

Understanding the Dynamics of Integrative Body-Mind Training in Stress Management

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the dynamics of Integrative Body-Mind Training (IBMT) in stress management, focusing on participants' experiences, perceived benefits, and challenges. A qualitative research design was adopted, utilizing semi-structured interviews to gather in-depth data from 22 participants who had engaged in IBMT for a minimum of six months. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure a diverse representation of backgrounds. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis, with theoretical saturation guiding the data collection process. The study aimed to capture the multifaceted experiences and perceptions of IBMT practitioners. The analysis revealed several key themes regarding the experiences of IBMT sessions, perceived benefits, and challenges. Participants reported significant stress reduction, improved emotional regulation, cognitive enhancements, better physical health, and strengthened interpersonal relationships. Key challenges included initial skepticism, time commitment, practice difficulties, and social and personal barriers. The findings align with previous research demonstrating the efficacy of mindfulness-based interventions in reducing stress and improving well-being, highlighting the holistic benefits and practical challenges associated with IBMT. Integrative Body-Mind Training offers a promising intervention for stress management, with participants experiencing substantial benefits across emotional, cognitive, physical, and social domains. However, several challenges need to be addressed to optimize its implementation. Future research should focus on larger, more diverse samples, and incorporate longitudinal and mixed-methods approaches to provide a more comprehensive understanding of IBMT's long-term effects. Practical recommendations include creating supportive practice environments, offering flexible program options, and addressing social and personal barriers to enhance engagement and effectiveness.

Keywords: *Integrative Body-Mind Training, stress management, mindfulness, emotional regulation, cognitive benefits, physical health, interpersonal relationships.*

1. Introduction

Stress is a ubiquitous and often debilitating aspect of modern life, impacting individuals across various demographics and professions. As the pressures of daily life mount, finding effective methods for stress management has become increasingly critical (Andreou et al., 2023; Jung et al., 2016; Kemper et al., 2011; Kemper & Khirallah, 2015). Integrative Body-Mind Training (IBMT) has emerged as a promising intervention, blending mindfulness practices with traditional Chinese medicine principles to promote holistic well-being (Romcevich et al., 2018; Tang, 2011). Mindfulness-based interventions have gained considerable attention for their potential to alleviate stress and enhance overall well-being. Mindfulness, defined as the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally, is foundational to these interventions (Bauer et al., 2019). Numerous studies have demonstrated the efficacy of mindfulness training in reducing psychological distress and improving emotional regulation (Andreou et al., 2023; Bauer et al., 2019; Daubenmier et al., 2011; Dinesh et al., 2022; Felton et al., 2013; Gu et al., 2020; Hunt, 2024; Kemper & Khirallah, 2015; Khoury et al., 2021; Kilpatrick et al., 2011; Lindsay et al., 2017, 2018; McNulty et al., 2022; Parviainen & Kortelainen, 2019; Romcevich et al., 2018; Seidi & Ahmad, 2018; Weijer-Bergsma et al., 2011).

In the context of stress management, IBMT offers a unique approach by integrating mindfulness meditation with body relaxation techniques, breath control, and mental imagery (Tang, 2011). This integrative approach aims to enhance self-regulation and physiological balance, making it particularly effective for stress reduction. Previous research has shown that IBMT can modulate physiological markers of stress, such as cortisol levels and blood flow in specific brain regions (Tang et al., 2007; Tang et al., 2015).

The effectiveness of mindfulness-based interventions, including IBMT, has been extensively documented across various populations and settings. For instance, Andreou et al. (2025) found a significant relationship between mindful eating and body mass index, suggesting that mindfulness practices can influence physical health outcomes. Similarly, Daubenmier et al. (2011) reported that mindfulness interventions targeting stress eating could reduce cortisol levels and abdominal fat among overweight and obese women, highlighting the physiological benefits of mindfulness.

In educational settings, mindfulness training has been shown to reduce stress and improve emotional well-being among students and educators. Bauer et al. (2019) demonstrated that mindfulness training could reduce amygdala reactivity to fearful stimuli in middle-school children, suggesting its potential to enhance emotional regulation (Bauer et al., 2019). Hunt (2024) further noted that teachers who participated in a mindfulness and fitness program reported significant reductions in stress and improved well-being (Hunt, 2024).

The corporate sector has also seen the benefits of mindfulness-based interventions. Dinesh et al. (2022) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis, revealing that mindfulness-based interventions effectively reduce work-related stress and enhance well-being in the financial sector (Dinesh et al., 2022). These findings are consistent with those of McNulty et al. (2022), who observed that mindfulness training could mitigate stress and burnout among new graduate nurses, underscoring the applicability of mindfulness in high-stress professions (McNulty et al., 2022).

