foster care for the child. The research suggested that father involvement can be a powerful force in providing stability and security for children in the child welfare system. In conclusion, Coakley's study provides valuable insight into the impact of father involvement on the permanency outcomes of children in the child welfare system.

One study focused on fathers' perceptions of how their social roles, professional obligations, and family situations impacted their ability to be involved in their children's lives (Coakley, Shears, & Randolph, 2014). Results showed that work obligations were the most cited obstacle to involvement, followed by lack of support from the mother. Fathers also reported feeling disconnected from their children's lives due to limited knowledge of their children's activities and interests. Fathers reported feeling frustrated by the lack of available time for them to spend with their children. The study found that fathers often experienced guilt for not being able to be more involved in their children's lives, creating a sense of ambivalence about their role as a parent. These findings suggest that further research is needed to better understand the complex factors impacting fathers' involvement in their children's lives. Such research could inform interventions that support fathers' involvement in their children's lives, which can ultimately benefit both fathers and children (Coakley et al., 2014).

Another study found that fathers need to be acknowledged as a core business in child welfare practice and research (Zanoni et al., 2013). The research suggested that fathers have been largely neglected, with a lack of research, policy, and practice attention being given to their involvement. It was argued that welfare agencies should implement strategies that focus on increasing fathers' knowledge about child protection services, strengthening family relationships and parenting skills, and providing access to resources and supports can be used to promote fathers' involvement in child protection services (Gordon et al., 2012). There are very few published studies that have focused on fathers and the limitations to fathers' involvement in both the care and protection of their children and the impact of fathers on the well-being of their children (Zanoni et al., 2013). Research studies have demonstrated the importance of fathers in providing stability, safety, and security for their children and families, as well as promoting a sense of purpose, identity, and self-esteem in their children. Despite the limited research on fathers and child welfare, the authors suggest that there is a need for more attention to fathers in child welfare practice and research, as it is important to consider the impact of fathers on their children's well-being (Zanoni et al., 2013). This is essential for ensuring fathers are provided with the same level of support and services as mothers, and that no child is denied the chance to benefit from the support of both of their parents.

Fathers are often overlooked in the child welfare system, but the research suggests that their involvement can have a large impact on the well-being of their children. 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. Fathers can influence the emotional and cognitive development of children, helping to instill a sense of self-worth, coping skills, and values. Fathers can also help create stronger family bonds and provide emotional support. Fathers and mothers may also help children develop a sense of identity and a sense of belonging in the family. The research suggests that fathers are an important component of children's social and emotional well-being, and that their involvement in child welfare and social services is essential. Lastly, research suggests that father involvement results in less maltreatment, reduced re-entry into foster care, and promotes better outcomes for our youth. Research suggests that for fathers to be successful in the child welfare system, caseworkers must be given additional training and resources to better understand the role of fathers and their potential to help their children. Additionally, there is a need for supportive services that will benefit fathers and actively engage them in the child welfare process.

Tools for Wellbeing

The Tools for Wellbeing were developed using the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) curriculum coined by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn, as well as Daniel Siegel's book, *The mindful brain: reflection in the cultivation of well-being*. The Tools for Well-Being curriculum is informed by research regarding: mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 1991; Siegel, 2007), positive psychology (Frederickson, 2001; Lyubomirsky & Della Porta, 2010), compassion (Neff, 2011; Yarnell & Neff, 2013), gratitude (Emmons & McCullough, 2003) and adult resilience (Kent & Davis, 2010; Ong, Bergeman & Chow, 2010) 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 Program has been provided to All Mom's Matters Groups, Employment and Training staff, supervision and management, social workers in child welfare and adult services as well as their supervisors and management and most recently All Dad's Matter groups based out of Merced County.

