

## **The Use of Mindfulness Breathing in Counselling**

### **Introduction**

Over the years, different techniques, and concepts, such as mindfulness breathing, have been employed to ensure effective counselling. Mindfulness breathing is a state that can be developed through meditation and other practices (Hayes et al., 2011). It involves observing thoughts and feelings without judging them while also focusing on the current situation. This keen observation of the current feelings, not forgetting the current environment, is essential for our state of mind. It helps people become more aware of their thoughts and feelings, which can help them manage stress, anxiety, and depression. Mindfulness breathing is one way of practicing mindfulness. It involves paying close attention to one's breathing to calm the mind and body.

Stress and depression have detrimental effects on our lives and should be managed by any means possible (Hayes et al., 2011). Mindfulness breathing helps individuals experiencing depression or anxiety control their feelings by helping them understand how their bodies react to different emotions. It also increases people's self-awareness by showing them how certain situations affect their emotions. Mindfulness breathing can be achieved through several exercises and scripts, which include pranayama, 4-7-8 breathing, and deep breathing.

### **Mindful Breathing Exercises**

#### **1. Pranayama**

Pranayama is a Sanskrit word that means "breath control." It is a yogic breathing practice used in counseling to help the client feel more grounded and present. It is a type of breathing exercise that involves controlling the breath through specific techniques and patterns to achieve

concentration and focus on the present situation (Singh, 2019). The effect is similar to taking deep breaths when we feel anxious or overwhelmed to calm ourselves down by trying to understand more about our state of mind. Mindful breathing in counseling involves taking deep breaths at intervals. However, taking deep breaths may only sometimes be enough since the breath does not happen on its own, and this is where yoga comes in. Therefore, Pranayama needs our conscious effort to breathe consciously and deeply. Physical postures and therapeutic modalities such as meditation and mindfulness-based therapies (MBT) are used by counselors to help to relax the body and mind to focus better on what is done at any given moment, be it sitting still or moving around. In conclusion, pranayama helps the mind focus on the present rather than stress and depression.

## **2. Deep Breathing**

Deep breathing is a mindfulness exercise that helps bring the mind back to the present moment. It is a simple way to draw attention away from thought and towards the body. It is not about taking deep breaths but focusing on your breath as it moves in and out of your lungs. When we talk about breathing, we are talking about our diaphragm, which moves up and down as we inhale and exhale air into our lungs. When we take deep breaths, we push down hard with our chest muscles to create more space for air in our lungs. This makes more room for oxygen to enter our bloodstream, which can help us feel more awake and alert after only a few minutes of practice (Agussalim et al., 2022). The main aim of deep breathing is to focus on the chest movements, thus moving away from stress and depression.

## **3. 2-4 Breathing**

When a person is mentally traumatised, their breathing pattern changes. The person always takes shallow breaths, which interfere with the gaseous equilibrium in the body, thus worsening the condition. By controlling one's breathing, for instance, by breathing deeply, one becomes mindful of the environment, which is a state of being active and paying attention to the present. When mindful, one observes their thoughts and feelings from a distance without judging them as good or bad. Instead of letting your life pass you by, mindfulness enables you to live in the moment and awaken to experience (Zahn & Kuonen, 2021). Mindful breathing reduces anxiety by helping you focus on your body's sensations and emotions. When you focus on breathing, it helps eliminate distractions and maintain a sense of control over your thoughts and emotions. It also reduces stress levels by slowing down your heart rate and decreasing blood pressure levels since it involves deep breathing techniques that help calm your mind and body down so they can return to a relaxed state.

### **Benefits of Mindfulness Breathing**

Studies have shown various benefits of mindfulness breathing in counselling. According to Zahn & Kuonen (2021), mindfulness breathing is a simple practice that can help one manage anxiety and stress, improve performance, and get better sleep. It is the practice of being aware of what one thinks and feels in the present moment without judgement. Judgement of one's thoughts always results in depression, which is why mindful breathing is discouraged. It means being fully awake and aware of what is happening around you, including one's thoughts and emotions. It brings you back to the present moment when you feel anxious or stressed. Mindful breathing is essential since it controls emotions, which can lead to suicidal cases or reduced performance at the workplace. It has several benefits, including reduced anxiety, less depression, reduced distress, better focus, and lower blood pressure.

