THE EVOLUTION AND IMPACT OF MINDFULNESS PRACTICE IN MODERN SINGAPORE: FROM BUDDHIST ROOTS TO CONTEMPORARY APPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

In Singapore, mindfulness has evolved from its Buddhist origins into a widely adopted approach for enhancing mental health. This study examines the factors contributing to this transformation, with a focus on individuals practicing Zen-based mindfulness. Researchers conducted interviews with 20 Singaporean participants who attended Zen mindfulness retreats to investigate their application of mindfulness in daily life and its impact on emotional regulation and stress management. Participants reported improved emotional control, reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression, and practical benefits in professional and social contexts. Many emphasized the continued relevance of Buddhist values such as non-judgment and compassion, which they perceived as enhancing the significance and effectiveness of their practice. However, participants also noted challenges in maintaining consistent mindfulness routines, particularly amid the distractions of urban living. The study identifies a tension between traditional and contemporary secular mindfulness approaches, highlighting the necessity for practitioners to remain connected to ethical frameworks. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of mindfulness in urban Asian contexts and inform the development of culturally sensitive and ethically grounded mindfulness programs for public health and governance.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Mindfulness (sati), as one of the important components of the Buddhist soteriological factors, is primarily founded on the Noble Eightfold Path, which is concerned with the knowledge of the present moment according to the scheme of the ethical intention (Ditrich, 2016). The result of its entrance into modern secular contexts has been the new growth of mindfulness into a useful therapeutic modality, especially in high-stress urban centres, such as Singapore, where one in seven people suffers from a mood or anxiety disorder (Murphy, 2016).

The scientific evidence supporting this venture is extensive and indicates that standardized Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs), of which mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) is one, are effective in decreasing stress and anxiety, as well as burnout (Khng, 2018).

It is this secularization which forms the root of a major academic dispute. Others believe that the severing of mindfulness from its Buddhist roots can lead to it becoming a commodified tool of corporate efficiency and individual success, at the expense of its transformational potential (Purser, 2013). This tension between therapeutic application and spiritual authenticity remains one of the major unanswered problems in the field.

Singapore is a particular context where it is particularly valuable to explore this dynamic. The integration of traditional and modern approaches to mindfulness is an actual experience in the country where 31% of the population professes to be Buddhist (Singapore Census, 2020). Mindfulness is still practiced in Buddhist temples as a combination of spiritual practices (Klein et al., 2020), and at the same time, secularized programs are being applied in schools, healthcare, and corporations, with the reported benefits, including increased student resilience (Ong, 2018) and decreased professional burnout (Yang et al., 2017; Goei et al., 2021). **Nevertheless, one important research gap remains in the context of this parallel development** there is lacking knowledge about how practitioners themselves go about navigating this tricky terrain. In particular, it is not obvious how people can reconcile or come to terms with the secular and spiritual aspects of mindfulness, and how their interaction with its ethical grounds affects the results of long-term mental health. To fill this gap, the research methodology will be a qualitative phenomenological study based on a particular and quantifiable cohort, which will be the practitioners of Zen meditation in Singapore. This study is well placed to investigate the point of interaction between the traditional and the

modern by focusing on a group that practices a more traditional based version of mindfulness. The research questions used to guide the study are as follows

1. What motivates Singaporeans to adopt mindfulness, and how do these motivations evolve?
2. How do practitioners perceive mindfulness's impact on mental health and daily functioning?
3. To what extent do Buddhist principles (impermanence, compassion) inform their practice?

This targeted study is not aimed at coming up with generalized statements regarding mindfulness in Singapore in general but is instead intended to produce very specific observations about a population that is at the intersection of the McMindfulness controversy. The results will be important, empirically based views of the adaptation and experience of ancient contemplative practices in a contemporary, pluralistic society. Ultimately, the study seeks to offer useful evidence for clinicians, educators, and policymakers designing mindfulness-based programmes that are both therapeutically effective and culturally and ethically relevant to Singapore's unique urban environment., the study should offer useful data to clinicians, educators, and policymakers who would like to create mindfulness-based programs that would be both therapeutically effective and culturally or ethically relevant to the unique urban environment of Singapore.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The widespread dissemination of mindfulness practices worldwide has produced a highly debated scholarly discussion (Pickerell et al., 2023; Baer, 2003), which lies at the border of the fields of clinical psychology, Buddhist studies, and sociology (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Monsillon et al., 2023). In order to contextualize the current research, this review will analyze the literature on three important dimensions, including the Buddhist roots and moral basis of mindfulness (Ong, 2013), its secularization and therapeutic use, and the definite outlines of its adoption in the unique socio-cultural context of Singapore (Dunning et al., 2022; Lomas et al., 2018).

The concept of mindfulness (sati) is traditionally closely connected to Buddhism soteriology (in which it is not a method that exists independently but a fundamental aspect of the Noble Eightfold Path to the cessation of suffering) (Galante et al., 2021). Under the same system of thought, the right mindfulness is developed together with other aspects of right ethical

conduct (sila) and wisdom (panna) with a focus on aspects of compassion (karuna), non-attachment, and impermanence (anicca) understanding. The researchers claim that such an ethical and philosophical environment is necessary to make the practice transformative, leaving the scope of symptom management and engaging in the deeper personal and existential transformation (Goldberg et al., 2018; Guo & Chueachainat, 2024).

