

Staff Mindfulness Suite

Testing the benefits of a relaxation room for correctional staff

Agency: Nebraska Department of Correctional Services Correctional Center for Women (NCCW)

Trial Duration:
04/17/17–05/16/17

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Context

Correctional staff have stressful jobs that can lead to exhaustion, anxiety, depression, absenteeism, and high turnover. Viewing serene nature scenes has been shown to improve mood, productivity, social relationships, and mental health.

Key Finding

No difference was found in absenteeism between the groups offered and not offered the mindfulness suite.

*BetaGov trains agency personnel to become research-savvy “Pracademics” who lead trials.

Background

Correctional staff work in a stressful environment that can yield negative psychological and work-related consequences. Providing a quiet place where staff can relax when job stress becomes overwhelming may promote staff wellness, especially when nature scenes are presented. The use of nature imageries has been found to be effective in reducing anxiety and improving performance. The NCCW designed a staff mindfulness suite based on a similar idea used with incarcerated persons with psychiatric disorders. Design features include comfortable seating, artwork, and nature videos.

Trial Design

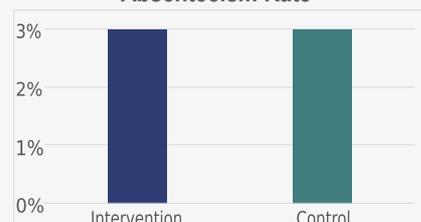
Staff working in two general-population housing units were randomly assigned to trial conditions: the intervention group (n=21) received invitations to use the mindfulness suite, whereas the control group (n=9) did not have access to the suite. The intervention group could request a 30-minute “time out” to use the mindfulness suite during the monthlong trial. Just knowing the suite was available could have influenced outcomes, so data were collected on absenteeism, measured as number of sick days during the trial. Pre- and post-trial surveys collected staff feedback on job satisfaction, psychological functioning, and, for the intervention group, use of the mindfulness suite.

Results

Three staff members in the intervention group used the mindfulness suite during the trial. Results show no difference in sick days between the two groups. No differences were seen between pre- and post-trial survey responses within and across the groups. Most staff described positive relationships with colleagues. Areas for job improvement include recognition, accountability, communication with leadership, and prison management.

This is an important first trial as it demonstrates that NCCW leadership values staff and their wellness. Additionally, this trial provides evidence that the team can successfully test innovations, and specifically shows that a mindfulness suite is a feasible option for addressing staff wellness. To increase the potential of this nature-themed room, NCCW may further survey staff’s opinions regarding logistical and design elements for improvement.

Absenteeism Rate



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