A systematic review and meta-analysis investigated the effectiveness of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) and mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) in improving mental health and wellbeing (Gu et al., 2015). The research found that both MBCT and MBSR were effective in reducing symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. Furthermore, the study found that the effects of

MBSR and MBCT were sustained over time, even after the interventions had ended. The study also identified that mindfulness-based interventions were able to improve emotion regulation and cognitive flexibility. The research highlighted that the effectiveness of these interventions was mediated by the increased level of mindfulness and self-compassion developed through the practices (Gu et al., 2016). This suggests that the improved mental health outcomes were not just a result of reducing negative symptoms, but also an increase in positive psychological traits. The findings of this study are important as they highlight the potential benefit of mindfulness-based interventions for improving mental health outcomes in nonclinical populations.

Another study examined the efficacy of a brief MBSR program on psychological health. The study found that a brief MBSR program can be effective in reducing stress and improving psychological health outcomes such as anxiety, depression, and perceived stress (Bergen-Cico et al., 2013). The program consisted of five sessions, for approximately 2.5 hours, and included mindfulness meditation, body scan, and yoga practices. Participants reported significant improvements in psychological well-being and stress reduction, which were maintained at a one-week follow-up (Bergen-Cico et al., 2013). The results of this study suggest that a brief MBSR program can be a feasible and effective intervention for individuals who may not have the time or resources to participate in a traditional MBSR program. However, it should be noted that while their posttest demonstrated change the

posttest were conducted one week following the study and only demonstrates a short term impact. Future research will require follow up assessments to determine continued reduction in negative traits.

Positive psychology intervention programs have proven to be effective in promoting well-being and reducing negative emotions. One positive psychology intervention program (PPI) implemented in a culturally diverse university assessed the impact of happiness and fear levels among students (Lambert et al., 2019). The program was a 14 week class and included activities such as gratitude journaling and mindfulness exercises, which have been shown to increase positive emotions and reduce negative ones. The results revealed a significant increase in happiness levels and a significant decrease in fear levels among the participating students (Lambert et al., 2019). The research suggested that positive psychology interventions can be effective in promoting well-being and reducing negative emotions, even in culturally diverse settings. Limitations for this study included all students were not native English language (Lambert et al., 2019). As a result, the participants have difficulty understanding the scales. Overall, this study provides valuable insights into the potential benefits of positive psychology interventions in promoting well-being and reducing negative emotions in diverse populations.

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.

Prior research completed on the tools for wellbeing found that Merced County valued the importance of implementing well-being and providing the curriculum (Alamkhel, 2018). By providing wellness interventions, employees who participated demonstrated the ability to reduce stress and improve wellbeing. Another study measuring the effectiveness of the tools for wellbeing showed an increase in mindfulness, improved coping skills, and decreased stress (Lopez, 2018). By providing mindfulness interventions, Merced County employees have demonstrated increased productivity and found more satisfaction in their daily lives (Alamkhel, 2018). Tools for Well-being builds on this research by incorporating mindfulness, resiliency, and wellbeing into a comprehensive intervention. By increasing mindfulness, individuals can learn to be more present in the moment and less reactive to stressors. By strengthening resiliency, individuals can develop the skills needed to cope with stressors and bounce back from adversity. By enhancing wellbeing, individuals can experience greater overall satisfaction and happiness in their lives. Overall, Tools for Wellbeing has demonstrated positive responses in prior research.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Fathers play a central role in the development of their children and influencing an array of critical outcomes in children and families (Guterman et al., 2018). A father's involvement in their child(ren)s' lives has shown to increase children's overall well-being, as well as reduce chances of delinquency and substance abuse (Jones & Mosher, 2013). There have been limited studies involving father involvement in high risk populations, including adolescents who have experienced or are at risk of maltreatment (Yoon et. al., 2018). Research continues to demonstrate the need for evidence-based interventions that involve fathers in high risk populations, such as those involved in child dependency cases.