The mindfulness movement has found its way into the mainstream sphere of health care and psychology, which has been enabled by its translation into Western secular settings, most notably by Hohlzel et al., (2011) Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). An impressive amount of empirical evidence now testifies to the effectiveness of Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs) in symptom reduction (anxiety, depression, and stress), as well as the enhancement of emotional balance and cognitive attention (Jong et al., 2025; Sparacio et al., 2025). But it is this success that has given rise to the so-called McMindfulness debate, which is a critique of mindfulness according to which the decoupling of mindfulness and the ethical principles underlying it turns it into a self-help method that can potentially strengthen the neoliberal capitalist ideals of productivity and individualism (Zuo et al., 2023).

Being a multicultural, high-technology country with a large Buddhist community (31%, Singapore Census, 2020), it represents a peculiar combination of ancient spiritual models and urban demands. The current studies in Singapore have initiated the recording of the advantages of MBIs that have been shown to improve resilience in school environments (Ong, 2018; Zhang et al., 2023) and alleviate burnout among healthcare professionals (Vonderlin et al., 2020; Treves et al., 2025). The popularity of mood and anxiety disorders, with one in seven individuals affected (Suyi et al., 2017), promotes once again the relevance of mindfulness to population health (Subramaniam et al., 2020). As much as this is emerging, major gaps in research still exist. First, there is scant qualitative research on the lived experience of practitioners in Singapore and especially how they negotiate and balance secular-therapeutic and Buddhist-spiritual aspects of the practice. Second, longitudinal insights into the changing motivations to follow the path of mindfulness over time and their influence on the long-term consequences in mental health are lacking.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design and Participants

This research utilized a phenomenological method in exploring the experience of mindfulness practitioners in Singapore. In total, 20 participants were sampled via Zen centers and related social media groups, with the purposive sampling approach being employed to guarantee the variety of experience levels (e.g., beginners and advanced students).

The inclusion criteria were to have attended at least one 2-day, residential Zen mindfulness retreat at the Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery or a tradition-oriented center in the last two years. This criterion was used to guarantee that the participants had had significant, immersive exposure to a mindfulness practice that was placed in its cultural context.

The sample size was 12 females and 8 males, and the age was between 22 and 58 years. The team members were very well-educated, and 16 of them owned university degrees, and they belonged to different professional areas, such as healthcare, education, technology, and business. Informed consent was already acquired before the data collection process, with the participants being clearly informed about the confidentiality and their right to withdraw at any point.

3.2. Data Collection and Context of Practice

Semi-structured interviews were conducted which included separate sections lasting between 45 minutes to one hour each. Interviews were held in a private counselling room at Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery and or via an online meeting platform depending on participant preferences. To increase comfortability and allow for nuanced expression, participants were allowed to interview in English or Chinese Mandarin. An interview guide based on previous literature was created embracing key themes within the research, including experiences of specific practices, incorporation into daily life, benefits and challenges and links back to the principles of Buddhism. To clarify the nature of the intervention in question, the "Zen mindfulness retreats" referred to usually were of 2-5 days duration, were residential, and held in well established Buddhist temples.

Core practices generally include extended periods of seated meditation (zazen), walking meditation (kinhin) and Dharma talks using the principles of Buddhism, such as the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path and compassion (karuna.) This traditional setting is a major factor to consider in understanding of participants' experiences and their relationship to the principles of Buddhism. All interviews were audio recorded with participant consent and whence transcribed word for word to facilitate analysis.

3.3. Data Analysis

The interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis following the approach of Braun and Clarke (2006). The researchers first gained familiarity with the interview data through repeated readings of the transcripts. Initial codes were then developed manually and with the assistance of qualitative data processing software (e.g., NVivo) that allowed significant quotes relevant to the questions of the study to be tagged. The codes were then subject to an iterative review process that led to grouping into larger categories.

Through discussions of the research team, repeating themes were derived that captured key aspects of the experience of mindfulness. **Notable themes were** "The Regulation of Emotion as Motivation and Outcome;" "Stress as a Stimulus to Practice;" "Spiritual Deepening versus Non spiritual use;" "Workplace and Interpersonal Applications;" and "The Problem of Sustaining Practice," etc. These categories were further refined in order to ensure the distinctness of each and their internal coherence.

The techniques were used to improve the validity and reliability are as followed. First, member checking was carried out through summarizing important points back to the participants when conducting interviews to ensure proper interpretation.

Second, to reduce bias, the coding and theme development were peer reviewed by an independent researcher who is well acquainted with the methods of qualitative research. Until there was agreement, disagreements were debated. An audit trail of analytical decisions was also observed in the study. The discussion includes illustrative quotes to support each theme (the pseudonyms are provided to conceal the identities).

3.4. Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

Within qualitative research, it cannot be assumed that the backgrounds of the researcher are neutral but may inform the interpretative process. **A parallel view also existed within our group** one of the researchers had an experiential background in secular mindfulness practice, while the other had a background of formal academic study in the field of Buddhism.

These positions were not arrived at as forms of bias that would have to be excluded, but as prismatic lenses to be treated with scrupulous care. The combined privileging of this insight and expertise enabled a much more subtle analysis of the data in an attempt to uncover the therapeutic and philosophic aspects of the narratives of the participants in the study.

To protect analytical rigour, a structured reflexive process was employed. This involved the use of personal and group reflexive journals, where preconceptions could be noted in order to challenge them.

