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Experiences of a Community-Based Mindfulness Program Among Bedouin-Arab Participants: A Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Ricardo Tarrasch

ricardo@tauex.tau.ac.il

Tel Aviv University

Fatme Kassem-Agbaria

The Center for Compassionate and Mindful Education (NGO)

Rani Assa Polansky

Tel Aviv University

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Abstract

Objectives Although mindfulness-based programs have been widely implemented across diverse populations, relatively little is known about how mindfulness is experienced within Arab and Muslim communities. The present study explored the experiences of Bedouin-Arab participants who completed a community-based mindfulness program, with particular attention to learning processes, perceived changes, cultural adaptation, and program evaluation.

Method Twenty participants who completed a community-based mindfulness program in a Bedouin-Arab community in southern Israel participated in semi-structured interviews. Interview transcripts were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. The analysis combined AI-assisted first-cycle coding with researcher-led second-cycle coding and thematic development.

Results Analysis resulted in a hierarchical thematic framework comprising six overarching themes and 41 subthemes. The themes captured participants' motivations and expectations for participation, experiences of learning mindfulness practices and concepts, psychological, cognitive, and behavioral transformations associated with mindfulness practice, interpersonal and group processes, cultural and religious interpretations of mindfulness, and evaluations of the program together with intentions for future engagement. Participants described mindfulness as an experiential learning process that contributed to increased self-awareness, emotional regulation, intentionality, and interpersonal sensitivity. Mindfulness practices were frequently integrated into participants' daily lives and interpreted through culturally and religiously meaningful frameworks.

Conclusions The findings suggest that mindfulness can be experienced as both personally transformative and culturally adaptable within a Bedouin-Arab context. Community-based mindfulness programs may be particularly effective when they emphasize experiential learning, group reflection, and opportunities for participants to integrate mindfulness practices into their existing cultural and spiritual frameworks.

Introduction

Over the past three decades, mindfulness has become one of the most widely studied and implemented contemplative approaches within psychology, healthcare, and education. Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs), including Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and related programs, have been associated with improvements in psychological wellbeing, emotional regulation, stress management, attention, and resilience across a wide range of populations (Grossman et al., 2004; Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Khoury et al., 2015; Shapiro et al., 2006). As mindfulness has expanded beyond clinical settings into schools, workplaces, universities, and community contexts, researchers have increasingly emphasized the importance of understanding not only whether mindfulness is effective, but also how participants experience and integrate mindfulness practices into their everyday lives (Crane et al., 2017).

Although quantitative studies have demonstrated the benefits of mindfulness across diverse outcomes, qualitative research has shown that participants' experiences of mindfulness are often complex, multifaceted, and shaped by personal, social, and cultural contexts. Participants do not simply acquire mindfulness techniques; rather, they engage in processes of learning, interpretation, experimentation, and adaptation through which mindfulness becomes meaningful in their lives. Qualitative studies have highlighted the importance of experiential learning, embodied awareness, self-reflection, interpersonal processes, and the gradual integration of mindfulness into daily routines and personal identities (Malpass et al., 2012; Mathews & Anderson, 2021).

At the same time, concerns have increasingly been raised regarding the cultural generalizability of mindfulness-based interventions. Mindfulness-based programs have been developed, tested, and disseminated primarily within Western, educated, and predominantly White populations, raising questions regarding their cultural relevance and applicability to minority communities (Christopher et al., 2009; Eichel et al., 2021). A review of mindfulness and meditation research found that only a small proportion of published studies explicitly addressed culturally diverse populations or incorporated cultural adaptations into intervention design (DeLuca et al., 2018). This limitation is important because increasing evidence suggests that interventions adapted to local cultural and contextual realities are more likely to be acceptable, feasible, and effective than interventions implemented without such adaptations (Movsisyan et al., 2021). Consequently, researchers have increasingly emphasized the need to examine how mindfulness is experienced within diverse cultural contexts and how mindfulness-based programs can be adapted to better reflect participants' social, cultural, and community realities (Bautista et al., 2022; Woods-Giscombé & Gaylord, 2014).

