

## BOOK REVIEWS

## Review of *Myths of Mindfulness*

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In the recently published title *Myths of Mindfulness* (Sequoia Books, ISBN 978191411061), Dr. Richard Sears (2021), an experienced clinician, author, and trainer who is a recognized expert on mindfulness and its application in the helping professions, sets out to clarify information on mindfulness. Throughout the book Dr. Sears addresses common misconceptions about mindfulness and challenges some of the excessive claims made about the proposed benefits from mindfulness practice. He also explains what mindfulness is and how mindfulness-based practices can support emotional health and well-being.

#### Mindfulness in Human Services

Mindfulness-based interventions have increasingly become a prominent part of behavioral health and social services over the past several decades, including the human services profession (Holt & Cottone, 2014). While mindfulness is often a central aspect of several contemporary psychotherapies, such as Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) and others, mindfulness practices and skills themselves are not necessarily a clinical, therapeutic intervention and can be utilized and facilitated by generalist human services practitioners (Paulson & Huggins, 2018).

The topic of mindfulness has increasingly become a part of human services education. This has included its incorporation into human services courses and curriculum to enhance the learning of attending, empathy, and therapeutic communication skills (Banks et al., 2016; Lahikainen & Soysa, 2014) and to increase student comfort with utilizing mindfulness skills as part of the services they provide (Lahikainen & Soysa, 2014). Mindfulness has also been explored as a means for fostering intentionality among human services practitioners and the interventions they utilize (Shuler, 2021). Other authors have highlighted how mindfulness can support practitioner self-care while also improving work efficiency and satisfaction with professional identity (Kerewsky, 2019; Lahikainen & Soysa, 2014). Given the rapid and broad expansion of mindfulness in the helping professions, it has become increasingly important

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for human services practitioners utilizing mindfulness as part of the services they provide to make sure that they are doing so in an ethical and competent manner (Kerewsky, 2019; Paulson, 2015).

### **Content and Focus for *Myths of Mindfulness***

There are several Important components and considerations for the competent use of mindfulness in practice. Practitioners must possess a functional understanding of mindfulness and be able to explain what mindfulness is to clients and its relevance and potential benefit as part of the services they are receiving. Practitioners also need to be able to help clients identify successful ways to incorporate formal and informal mindfulness practices into their daily lives and routines. One of the most important competence factors for helping professionals using these approaches is for practitioners to maintain their own on-going personal mindfulness practice (Paulson, 2018; Sears, 2015). In *Myths of Mindfulness* Dr. Sears dedicates several chapters to specifically discusses what mindfulness is and what it is not. He also offers suggestions for how those working with mindfulness, whether they be clients or helping professionals, can have more realistic expectations about the practice, recognize common obstacles to establishing a mindfulness practice, and apply mindfulness more consistently to their everyday lives and activities.

Another important aspect of successfully utilizing mindfulness in human services practice is to understand the function of mindfulness practices, including what dynamics they address and how they support change. This includes appreciating how mindfulness skills relate to other similar techniques and when mindfulness is appropriate for use and when other approaches might be more beneficial (Paulson, 2018; Sears, 2015). Dr. Sears addresses how mindfulness shares similar characteristics with other common helping interventions, including relaxation training, guided imagery, and hypnosis, while also differentiating mindfulness from these practices. In discussing these similarities and differences he does not suggest that mindfulness is somehow superior to those other approaches or should be the preferred intervention. Dr. Sears makes sure to emphasize that each is an important tool whose clinical utility and effectiveness relies on the practitioner understanding not only the purpose for the use of the intervention but also when, in what circumstance, and with whom each skill might be most indicated.

As with other human services interventions, attention must be paid to cultural and diversity issues, as well as client preferences and comfort with the chosen plan of care. With mindfulness this can at times create challenges for recipients of care given the sociocultural origins of these practices in Asian religious and wisdom traditions, most specifically the Buddhist tradition. This can create a potential point of conflict for clients who might see such practices as inconsistent with or running counter to their own heritage (Kerewsky, 2019; Paulson, 2015). Dr. Sears addresses this topic in detail and emphasizes the contemporary scientific foundation for these practices and their successful

integration into behavioral healthcare. In doing so he strives to offer a framework for engaging and utilizing these practices beyond their historical context.

### **Limitations and Benefits for *Myths of Mindfulness***

Unlike other resources on the topic of mindfulness, a limitation of this book is that it does not directly teach one how to engage in mindfulness practice. Readers of this book will either need to already have some practice background with mindfulness or will need to seek out other titles or trainings that more systematically teach one how to engage in mindfulness practice and how to apply mindfulness in particular practice settings. This title also does not address the benefits or limitations of mindfulness-based interventions with particular issues or how to successfully apply mindfulness with specific populations.

*Myths of Mindfulness* does, however, offer several strengths that make it a beneficial resource for human services students, educators, practitioners. It presents its content in an organized and understandable manner that also connects readers to a multitude of additional resources on the topic. *Myths of Mindfulness* is written in a way that avoids the overuse of confusing professional language and terminology, making it clear and accessible to all readers regardless of their familiarity with mindfulness. *Myths of Mindfulness* skillfully provides readers with a thorough overview of what mindfulness is, challenges commonly held misconceptions about mindfulness, and highlights general ways that mindfulness can support psychological coping, adaptation, and well-being. The content is pertinent and applicable to a broad audience, including helping professionals, as psychoeducation for clients engaged in mindfulness practices, and for the general public.

Given its structure, content, and focus, it would likely not be able to serve as a standalone textbook for a human services class focused on mindfulness but could be an additional or recommended reading. It would be best as a professional resource for human services students, educators, and practitioners wanting to have a broader and more informed understanding of mindfulness. Regardless of educational or experience level, this book would be a great resource for human services students and practitioners who are either beginning to learn about mindfulness or for those more familiar with mindfulness who are looking to expand and deepen their understanding.



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