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Article

Emotional Wellbeing During Occupational Engagement: A Role for Mindful Awareness

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ABSTRACT

Background: Emotional wellbeing reflects the quality and balance of individuals' everyday emotional experiences and is a key contributor to overall health and quality of life. Engagement in routine occupations plays a central role in supporting wellbeing; however, the factors that influence how individuals emotionally experience these everyday occupations remain insufficiently understood. Mindful awareness has been proposed as a mechanism that may support emotional regulation during occupational engagement. This study examined the relationship between mindful awareness and emotional regulation during completion of daily occupations across two complementary studies.

Methods: Two quantitative studies, each employing a descriptive cross-sectional study design, were conducted with healthy adult participants. In Study 1, 141 healthy community-dwelling adults completed the Mindful Attention and Awareness Scale (MAAS), Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS), and Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) to assess associations among mindful awareness, emotional regulation, and affect. In Study 2, 92 healthy adults completed the MAAS and the Emotional Experiences in Activities of Daily Living Scale (EEADLs) to explore how mindful awareness relates to emotional experiences during routine occupations.

Results: Higher levels of mindful awareness were consistently associated with better regulation of negative emotions. In Study 1, individuals with high mindful awareness demonstrated fewer difficulties in emotional regulation. In Study 2, mindful awareness was associated with reduced experiences of negative emotions, including frustration and overwhelm while engaging in routine occupations.

Conclusion: Findings suggest that mindful awareness supports emotional regulation during everyday activities. Assessing emotional experiences during routine occupational engagement may inform occupational therapy interventions aimed at promoting emotional wellbeing and supporting sustained occupational participation across populations.

Keywords: emotional regulation, mindful awareness, occupational engagement, emotional wellbeing

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary occupational therapy theory focuses on the importance of occupational engagement, which captures the concept of presence while doing, for health and wellbeing (Jackman, 2014; Morris & Cox, 2017; Ikiugu, 2019). The ability to notice and pay attention to the physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual aspects of occupations in our lives is fundamental to engagement in the present moment (Elliot, 2011; Kabat-Zinn, 2023; Reid, 2011). Successful occupational engagement is associated with positive emotional health, life satisfaction, and wellbeing (Bowie & Peacock, 2025; Eklund & Argentzell, 2026; Goodman et al., 2019; Ikiugu, 2019; Ikiugu et al., 2022).

Engagement of the self during completion of occupations is captured by concepts of mindfulness and flow within the occupational therapy literature (Black et al., 2019; Elliot, 2011; Jackman, 2014; Reid, 2011; White et al., 2020; Wright et al., 2014). Mindful occupational engagement describes the ability to purposefully bring cognitive awareness to the completion of an occupation (Jackman, 2014; White et al., 2020). Flow describes the state of effortless engagement and loss of time awareness that occurs during a just-right challenge between occupational demands and individual skills (Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 2010; Wright et al., 2014). The relationship between mindfulness and flow is complex with modern theorists highlighting that these states may reside on a continuum (Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 2010; Elliot, 2011; Jackman, 2014). Individuals can use mindfulness skills including mindful awareness to enter a state of flow during routine occupations, while the flow state emerges organically during meaningful occupations that provide an appropriately high level of challenge.

The subjective emotional aspects of occupational engagement are crucial for supporting quality of life and wellbeing (Black et al., 2019; Ikiugu, 2019). While mindful occupational engagement is not automatically associated with enjoyment, deep engagement in occupations during flow is associated with positive feelings (Jackson, 2014). Furthermore, training in mindful awareness reduces the intensity of negative emotions through a proposed mechanism of removing the reflective "self" from difficult thoughts and emotions (Ferguson et al., 2021). Mindful awareness may improve an individual's ability to self-manage difficult emotions during the completion of occupations. In this study we examined how individual differences in mindful awareness are associated with skills in emotional regulation and the subjective experience of positive and negative emotions during the completion of routine occupations.