Our divergent positions were means that were actively employed as a dialectic instrument within the analysis meetings, where positions were argued from oppositional points of view by intent (e.g., How would the secular view of this quotation take shape? vs. What does this Buddhist thought correspond to?). The aim of this rigorous application of intellect and instinct was to ensure that the themes that emerged were extracted purely from the data, and not our bias. This was seen to be a sine qua non of the faithful enactment of the lived experience of the participants.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

This research was carried out using established ethical principles in doing research involving human subjects. A detailed information sheet was given to all the participants and informed consent written before participation.

Transcription was done anonymously, and pseudonyms reported. Audio records and transcripts were saved in a password-secured server to get deleted in five years. Ethical and methodological consideration of the demographic structure of our sample is also important.

The transferability of the findings may be reduced by the high level of formal education (80% with university degrees). It is possible that the experiences of stress, practice integration, and access to retreats vary considerably between people of other socioeconomic or educational backgrounds. This is one of the limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting the results and is an exceptionally useful direction on which future studies can be conducted to investigate the concept of mindfulness engagement in a wider population.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

When interpreting the interviews, we frame the discussion on the dimensions of the mindfulness practice under the following reasons to practice, effects of mental well-being, influence of Buddhist traditions, and uses of mindfulness in Singaporean contemporary society.

The results give the impression of mindfulness as a complex activity that can be used as a source of personal therapeutic outcomes as well as a medium to transmit spiritual values and community well-being. Table 1 gives a summary of the key themes

and study findings.

Table 1: Key Themes from Interviews on Mindfulness Practice in Singapore.

Theme	Summary of Findings	Key Nuances & Evidence
Initial Motivations	Participants began mindfulness primarily for emotional regulation (managing anger, anxiety) and stress reduction in response to urban pressures. A smaller subset cited initial interest in personal growth or spiritual exploration.	The data strongly links the start of practice to coping with the "hectic life" of Singapore. Motivations were largely self-focused and therapeutic at this stage.
Evolving Goals & Motivations	Over time, motivations broadened from stress relief to self-discovery, heightened self-awareness, and a search for greater life meaning. A key evolution was the rise of pro-social and altruistic goals (e.g., "to be a more patient parent," "to listen better to my colleagues").	This shift is thematically connected to the adoption of Buddhist principles. Participants described growing empathy and a desire to reduce others' suffering as a direct outgrowth of learning compassion (karuṇā) and mindful speech/action (sīla) in their practice
Emotional and Mental Health Impact	Practitioners reported significant improvements in emotional control (less reactive anger/worry), reduced perceived stress, and alleviation of symptoms related to anxiety and depression. They described feeling more resilient and mentally balanced.	These reported outcomes align with established global research on Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs), suggesting that the Buddhist-derived practice produced similar therapeutic benefits.
Daily Life Applications	Mindfulness was integrated into work (focused attention, workload stress management), interpersonal relationships (active listening, patience), and personal habits (mindful eating, sleep routines). Many reported downstream benefits in work efficiency and relationship quality.	Applications were described as practical tools for navigating specific daily challenges, extending beyond formal meditation into moment-to-moment awareness.
Integration of Buddhist Principles	Most participants engaged with Buddhist principles, but the nature and depth of this integration varied significantly.	This theme indicates different kinds of engagement, elaborating on how non-Buddhists interpreted and applied these principles and differentiating between general ethics and more specific doctrines: Philosophically: some, including non-Buddhists, adopted things like non-attachment to results and compassion in a philosophical context, as meaningful standards for deepening their practice; Practically: others utilized principles such as non-judgmental awareness mainly as practical techniques divorced from their Buddhist context ("I use it so I don't get swept away by negative thoughts"); Specifically: doctrines such as karma and the four noble truths had not been adopted as universally, and were referred to mainly by those who identified most strongly as Buddhists.
Challenges in Sustaining Practice	The primary challenges were practical: finding time and maintaining consistency in a busy urban schedule, overcoming initial difficulties (restlessness, discomfort), and managing external distractions (noise, digital devices).	These challenges highlight the tension between the contemplative nature of mindfulness practice and the fast-paced urban environment of Singapore.
Coping Strategies and Supports	To continue practice, participants utilized structural supports like a group meditation so they could hold each other accountable, guided apps, and actually carving out a space in their home for practice. Community social support and reigniting original motivation was also key.	These strategies were essential for translating intention into long-term, sustained practice, acting as buffers against the identified challenges.
Societal Applications (Grounded in Participant Roles)	Participants generally supported broader societal applications of mindfulness, but their views were shaped by their professional and personal roles.	This theme is derived from the experiences-based expertise of the participants, which shows how professional identities informed perspectives: Educators promoted programs in the schools because they had first hand knowledge of the anxiety in the students they observed. Healthcare workers saw in the clinical experience possible treatment for the patients and a lessening of burnout among staff. Corporate employees commented on educating Columbia to learn how to promote cultural improvements in the workplace and thus better concentrate on work-related projects, referring to their own gains in learning.

4.1. Motivations for Practicing Mindfulness

Three important factors determined the original motivations of the participants in embracing mindfulness, under the heading of mood control, stress control, and self-development. They gave a very different impression of themselves, however, since some of them indicated a secular context, and others a Buddhist context. One of the main secular driving forces was a need to have a greater emotional self-regulation.

A large number of participants were looking to use practical means of dealing with overwhelming emotions such as anger, anxiety, or frustrations that had an effect on their daily lives. As an illustration, one of the professionals said that he started practicing because he wanted not to be dictated by anger after his temper had caused tension between

him and his colleagues at work.