These concerns are particularly relevant in Arab and Muslim communities, where mindfulness research remains relatively limited. Existing studies suggest that mindfulness practices may be interpreted through cultural, religious, and communal frameworks that differ substantially from those represented in the mainstream mindfulness literature (Rothman & Coyle, 2018; Thomas et al., 2017). An emerging body of work has begun to adapt mindfulness-based programs to Muslim populations by incorporating culturally and religiously relevant language, examples and practices (Al-Ghalib & Salim, 2018; Thomas et al., 2016). These adaptations have been associated with improvements in wellbeing, stress reduction, self-esteem, depression, and anxiety among Muslim participants in a variety of contexts (Al-Ghalib & Salim, 2018; Aslami et al., 2017). However, most existing studies have focused on intervention outcomes, while comparatively little attention has been given to how participants themselves experience, interpret, and integrate mindfulness practices within their cultural and social worlds. This gap is particularly evident within Arab minority communities, where questions regarding cultural adaptation, acceptability, and lived experience remain largely unexplored.

The Bedouin-Arab community in Israel represents a particularly important context in which to explore these questions. Bedouin society has undergone rapid social, educational, and economic transformation during recent decades while maintaining strong family, communal, cultural, and religious traditions (Abu-Saad, 2008). These changes, together with ongoing social and economic challenges experienced by

many Bedouin communities, have generated increasing interest in interventions that promote psychological wellbeing and resilience. Yet little is known about how mindfulness is experienced within this cultural context or how participants make sense of mindfulness practices in relation to their existing values, identities, and daily lives.

The present study addresses this gap through a qualitative examination of participants' experiences in a community-based mindfulness program delivered within a Bedouin-Arab community. Using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the study explores how participants experienced mindfulness practices, what changes they perceived in themselves, how they interpreted mindfulness within their social and cultural contexts, and how they evaluated the program as a whole.

Rather than focusing primarily on clinical outcomes, the study seeks to illuminate the lived experience of learning and practicing mindfulness within a culturally distinctive community. By examining participants' narratives of engagement, challenge, transformation, and adaptation, the study contributes to growing efforts to understand how mindfulness is experienced across diverse cultural settings and how mindfulness-based programs may be implemented in culturally responsive ways.

The study is informed by a constructivist understanding of mindfulness as an experience whose meaning emerges through participants' interactions with mindfulness practices, social relationships, and cultural contexts. From this perspective, mindfulness is not viewed as a fixed intervention that produces uniform effects, but as a set of practices that participants actively interpret, adapt, and integrate into their everyday lives. Examining participants' experiences can therefore provide insight into both the processes through which mindfulness becomes meaningful and the contextual factors that shape its implementation within culturally diverse communities.

The study was guided by the following research question: How do Bedouin-Arab participants experience, interpret, and integrate mindfulness practices within their personal, social, cultural, and religious lives following participation in a community-based mindfulness program?

Method

Participants

Twenty Bedouin-Arab participants who completed a community-based mindfulness program and agreed to participate in follow-up interviews were included in the study. The participants were drawn from three cohorts of a mindfulness program implemented in a Bedouin-Arab community in southern Israel. The program initially targeted university students and was subsequently expanded to include professionals, primarily from the education, health, and welfare sectors. Across the three cohorts, 141 individuals applied to participate, 69 were admitted to the program, and 44 successfully completed all program requirements. Participants described varying degrees of religious commitment, ranging from moderate religious observance to strong engagement with Islamic practices. Most had little or no previous formal

experience with mindfulness, meditation, or related contemplative practices, although a small number reported prior interest in meditation, psychology, personal development, or spiritual practices

Interview participants ranged in age from 19 to 50 years (M = 27.2, SD = 8.1) and represented diverse educational and occupational backgrounds. The sample comprised 14 women and 6 men. Most participants were single (n = 16), while three were married and one was divorced. Participants were recruited from all three program cohorts through random contact among program completers, with the goal of ensuring representation across cohorts. Recruitment continued until 20 interviews had been completed. Detailed participant characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Participant Characteristics

