



## Research Snapshot

# A mindfulness-informed social-emotional learning program in kindergarten classrooms



### What is this research about?

Self-regulation involves managing our attention, feelings, thoughts and behaviours. When our self-regulation is impaired it can result in poor developmental and educational outcomes. Evidence-based social emotional learning (SEL) programs have been associated with improved self-regulation relating to social, emotional and academic outcomes for children and youth.

The Hawn Foundation developed one of the first programs to incorporate SEL with mindful awareness. The MindUP™ program was developed on the premise that SEL components (emotion regulation) would be better supported through mindful awareness (e.g., deep breathing). The teacher-delivered, 15 lesson program focuses on teaching children about the brain, learning concepts such as gratitude and optimism, and practicing perspective taking, empathy and mindful awareness.

The current study examined young children's behaviours following the implementation of MindUP™. This study investigated whether children's behaviours (e.g., aggression, anxiety) changed following MindUP™. The study also explored the importance of children's severity of behaviours (i.e., clinical vs. non-clinical levels of behaviours) and its role in how children's behaviours change following MindUP™.

### What you need to know:

This study explored changes in kindergarten children's behaviours following a mindfulness-informed social emotional learning program, MindUP™. Children showed improvements in resiliency and behaviours such as anxiety and depression following MindUP™, but no changes in aggression and hyperactivity. More research is needed to understand these mixed preliminary findings and investigate whether these changes are linked to the MindUP™ program.

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### What did the researchers do?

MindUP™ was delivered to 285 children in 15-junior/senior kindergarten classrooms across eight high needs schools in a Southwestern Ontario school board. This study's sample included 159 young children of which had consent to be involved in the research. Educators completed an assessment scale for each child in their classroom before and after MindUP™ was implemented, measuring children's internalizing behaviours (e.g., anxiety, depression), externalizing behaviours (e.g., aggression and hyperactivity), and resiliency (e.g., recovering from setbacks). This study took place during the pilot year of a 5-year project where the major focus was on feasibility of the MindUP™ program within a catholic school board context. Due to not having a control group (does not receive program), this study was unable to attribute its findings to MindUP™.

## What did the researchers find?

Kindergarten children demonstrated significant improvements in resiliency and internalizing behaviours. There was no significant change in children's externalizing behaviours overall, despite boys displaying externalizing behaviours more often than girls.

When examining the sample it was found that 39% of the children displayed clinical/more severe levels of internalizing and/or externalizing behaviours. The children who displayed clinical/more severe levels of internalizing behaviours before MindUP™, displayed greater improvement in resiliency than their peers following MindUP™.

## How can you use this research?

This study shows promising outcomes with children showing significantly improved resiliency and internalizing behaviours following the MindUP™ program. This study also suggests a potential need for more development and support surrounding self-regulation and social-emotional learning for children in high needs schools during their early years. The mixed findings from this study suggest that more rigorous evaluation, including a control group, is needed to further understand the discrepancy between improvements in internalizing and externalizing behaviours as well as to potentially connect these positive outcomes with the MindUP™ program.

This study also highlights the need for further research on mindfulness-based programs for children and youth as a whole; ensuring that programs like MindUP™, despite their popularity, are effective and not causing harm to the children and youth we are trying to support.

## Original Research Article:

For a complete description of the research and findings, please see the full research article:

Off, Nicole, "Exploring a mindfulness-informed social emotional learning program in kindergarten classrooms: The moderating role of participant characteristics on behavioural outcomes" (2018). *Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository*. 5271.

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