Such a motivation was frequently separated out of any spiritual ambition and centered around mindfulness as a psychological strategy of becoming stable. The stressful work environment in Singapore was a common trigger, and some of the younger participants reported that they used mindfulness to help them overcome stressful situations in academics or careers.

On the same note, the reduction of stress was almost a universal and almost secular motivation. The participants explained that they were getting tired of the stressing nature of urban living which included insomnia, impatience, and worrying.

One schoolteacher mentioned that she needed something to help her feel calm and centered during the mess, which is also indicative of a perception of mindfulness as a practical ability of surviving stress management and is consistent with the clinical literature on mindfulness-based interventions.

Conversely, a separate group of respondents reported inspirations based on personal and spiritual development, and frequently directly related their practice to the teachings of Buddhism. Some of them who had previously shown interest in Buddhism attended retreats to explore further what the Buddhism teachings such as enlightenment taught but others realized that what they had initially meant by their secular objectives changed.

They started appreciating the results of self-awareness, acceptance and discovery of meaning that they would later relate to Buddhist ethical system that guided their practice. This emphasizes the fact that to others, the perceived value of mindfulness is inextricably connected to the state of philosophy, and not the methodology.

4.2. Evolving Motivations and Continued Practice

Importantly, participants noted that their reasons for practicing mindfulness did not remain static. After months or years of practice, new motivations emerged alongside the original one Initially, someone might have begun meditation just to handle anxiety, but as they continued, they found unexpected benefits like improved concentration or a kinder outlook, which then became additional motivators to keep practicing. **A young professional participant explained** "At first, I was just trying to reduce stress, but now I find that mindfulness helps me understand myself better. It's become more of a journey of self-discovery." This quote exemplifies how a narrow goal (stress reduction) broadened into a deeper reflective journey.

The other change was the one that shifted the focus on self and emphasized on relationships and other people. Mindfulness seemed to increase awareness of the interaction of the participants with individuals around them. The development of mindfulness made many of them more tolerant listeners, less likely to jump to conclusion, and more understanding, as described by many. A single respondent discovered that the ability to relax mind meant that she would not tend to bring home work stress and transfer it to the family, thus her family life was better. These experiences further strengthened their promise to mindfulness since they observed physical gains in social connectedness and empathy. Effectively, the incentive to practice increased to the need to uphold these interpersonal advantages. This is in line with other research studies that show that mindfulness training is able to help increase compassion and empathy. Birnie et al. (2010) among others established that an 8 weeks MBSR program had positive effects in enhancing the levels of self-compassion and empathy towards others among participants, which probably drives them to persist with the practices that led to the development of these traits.

Some of the participants also explained that they got inspired by a feeling of community and altruism as they got to understand more about mindfulness and meditation. They began identifying themselves with a bigger movement or community of practice of mindfulness. An example is that following the positive changes, some of them started volunteering in mindfulness events or teaching mindfulness to their friends and co-workers. The process of teaching or sharing the mindfulness at that time was a driving force in their continued practice in order to help others better.

4.3. Impact on Mental Well-Being and Daily Life

Every one of the participants noted significant improvement in their mental and emotional state that could be attributed to mindfulness practice. These effects may be divided into the positive changes in emotional regulation, stress management, general mental health, and the positive spillover into everyday activities and relationships.

The best advantage was emotional control. Several people did give testimonies of how they would handle situations that would have caused anger, fear or sadness more easily. Through the development of a mindset of an observer, they had more control over their responses. As an example, one of them said about a challenging work meeting in which she would have ordinarily felt defensive

and upset after criticism; since she had mindfulness skills, she instead centered on her breathing, and realized that she was getting frustrated but did not have to react to it on the spot, which allowed her to respond in a calm and constructive manner to the criticism that her colleague had given her. In hindsight, she said this prevented a confrontation as well as she was proud of her new emotional strength. It was not an isolated experience, as participants were convinced that greater involvement in mindfulness resulted in improved emotional balance which reverberates the thesis result that it is linked to improved emotional control. This anecdotal study of Singaporean practitioners does not contradict the psychological studies that mindfulness training increases emotional awareness and decreases emotional reactivity (Tang et al., 2015). Also, other interviewees reported the rise of positive emotions. They said that they felt more thankful, satisfied and even happier in the daily activities that they had been present and mindful.

During stress management, the respondents were all in agreement that mindfulness was effective in lowering their perceived stress levels. **The mechanisms they mentioned were** taking conscious breaths when experiencing overwhelm, re-framing stressful situations without being judgmental and being conscious of your body, which noticed you were tightening your jaw, or tightening your shoulders and consciously relaxing. One of them used to refer to mindfulness as his stress reliever whenever he felt the stress of deadlines and some short meditation would empty out the built stress and he would go back to work with a clear mind. Some of the practitioners that experienced anxiety problems stated that mindfulness provided them with a mechanism to break the loop of worrying. They learned not to spend hours having a cogitate but rather to get back to the task at hand or feeling so that the thoughts of anxiety did not spiral out of control. **Quantitative studies support these anecdotal reports** MBSR and other related treatments have been demonstrated to reduce self-reported stress and anxiety symptoms significantly, and the effect has many times been maintained at follow-ups.