Participant	Age	Gender	Marital Status	Education
P1	27	Male	Single	B.Sc. Civil Engineering
P2	25	Male	Single	Diploma in Interior Design
P3	26	Female	Single	B.A. in Culture, Creativity, and Production
P4	24	Male	Single	Diploma in engineering (did not finish)
P5	24	Female	Single	Teacher training
P6	27	Male	Single	B.A. Human Resources Management; pursuing M.A. in Management and Innovation
P7	22	Female	Single	Sociology student
P8	19	Female	Single	Psychology undergraduate student
P9	26	Female	Single	B.A. Comparative Literature and Islamic Studies
P10	30	Female	Single	B.A. Social Sciences (Criminology and Anthropology)
P11	21	Female	Single	Diploma in civil engineering
P12	34	Female	Married	B.Sc. Chemical Engineering
P13	32	Female	Married	B.A. Sociology and Education; M.A. Educational Counseling
P14	50	Female	Divorced	Master's degree
P15	20	Female	Single	Student: vocational training
P16	24	Female	Single	B.Sc. Computer Science
P17	26	Male	Single	Software Engineering
P18	20	Male	Single	Phd student
P19	20	Female	Single	B.A. Public Administration and Policy; M.A. student
P20	47	Female	Married	English teacher

Mindfulness Program

Participants attended a community-based mindfulness program delivered in the Bedouin-Arab city of Rahat. The program consisted of 14 weekly sessions, each lasting approximately three academic hours and a one day retreat, before the last session. The program was led by an experienced mindfulness

practitioner and facilitator with extensive experience in contemplative practice and mindfulness-based group facilitation. The curriculum was developed collaboratively with experts in mindfulness, psychology, and education. In addition to the weekly meetings, participants attended a full-day mindfulness retreat in a natural setting. The program combined theoretical instruction, experiential mindfulness practices, group discussions, reflective exercises, and weekly home practice assignments. The curriculum drew upon concepts from mindfulness, neuroscience, psychology, emotional regulation, self-compassion, and interpersonal awareness.

A central goal of the program was to cultivate present-moment awareness and to help participants develop a more conscious relationship with thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, stress, and interpersonal experiences. Participants were encouraged to integrate mindfulness practices into their everyday lives through structured home practice assignments and reflective journaling.

The program emphasized experiential learning through a range of mindfulness practices, including attention training, awareness of thoughts and emotions, mindful movement, self-compassion exercises, reflective writing, and nature-based contemplative activities (see Table 2). Group discussions and sharing circles were incorporated throughout the program to facilitate reflection, integration of learning, and peer support.

To support program fidelity, the facilitator followed a structured curriculum that specified the themes, practices, home assignments, and learning objectives for each session. Although discussions were adapted to participants' experiences and emerging needs, the core content and sequence of practices were delivered consistently across sessions.

Table 2

Overview of the Mindfulness Program

Session	Main topic	Examples of Practices and Activities
1	Introduction to mindfulness, expectations, attention, and emotional regulation	Grounding exercises, body awareness, attention training, introductory meditation, group activities
2	Mindfulness as mental training and neuroplasticity	Breath awareness, diaphragmatic breathing, observing breathing without intervention
3	Awareness and turning inward: from autopilot to presence	Mindful eating (date exercise), beginner's mind, sensory awareness
4	Attention, concentration, listening, and awareness	Sitting meditation, delaying automatic reactions, awareness of impulses and sensations
5	Awareness of thoughts	Observing thoughts, cognitive defusion, "leaves on a stream" meditation, reflective exercises
6	Awareness of emotions and bodily sensations	Body awareness meditation, observing emotional experiences without judgment
7	Understanding stress and tension	Mindful movement, awareness of bodily limitations, stress education
8	Working with stress during challenges and crises	Mountain meditation, stress awareness practices, resilience-building exercises
9	Self-care and self-compassion	Mindful walking, guided meditation, role-model reflection exercises
10	Compassionate communication and self-compassion	Self-compassion meditation, reflective writing, identifying personal needs
11	Forgiveness, compassion, and qualities of the heart	Forgiveness meditation, reflection on personal and interpersonal experiences
12	Compassionate Communication: Facts vs. Interpretation	Distinguishing observations from judgments, mindful listening exercises, awareness of personal and interpersonal needs, empathic reflection practices
13	Compassionate Communication: Theory and Practice	Self-compassion exercises, responsive versus reactive communication, perspective-taking activities, interpersonal communication practice, reflective group discussions
Retreat day	Nature retreat and compassionate communication	Mindful walking, nature meditation, tree meditation, environmental awareness, communication exercises
14	Mindfulness as a way of life	Reflection, integration of learning, group discussion, course evaluation