The purpose of this study is to determine if a mindfulness-based intervention through Merced County's "All Dads Matter" program can support participants to reduce stress, build coping skills, resiliency and have an enhanced well-being. Merced County Human Services Agency is working towards providing ongoing modules for 21 weeks over a year as an effort to reduce reentry for families. Research has shown the benefits of positive father involvement to include family economic contributions, improved mother-infant attachment quality, academic achievement, lower aggression, lower delinquency, lower depression and lower anxiety in children (Guterman et al., 2018). The goal of this study is to demonstrate

the ongoing need for evidence-based intervention programs and expand this program to reach other fathers. If social services invest in fathers by creating evidence-based fatherhood programs, similar to “All Dads Matter,” there will likely be a reduction of child abuse and neglect and less numbers of reentry into foster care.

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. The independent variable in this study is the intervention “Tools for Well Being”. The intervention was delivered in a series of eight-week classes. The dependent variables were specific outcome measures of the curriculum and growth expected from the fathers who partake in the curriculum. With support from Merced County’s All Dads Matter intervention program this study gives readers a better understanding of mindfulness and interventions.

This is a quantitative study with a pre-test and post-test. For this study participants received an evidence-based curriculum, “Tools for Well-Being.” 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. Participants in this study were adult males, with children participating in child

welfare case, or welfare to work program within Merced County. The theory is this population would find stress reduction, better coping skills and well-being tools as helpful in supporting their roles as parents, as well as the challenges faced in society.

The Tools for Well-Being curriculum is informed by the 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. There are many advantages to using pretest-posttest design for this study. With a pretest the researcher will gain an understanding where the participant stands regarding their resiliency, stress and coping skills, mindfulness, compassion, cognitive flexibility, and their satisfaction with life. With a posttest, the research was intended to be able to measure how the curriculum was beneficial based on potential improvement with data collected. When trying to implement an intervention program and gain funding for a program it is beneficial to demonstrate the evidence-based benefits of the intervention. While there are many benefits of a pretest-posttest design there can be disadvantages to consider as well. There is always a possibility of a testing effect, such as preset measurements influencing posttest results. A researcher is also unable to exclusively observe changes to the treatment. While there are some disadvantages for intent of funding and demonstrating positive change, the pretest-posttest design was determined to have the most benefits for this study.

Sampling

The researchers have developed a partnership with Merced County, to recruit individuals willing to participate in the intervention. This is a non-probability sampling method based on availability of participants for this study. Participants in this study were enrolled in the All Dads Matter 8-week intervention course. The sample was comprised of participants who agreed to the intervention and who agreed to participate in the research. Participant in the All Dads Matter Curriculum would have to meet the following criteria: 1) commitment to the All Dad's Matter 8-week course through CalWORKs or Child Welfare, and 2) be a father or an expecting father. Participants were evaluated based on these criteria.

Participants were recruited by attending the initial All Dads Matter course. While this is a hard to reach population sample, Merced County and the All Dads Matter program have given the researcher access to this population through the intervention program.

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)

Screen for Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms was used to measure stress levels. Version 1.0 of the SPTSS consisted of 17 items rated on an 11-point scale ranging from 0 "never" to 10 "always. Respondents are asked to rate frequency of the symptom over the past two weeks. The SPTSS is especially useful for clients with histories of multiple traumatic events or for clients whose trauma history is unknown as it does not key symptoms to any single traumatic event. The SPTSS yields a total score that is the average of the item scores (Carlson, 2001). . The second version of the SPTSS has more specific response format ranging from 0 "not at all" to 4 "more than once a day". It is unknown how the change of the scale will impact findings.

Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ)

The Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) consists of ten items rated on a seven point Likert scale from 1 "Strongly Disagree" to 7 "Strongly Agree". The ERQ elicit from participants how they manage their emotions. The ERQ measures the habitual use of two emotion regulation strategies: Reappraisal and Suppression. The questions involve two distinct aspects of emotional life. One is emotional experience, or what you feel like inside. The other is emotional expression or how you show your emotions in the way you talk, gesture or behave (Gross & John, 2003).

Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS)

The Mindfulness Awareness Attention Scale (MAAS) consists of 15 items rated on a six-point Likert scale from "almost always to almost never". The MAAS

concentrates on the frequency each participant experiences events of mindfulness in their daily lives. The MAAS has demonstrated high test/retest reliability, discriminant and convergent validity, known-groups validity, and criterion validity. Correlational, quasi-experimental, and experimental studies have shown that the trait MAAS taps is a unique quality of consciousness that is related to, and predictive of, a variety of emotion regulation, behavior regulation, interpersonal, and well-being phenomena (Brown, & Ryan, 2003).

Coping Self-Efficacy Scale (CSE)

The Coping Self-Efficacy (CSE) Scale consists of a 26-item scale that measures an individual's confidence in performing coping behaviors when faced with challenges. The CSE has an introductory question, "when things aren't going well for you, how confident are you that you can:" followed by 26 additional questions using a Likert scale rated from 0 "Cannot do at all to 10 "certain can do". The CSE Scale measures ways of coping, measures of social support and psychological distress and well-being. The CSE Scale uses problem-focused coping, stops unpleasant emotional thoughts, and gets support from friends and family. Internal consistency and test/retest reliability are strong for all three factors. The CSE Scale provides measures of a person's perceived ability to cope effectively with life challenges, as well as a way to assess changes in CSE over time in intervention research (Chesney et. al., 2006).

Self-Compassion Scale-Short Form (SCS-SF)

The Self-Compassion Scale Short Form (SCS-SF) consists of 12 items instead of 26 items, for the full scale. The short scale has a near perfect correlation with the long scale when examining total scores. The SCS-SF is rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 “Almost never” to 5 “Almost always”. Self-Compassion Scale measures six components of self-compassion (negative aspects are reverse coded): Self-Kindness, Self-Judgment, Common Humanity, Isolation, Mindfulness and Over-Identification. Subscale scores are computed by adding item scores. A total self-compassion score is computed by reversing the negative subscale items and then adding all subscale scores. The shortened version is reliable and structurally equivalent version of the long SCS. The short version is useful in settings where time constraints make the use of the long form less feasible or advisable. The short version has been found to measure all six components of self-compassion (Raes et. al., 2011).

Cognitive Flexibility Inventory (CFI)

Cognitive Flexibility Inventory (CFI) consists of 20 items rated on a six-point Likert scale from 1 “Strongly disagree” to 6 “Strongly Agree”. The CFI evaluates resiliency when dealing with stressful situations. The CFI was developed to be a brief self-report measure of the type of cognitive flexibility necessary for individuals to successfully challenge and replace maladaptive thoughts with more balanced and adaptive thinking. It was designed to measure three aspects of cognitive flexibility:

(a) the tendency to perceive difficult situations as controllable; (b) the ability to perceive multiple alternative explanations for life occurrences and human behavior; and (c) the ability to generate multiple alternative solutions to difficult situations (Dennis & Wal, 2010). The CFI is then measured by measuring only two of the categories; alternative and control. Alternatives measures the ability to perceive multiple alternative explanations for life occurrences and human behavior. As well as the ability to generate multiple alternative solutions to difficult situations. The control measures the tendency to perceive difficult situations as controllable. Items are summed together with items, 2, 4, 7, 9, 11, and 17 reverse coded (Dennis & Wal, 2010).

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) is five item scale rated on a seven-point Likert scale from 1 "Strongly agree" to 7 "Strongly disagree". The Satisfaction with Life Scale is widely used as a tool to measure the well-being. Three central discussions within life satisfaction theory are reflected in the construction of the SWLS; (1) Whether we should be equally satisfied with our past, present and future, (2) Whether we should be satisfied with all the various domains of our lives, and (3) How to avoid the trap of "false consciousness" (i.e., that people fail to recognize the injustice or misfortune of their lives). In the end, life satisfaction theory is contrasted with affective foundational theories of well-being, to explore the magnitude and

limits of SWLS as a rating scale based on life satisfaction theory (Kusier & Folker, 2021).