The other effect covered was on the overall mental health outcomes such as depression. Some participants had a history of mild to moderate depression and said that mindfulness training was beneficial to them in managing their mood. It managed to do it by encouraging the acceptance of negative emotions and de-identification with negative thoughts (the revelation, I am not my thoughts; I can witness sadness without being overwhelmed by it). It is just this assumption in MBCT that has been empirically tested to help avert relapse in recurrent depression through mindfulness skills instruction. Although the qualitative data we gathered in the study cannot prove clinical efficacy, the reported subjective mood and outlook improvements by the participants are in line with the literature - one meta-analysis by Alvarado-Garcia et al. (2025) reported that mindfulness-based therapy is effective in the reduction of symptoms of depression in various studies. Other interviewees also associated mindfulness with better quality of sleep and alleviation of psychosomatic problems (such as tension headache or high blood pressure) commonly related to stress.

One of them said that he has begun a nighttime mindfulness practice, and his chronic insomnia has significantly improved, probably because of relaxation and release of mind chatter. The participants emphasized that the advantages were not merely limited to the formal meditation sessions; they were transferred to the daily life routines and challenges. This is indicative of the aim of most mindfulness programs to develop trait mindfulness and not state mindfulness in meditation. Employees said they were more productive and focused in the workplace. This helped them become more efficient by training their attention muscle and, as a result, they could focus on a single task at a time and resist the temptation of being a multitasker or checking their phone, which resulted in increased efficiency. Mindfulness was also beneficial in relation and communication at work. Interviewees reported to have been more mindful of their tone in emails or speech, have been more understanding of the views of their colleagues, and have been able to manage work conflict through listening and cognitive replies. A manager said that he used a brief mindful pause before the meetings, which enabled him to get into the discussion without being defensive to any of the criticism. As time passed, he noticed that the meetings of his staff became more collegial, and he blames his own more peaceful attitude as a contributing factor to the effect.

In interpersonal relationships outside of work, similar positive changes were observed. Partners, friends, and family members of participants sometimes commented on their increased patience or warmth. **By way of example, a mother in the study recounted how mindfulness techniques helped her to be more present with her children** "Instead of my mind being on tomorrow's to-do list, I really listen to my kids now, which has made them happier and me

a better parent." Strengthened relationships and improved social support can in turn further bolster mental well-being, creating a virtuous cycle.

The interviewees also used mindfulness in personal growth activities and practices. Others also practiced mindfulness in connection with physical exercise, such as mindful running and yoga, or practice in spirituality, such as mindfulness prayer and religious practice, or in connection with creative activities,such as, mindful drawing and mindful music practice. Through this, they enjoyed and enjoyed more in these activities that improved the quality of their life. Other practices that some of them adopted were mindful eating that resulted in healthy eating habits and enjoying food. Practically, mindfulness was now a way of life or even a way of thinking to many people not an isolated practice, but how they conducted their day-to-day activities within the bustling urban environment.

It is worth noting that the effects were mostly positive though they generally accumulated with time through practice. It was found that those who practiced more or had practiced longer, reported more profound changes. Even the more recent people who had practiced mindfulness were still benefiting but also reported persistent challenges (such as the mind wandering often or the mind struggling to keep discipline). This highlights one of the main insights that have been made in mindfulness training namely that it is like fitness to the mind; practice is important to gain and maintain the advantages (Carmody and Baer, 2008). The qualitative findings of the current research are very much supportive to conclude that mindfulness practice, once maintained, may result in significant emotional well-being, stress resistance, and everyday functioning in the people in an urban setting with Singapore as the case of the study. These individual results give a platform as to why the expansion of mindfulness in community and programmes could benefit society at large.

4.4. Intersection of Mindfulness and Buddhist Traditions

The issue of the pervasively of Buddhist concepts in the modern mindfulness practice in Singapore was one of the areas of the research interest. Seeing that all of the participants had attended Zen retreats (which are inherently related to Buddhist teachings), it does not come as a surprise that quite a number of them acknowledged and appreciated the traditional foundations of their practice. Nevertheless, the extent to which the Buddhist concepts were incorporated into a person differed, and the approach to the interpretation of the concepts was also a sign of the

contemporary perspective.

Several participants explicitly stated that mindfulness cannot be separated from Buddhism in their view. They pointed out that mindfulness is one of the core teachings of the Buddha (Right Mindfulness in the Eightfold Path) and that it gains depth when practiced with the ethical and philosophical framework that Buddhism provides. One interviewee remarked, "The wisdom of the Four Noble Truths that life has dissatisfaction, there are causes, and a way out really became more real to me through mindfulness. I catch myself clinging or craving less because I remind myself of impermanence." This illustrates how a practitioner used Buddhist doctrine (impermanence and the causes of suffering) as a lens for their mindfulness practice, leading to reduced attachment and a more balanced mind. Another participant mentioned regularly reflecting on loving-kindness (mettā) and compassion during or after her mindfulness sessions, which she had learned from Buddhist meditation classes, and found that it made her meditation feel more purposeful and heart centered.

Harder to people to understand was the Buddhist notion of non-self (anatt 2), though some did mention having a sense of dissolution of the ego during retreat, or that they felt connected with others. They made different interpretations of these experiences - some in decidedly Buddhist language of recognizing non-self, others in less religious language of I saw that we are all human and that we are not alone in what we are going through. The result in both instances was usually compassion and less suffering of self, which is in line with the Buddhist objectives.