Literature Review

Mindful Awareness, Emotional Regulation and Emotional Wellbeing

Wellbeing is a multifaceted concept that includes physical, psychological, and emotional health as well as quality of life (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2024). Significant work has documented that mindfulness is associated with psychological wellbeing and improved quality of life (Brown et al., 2025; Hofmann & Gomez, 2017; Kabat-Zinn, 2023). Specific skills in mindful awareness are related to psychological and emotional wellbeing both across individuals and during participation in daily life (Brown et al., 2025). The balance between the frequency of positive and negative emotions during daily life is a crucial aspect of wellbeing (Diehl et al., 2011). Individuals who experience more positive than negative emotions flourish with high rates of life satisfaction, resilience, and psychological wellbeing.

One of the ways that mindful awareness may improve wellbeing is through its use as an emotional regulation strategy (Brown et al., 2025; Ferguson et al., 2021; Raugh & Strauss, 2024). The Dual-Mode Model of Mindful Emotion Regulation identifies the impact of mindfulness skills at several stages of the emotional regulation process (Raugh & Strauss, 2024). Mindful awareness affects attentional deployment towards emotional stimuli and cognitively reframes how individuals relate to and engage with negative emotions. Clinically, mindfulness training improves emotional regulation skills (Hofmann & Gomez, 2017) and individuals high in mindful awareness experience fewer unpleasant and more pleasant emotions daily (Brown et al., 2025).

Skills in mindful awareness support executive functions including cognitive control during challenging computerized cognitive tasks (Lin et al., 2022). Improving mindful awareness in office workers reduced feelings of negative emotions during completion of cognitively demanding multitasking activities (Kudesia et al., 2022). These effects were particularly pronounced among individuals with fewer cognitive resources, highlighting the mediating role of awareness between cognitive demands and negative emotional experiences. Together, these findings suggest that mindful awareness may be particularly relevant in helping manage emotions during the completion of tasks with high cognitive demands.

Emotional Experiences During Occupational Performance

Individuals identify routine occupations as a source of both positive and negative emotions (Hebert, 2025; Hebert & Feldhacker, 2024; Hebert & Ricker, 2023). The Emotional Experiences in Activities of Daily Living Scale (EEADLs) was developed to explore the impact of occupation-embedded emotions on health and wellbeing (Hebert & Ricker, 2023). This scale involves rating the frequency of five emotions (engagement, excitement, frustration, overwhelm, and fatigue) that reflect concepts of mindfulness, flow, and psychological distress during the completion of occupations. The cognitive demands associated with routine occupations have an impact on positive and negative emotional ratings (Hebert, 2025; Hebert & Feldhacker, 2024; Hebert & Ricker, 2023). Occupations with significant cognitive demands (driving, shopping, caring for family members) are rated as more negative than occupations with primary motor demands (making a bed, folding the laundry) or personal care tasks (dressing, eating). Interestingly, ratings of positive emotions show a different relationship with high positivity found in both cognitively demanding and personal care occupations when compared to physically demanding occupations.

The experience of negative emotions during occupations is related to wellbeing among various clinical populations (Hebert, 2025; Hebert & Feldhacker, 2024). Quality of life is reduced among healthy older adults and individuals with Parkinson's disease who experience higher ratings of negative emotions during routine occupations (Hebert & Feldhacker, 2024). Symptoms of anxiety are also associated with high rates of negative emotions but no changes in positive emotions during routine occupations (Hebert, 2025). Despite these findings in clinical populations, little work has explored the relationship between key aspects of wellbeing and emotional experiences during occupations in healthy young adults.