Data Collection

Participants were recruited from a community-based mindfulness program conducted in a Bedouin-Arab community in southern Israel. Individuals who completed the program were invited to participate in a follow-up qualitative interview exploring their experiences of mindfulness and their perceptions of the course. Participation was voluntary, and all participants provided informed consent prior to participation.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted several weeks following completion of the program to allow participants time to reflect on their experiences and any perceived changes associated with mindfulness practice. Interviews were conducted individually in Arabic by a trained interviewer using an interview guide developed for the study.

Questions explored participants' motivations for joining the program, experiences of mindfulness practices, perceived psychological, behavioral, interpersonal, and spiritual changes, challenges encountered during participation, and evaluations of the program. Interviewers used follow-up questions and prompts to encourage elaboration and reflection on specific experiences.

Interviews lasted between 14 and 74 minutes (M = 35, SD = 16), were audio-recorded with participants' permission, and subsequently transcribed verbatim in Arabic. The transcripts were then translated into English to facilitate analysis and reporting. To preserve meaning and cultural nuance, the translated transcripts were reviewed by bilingual members of the research team. Identifying information was removed during transcription to protect participant confidentiality.

The study was approved by the XXXX University institutional ethics committee, and all procedures were conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines for research involving human participants.

Data Analysis

The interview data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis following the six-phase approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis combined AI-assisted first-cycle coding with researcher-led second-cycle coding and thematic development.

In the first phase, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim in Arabic using Samsung Voice Recorder. The resulting transcripts were reviewed and corrected through an iterative process involving manual verification and assistance from ChatGPT (OpenAI). ChatGPT was also used to support the translation of the transcripts into English. To ensure linguistic accuracy, cultural nuance, and preservation of meaning, the translated transcripts were subsequently reviewed and refined by a fluent Arabic–English speaker. The translated transcripts were subsequently segmented into sentence-level meaning units, each of which was coded inductively using a large language model (LLM). A standardized prompt based on Braun and Clarke's principles of data-driven coding was implemented using the Perplexity platform (Perplexity AI). The prompt was used to assign an initial descriptive code representing the primary topic or meaning of each sentence-level meaning unit. The purpose of this stage was to generate detailed first-cycle codes that remained close to participants' language and experiences. This process resulted in 2,330 coded segments across the 20 interviews. The coding

process generated 2,262 unique descriptive codes, reflecting the highly granular sentence-level coding strategy.

The AI-generated codes were treated as preliminary analytic labels rather than as themes. In the second phase, the research team reviewed the complete set of coded segments and examined the resulting codes for similarities, overlaps, and conceptual relationships. Codes reflecting related experiences, perceptions, behaviors, or meanings were grouped together into candidate subthemes. This stage functioned as a second-cycle coding process, moving from highly granular descriptive codes toward more abstract conceptual categories.

Next, the candidate subthemes were reviewed and refined through an iterative process of comparison across participants and consultation with the original transcripts. The researchers moved repeatedly between the coded extracts, subthemes, and interview transcripts to ensure that the developing analytic structure remained grounded in participants' accounts. Subthemes were revised, merged, split, or reorganized where necessary to improve conceptual coherence and distinctiveness.