**a) Reduce Anxiety**

When a person is mentally traumatised, their breathing pattern changes. The person always takes shallow breaths, which interfere with the gaseous equilibrium in the body, thus worsening the condition. By controlling one's breathing, for instance, by breathing deeply, one becomes mindful of the environment, which is a state of being active and paying attention to the present. When mindful, one observes their thoughts and feelings from a distance without judging them as good or bad. Instead of letting your life pass you by, mindfulness enables you to live in the moment and awaken to experience (Zahn & Kuonen, 2021). Mindful breathing reduces anxiety by helping you focus on your body's sensations and emotions. When you focus on breathing, it helps eliminate distractions and maintain a sense of control over your thoughts and emotions. It also reduces stress levels by slowing down your heart rate and decreasing blood pressure levels since it involves deep breathing techniques that help calm your mind and body down so they can return to a relaxed state.

**b) Less Depression**

Mindful deep breathing is a simple way of reducing depression by activating the parasympathetic nervous system, which works in opposition to the sympathetic nervous system that is activated during stress. Mindful deep breathing has been shown to help people with depression by acting as a form of meditation (Wang et al., 2021). It is not clear how mindfulness-based deep breathing reduces depression, but it may be due to its calming effect on your body and mind. It is also a result of helping people become more aware of their thoughts and feelings to manage them better. Mindfulness also changes brain activity in regions associated with mood regulation. This also helps one focus on other things rather than depression. It, therefore, implies that mindfulness breathing techniques can be used as

part of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), which is an approach to treating depression that focuses on changing negative thought patterns and behaviours. In conclusion, mindfulness breathing should not be overlooked since it plays a significant role in reducing depression.

### **c) Reduced Distress**

Mindfulness-based interventions such as mindful breathing are increasingly used in healthcare settings to deal with distress and improve physical and mental health. Mindful deep breathing helps reduce distress by taking slow, gentle breaths, focusing on the sensations of your breath, and observing the thoughts that arise during the process. The purpose of mindful breathing is not to control breathing but to enable one to become aware of their breathing so that one can focus on what is happening in the present moment. By paying close attention to breathing, one becomes more aware of how it changes depending on what one is doing at any particular moment. For example, when one is feeling anxious or stressed out, their breathing tends to become faster and shallower than usual. Noticing these changes in your breathing pattern can enable you to learn how to respond differently to stressful situations, mindful breathing being one of them. It is, therefore, clear that mindful breathing reduces distress and should not be taken for granted.

### **d) Better Focus**

Mindful breathing brings your attention back to the present moment and away from the worries of the past or future. It is an effective way of reducing stress and anxiety, and it can also improve your mood and help you relax. When stressed or anxious, their breathing tends to be shallow and quick. This type of breathing deprives the body of oxygen, which makes it harder for the brain to think clearly. Still, mindful breathing reverses this process by slowing your breathing rate and allowing

more oxygen into your system. As a result, you feel calmer and more focused on the task. It is necessary for the workplace since these emotions always affect our concentration, thus causing us to lose focus. Mindful breathing is an essential practice when dealing with stress, and it should not be overlooked; instead, there should be a campaign to create this awareness for those who have never learned about it.

### **e) Lower Blood Pressure**

Mindful breathing is a technique that has been shown to reduce blood pressure. It reduces blood pressure by enabling one to focus on the present moment and not worry about problems from the past or future. The control of stress and anxiety improves one's mood, thus reducing blood pressure (Brenner et al., 2020). Mindful deep breathing also increases one's parasympathetic activity, which causes a relaxation response. The response lowers heart rate, blood pressure, and cortisol levels. An increase in blood pressure has adverse effects on an individual's life, which is why it should be controlled by all means. Therefore, this shows that mindful breathing should be embraced everywhere, whether in learning institutions or workplaces.

### **Conclusion**

Breathing is an essential part of meditation. When one breathes mindfully, their body and mind become relaxed. Breathing exercises can be used to meditate and relax. Mindful breathing exercises are pranayama and deep, rhythmic breathing through the nose. The second is 4-7-8 breathing, a simple exercise involving taking four seconds to inhale, seven seconds to hold your breath, and eight seconds to exhale. The third is 2-4 breathing, a method for calming your mind by focusing on two numbers as one breathes in and out. Taking deep

breaths, which involve inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth, is the fourth exercise of mindfulness breathing. During the exercise, one focuses on the sensation of each breath, whether it is cold air rushing into your nostrils or the pushing out of the air from your lungs. Mindful breathing has benefits that include reduced anxiety, less depression, reduced distress, better focus, and lower blood pressure. People who meditate regularly are less likely to suffer from stress-related diseases such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes. Mindfulness breathing helps you stay calm in stressful situations, helps you focus on the present moment, and reduces anxiety. It is known as conscious breathing or controlled breathing and involves focusing attention on the breath instead of letting your thoughts wander aimlessly. This technique relieves stress and anxiety during a panic attack or other stressful situations.

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