Study Aims

This study explored if mindful awareness was related to the experience of positive and

negative emotions during daily life. Study 1 examined the relationship between mindful awareness and self-reported emotional regulation and rates of daily emotions. Study 2 examined the relationship between mindful awareness and ratings of positive and negative emotions during the completion of routine occupations. Based on the importance of mindful awareness for emotional wellbeing we predicted the following: (1) Individuals with less awareness would experience higher rates of negative emotions; (2) Individuals with greater awareness would experience higher rates of positive emotions; (3) The relationship between mindful awareness and emotion would be strongest when completing occupations that require significant cognitive resources.

METHODS

Study design

This research comprised two separate studies that both utilized a descriptive, cross-sectional survey design. Data for each study were collected at a single point in time using quantitative questionnaires. Study 1 was conducted independently, but its findings informed the development of the occupation-based questionnaire subsequently administered in Study 2. Ethical approval for the studies was obtained from the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board (Project No. 1211896) and the University of South Dakota Institutional Review Board (Study No. 22-139).

STUDY 1

Participants.

One hundred and forty-one healthy individuals participated in this study (32 men, 109 women; mean age = 23.6 (SD = 7.55). Participants were recruited through print and electronic advertisements placed at a large university campus. Exclusion criteria included a diagnosed history of a significant medical, neurological, or mental health disorder. Experienced meditators, defined as having participated in a formalized meditation course of at least 6 hours duration were excluded from this study because the goal was to understand the impact of mindful awareness on emotional experiences in typical healthy adults.

Measures

Mindful Awareness. The frequency of daily mind wandering was assessed using the 15-item Mindful Attention and Awareness Scale (MAAS; Brown & Ryan, 2003). Individuals without explicit mindfulness training are better able to report mind wandering episodes than subjectively rate cognitive skills in mindful awareness so this terminology is utilized in the measure. Frequency was rated on a six-point scale ranging from 1 (almost always) to 6 (almost never). Responses were averaged across items with higher scores reflecting greater mindful awareness (fewer episodes of mind wandering). The scale has high internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.87$) and test-retest reliability ($r = 0.81$).

Emotional Regulation. Skills in emotional regulation were assessed using the 36-item Difficulties in Emotional Regulation Scale (DERS; Gratz & Roemer, 2004). This scale examines emotional regulation skills in six domains: (1) Nonacceptance of emotional responses, (2) Difficulty with goal-directed behavior, (3) Impulse control difficulties, (4) Lack of emotional awareness, (5) Limited access to emotional regulation strategies, (6) Lack of emotional clarity. Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always) with higher scores indicating more difficulty with regulating emotions. The questionnaire has good reliability, with high internal consistency for the full scale ($\alpha = 0.94$), and for the

individual subscales (ranging from α = 0.80 to α = 0.89).

Positive and Negative Emotions. Rates of experienced emotions within the past week were measured using the 20-item Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS: Watson et al., 1988). Frequency of positive (interested, enthusiastic, proud) and negative (upset, nervous, ashamed) moods were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely). Responses were summed independently for each scale with higher scores indicating more intense mood experiences (score range 10-50). Reliability is high with good internal consistency for the positive (α = 0.90) and negative (α = 0.87) subscales.

Procedure

Individuals provided written informed consent followed by a battery of questionnaires including the MAAS, DERS, and PANAS. Questionnaires were administered in person in a one-on-one setting by a trained research assistant followed by additional experimental measures of emotional and cognitive responding for use in another study.

Data Analysis

All analyses were performed using the IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences software (IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 28) and R statistical software (R Core Team, 2021). Normal distribution was checked for all study measures (MAAS, DERS, PANAS) using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. As these variables followed a normal distribution (Kolmogorov-Smirnov test p-value > 0.05), means and standard deviations were used for descriptive statistics. Pearson's correlations were used to explore the relationship between mindful awareness, emotional regulation, and rates of positive and negative emotions. We hypothesized that greater awareness would be associated with more difficulties in emotional regulation and higher rates of negative emotions (hypothesis one). We also hypothesized that greater awareness would be associated with higher rates of positive emotions (hypothesis two).