In the subsequent phase, related subthemes were clustered into higher-order themes that captured broader patterns of shared meaning across the dataset. Theme development was guided by both semantic content and underlying patterns in participants' experiences. Candidate themes were reviewed against the entire dataset to evaluate their internal coherence, consistency, and explanatory value. Themes that were overly broad, insufficiently supported, or conceptually overlapping were refined until a coherent thematic framework was achieved.

To enhance transparency, frequency tables were generated for codes, subthemes, and themes. These frequencies were used descriptively to characterize the prevalence of patterns within the data; however, consistent with Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis, theme importance was determined by conceptual significance and relevance to the research questions rather than frequency alone.

The final stage involved defining and naming the themes and subthemes, identifying their central organizing concepts, and selecting representative quotations. Through this iterative process, the original set of detailed AI-generated codes was consolidated into a hierarchical thematic framework comprising six overarching themes and 41 subthemes. To focus on participants' experiences of the mindfulness program, demographic self-descriptions and interview-management statements were excluded from thematic interpretation, resulting in a final framework based on 1,841 substantive coded segments. Figure 1 presents the final hierarchical thematic framework.

Although AI was used to support the initial sentence-level coding process, all second-cycle coding, theme development, theme refinement, thematic naming, and interpretation were conducted by the researchers. Consistent with Braun and Clarke's reflexive approach, the final themes were understood as analytic constructions developed through researcher engagement with the data rather than categories automatically derived from the transcripts.

Trustworthiness

Several strategies were employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis. First, the researchers repeatedly reviewed the coded segments, candidate subthemes, and original interview transcripts throughout the analytic process. This iterative movement between data extracts and emerging interpretations helped ensure that themes remained grounded in participants' accounts. Second, the development of themes involved multiple rounds of refinement, including the merging, splitting, and reorganization of subthemes to improve conceptual coherence and distinctiveness. Third, representative quotations were retained to provide transparency between participants' narratives and the researchers' interpretations. Fourth, deviant or contradictory cases were actively examined to ensure that the thematic framework captured both common and divergent experiences. Finally, AI-generated codes were used only as preliminary descriptive labels, while all higher-order coding, theme development, theme naming, and interpretation were conducted by the researchers.

Researcher Reflexivity

Consistent with Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis approach, the researchers acknowledge their active role in the construction and interpretation of themes. Theme development was informed by ongoing reflection on how personal assumptions, disciplinary perspectives, and familiarity with mindfulness research might shape the analytic process. Throughout the analysis, the researchers sought to balance interpretive insight with close attention to participants' accounts, recognizing that themes represent analytic constructions rather than objective categories inherent within the data.

Results

Analysis of the 20 interviews resulted in a hierarchical thematic framework comprising six overarching themes and 41 subthemes. The six themes captured participants' motivations and expectations for participation, experiences of learning mindfulness practices and concepts, psychological, cognitive, and behavioral transformations associated with mindfulness practice, interpersonal and group processes, cultural and religious interpretations of mindfulness, and evaluations of the program together with intentions for future engagement. Figure 1 presents a conceptual overview of the relationships among the six themes, while Table 3 summarizes the central meaning and participant representation of each theme. The complete coding hierarchy, comprising six overarching themes, 41 subthemes, and associated lower-level categories, is presented in Appendix A. Detailed prevalence information for all themes and subthemes is presented in Appendix B.

Figure 1

Thematic Journey of Participants' Experiences in the Mindfulness Program

Table 3

Final Thematic Framework and Prevalence of Subthemes

Theme	Central Meaning	Number of Subthemes	Participants Represented
Motivations and Initial Expectations	Reasons for joining the program and expectations regarding mindfulness	6	20
Learning Mindfulness Practices and Concepts	Experiences of learning and practicing mindfulness skills	7	20
Psychological, Cognitive, and Behavioral Transformation	Perceived personal changes associated with mindfulness practice	13	20
Interpersonal and Group Processes	Social and relational aspects of participation	4	19
Cultural and Religious Negotiation of Mindfulness	Integration of mindfulness within religious and cultural frameworks	5	19
Program Evaluation and Future Engagement	Evaluation of the course and intentions for future practice	6	20
Total		**41**	**20**

The six themes and their associated subthemes are presented in greater detail in Appendix B. Among these, the most prominent themes concerned participants' engagement with mindfulness practices, experiences of personal transformation, and the integration of mindfulness within cultural and religious contexts. Although prevalence was examined to characterize the distribution of themes across the dataset, thematic importance was determined primarily by conceptual relevance and contribution to understanding participants' experiences, consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis approach.

