Abstract

Background: Paranoia, the fear of oneself being harmed by others, exists in the non-clinical population as prevalent as 30%. Features of anxiety such as worry and negative meta-cognition predict paranoia. With the distress paranoia brings, and the small effect sizes of current treatments on psychosis and non-clinical paranoia, this study aimed to examine the effectiveness of an online, low-intensity mindfulness-based intervention (MBI) in reducing paranoia in the non-clinical population, and whether anxiety mediates the relationship.

Method: In this randomised controlled trial, 145 participants were recruited (mean age: 24.29, 62.8% female). In the experimental group (n = 70) and active control group (n = 75), participants listened to a 10-minute guided mindfulness meditation or classical music for 14 days respectively. Measures on state paranoia and other psychological variables were taken pre-, post- intervention and at 1-month follow-up.

Results: In the MBI group, there was a significant reduction in paranoia post-intervention (p = .003, d = 0.44), which was sustained at follow-up (p = .003, d = 0.43). In the control group, there was a significant reduction in paranoia post-intervention (p = .019, d = 0.29), although it did not sustain at follow-up. There was no time x group interaction effect (p > .05). Path analysis showed a significant effect of anxiety reduction on paranoia reduction (β = 0.29, p < .001).

Conclusion: The two-week self-administered MBI was effective in reducing state paranoia post-intervention and at 1-month follow-up, although the effect was not greater than listening to music. Mediation analysis supported that the reduction of state paranoia was predicted by reduction of anxiety.