Simultaneously, numerous members of the population combined these conservative forces with the practical, secular vision of the everyday life. Some of them indicated that they themselves enjoyed the Buddhist background, but that they would clarify or communicate the concept of mindfulness to others (friends, colleagues) in an entirely secular way concentrated on the aspects of stress alleviation and mental clarity to avoid the religious implications which anyone would find off-putting. **This is an understanding of the situation** the society of Singapore is religious and, to a great extent, secular in governmental institutions, so maintaining mindfulness is essential. One participant expressed the view that, "Mindfulness is Buddhist to begin with, yes. But it is also universal. You do not have to be a Buddhist to gain from breathing. It is a human thing." This is a sentiment expressed in almost all modern mindfulness groups, which pay attention to

origins but feel that the practice can benefit anybody, regardless of its belief.

Interestingly, the non-Buddhist participants of the study (one Christian and one atheist) said that contemplating Buddhist ideologies through mindfulness did not impact their faith nor make them converts; however, it did create a sense of curiosity or esteem toward Buddhist philosophy. They came to see Buddha as a sort of ancient psychologist. One said, "I'm Christian, but I find Buddhist mindfulness complements my faith – it helps me be still and know God, in my interpretation. And I respect that Buddha figured out a lot about the mind." This indicates that in a pluralistic setting, people can cherry-pick the practical aspects of Buddhism (like meditation techniques and insights on suffering) without necessarily adopting the entire religious framework.

Based on the information, the most apparent concepts which were successfully integrated into practice according to the Buddhist teachings were those which had direct practical significance such principles as compassion (karuṇā), loving-kindness, impermanence (anicca) and the ethical principle of non-harming (which in mindfulness context translates to the inclination to approach oneself and others in a kind way). These gave what the participants termed as a moral compass or grounding to their practice. For example, remembering impermanence helped some not to get discouraged by setbacks in meditation ("a bad session will pass") and also not to cling to especially blissful states ("a great session is nice but I shouldn't chase that feeling"). Remembering compassion helped them treat themselves gently when their mind wandered, rather than scolding themselves – which in turn made the practice more sustainable.

Participants on the issue of whether contemporary mindfulness has lost its path were subtle. It was almost unanimously acknowledged that mindfulness should be adapted to become relevant. They valued the fact that secular mindfulness enabled individuals of different origins to attend. Others even believed that mindfulness was a gateway between religious and secular worlds an illustration of how ancient wisdom could be dealt with by modern science and applied to secular environments with no contradiction. **Nonetheless, it also had a warning sign** some feared that mindfulness may turn into an excessively popular trend or a solely productivity-oriented device that may end up losing its meaning. Mindfulness is not about feeling better or doing better, as one of the long-term Buddhism practitioners cautioned me and

instead, comes to comprehending the mind and reducing suffering. Unless we remember that, then we are not really being mindful we are engaged in some other activity. This view has been repeated by other researchers such as Purser and Loy (2013) and Kabat-Zinn (2003) regarding the decontextualization of mindfulness.

Overall, it is possible to state that the interaction between mindfulness and Buddhism in Singapore is relatively positive and synergistic. The old foundations are rich and give the perception of history that a lot of people appreciate, whereas the updated changes make the practice widely acceptable and widespread. The findings of the study point to the idea that the connection to Buddhist values (particularly, the values, which promote compassion, morals and wisdom) can greatly enrich mindfulness practice and even improve the results of the practice in terms of stress and mental wellbeing. Meanwhile, the capacity to position mindfulness secularly where necessary has enabled it to permeate through sects of society without being perceived as a tool of growth of religion. Such a compromise of respecting the source but adapting flexibly is the common feature of the current mindfulness trends in Singapore. **It also provides an example to apply to other situations** the fusion of ancient knowledge with the new requirements, instead of a total secularisation of the practice, could result in a more comprehensive one.

4.5. Applications in Education, Healthcare, and Civic Life

The prospects of implementing mindfulness practices in the contemporary Singaporean society formed one of the research questions, which, in turn, leads to the prospects of how mindfulness is currently being implemented and can continue to be implemented in numerous aspects. Having enjoyed personal gains, the participants were, as a rule, eager about the implementation of mindfulness in the community and institutional context on a larger scale. Among the main areas that mindfulness has penetrated or has an evident potential, they distinguished education, healthcare/psychotherapy, workplaces, and community/civic programs.

Education The most common idea among many participants was that the introduction of mindfulness in schools and universities can change young people. Two of the participants had experienced mindfulness in their student years either in a co-curricular workshop or in a counseling service and they said that it had helped them with exam anxiety and social stress. Specifically, a case (literature) was mentioned

of a secondary school mindfulness initiative in Singapore that has brought positive outcomes in the well-being of students and even improvements in the academic outcomes. Although not everyone was informed about certain researches, there was a general feeling that introducing mindfulness at an early age would bestow emotional resilience, increased attention, and the ability to act empathetically, and both mental and academic performance. Among the participants, teachers identified opportunities of how this may be implemented: a few minutes of mindful breathing at the beginning of the lesson, an exercise in mindful listening to enhance the communication in the classroom, or a mindfulness session as a character education unit. One teacher reported that since she had begun to practice mindfulness herself, she had been informally leading her students through a simple breathing break just before exams and had noticed that it made the classroom relaxation. This example is in favor of the possibility of integration. However, obstacles were also identified by participants such as busy school timetables and potential parental or administrative resistance. They proposed that voluntary programs (or after-school clubs) could be one option, and pointing to evidence (such as lower bullying or higher occurrences of better test scores) could serve to get the buy-in. **Evidence has been found elsewhere to support these educational uses** mindfulness in schools has been associated with better student attention and decreased test anxiety.