Data Collection

Data were collected following the initial meeting for those who agreed to participate. The participants were given time prior to the course to complete the pre-test survey, as well as given an opportunity to return the survey prior to starting the second course. Once the pre-test surveys were complete, they were collected by the researcher on the initial date. Once collected the data was placed in a sealed envelope by the researcher. Participants were not given an opportunity following the final course to complete the post-test survey. The researcher met with the participant in the community to collect the data and placed the data in a sealed envelope. The surveys were securely stored, in a locked file cabinet, until the researcher was ready to begin analyzing and interpreting the data.

Plan for Data Analysis

The researcher intended to use a univariate and bivariate analysis of the variables. The researcher used Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software to review and compare data collected. The univariate analysis compared the variables such as age ranges and number of children. The description of patterns found were used to draw conclusions using central tendency measures such as mean, median, and mode. The bivariate analysis (Paired Sample T-tests) was planned to compare changes in the seven dependent variables from pretest to

posttest. Variables that were measured were levels of mindfulness and levels of secondary traumatic stress. The various scores determined if there was a reduction in stress, improvement of well-being, or if there were no changes based on participation in the “Tools for Well-Being” curriculum.

Protection of Human Subjects

Prior to the study taking place, approval from the University Institutional Review Board (IRB) was granted. Once the approval was granted, the researcher was able to start collecting data. An informed consent form was provided to the participants at the beginning of the eight-week curriculum. During the initial contact with participants, the researcher explained to the participants that the study was voluntary, and they were free to withdraw their participation at any point, even after having signed informed consent. The researcher informed the participants they were able to skip any questions they did not want to answer. Participants were provided the contact information of the faculty sponsor and researcher in case they had further questions. Participants were informed that they will not receive any form of consequence for withdrawing their participation. The pre-test was provided during the first class and the post-test was provided following the final class. The surveys were coded for confidentiality. When the participants completed the survey, the researcher gathered the surveys and put them away for confidentiality. The researcher always kept all data at a secure location. Participants were informed

following the researcher completing data collection, that all research-related material will be destroyed once the research study is complete.

CHAPTER IV

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? Nevertheless, 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. This chapter reports on the pretest/posttest results from the participant who completed the training and the instrumentation designed to assess change.

The Participant

The participant who completed the training was a 45-year-old Mexican male. The participant is a divorced father with three children aged 13, 12 and 11 years of age. The participant is a high school graduate and has no additional college or education. He is not the primary caregiver of his children and has limited interactions with his children. He is not involved in child welfare and denied having prior involvement with Child Protective Services. Additionally, the participant

indicated not having any experience in mindfulness and joined the sessions to learn new ways to de-stress. The participant reported he attended all sessions of the program. The participant reported gaining skills from sessions, which has positively impacted his relationship with his children.

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. The individual items are scored 0-4 and summed to produce a total score with a low possible score of 0 and a high score of 68, with higher scores indicating higher levels of stress. 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.

While there were little significant changes, the results indicate a positive step towards the reduction in stress. Of the seventeen questions asked on the SPTSS scale, the participant began with two indicators of stress induced situations about once every day or more than once every day, and following the study the responses indicated that those stress induced situations reduced to not at all or 1 or two times in the past two weeks. In one instance the participant indicated in the past two weeks he would find himself remembering bad things that happened to him over

and over, even when he did not want to think about them. Following the intervention, the participant's answer was reduced to these thoughts one or two times in the past two weeks.

Of the items on the Stress scale, the participants experienced positive decreases in six questions involving stress, while experiencing five stress item responses that remained the same. However, the participant concluded the study with five additional response items that indicated stress induced circumstances almost every day. Of the five responses, two were indicators higher than the initial pretest responses. In one response the participant indicated he was unable to remember much about bad things that have happened to me almost every day at the posttest. However, during the pretest, the participants response indicated he did not recall the bad things. In the second response at the posttest the participant indicated he was feeling irritable and was losing his temper almost every day, compared to a couple times a week during the pretest. Overall, the results have indicated some positive reductions of stress as a result of participating in the mindfulness training.

