Investigating the Effectiveness of a Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Course Within Healthcare: A Qualitative Methods Study

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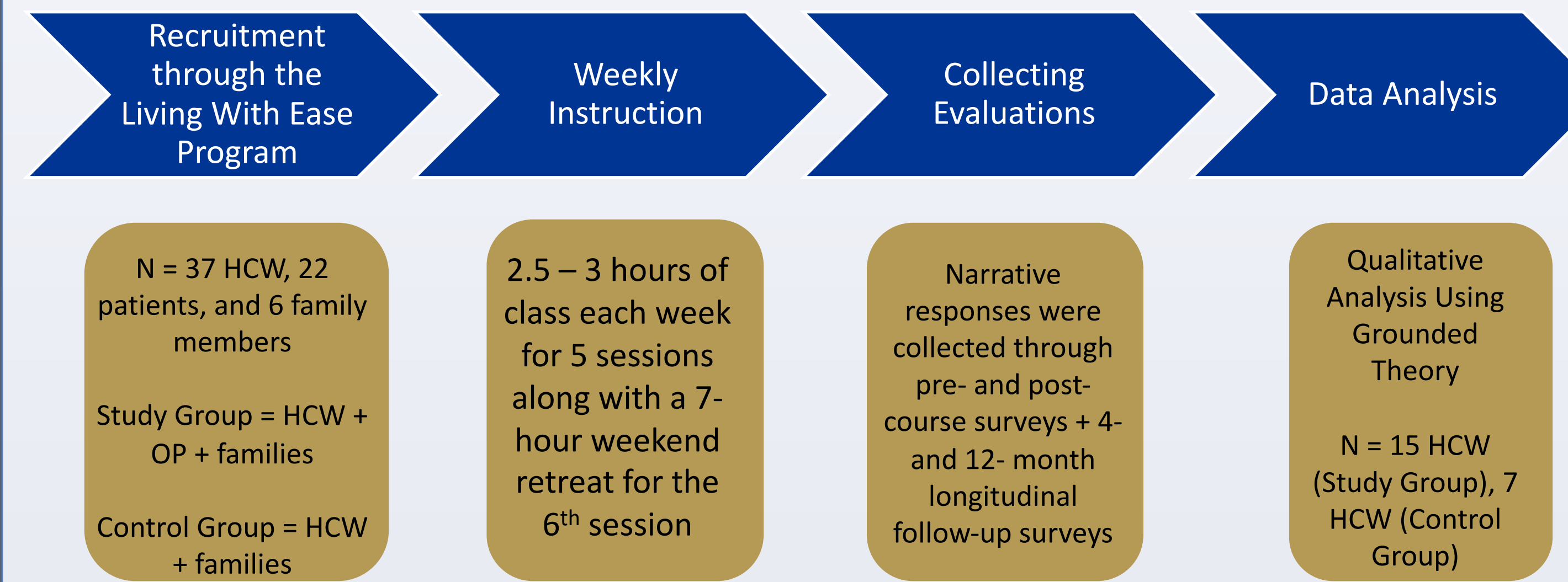
Introduction

Healthcare workers (HCW), Oncology Patients (OP), and their families all suffer from stress and burnout. Research has demonstrated that patients and physicians alike suffer from increased levels of stress, burnout, and depression relative to the general population. The practice of mindfulness has emerged as an effective way to combat these issues. Mindfulness can be defined as the maintenance of a moment-by-moment awareness of thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations, and surrounding environment through a gentle, nurturing lens. Many mindfulness practices exist today, each offering a unique approach to this complex topic. Our study specifically examines the efficacy of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), a widely recognized, standardized curriculum of mindfulness training used in Western health care systems.

