

# Mindfulness should be about more than just 'me,' argues new study

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Is looking after kids in the summer stressing you out? Are you in need of a relaxing break? Maybe it's time to unwind and practice some calming mindfulness.

Over recent years, around the world, there has been growing interest in the practice, which encourages people to pause, be fully present in the moment, and explore how to be less reactive or overwhelmed by whatever is going on around and within us. Mindfulness's origins stem from Eastern philosophy and Buddhism, where it is integrated within a broader ethical framework.

However, a new review from the unique University of Bath Centre for Mindfulness and Community challenges how the practice has been evolving in the West and how it has, in part, been distorted by the self-help community. It suggests that instead of people using mindfulness to focus on their role in relation to others, more often they focus on themselves and self-improvement.

The analysis, from a team of psychologists and therapists at the Bath Centre for Mindfulness and Community suggests the broader meaning and applications of mindfulness are often lost, and that the true benefits of the practice in developing a deeper sense of reflection and connection are missed. Their review is published in the *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*.

One of the report leads, clinical psychologist Dr. Liz Marks has successfully used mindfulness within the NHS as an approach for managing tinnitus, and recognizes its effectiveness in encouraging people to pause and reflect on busy lives. She thinks people could benefit even more if they used mindfulness to help them think about other people and the natural world.

"There is growing interest in mindfulness around the world, and rightly so. The practice offers an important opportunity in ever-hectic lives to pause and reflect. But too often, this is presented as another tool for self-betterment. We suggest that mindfulness can offer more than this, giving people the chance to 'look outside themselves,' deepening their sense of

place within nature and interconnectedness with their community," she said.

Dr. Marks's other area of research focuses on environmental psychology, the rise of eco-anxiety, concerns about the planet, and what can be done about this. Instead of seeing the practice of mindfulness as a fix for "how to make my life better," she suggests that it is a supportive practice helping people live well alongside the challenges of modern life, while also helping them to think about "how can we make the world a better place for all of us?"

Co-author Dr. Pamela Jacobsen is a specialist in [cognitive behavioral therapy](#) and mindfulness, and has studied how the practice can be used in acute psychiatric settings to help patients with severe mental health challenges. She hopes the findings can also spur extra interest in testing mindfulness for [clinical settings](#).

"There is a great potential to use mindfulness across a range of health conditions, from chronic pain to depression. In line with growing interest in the [practice](#), there has also been a proliferation of online '[mindfulness](#) apps.'" We need to ensure these are matched with fully tested and evaluated programs which people can access and benefit from."

Other authors on the paper include: Ben Ainsworth, Melissa J. Atkinson, Eman Al Bedah, Sian Duncan, Julia Groot, Amanda James, Tom A. Jenkins, Katerina Kyliova, Emma L. Osborne, Masha Remskar and Rosalia Underhill.

**More information:** Ben Ainsworth et al, Current Tensions and Challenges in Mindfulness Research and Practice, *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy* (2023). [DOI: 10.1007/s10879-023-09584-9](#)

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