STUDY 2

Participants

Ninety-two individuals participated in this study (20 men, 72 women; mean age 37.61 (SD = 12.45). Participants were recruited through print and electronic advertisements placed at a mid-sized university campus. Exclusion criteria included a diagnosed history of a significant medical, neurological, or mental health disorder. Experienced meditators, defined as having participated in a formalized meditation course of at least 6 hours duration, were excluded from this study.

Measures

Mindful Awareness. Mindful awareness was measured using the MAAS (see study 1 methods).

Positive and Negative Emotions during Occupational Performance. The frequency of positive and negative emotions during the completion of routine occupations was assessed using the Emotional Experiences in Activities of Daily Living Scale (EEADLs; Hebert & Ricker, 2023). Individuals identified how often they experienced two positive emotions (engagement, excitement) and three negative emotions (frustration, overwhelm, fatigue) during the completion of 25 routine occupations within the past month. Only occupations that are completed on at least a weekly basis are scored using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always) for each of the five emotions. Factor analysis of the 25 occupations has identified three categories that vary in task related cognitive demands:

personal care (getting dressed), simple instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs, making the bed) and complex IADLs (cooking a meal). The emotional subscales demonstrate good internal reliability (α = 0.820 for negative; α = 0.812 for positive). The three occupational categories also display acceptable to good internal reliability: personal care (α = 0.708 for negative affect, and α = 0.723 for positive affect), simple IADLs (α = 0.691 for negative affect, and α = 0.716 for positive affect) and complex IADLs (α = 0.682 for negative affect, and α = 0.635 for positive affect).

Procedure

Data was collected online using Qualtrics Software accessed via a QR code (Qualtrics, 2026). The study materials were made available from November 2022 until March 2023. Participants were presented with the consent information and risks and benefits of the study prior to completing the surveys (MAAS, EEADLs, basic demographic information).

Data Analysis

Normal distribution was checked for all study measures (MAAS, EEADLS) using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. As these variables followed a normal distribution (Kolmogorov-Smirnov test p-value > 0.05), means and standard deviations were used for descriptive statistics. Participants were divided into three mindful awareness groups based on the distribution of MAAS scores (low <3.67, medium = 3.68–4.39, high >4.40) in a normal population. Pearson correlations were used to determine the strength of the relationship between mindful awareness and ratings of both negative (hypothesis one) and positive (hypothesis two) emotions. Between subject ANOVAs were used to compare the three mindful awareness groups on the five emotional ratings. We predicted that the group with low awareness would have higher rates of negative emotions than the group with high awareness (hypothesis one). We further predicted that the group with high awareness would have higher rates of positive emotions than the group with low awareness (hypothesis two). A MANOVA model was used to quantify the impact of occupation related cognitive demands (personal care, simple IADL, complex IADL) on ratings of positive and negative emotions with post hoc comparison using the Least Significant Difference test to determine differences across occupational categories (hypothesis three). To examine the relationship between emotional ratings of occupations of varying cognitive demands and mindful awareness, a multivariate multiple regression was run with mean positive and negative emotions across the three occupational complexity categories as dependent variables and MAAS scores as the predictor variable (hypothesis three). Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$ for all tests.

RESULTS

Study 1: Mindful Awareness, Emotional Regulation Skills, and Rates of Positive and Negative Emotions

Mindful awareness was not associated with frequency of positive and negative emotions. Mindful awareness was associated with skills in emotional regulation, with those with less awareness having more difficulties with regulating emotions. Individuals with fewer skills in emotional regulation experienced higher rates of negative emotions over the past week.

Table 1 shows the relationship between mindful awareness, daily emotion rates, and emotional regulation skills.