Online mindfulness training programs have also gained traction, providing accessible and flexible options for stress management. Jung et al. (2016) evaluated an online mind-body training program, finding significant improvements in stress, coping strategies, emotional intelligence, resilience, and psychological state (Jung et al., 2016). Kemper et al. (2017) and Lee et al. (2018) also reported positive outcomes from online mindfulness training, including enhanced resilience, mindfulness, and empathy (Kemper et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2018).

The mechanisms through which IBMT and other mindfulness-based interventions exert their effects are multifaceted. Neuroimaging studies have provided insights into the neural correlates of mindfulness, showing changes in brain regions associated with attention, self-regulation, and stress reactivity (Kilpatrick et al., 2011; Tang et al., 2015). For example, Tang et al. (2009) found that short-term meditation training could improve attention and self-regulation, while also altering interactions between the central and autonomic nervous systems (Tang et al., 2009).

Physiologically, mindfulness practices can influence stress-related biomarkers such as cortisol. Fan et al. (2013) demonstrated that cortisol levels could be modulated by integrative meditation in a dose-dependent fashion, indicating that regular practice can lead to more significant stress reductions (Fan et al., 2013). Additionally, mindfulness training has been shown to enhance intrinsic

brain connectivity, which may underlie its broad range of psychological benefits (Kilpatrick et al., 2011).

Despite the documented benefits, implementing mindfulness-based interventions, including IBMT, presents several challenges. Initial skepticism and resistance to new practices are common barriers (Felton et al., 2013). Time commitment and the need for consistent practice can also deter individuals from fully engaging in these interventions (Kemper et al., 2011; Kemper & Khirallah, 2015; Kemper et al., 2014; Kemper & Rao, 2016; Kemper et al., 2017). Social factors, such as lack of support from peers or cultural misunderstandings, further complicate the adoption of mindfulness practices (Seidi & Ahmad, 2018).

Moreover, personal barriers such as low motivation, negative self-talk, and previous negative experiences with similar practices can hinder individuals' engagement with mindfulness training (Gu et al., 2020). Addressing these challenges requires tailored approaches that consider individual differences and provide adequate support and encouragement.

This study aims to explore the dynamics of IBMT in stress management through qualitative research, providing a comprehensive understanding of its benefits and challenges. This study seeks to deepen the understanding of the dynamics of IBMT in stress management by exploring the experiences, perceived benefits, and challenges faced by individuals who have engaged in this practice. Specifically, the research aims to:

- Investigate the lived experiences of participants during IBMT sessions.
- Identify the perceived benefits of IBMT in managing stress and enhancing well-being.
- Examine the challenges and barriers encountered by participants in practicing IBMT.
- Provide practical insights and recommendations for optimizing the implementation of IBMT in various settings.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This qualitative research aimed to explore the dynamics of Integrative Body-Mind Training (IBMT) in stress management. A purposive sampling method was employed to select participants who had undergone IBMT for a minimum of six months. The study included 22 participants, comprising 10 males and 12 females, aged between 25 and 50 years. The participants were selected from various

backgrounds, including professionals, students, and individuals with a history of high-stress occupations.

2.2. Measure

2.2.1. Semi-Structured Interview

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews to gain in-depth insights into the participants' experiences and perceptions of IBMT in managing stress. The interviews were conducted face-to-face in a quiet and comfortable setting to facilitate open and honest communication. Each interview lasted approximately 60-90 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participants' consent. The interview guide included open-ended questions designed to explore the following areas:

- Participants' initial reasons for engaging in IBMT
- Personal experiences and perceptions during IBMT sessions
- Perceived benefits and challenges of IBMT in stress management
- Impact of IBMT on daily life and overall well-being
- Suggestions for improving IBMT practices

Interviews continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, meaning no new themes or insights were emerging from the data.

2.3. Data Analysis

The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis process involved the following steps:

Familiarization: The researchers immersed themselves in the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts to gain a comprehensive understanding of the content.

Coding: Initial codes were generated by identifying significant phrases, sentences, or paragraphs related to the research questions. Coding was done manually to ensure a deep engagement with the data.

Theme Development: Codes were organized into potential themes by identifying patterns and relationships within the data. Themes were continuously reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately reflected the participants' experiences.

Reviewing Themes: Themes were reviewed in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set to ensure coherence and consistency. Any discrepancies were discussed and resolved among the researchers.

