

# Arabic Mindfulness Intervention Project



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# Background



- Arabic speaking community members have poor engagement with mental health services and high levels of psychological distress
- Mindfulness: psychological practice, based on Buddhist traditions, that focuses on “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally”
- Strong evidence base for treatment of depression, anxiety and stress
- Current treatment resources are almost exclusively available in English

# Phase 1 Research



- Translation of an evidence-based Mindfulness Intervention into Arabic (CD and electronically)
- Systematically testing cultural acceptability and clinical utility of the intervention in the Arabic speaking community in St George
- First study of this type in the world with Arabic speakers
- Intervention – 5 week program of guided mindfulness exercises which participants undertook in their own homes (3 x 30 minutes per week)
- 70 Arabic speaking community members participated in the research
- Ethics approval (HREC reference no. 14/155)

# Intervention Description



Intervention – 5 week program of guided mindfulness exercises which participants undertook in their own homes (3 x 30 minutes per week)

## **Week 1:**

Track 1 Introduction

Track 2 Breathing exercises

Track 4 Leaves on the Stream

## **Week 2:**

Track 2 Breathing exercises

Track 4 Leaves on the Stream

## **Week 3:**

Track 4 Leaves on the Stream

Track 5 The Observing Self

## **Week 4:**

Track 4 Leaves on the Stream

Track 5 The Observing Self

## **Week 5:**

Track 3 Mindfulness of Emotions

[Link to Mindfulness audio track](#)

# Key Outcomes

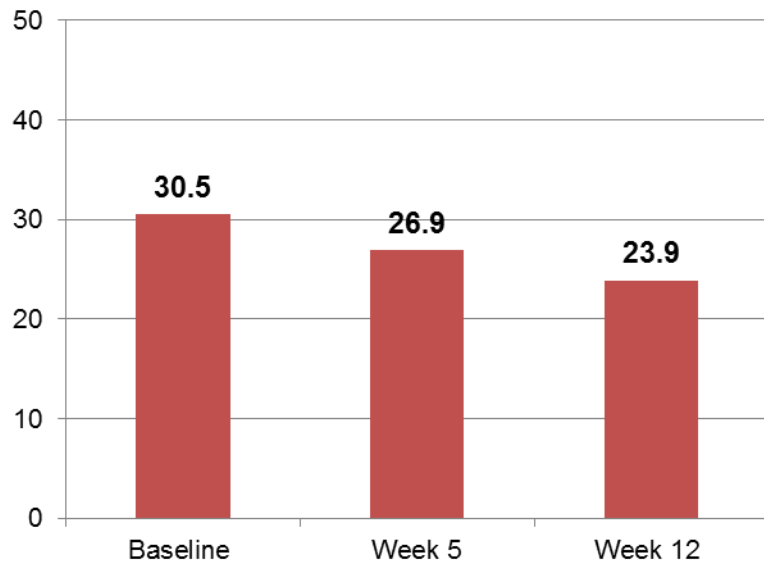


- Was the Arabic Mindfulness CD culturally acceptable to members of the Arabic speaking community?  
(compliance with intervention; survey re. attitudes)
- Did the use of the exercises on the CD reduce psychological distress over a five week period?  
(K10 and DASS21 – Arabic translations)
- Was the reduction in psychological distress maintained over a 12 week period?  
(K10 and DASS21 – Arabic translations)