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 ERQ consists of 10 items which measure emotional regulation by rating the scores collectively. Possible scores range from a high of 70

and a low of 10, with higher scores having higher levels of dispositional emotion regulation. 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 ten ERQ scale items were broken into two categories of emotion regulation; Cognitive Reappraisal (6) and Expressive Suppression (4). 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.

Of the six cognitive reappraisal items, four had an increased score at posttest and one remained the same. For the expressive suppression items, two had an increase and two remained the same. The participant demonstrated the highest emotion regulation in cognitive reappraisal when dealing with stressful situations, by changing the way he thinks about those situations. The participant had a decrease in cognitive reappraisal regarding have more positive emotions he changed what I'm thinking about. The participant had the highest emotion regulation in expressive suppression by controlling these emotions by not expressing them. There was no reduction of scores regarding expressive suppression responses, however two responses remained the same. The participant continued with the same score

involving, not expressing negative emotions, and not expressing positive emotions. Overall, three of the ten responses remained the same for both the pretest and posttest.

Mindfulness Awareness

The research study hypothesized the fathers who participated in the study would have an increase in mindfulness awareness following the mindfulness intervention. The MAAS consists of 15 items which measure mindfulness by rating the scores collectively. Possible scores range from a high of 90 and a low of 15, with higher scores having higher levels of dispositional mindfulness. 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.

Of the 15 items, the participant had four slight increases of mindfulness and only one response remained the same at posttest. This resulted in ten responses with a decreased score of mindfulness with most of those responses having a significant decrease. Of the ten decreased scores the participant has demonstrated a few major shifts compared to pretest. At the initial pretest the participant indicated he was almost never running on automatic, however at posttest the participant indicated he was always running on automatic, which is a significant

decrease in mindfulness for this scale. Additionally, the participant had a significant decrease in regard to noticing feelings of physical tension or discomfort. The participant indicated another significant decrease in his environment and surroundings. The participant did demonstrate some positive changes to include being more aware when snacking and being more cautious to not break things. The score also demonstrated a slight increase of mindfulness of what is happening in the present and remembering names of those he has interactions with. Overall, the participant did not demonstrate an overall increase of mindfulness, but on the contrary had a significant decrease 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 Coping Self-Efficacy scale consists of 26 items that measure how confident the participants are when things are not going well. Possible scores range from a high of 260 and a low of 0, with higher scores having higher levels of coping. At pretest the participant had a total score of 194 with an average score of 7.46. Following the sessions, the participant had a total score of 219 with an average score of 8.42. The participants results were supported by the hypothesis as the participant had an increase score following the intervention.

The participant demonstrated an overall increase of coping following the mindfulness intervention with 17 responses having an increased score. The

remainder nine responses remained the same at posttest. There were no decreased scores for this scale. At pretest the participant only rated one question where he was certain he can do the item, however, at posttest the participant indicated five responses where he was certain he can do the item. Compared to the pretest, at posttest the participant was confident he can make new friends, ask friends for help, pray or mediate and get emotional support from the community. While the participant already had above average coping skills, he continued to gain new skills.

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 Self-Compassion scale-short form consists of 12 items that are broken into six categories with half responses having a reverse score. Possible scores range from a high of 60 and a low of 12, with lower scores having higher levels of self-compassion. At pretest the participant had an overall total score of 47 with an average score of 3.92. The participants negative subscale had a total score of 30 at pretest and a positive subscale total score of 17. Following the sessions, the participant had an overall total score of 36 with an average score of 3. The participants negative subscale had a total score of 18 at posttest and a positive subscale total score of 18 following the 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.