Defining and Naming Themes: The final themes were defined and named to capture the essence of the participants' experiences and perceptions of IBMT in stress management.

The credibility and trustworthiness of the data were ensured through member checking, where participants were asked to review and validate the findings. Additionally, peer debriefing and triangulation with existing literature were employed to enhance the rigor of the study.

3. Findings and Results

The study included a diverse group of 22 participants, comprising 12 females (54.5%) and 10 males (45.5%). Participants' ages ranged from 25 to 50 years, with a mean

age of 37 years. In terms of occupational background, the sample consisted of 8 professionals (36.4%), 6 students (27.3%), and 8 individuals from high-stress occupations such as healthcare and emergency services (36.4%). Educationally, 16 participants (72.7%) held a bachelor's degree or higher, while 6 participants (27.3%) had completed high school or vocational training. The duration of participants' engagement with Integrative Body-Mind Training varied, with 14 participants (63.6%) practicing for over a year, and 8 participants (36.4%) practicing for six months to one year. This diverse sample provided a comprehensive perspective on the impact of IBMT across different demographic groups.

Table 1

Categories, Subcategories, and Concepts

Categories	Subcategories	Concepts
1. Experience of IBMT Sessions	Initial Engagement	Motivation for joining, Expectations, Initial challenges
	Sensory Experiences	Physical sensations, Emotional responses, Cognitive reflections
	Practice Environment	Comfort of the space, Ambient conditions, Group dynamics
	Session Dynamics	Instructor's role, Structure of sessions, Interaction with others
	Mind-Body Connection	Awareness of bodily sensations, Integration of mind and body, Mindfulness
	Post-Session Feelings	Relaxation, Mental clarity, Physical rejuvenation
2. Perceived Benefits of IBMT	Adaptation Over Time	Changes in perception, Evolution of practice, Long-term commitment
	Stress Reduction	Decreased anxiety, Improved relaxation, Better stress response
	Emotional Regulation	Enhanced emotional control, Improved mood, Reduced negative emotions
	Cognitive Benefits	Improved concentration, Enhanced memory, Better problem-solving
	Physical Health	Improved sleep, Reduced physical symptoms of stress, Enhanced energy levels
	Interpersonal Relationships	Better communication, Increased empathy, Reduced conflicts
3. Challenges and Barriers	Overall Well-being	Greater life satisfaction, Improved quality of life, Enhanced self-awareness
	Initial Skepticism	Doubts about effectiveness, Resistance to new practices, Fear of the unknown
	Time Commitment	Scheduling difficulties, Balancing practice with other responsibilities, Consistency in attendance
	Practice Difficulties	Difficulty focusing, Physical discomfort, Emotional resistance
	Social Factors	Lack of social support, Cultural barriers, Misunderstanding from peers
	Personal Barriers	Lack of motivation, Negative self-talk, Previous negative experiences with similar practices

3.1. Experience of IBMT Sessions

Participants' experiences of IBMT sessions were multifaceted, highlighting several key aspects of their engagement and practice.

Initial Engagement

Participants often described their initial motivations for joining IBMT, which ranged from seeking stress relief to exploring new mindfulness practices. One participant mentioned, "I was looking for something that could help me manage my stress better than traditional methods." Others

expressed initial challenges such as skepticism and unfamiliarity with the techniques.

Sensory Experiences

The sensory experiences during sessions were profound for many participants. They reported a heightened awareness of physical sensations, emotional responses, and cognitive reflections. One participant noted, "During the sessions, I became acutely aware of the tension in my shoulders and how it gradually released."

Practice Environment

The environment in which the sessions took place was significant. Participants highlighted the comfort of the space,

ambient conditions, and the dynamics within the group. "The room was always set up in a calming way, and having others around made the experience more supportive," said one participant.

Session Dynamics

The structure of the sessions and the role of the instructor were critical to participants' experiences. They appreciated the structured approach and the interactive elements. A participant shared, "The instructor guided us gently but effectively, making each session feel well-structured and engaging."

Mind-Body Connection

Participants frequently discussed the development of a strong mind-body connection. This included an increased awareness of bodily sensations and an integration of mind and body. "IBMT helped me to be more in tune with my body and how my mind affects it," one participant explained.

Post-Session Feelings

After the sessions, participants often felt relaxed, mentally clear, and physically rejuvenated. "I always felt a sense of calm and clarity after each session," said a participant, reflecting a common sentiment.