Table 1: *Relationship between mindful awareness, daily emotion rates, and emotional regulation skills*

	MAAS	Positive Emotion	Negative Emotion
MAAS	-		
Positive Emotion	0.007	-	
Negative Emotion	-0.109	0.069	-
DERS	-0.495**	-0.148	0.371**

*MAAS: Mindful Attention and Awareness Scale; DERS: Difficulties in Emotional Regulation Scale, *p<0.05, **p<0.01*

Study 2: Mindful Awareness and Negative Emotions during Occupational Performance

Mindful awareness was correlated with the experience of all negative emotions (frustration (r = -0.389, p <0.01), overwhelm (r = -0.513, p <0.01), and fatigue (r = -0.337, p<0.01)) during routine occupations. Group differences were found between individuals with low, medium, and high levels of mindful awareness for emotional ratings of frustration, overwhelm, and the average score of all negative emotions. Post hoc testing indicated that individuals low in mindful awareness had higher rates of frustration than individuals with medium (mean difference = 0.38) and high (mean difference = 0.41) with no differences found between those medium and high in mindful awareness. Individuals low in mindful awareness also had higher rates of overwhelm than those with medium (mean difference = 0.48) or high awareness (mean difference = 0.71) with no difference between those with medium and high awareness.

Table 2 shows the mean emotional rating across all occupations for individuals with low, medium, and high rates of mindful awareness.

Table 2: *Mean emotional rating across all occupations for individuals with low, medium, and high rates of mindful awareness*

Emotion	Low Mindful (n = 35)		Medium Mindful (n = 37)		High Mindful (n = 20)		*F* (2,89)	*p*
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*		
Frustration	2.33	0.52	1.95	0.49	1.92	0.59	6.04	<0.01
Overwhelm	2.54	0.63	2.07	0.55	1.84	0.60	10.53	<0.001
Fatigue	2.36	0.84	2.03	0.59	1.98	0.81	2.33	0.10
Negative Total	2.41	0.62	2.09	0.63	1.91	0.61	4.58	<0.05
Engagement	3.37	0.73	3.46	0.72	3.46	1.11	0.14	0.87
Excitement	2.27	0.48	2.36	0.74	2.47	0.68	0.65	0.53
Positive Total	2.82	0.49	2.91	0.58	2.96	0.81	0.39	0.67

The overall MANOVA model revealed a significant effect of occupational complexity on the combination of emotional ratings (Wilks' lambda = 0.667, F(14, 534), = 8.569, p <0.001). Follow-up univariate ANOVAs indicated a significant effect of occupation complexity on negative emotion ratings. Post hoc comparisons indicated that occupations with higher cognitive demands (complex IADLs) were rated as more negative than simple IADLs (Mean Difference = 0.219) or personal care occupations (Mean Difference = 0.576). Simple IADLs were also rated as more negative than personal care occupations (Mean Difference = 0.356). The multivariate multiple regression revealed that mindful awareness scores were a significant predictor of negative emotions during the completion of personal care, simple IADL, and complex IADLs (Wilks' lambda = 0.738, F(6,85) = 5.017, p <0.007, η2p = 0.262; see table 4 for model parameters).

Table 3 on page 8 shows the differences in emotional ratings for routine personal care, simple, and complex instrumental activities of daily living.

Table 3: *Differences in emotional ratings for routine personal care, simple, and complex instrumental activities of daily living*

Emotion	Personal Care		Simple IADL		Complex IADL		$F(2,273)$	p
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*		
Frustration	1.78	0.61	2.13	0.76	2.31	0.67	14.57	<0.01
Overwhelm	1.87	0.75	2.19	0.77	2.39	0.78	11.21	<0.001
Fatigue	1.70	0.75	2.18	0.98	2.41	0.84	16.57	<0.001
Negative Total	1.78	0.63	2.14	0.74	2.36	0.66	16.88	<0.001
Engagement	3.61	0.94	3.17	0.92	3.52	0.94	6.04	<0.001
Excitement	2.50	0.84	1.75	0.68	2.69	0.77	38.91	<0.001
Positive Total	3.06	0.70	2.45	0.66	3.10	0.74	24.48	<0.001