The participant has demonstrated a significant increase in self compassion. Prior to the mindfulness intervention all scores in self judgement, isolation and over-identified items had responses indicating he almost always behaved in the negative manner, for all questions. Following the intervention, the decreased from an average response of 5 to an average response of 3. While most response had a decrease the participant still almost felt as though others were happier than he was when he was feeling down. Overall, the participant gained clear positive growth towards self-compassion.

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 Cognitive Flexibility Inventory scale consists of 20 items that are broken into two sub categories; Alternative and Control. Possible scores range from a high of 120 and a low of 20, with higher scores having higher levels of cognitive flexibility. At pretest the participant had an overall total score of 93 with an average score of score of 4.65. In regards to Alternatives the total score was 62 with an average score of 4.77, and with control the total score was 31 with an average score of 4.43. At post test the participant had an increased overall score of 98 with an average score of 4.9. In regards to Alternatives at posttest the total score was 65 with an average score of 5, and with control the total score was 33 with an average

score of 4.71. The participants results were supported by the hypothesis as the participant had a slight increase in cognitive flexibility.

The cognitive flexibility scale consists of 20 items. The participants demonstrated a slight increase in cognitive flexibility when comparing the pretest and the posttest for this scale. The majority of the responses provided were the exact same for the pretest and posttest. While the participant demonstrated an overall higher score in the alternative section the participants responses were more significant in the control section. In one instance the participant indicated he agreed he would lose control when he was encountered with difficult situations. However, at posttest he no longer agreed but disagreed. Additionally, the participant only had two responses where the participant initially somewhat agreed at pretest and then was neutral at posttest in the control section. For instance, the participant no longer agreed he had hard time when faced with difficult decisions and his responses was natural at posttest. Overall, the participants scores had positively increased.

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 satisfaction with life scale consists of 5 questions that measure the participants satisfaction with life from extremely dissatisfied with life to extremely satisfied with life. Possible scores range from a high of 35 and a low of 5, with higher scores having higher subjective well-being. At pretest the participant had a total score of 18, which

is measured as slightly dissatisfied with life. At the posttest the participant had a total score of 12 which measured dissatisfied with life. The participants responses indicated a decrease increase of satisfaction with life, which did not support the hypothesis.

The overall all but one of the responses had a significant decrease at posttest. 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. Additionally, at posttest the participant indicated he strongly disagreed that he has gotten important things in his life and disagreed that he would change nothing in his life. While the responses indicated a decrease in satisfaction according to the scales the participant had his highest score at posttest when indicating his lie is close to ideal. The participant indicated to the researcher that he had not seen his daughters and he has learned skills to cope with the situation and wished he had made better decisions to be more involved in their lives. The participants statements may be an indication of why his posttest scores are lower than pretest.

This study was converted to quantitative case study focusing on a sole father who completed the intervention. This chapter reported on the pretest/posttest results from the participant who completed the training and the instrumentation designed to assess change. In summary, the participant demonstrated an overall benefit for participating in the mindfulness intervention. The participant scores

indicated a slight reduction in stress indicating learned positive coping skills to manage stress. The participant had a positive increase score for emotional regulation, to include cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression, coping skills, self-compassion, and cognitive flexibility. While the majority of the scores demonstrated high indications of improved wellness, not all scores had positive findings. The participant had a strong negative decrease in the mindfulness scale as well as the subjective wellbeing. While the results may appear to have decreased, the scores can be indicative of a deeper understanding regarding what mindfulness and subjective wellbeing actually is, thus resulting in the participant being more critical of how he is functioning and operating in relationship to his surroundings.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine if a mindfulness-based intervention through Merced County's "All Dads Matter" program can support participants to reduce stress, build coping skills, resiliency and have an enhanced wellbeing. This chapter provides an overview of the major findings, limitations, and implications for practice, policy, and future research. The chapter first reviews the major findings where the research study was guided by the following questions: Does a mindfulness intervention increase resiliency and positive coping skills? And, does providing curriculum to father's increase engagement of father-child relationship? The chapter then provides a discussion on the limitations of the study in order to place the major findings into their proper context. Lastly, this chapter discusses the implications of the research and how this study impacts practice, policy and future research.