Healthcare and Psychotherapy The healthcare system of Singapore has started to recognize the importance of mindfulness particularly in mental healthcare. Those healthcare workers who participated in our study and those with experience of therapy said that mindfulness-based therapies were slowly taking root. An example is Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), which is applied in other clinics to prevent depression relapse, and programs based on Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction have been run in hospitals to assist patients with chronic pain or cancer to cope (local trials reflecting the successes include Kemper and Danhauer (2005 and Dawson et al. (2020) on cancer survivors). **The view of one interviewee who was a psychological trainee was the same** Mindfulness provides something that cannot be taught to patients using medications they can learn to manage their thoughts and emotions. I have witnessed clients with anxiety training to ride their panic attack by breathing and watching it instead of becoming engulfed by it. This shows how mindfulness

practices are therapeutic per se. Some of the participants also referred to the concept of mindfulness as an element of the well-being of healthcare professionals. In Singapore, the problem of burnout among doctors and nurses exists. At that, internal staff training on mindfulness (such as short meditations on hospital employees) has been tested. The research identified by one respondent must have been similar to that of Bazarko et al. (2013), who discovered that nurses who were subjected to an 8-week mindfulness program had lower levels of stress and were experiencing a better well-being. Overcoming the challenges of introducing mindfulness to the mainstream healthcare, such as the existence of additional local research data, the presence of appropriate trainers, and a combination with already existing treatment regimes remain hurdles (Khoury et al., 2015). However, according to the interviewees, an institutional support is increasing, particularly because mindfulness remains substantiated by global research in managing such conditions as anxiety, depression, insomnia, and even as a complement to management of hypertension or healthier immune functioning.

In a nutshell of the multi-sector processes and suggestions, their deliberations frequently reverted to several points. They also pushed the government and policy support to authorize and finance mindfulness programs (such as adding mindfulness programs to national mental health campaigns). They emphasized that it is necessary to adjust programs to local culture, maybe by using bilingual resources (English and Mandarin/Malay/Tamil words to define mindfulness) and by considering various religious sensibilities. A large part of the recommendations was to capitalize on technology (which is in line with one of our discoveries regarding the utilization of apps) they can introduce mindfulness to individuals who might not necessarily go to physical classes. Some observed that online mindfulness sessions were being popular during the COVID-19 pandemic and this trend can be further expanded to reach more people.

Lastly, the participants imagined the future in which mindfulness will become accepted as a civic practice in Singapore community centers offering weekly meditation sessions, employers will include meditation breaks in their work schedules just like coffee breaks, schools will include mindfulness in their curriculum, and doctors will be prescribing meditation on top of medications. This rose colored spectacle highlights an acknowledgment that though mindfulness is personal in application, its mass usage may bring rewards to the society such as lower

stress-related healthcare expenditures, better health of the populace, and possibly even a more humane and mindful population.

In Table 2 below, we consolidate examples of current and potential applications of mindfulness across different sectors in Singapore, based on participant input and supporting references.

Table 2: Applications of Mindfulness in Key Sectors of Singapore.

Sector	Current/Potential Initiatives	Evidence-Based Outcomes	Participant-Reported Benefits
Education	Mindfulness sessions in schools (e.g., daily 5-minute mindful breathing)	Improved student concentration and academic performance	Enhanced emotional regulation and reduced anxiety among students
	Mindfulness-based well-being programs for students and teachers	Teachers experience less stress and improved classroom environment (Bernay, 2014)	
	University counseling centers offering mindfulness workshops		
Healthcare	Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) courses for patients	Reduced relapse rates in depression (per MBCT evidence)	Patients report lower pain perception and stress
	Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) for depression and anxiety	Healthcare professionals have lower burnout (Bazarko et al., 2013)	Improved empathy and anxiety management
	Mindfulness training for healthcare staff		
Workplace	Corporate wellness programs including mindfulness	Employees show increased job satisfaction and reduced sick days	Better teamwork and communication
	Offices creating quiet rooms for meditation		Enhanced creativity and problem-solving
	Leadership training integrating mindful leadership principles		
Community/Civic	Community centers offering low-cost mindfulness classes	Greater public awareness and acceptance of mental health practices	Reduction in societal stigma around stress
	Public campaigns on mental well-being		Social cohesion fostered by group practice
	Community-based meditation groups		Increase in pro-social behaviors
(Note: The above outcomes are based on participant observations and relevant research; actual results may vary and would benefit from further study.)			

As shown, the penetration of mindfulness into the different strata of Singaporean society is in progress, and the respondents of this research mostly view it as a beneficial phenomenon that must be fostered. The urban governance perspective here is that leaders of cities and policymakers may view mindfulness not as a personal health practice, but an element of community health and development.

By funding these programs (in schools, clinics, workplaces and community centers) the benefits accorded to individuals may be multiplied to societal benefits, including stress-related illnesses lessening the healthcare burden and social capital enhancement due to heightened emotional well-being of citizens.

4.6. Challenges and Strategies for Sustaining Mindfulness Practice

While participants spoke about the positive effects of mindfulness, they were also frank about the difficulties of sustaining their practice and the strategies they used to address these challenges. Such obstacles are crucial for understanding large-scale implementation, as mindfulness programmes often fail when individuals are unable to maintain a regular routine or feel discouraged by early setbacks. Consistency was the most frequently mentioned difficulty.