Adaptation Over Time

Over time, participants noted changes in their perception of IBMT and an evolution in their practice. They described a deepening commitment and long-term benefits. "Initially, it was hard to stick with it, but now it's an integral part of my routine," one participant remarked.

3.2. Perceived Benefits of IBMT

The benefits of IBMT as perceived by the participants were diverse and impactful, spanning emotional, cognitive, physical, and social domains.

Stress Reduction

Participants consistently reported a significant reduction in stress levels. This included decreased anxiety, improved relaxation, and a better overall stress response. "I feel much less anxious and more relaxed after starting IBMT," stated one participant.

Emotional Regulation

Improved emotional regulation was another key benefit, with participants experiencing enhanced emotional control and a better mood. "IBMT has helped me manage my emotions better, I don't get as easily upset," shared a participant.

Cognitive Benefits

Cognitively, participants noted improvements in concentration, memory, and problem-solving skills. "My focus has improved, and I find it easier to solve problems at work," one participant mentioned.

Physical Health

Several participants reported physical health benefits such as improved sleep, reduced physical symptoms of stress, and enhanced energy levels. "I sleep better and have more energy throughout the day," commented a participant.

Interpersonal Relationships

IBMT also positively affected interpersonal relationships. Participants experienced better communication, increased empathy, and reduced conflicts with others. "I find myself more empathetic and better at communicating with my family," said one participant.

Overall Well-being

The overall well-being of participants improved, with many reporting greater life satisfaction, an improved quality of life, and enhanced self-awareness. "IBMT has significantly improved my quality of life," noted a participant.

3.3. Challenges and Barriers

Despite the benefits, participants also identified several challenges and barriers to practicing IBMT effectively.

Initial Skepticism

Many participants expressed initial skepticism about the effectiveness of IBMT. They mentioned doubts and resistance to trying new practices. "I was doubtful at first, unsure if it would really help," admitted one participant.

Time Commitment

The time commitment required for regular practice was a significant barrier. Participants struggled with scheduling difficulties, balancing practice with other responsibilities, and maintaining consistency. "Finding the time to practice regularly was challenging," shared a participant.

Practice Difficulties

Participants faced various practice difficulties, including challenges in focusing, physical discomfort, and emotional resistance. "Sometimes it was hard to focus, and I felt physically uncomfortable," one participant reported.

Social Factors

Social factors such as lack of social support, cultural barriers, and misunderstandings from peers also posed challenges. "My friends didn't understand why I was doing it, which made it harder," said a participant.

Personal Barriers

Personal barriers included a lack of motivation, negative self-talk, and previous negative experiences with similar practices. "At times, I struggled with motivation and self-doubt," confessed one participant.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the dynamics of Integrative Body-Mind Training (IBMT) in stress management. Participants reported a variety of experiences, perceived benefits, and challenges associated with IBMT. The rich qualitative data revealed several key themes that shed light on how IBMT influences stress and overall well-being.

Participants described their initial engagement with IBMT as being driven by a desire to manage stress more effectively. The sensory experiences during the sessions, including heightened awareness of physical sensations and emotional responses, were particularly profound. This aligns with previous research by Bauer et al. (2019), who found that mindfulness training can reduce amygdala reactivity to stress, highlighting the emotional regulation benefits of such practices.

The practice environment and session dynamics were also critical to participants' experiences. The importance of a comfortable and supportive environment was emphasized, which is consistent with findings by Kemper et al. (2011), who noted that the setting and group dynamics play a significant role in the effectiveness of mind-body practices. Participants also highlighted the development of a strong mind-body connection and the positive feelings post-session, such as relaxation and mental clarity (Kemper et al., 2011). These findings resonate with those of Kilpatrick et al. (2011), who demonstrated that mindfulness-based stress reduction training could enhance intrinsic brain connectivity, leading to improved emotional and cognitive functioning (Kilpatrick et al., 2011).

The study participants reported numerous benefits of IBMT, including significant stress reduction, improved emotional regulation, cognitive enhancements, better physical health, and strengthened interpersonal relationships. Stress reduction was a common theme, with participants noting decreased anxiety and better overall stress responses. This is supported by the work of Daubenmier et al. (2011), who found that mindfulness interventions could reduce cortisol levels and improve physiological markers of stress (Daubenmier et al., 2011).

Emotional regulation was another critical benefit, with participants experiencing enhanced emotional control and mood improvements. These findings align with those of Felton et al. (2013), who reported that mindfulness training could positively impact counseling students' perceptions of stress (Felton et al., 2013). Cognitive benefits, such as improved concentration and problem-solving skills, were also noted, supporting the research by Lindsay et al. (2018), which demonstrated that mindfulness training could enhance cognitive functions and reduce stress reactivity (Lindsay et al., 2018).