# Indicators of clinical utility (K10 and DASS21)

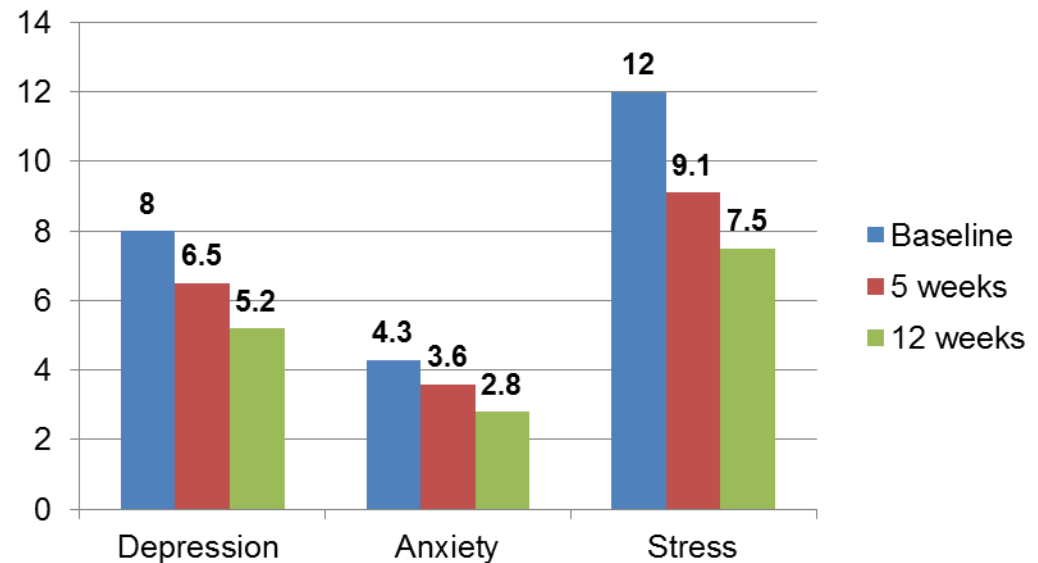


## Mean change in K10 scores



( $p < 0.001$ )

## Mean change in DASS21 subscale scores



( $p < 0.01$ )

# Indicators of cultural acceptability



Evaluation results showed that Mindfulness is connected to familiar spiritual ideology and cultural practices of Arabic speaking Muslims and Christians :

- Compliance with the protocol was high: 64 of 70 participants (91%) reported using the CD 15 times or more during the period.
- The majority (94%) of participants practiced Mindfulness after the intervention period.
- At 12 weeks follow up all participants (100%) agreed or strongly agreed that:
  - Mindfulness was suitable to their way of life.
  - Mindfulness was compatible with their cultural and religious practices

# Quotes from participants



*“Thank you for the opportunity to participate. This experience made me feel as if I am performing a religious act of worship.”*

(Female, 26-35 years, Christian)

*“[It] helps with dealing and coping with emotional distress and ways of not being affected by negative feelings. And this is good for the physical and mental health.”*

(Female, 18-25 years, Christian)

*“I felt that it helped me so I don’t get distracted with thoughts while I am carrying out an activity. Especially activities that require focus such as prayers.”*

(Male, 36-45 years, Muslim)

*“Mindfulness is important and is considered as part of Islamic practices. Imam Ali (pbuh) said:  
“To be mindful one hour is better than an act of worship practiced in 60 years“*

(Female, 26-35 years, Muslim)



# Critical success factors



Engagement of community was evident. 70% of participants were recruited directly from the community. This was attributed mainly to:

- established connection with the Arabic speaking community
- word-of-mouth and Snowballing sampling

Other success factors include:

- rapport build with participants, engaging in conversations and gaining their trust
- high level of participation in the Arabic Wellbeing Forum indicating willingness to learn about ways to improve wellbeing
- positive feedback received from participants about the Mindfulness research and the forum

# Scalability and Sustainability



- **Effective, low cost** intervention
- **Uploaded** onto the SESLHD intranet and internet sites
- Suitable across a **range of settings** including:
  - individual self-management
  - community groups
  - adjunct to primary mental health care
- **Translation** into current practice:
  - **adjunct to clinical care** for Arabic speaking clients of the St George Community Mental Health Service
  - delivered as a **group program** through the Mental Health Service Recovery College and community groups

# Phase 2 Research



- Research question: can the results be replicated in a group setting?
- Research design: intervention group and wait list control group
- Participants: high number recently arrived women from refugee/trauma backgrounds
- Experience so far:
  - Very engaged in the intervention
  - Longer time to understand concepts of mindfulness
  - Report intervention very helpful
  - Social aspect of group setting very helpful

# Future Directions



- Discussions with CESP HN:
  - Roll out group program to Arabic and Bengali speaking communities as part of their low intensity mental health interventions for vulnerable communities
  - Train GPs
- Submitted manuscript for publication Transcultural Psychiatry

# Questions



## Acknowledgments

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### Community Partners:

Al Zahra Muslim Women's Association

### Statistical Support:

A/Prof Elizabeth Comino, Fakhrul Islam and

Dr Julie McDonald, University of NSW