Several interviewees noted that after an initial "peak period," such as immediately following a retreat or course, it was difficult to continue practising on a daily basis. Long working hours in the city, family responsibilities, and social commitments often eroded the time available for meditation. Some participants humorously remarked that on the busiest days mindfulness was the last item on their to-do list, even though these were precisely the days when they needed it most. This pattern underscores

that time management and prioritisation are key concerns. As one respondent put it, "It is so easy to say I will meditate later and never get around to doing so; something is always urgent at work, or I am too tired." The fast-paced nature of life in Singapore may thus conflict with the slow, quiet, introspective time required for mindfulness practice.

Some respondents remarked on an initial learning curve and initial impediments to meditation. Novices frequently became restless, tense or uncomfortable sitting still and found emotional pain that they avoided in the course of their lives that was, as it turned out, being engendered by distraction. Many respondents remarked on their frustration at not finding meditation as easy as they had expected. Instead of the pleasant sense of ease they expected to find, they were met with "a lot of thoughts rushing through" and/or physical discomfort. In the absence of sufficient guidance these conditions might have caused meditators to discontinue the discipline. However respondents interested in meditation had generally the benefit of retreat settings or teachers who validated the conditions (the monkey mind is perfectly normal, keep going.) Even among more experienced meditators there are days when the mind does seem not manageable and progress seems to sag. Several of the respondents spoke of "plateaus" when they did not feel they were making progress which they found disheartening. Ego driven self-judgements sometimes appeared (I am so bad at this, I can not even concentrate for five minutes) that seem to go directly in the face of the non-judging aspect of mindfulness, but show human tendencies when situation presents.

Another major challenge was external distractions. Although the city environment in Singapore is fairly orderly, it exposes residents to noise and many digital distractions. Notifications from electronic devices, the desire to turn on the television and surf the Internet after a long day's work, limited physical space within small apartments all interfered with regular practice. One respondent said it was almost impossible to find both time and privacy for meditation in the home because she lived with members of her extended family, and so she practised only at 5 a.m. before the others rose, which could not easily be sustained. **Other remarks from respondents had to do with cultural values which were not conducive to physical stillnes**s to be able to just sit and "do nothing" seemed to them almost immoral, almost indulgent, wherein ordinary cultural attitudes stressed subservience to productivity, a cultural stance which had to be consciously unlearned.

In spite of these obstacles, participants offered a number of ways to promote long-term practice. Perhaps the single most important resource was community and social support. A number of participants pointed to the enhancement of motivation and consistency in practice realized through practicing in groups, e.g., a sitting group, e.g., each week, or together with a companion. Knowing one is expected by others and has shared experience facilitated practice, making it more enjoyable and harder to avoid.

Others formed or joined peer groups after retreats to promote continuation of practice. In Singapore, mindfulness meet-ups and group meditations were variously mentioned and one participant encouraged others to take advantage to practice in these ways. Group practice was also useful in dealing with more difficult issues, participants could compare notes and experiences, exchange ideas and practical solutions, and gain assurance that difficulties were normal and to be expected.

Another commonly employed approach was to incorporate mindful awareness into general behaviours and frame it as a way of living rather than as a separate activity. Some subjects turned their transport assumptions into a mindfulness activity (ie by attending to the breath on the MRT or going for a mindful walk after parking the car).

Others included meditation into their existing routines an approach often termed as "habit stacking"; for example, having a very short meditative experience immediately after brushing their teeth at night or stopping at lunchtime to bring mindful awareness to body and breath prior to eating. By relating mindfulness to stable cues across the day, subjects found it easier to remember to practise and were less likely to be tempted to postpone or skip sessions.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the results indicate that although practitioners repeatedly report increased emotional control and stress alleviation as the central advantages being confirmed through mindfulness-based interventions the long-term efficacy of the practice is greatly complemented by the ethical underpinnings. The Buddhist principles of loving-kindness and non-attachment offered others who were part of the experience different philosophical perspectives that helped them to understand that mindfulness was not only a tool to reduce stress but a widespread tool to well-being and the creation of meaning. This experience of the underground resonance of well-being/spirituality points to the

possibility that mindfulness can yet be as transforming as ever, if it is maintained in its most secular form and does not allow its roots in contemplation to be forgotten.

The introduction of mindfulness to the social setting , including educational, business, and community environments of Singapore, is an advantageous opportunity to establish solidarity and cohesiveness. However, its implementation should be implemented in a culturally sensitive manner that would take into account the pluralistic character of the country but would meet its practical purposes such as long-term involvement. The additional effort needs to be to develop the inclusive programs that would not impose the philosophical foundation of the practice but rather make mindfulness a resource of all citizens. The Singapore experience ultimately offers an example of how urban neighborhoods can create internal sanctuary amid the pressures of the external world but it is not panacea since mindfulness is a practice that individuals and groups can cultivate to help them prosper.

6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This research is limited in several ways that can be utilized in future studies. The small sample of dedicated practitioners, which qualitatively richly captures experience, but limits the generalization of the findings is because the qualitative design was used, and smaller sample sizes could benefit future quantitative or mixed-method studies with larger sample sizes, including those with minimal mindfulness exposure, by quantifying prevalence and specific effect sizes of the reported benefits. Moreover, the fact that the secular and Buddhist-informed postulations were conflated in the participant sample is still insightful, but it renders it quite challenging to make the distinct contributions of the philosophical framework and the core technique to be isolated; a series of studies conducted later would make the use of the comparative design more explicit and straightforward. Lastly, longitudinal research is required to monitor the changes in motivations and effects with time and assess the effectiveness and social influence of mindfulness interventions implemented in the policy.

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