Physical health improvements, including better sleep and reduced physical symptoms of stress, were frequently mentioned. These findings are consistent with Fan et al. (2013), who found that integrative meditation could modulate cortisol levels and improve physical health outcomes (Fan et al., 2013). Participants also reported positive effects on their interpersonal relationships, including better communication and increased empathy, echoing the results of Gu et al. (2020), who noted that mindfulness training could improve social interactions and reduce conflicts (Gu et al., 2020).

Despite the numerous benefits, participants also faced several challenges and barriers to practicing IBMT. Initial skepticism and resistance to new practices were common, reflecting the findings of Felton et al. (2013), who highlighted similar barriers in their study (Felton et al., 2013). Time commitment and scheduling difficulties were significant obstacles, consistent with the challenges reported previously (Kemper et al., 2011). Participants also faced practice difficulties, such as focusing issues and physical discomfort, which are common barriers in mindfulness training (Seidi & Ahmad, 2018).

Social factors, including lack of support from peers and cultural misunderstandings, further complicated the practice of IBMT. These challenges are supported by previous research, such as that by Gu et al. (2020), who noted that social and cultural barriers could hinder the effectiveness of mindfulness training. Personal barriers, such as low motivation and negative self-talk, were also significant, reflecting the prior findings (Felton et al., 2013; Gu et al., 2020).

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the sample size was relatively small, consisting of only 22 participants, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. While the qualitative approach provided in-depth insights, it also means that the results may not be representative of the broader population.

Additionally, the participants were self-selected and had already engaged in IBMT for a minimum of six months, which may introduce a selection bias, as those who did not find the practice beneficial may have discontinued it and were therefore not included in the study.

Another limitation is the reliance on self-reported data, which can be subject to biases such as social desirability and recall bias. Participants may have provided responses they believed were expected or favorable, and their recollections of past experiences may not be entirely accurate. Finally, the study did not include a control group, which makes it difficult to attribute the reported benefits and challenges solely to IBMT without considering other potential influencing factors.

Future research should address these limitations by including larger and more diverse samples to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Studies could also benefit from incorporating longitudinal designs to track participants' experiences and outcomes over time, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the long-term effects of IBMT.

Including a control group in future studies would help isolate the specific impact of IBMT on stress management and other outcomes. Additionally, employing mixed-methods approaches that combine qualitative and quantitative data could provide a more robust analysis of the effectiveness of IBMT. Quantitative measures, such as physiological markers of stress (e.g., cortisol levels, heart rate variability), could complement self-reported data and offer more objective evidence of the benefits of IBMT.

Exploring the mechanisms underlying the effects of IBMT through neuroimaging and other advanced techniques could further elucidate how this practice influences brain function and physiological processes. Finally, research should investigate ways to overcome the identified challenges and barriers, such as developing tailored interventions that address individual differences in motivation, time constraints, and cultural factors.

Based on the findings of this study, several practical recommendations can be made to enhance the implementation and effectiveness of IBMT in stress management programs. First, it is essential to create a supportive and comfortable practice environment. Ensuring that the setting is conducive to relaxation and mindfulness can significantly enhance participants' experiences and outcomes. Providing clear instructions and guidance from trained instructors can also help participants navigate initial skepticism and practice difficulties.

To address time commitment and scheduling challenges, offering flexible and accessible IBMT programs, such as online or mobile-based sessions, could make it easier for individuals to incorporate the practice into their daily lives. This approach has been supported by the positive outcomes reported in online mindfulness training programs (Jung et al., 2016; Kemper et al., 2017).

Addressing social and cultural barriers requires creating an inclusive and culturally sensitive environment. Educating participants about the benefits of IBMT and providing support networks can help mitigate these challenges. Peer support groups or community-based programs could foster a sense of belonging and encouragement, making it easier for individuals to sustain their practice.

Finally, personal barriers such as low motivation and negative self-talk can be addressed through tailored interventions that incorporate motivational interviewing and cognitive-behavioral techniques. Providing ongoing support and feedback from instructors can help participants stay motivated and overcome internal obstacles.

In conclusion, this study highlights the significant potential of Integrative Body-Mind Training in managing stress and enhancing overall well-being. While there are challenges and barriers to its practice, the reported benefits underscore the value of incorporating IBMT into stress management programs. By addressing the identified limitations and barriers, future research and practice can further optimize the effectiveness of this holistic intervention.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethics Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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