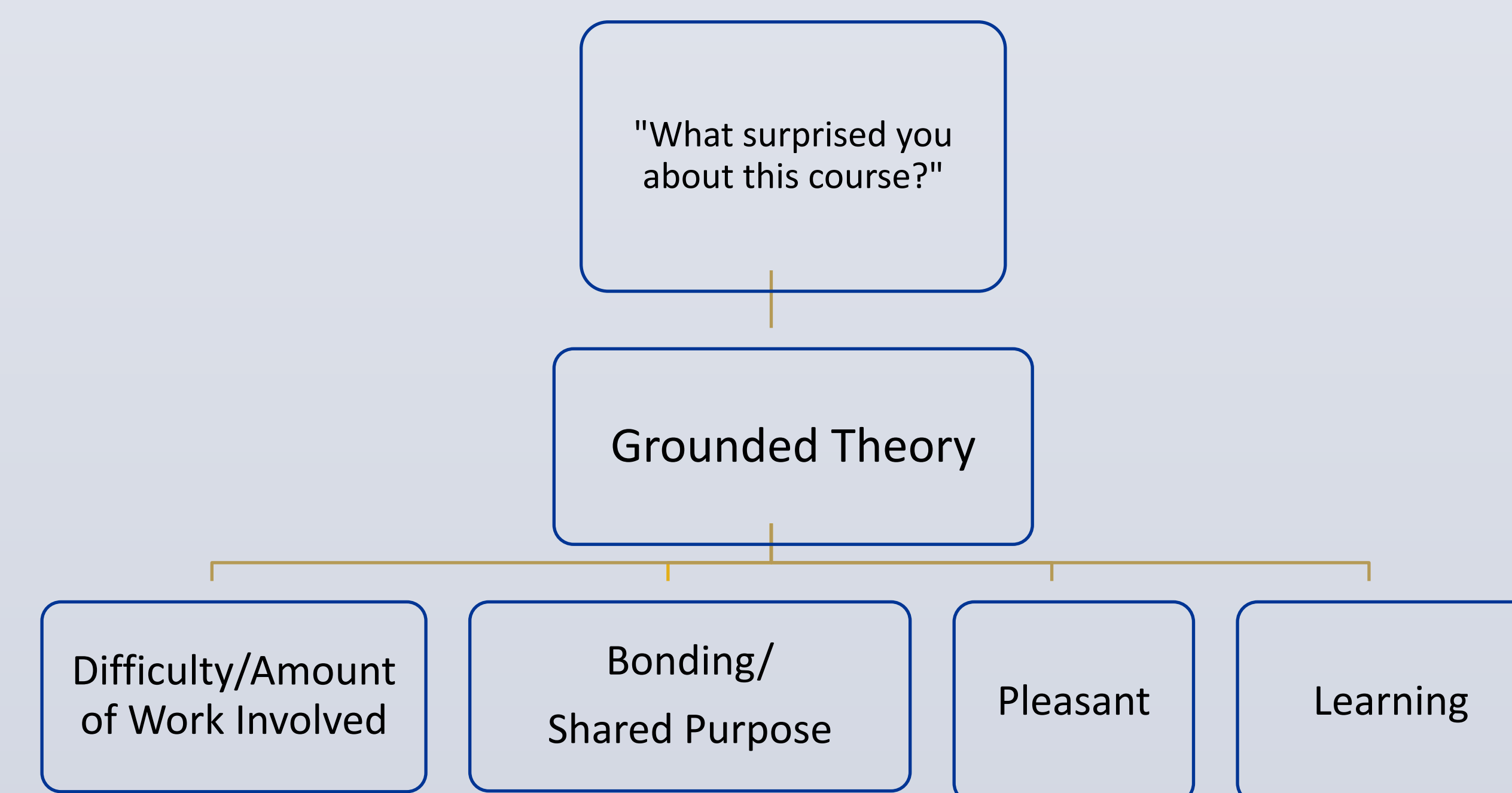## Aims and Objectives

The goals of this study were to:
- Assess the effectiveness of an MBSR course for a heterogenous group of HCW, OP, and families in providing positive coping mechanisms as measured by:
  – Enrollment
  – Retention
  – Positive reflections to Narrative Questions
- Provide the groundwork for more sophisticated projects in this area that can expand this course to be offered across various institutions around the country

Methods

Recruitment through the Living With Ease Program → Weekly Instruction → Collecting Evaluations → Data Analysis