IADL: Instrumental Activity of Daily Living

Mindful Awareness and Positive Emotions during Occupational Performance

Mindful awareness was not correlated with the experience of positive emotions (engagement ($r = 0.148$, $p = 0.25$), excitement ($r = 0.085$, $p = 0.49$) during routine occupations. No group differences were found between individuals with low, medium, or high rates of mindful awareness for ratings of positive emotions (see Table 2). Rates of positive emotions did vary for the three occupational complexity categories (Wilks' lambda = 0.667, $F(14, 534)$, = 8.569, $p < 0.001$). Post hoc comparisons indicated that both complex IADLs (Mean Difference = 0.6478) and personal care occupations (Mean Difference = 0.605) were rated as more positive than simple IADLs. No difference was found between positive-emotion ratings for complex IADLs and personal care tasks (Mean Difference = 0.042). The multivariate multiple regression revealed than mindful awareness scores were a predictor of positive emotion rates only during the completion of occupations with significant task related cognitive demands. Table 4 shows the multivariate multiple regression with ratings of positive and negative emotions across all three occupational categories predicted by mindful awareness scores.

Table 4: *Multivariate multiple regression with ratings of positive and negative emotions across all three occupational categories predicted by mindful awareness scores*

Predictor	Personal Care Positive	Simple IADL Positive	Complex IADL Positive	Personal Care Negative	Simple IADL Negative	Complex IADL Negative
Intercept	2.84 (0.31)	2.79 (0.32)	1.90 (0.28)	2.65 (0.26)	3.24 (0.31)	3.61 (0.26)
MAAS	0.06 (0.08)	0.09 (0.09)	0.15 (0.08)	-0.24 (0.07)	-0.30 (0.08)	-0.34 (0.07)
R^2	0.006	0.00	0.03	0.11	0.12	0.20
F	0.52	0.98	4.08*	11.63**	12.63**	24.17**

*Note: Unstandardized coefficients (β) are reported with standard errors in parenthesis. *p<0.05; **p<0.01; MAAS: Mindful Attention Awareness Scale; IADL: Instrumental Activity of Daily Living*

DISCUSSION

This study found that scores in mindful awareness were related to the experience of negative emotions during daily life. In Study 1, individuals with higher mindful awareness also demonstrated greater skills in emotional regulation. However, greater mindful awareness was not directly related to the frequency of experiencing positive and negative moods during daily life. In Study 2, the ability to bring mindful awareness to being present during the completion of routine occupations was associated with reduced feelings of frustration and overwhelm during engagement. This relationship was most pronounced during the completion of routine occupations with higher cognitive demands.

Occupational therapy theory has primarily focused on the use of high-value, meaningful, and purposeful occupations to promote health and wellbeing (Ikiugu, 2019; Ikiugu et al., 2022). This is seen in descriptions of occupational engagement as a source for mindfulness and flow (Elliot, 2011; Goodman et al., 2019; Jackman, 2014; Reid, 2011). From this perspective, emotional wellbeing occurs when individuals can select occupations that align with valued life roles and reflect personalized interests and goals

(Ikiugu, 2019). However, individuals must complete a range of routine obligatory occupations that often provide limited opportunities for meaning-making and are only loosely associated with the completion of valued roles. A bias towards experiencing more positive than negative emotions daily is a significant predictor of psychological wellbeing and resilience in the face of adversity (Diehl et al., 2011). This study highlights the importance of promoting emotional wellbeing during the completion of routine occupations. Identifying how mindful awareness skills influence the immersive emotional experience of routine occupations provides an opportunity to modify negative and increase positive aspects of engagement.

