Mindfulness Classes Transform the Experiences of Postpartum Women

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Background

The postpartum period can be a challenging experience for many women as they adjust to the physical and social changes of new motherhood.

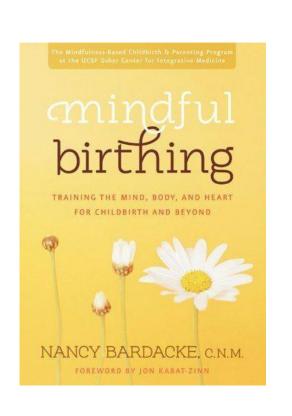


Breastfeeding is one of the postpartum tasks that may be more difficult than expected. Additionally, many women may feel that their postpartum body fails to meet an idealized image, leading to body dissatisfaction.



Mindfulness-based interventions have been developed for stress reduction in a variety of health contexts, including pregnancy. Such interventions may provide strategies for new mothers to handle the challenges of breastfeeding the infant and to improve their body image. The purpose of this study is to explore the postpartum experience of participants in a mindfulness based childbirth and parenting class (MBCP).

Mindfulness: The awareness that arises from paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally.



Methods

Eleven women who participated in a ten week Mindfulness for Childbirth and Parenting course during pregnancy were interviewed within the first year postpartum to discuss their experiences. Data analysis included a coding and categorization process as described by Granaheim (2004). The results of this process are visualized below.



- Worry about the future
- Life and relationship changes
- Change in body's function & form
- Increased demands
- "...that feeling of overwhelm when you're really tired and you have a lot of demands from a little person who you really want to help but aren't sure how to help..."



- Loving Kindness
- Body Scan
- Being with Baby
- Awareness of Breathing

"...so what I'll start doing is just doing the body scan, and I don't think I've ever finished it — I've just fallen asleep during the body scan. And that's really helpful."



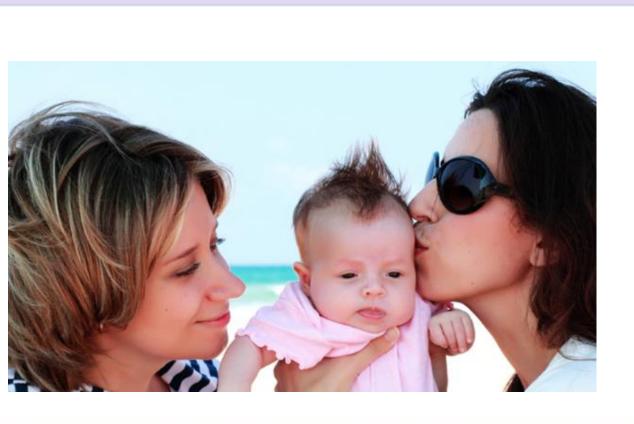
- Awareness and staying present in the moment
- Reading baby cues
- Self-compassion
- Mindful daily activities

"I've developed a little practice of when I notice my belly, saying to myself you know, 'That's a beautiful place where your child came from."



- Magical
- Letting go of past behaviors and patterns
- Embracing a new way of life
- Intense joy
- Resource for the journey

"...so that was really — that eased a lot of my anxiety about being a parent, that I did have the skills, that I could take care of her..."



Limitations

This is a preliminary study, and is limited by the relative homogeneity of race, age, and education among participants (most were white, older than 30, and college educated). Future studies should include a wider variety of participants.



Conclusions

Through the analysis, it was found that mindfulness does have an impact on women's postpartum experiences. Through a variety of formal and informal mindfulness practices, women expressed feelings of positive transformation and life-change.

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*Photos are not of actual participants