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. This finding is consistent with previous research findings related to mindfulness interventions. Studies have shown that mindfulness interventions can reduce stress and anxiety, improve mood, increase self-awareness, and enhance psychological well-being (Carsley, Khoury, & Heath, 2017)).

Mindfulness interventions have also been found to positively impact parenting practices, parent-child relationships, and family functioning (Zhang, et. al., 2021).

The research suggests that mindfulness interventions can be a helpful tool for social workers and other professionals working with families involved in child welfare.

What is unique about the finding in this study is that these outcomes from the mindfulness intervention under study appear to also apply to fathers connected to the child welfare system.

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. As a matter of fact, the findings revealed a decrease from pretest to posttest in both areas. While previous research has revealed how the practice of mindfulness promotes positive change and well-being in various areas, including physical and psychological health (Brown & Bellamy, 2017), this was not the case in this study.

Learning mindfulness is not a simple practice, and it requires ongoing effort to develop and refine. While there is insufficient research to determine if

mindfulness impacts long-term goals, gaining mindfulness is a long-term journey that requires dedication (Kabat-Zinn 2003). The lack of progress towards developing mindfulness in this study could suggest the participant has a more complete understanding of mindfulness skills that have resulted in a lower assessment at the posttest. The research also argues mindfulness requires ongoing long term mindfulness practices, which were not provided during the intervention. With ongoing mindfulness training and practices in daily life, the participant may have an increased score.

The participant indicated that most aspects of his life were ideal; however, he was dissatisfied with his life. Despite the decrease in satisfaction, the participant's highest score was in indicating that his life was close to ideal. The participant revealed to the researcher that he had not seen his daughters and had learned skills to cope with the situation but wished he had made better decisions to be more involved in their lives. The participant's statements may explain the lower posttest scores compared to pretest.

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. One participant decided against participation in the study due to the excessive number of questions on the questionnaire. Additionally, the second individual declined to participate due to the lack of allocated time to complete the session following the curriculum. The participant initially agreed then withdrew prior to the completion of the posttest. 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. Fathers are

often viewed as less involved and less capable of raising their children than mothers. This is a harmful stereotype that needs to be challenged. Additionally, gendered thinking and assumptions by social workers have hindered the involvement of fathers in the child protection process. The concept of "manufacturing ghost fathers" highlights the paradox of father presence and absence in the lives of children in foster care and the need for the child welfare system to be more inclusive of fathers (Brown et al., 2009). Fathers are just as capable of raising their children as mothers are, and they should be given the same opportunities and support to do so. Child welfare agencies must recognize that fathers are valuable members of the family unit and should be treated as such. More American children are growing up without their biological father in the home, and efforts are being made to emphasize the role of fathers in their children's lives. 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. Father engagement is critical to positive outcomes for children, and child welfare agencies must make an active effort to locate and engage fathers in meaningful services, such as mindfulness interventions like the Tools for Wellbeing.

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 (O'Donnell et al., 2005). 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.

Additionally, there is an ongoing need for the implementation of mindfulness interventions into child welfare policies. Child welfare Agency have failed to provide adequate services that reduce recidivism, and most services are not tailored to address stress, trauma, and lack of effective coping skills. Child Welfare Agencies should be open to providing more evidence-based services that will meet the needs of the families to create more stability in the home.

The lack of research on fathers and father figures in child protection families hinders the provision of appropriate services to fathers. More ongoing research studies with fathers should be conducted to better understand the complex relationship between fathers and child maltreatment. Increasing the number of fathers participating in research will continue to be difficult if men are not engaged in services and interventions to the same extent as mothers. Father-specific services

and interventions may be the best way to reach and assist fathers in child welfare families. Future research should include effective techniques and interventions to engage fathers, such as more studies involving fathers in child welfare and mindfulness interventions.

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