This study found that the impact of mindful awareness on negative emotions was particularly evident during completion of occupations with significant cognitive demands. Previous work has found that mindfulness training improves executive functioning and emotional regulation during high stress decision-making and multitasking activities (Kudesia et al., 2022; Lin et al., 2022). Furthermore, mindfulness training appeared to be particularly effective among individuals with reduced cognitive resources. This aligns with the role of mindful awareness in supporting attentional deployment during situations requiring emotional regulation (Raugh & Strauss, 2024). Routine occupations provide individuals with the opportunity to engage cognitive resources in a wide range of ecologically valid real-world contexts. When an individual's cognitive abilities are significantly challenged during occupations negative emotions of frustration, overwhelm, and fatigue may appear. It is plausible that skills in mindful awareness allow individuals to focus attention on key aspects of the occupation, reducing extraneous multitasking and cognitive demands and the resultant negative emotions. Improved understanding of how mindful awareness supports emotional regulation opens new pathways to promote occupational engagement and emotional wellbeing among clients with a range of cognitive abilities.

While we hypothesized that mindful awareness would be associated with increased positive emotions, this study primarily found an association with reduced negative emotions. Unexpectedly, mindful awareness was only associated with increased engagement and excitement during the completion of occupations with the greatest cognitive demands. The EEADLs provides a definition of engagement that aligns with the mindfulness literature (i.e., attentional engagement in the moment-to-moment unfolding of an experience). However, it appears that individuals may view engagement as more general enjoyment with an identified occupation (as evidenced in part by the overlap between engagement and excitement ratings). It is anticipated that the relationship between mindful awareness and positive emotions would emerge more strongly with a scale the captured other aspects of mindfulness (non-judgement, centering, acceptance) that are associated with general positivity.

This study suggests that the completion of routine occupations has a significant impact on emotional wellbeing. It is recommended that occupational therapists use occupation-based interventions including collaborative identification of occupations experienced as emotionally supportive as a means of improving emotional wellbeing among various populations. Occupational therapists may also consider supporting clients in the use of mindfulness skills to promote positive occupational engagement. Occupation-based interventions that promote skills in attentional

deployment, distress tolerance, and present-moment presence and awareness can potentially improve emotional wellbeing. The experience of negative emotions during occupations could be addressed by simplifying cognitive demands via direct task modification. A distinct way that occupational therapists could contribute to improvements in emotional wellbeing is through the completion of occupational analysis to identify the cognitive, physical, and sensory demands that occur in highly negative occupations. Resulting environmental and occupational modifications that reduce multitasking demands may support calmer, more reflective engagement that can improve overall emotional balance.

Limitations

Both studies described in this manuscript involved a cross-sectional analysis of young healthy individuals with no significant mental health conditions. Furthermore, these healthy individuals engaged in a full range of occupations, including those that are meaningful and purposeful. It is unclear how occupational deprivation would impact the emotional experience of routine occupations. Occupational deprivation may occur among people with chronic depression, where symptoms can substantially reduce daily occupational engagement (Eklund & Argentzell, 2026). It would also be important to see how individuals living in situations of occupational deprivation due to economic hardship or other barriers experience emotions during occupations. The routine personal care and household maintenance occupations examined in this study are likely to be overrepresented among the available activities in situations of deprivation potentially resulting in significant changes in emotional ratings.

How factors of occupational opportunity and choice impact emotional experiences during routine occupations should be examined. Qualitative studies that focus on how the individual's phenomenological experience of emotion during occupations is impacted by differing occupational histories could prove informative in this regard. Future work should also examine how awareness training improves emotional experiences during routine occupations. Exploring mindful awareness training among individuals with a range of cognitive abilities may be particularly informative for occupational therapy practitioners who are seeking to improve emotional wellbeing in various clinical populations.

CONCLUSION

Skills in mindful awareness were associated with reduced experiences of negative emotions including frustration and overwhelm during the completion of routine occupations among healthy adults. Understanding how mindful awareness is related to emotional experiences during occupations may allow occupational therapists to promote health and emotional wellbeing by selecting activities that provide a just-right emotional challenge. Education and support regarding engagement in occupations to promote emotional regulation is a potential area of expansion for occupational therapists working to improve emotional wellbeing.

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