N = 37 HCW, 22 patients, and 6 family members

Study Group = HCW + OP + families

Control Group = HCW + families

2.5 – 3 hours of class each week for 5 sessions along with a 7-hour weekend retreat for the 6th session

Narrative responses were collected through pre- and post-course surveys + 4- and 12- month longitudinal follow-up surveys

Qualitative Analysis Using Grounded Theory

N = 15 HCW (Study Group), 7 HCW (Control Group)

MBSR is an eight-week course that teaches mindful meditation, yoga, eating, and communication. Living With Ease is an MBSR program offered through Beaumont Hospital to cancer survivors, those at high risk of developing cancer, Beaumont employees, physicians and family members of each group. In total, 37 HCW, 22 patients, and 6 family members participated in the Spring 2018 and Fall 2018 MBSR courses. Handwritten responses to 18 open-ended, narrative assessments that were collected through pre-course, post-course, and 4- and 12-month longitudinal follow-up surveys. A qualitative analysis using Grounded Theory was used to analyze the results of the surveys. Only the responses of HCW were analyzed for this study

Final Assessment Narrative Evaluation

"What surprised you about this course?"

Grounded Theory

Difficulty/Amount of Work Involved | Bonding/ Shared Purpose | Pleasant | Learning

Two questions from the Final Assessment Narrative Evaluation were chosen for analysis. These questions were selected on the basis of relevance to our overall objectives, quality of participant responses, as well as the inter-rater reliability scores utilizing Cohen's Kappa.

Responses to the chosen questions were coded as themes utilizing Grounded Theory techniques.

Results

Participants that completed a minimum of 8 out of 10 sessions were offered narrative evaluations. 15 of the 18 HCW (83%) in the study arm and 7 of the 19 HCW in the control group completed narrative responses and were included in the data analysis. The figures below define each code and provide examples of participant narratives.

Final Assessment Narrative Evaluation

Question #1

HCW were asked, in retrospect, if they preferred homogeneous or heterogeneous classes.

Preferred Heterogenous
- All study and a few control group members preferred this
- "The way that the class was structured helped both groups understand what each person is going through"
- "Gained a lot of wisdom from the [patients and families] because they had so much insight into what they were experiencing"
- It would have been beneficial to have "seen how others have fought back and been survivors"

Neutral
- No participants felt neutral about this question

Preferred Homogenous
- Most control and no study group members preferred this
- "Would have been uncomfortable"
- "May not have gotten as far as they have"

Question #2

Participants were asked to discuss what surprised them most about the course.

Difficulty/ Amount of Work Involved
This theme was expressed by control group but not study group
- "[I] didn't realize how difficult the mindfulness practice is"

Bonding/ Shared Purpose
Unity of the group and how bonded participants felt with each other
- "The experiences of others [were] very similar to my own"

Pleasant
Participants' enjoyment of the course
- "When [I] shared some hard things, it was received very warmly"

Learning
- What the participants learned throughout the course, including any insights into themselves or others
- "I was surprised at how much stress the other HCW were also experiencing"

Conclusions

This project provided a tangible way to determine the value of the MBSR course and the participants' subjective perception of their experiences. Our hypothesis, that a combined course involving both HCW and patients would provide reciprocating benefits for both parties. The themes of bonding and shared purpose, pleasant, amount of learning as well as an overwhelming majority of HCW that cited that they would not have preferred a course with only HCW and families supports that hypothesis. In addition, the lower course drop-out rate and overwhelming positive reflections amongst participants further supports our conclusions.

MBSR courses provide more benefit when people are open and bond with each other. In addition, hearing the struggles of others can give insight into one's own challenges. This combined course demonstrated a stronger sense of bonding in the classes that were heterogenous.

Limitations of our study include the small population size, difficulty in follow-up, and some lack of effort in survey responses.

We hope that future studies seek to evaluate the impact of a heterogenous population of patients and HCW in MBSR courses on a larger scale. This could include courses with non-oncology patients and an evaluation of the best way to facilitate discussion amongst these groups

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Acknowledgments