Theme 1: Motivations and Initial Expectations

Participants described a variety of motivations for joining the mindfulness course. The most common motivation was the desire to improve emotional wellbeing and develop more effective ways of coping with everyday pressures. Several participants viewed the program as an opportunity to address stress, improve emotional balance, and learn practical strategies for managing difficult experiences.

Participants frequently described entering the course during periods of personal challenge, uncertainty, or self-exploration. For some, mindfulness represented a practical tool for managing stress and emotional pressures. For others, it offered an opportunity to learn something new about themselves and explore unfamiliar approaches to wellbeing.

One participant explained:

I heard about the course and thought it might help me deal with stress and pressures in daily life. (P12)

Similarly, another participant described seeking a deeper understanding of themselves:

I was interested because I wanted to learn something new about myself and how to understand my thoughts better. (P13)

Curiosity also emerged as a common motivation. Some participants had little prior knowledge of mindfulness but were interested in exploring an unfamiliar approach to wellbeing. As one participant noted:

At the beginning I didn't really know what mindfulness meant, but I was curious to see what it was about. (P8)

Others reported a longstanding interest in meditation or contemplative practices and viewed the course as an opportunity to deepen an existing interest.

Taken together, these accounts suggest that participation was motivated by a combination of practical needs, personal growth aspirations, curiosity, and a desire for emotional wellbeing. At the same time, participants entered the program with varying expectations, ranging from hopes for stress reduction to uncertainty regarding what mindfulness might offer.

Theme 2: Learning Mindfulness Practices and Concepts

Participants frequently discussed their experiences of learning mindfulness practices and developing a new understanding of mindful awareness. Breathing exercises, body-awareness practices, walking meditation, and sensory awareness activities were commonly described as meaningful learning experiences.

For many participants, mindfulness became meaningful through direct experience rather than theoretical explanation. Learning occurred through repeated engagement with practices that encouraged attention to bodily sensations, breathing, thoughts, emotions, and everyday experiences. Participants often described mindfulness as a skill that developed gradually through practice.

Several participants emphasized the importance of breathing practices as a foundation for mindfulness. One participant reflected:

The breathing exercises were the thing I connected with most because they helped me focus on the present moment. (P17)

Others highlighted the role of bodily awareness in helping them notice experiences that had previously gone unnoticed:

I learned how to notice what was happening in my body instead of immediately reacting. (P12)

Participants often described mindfulness not only as a collection of exercises but also as a new way of relating to thoughts, emotions, and experiences. Many reported learning to observe internal experiences with greater acceptance and less judgment.

The learning process was not always straightforward. Several participants described difficulties maintaining concentration, dealing with distractions, or establishing a regular practice routine. As one participant explained:

At first it was difficult to stay focused, but over time it became easier and more natural. (P6)

Overall, participants viewed mindfulness as a learned capacity rather than an innate skill. The gradual acquisition of attentional, emotional, and reflective skills was frequently described as one of the most valuable aspects of the program.

Theme 3: Psychological, Cognitive, and Behavioral Transformation

The most extensive theme concerned participants' descriptions of psychological, cognitive, and behavioral changes associated with mindfulness practice. Many participants reported becoming more aware of their thoughts, emotions, and habitual reactions. This increased awareness was often described as the foundation for broader personal transformation.

Participants frequently described mindfulness as helping them observe internal experiences with greater clarity and less automatic reactivity. Increased awareness was often accompanied by a greater capacity to pause, reflect, and respond intentionally to challenging situations. Several participants portrayed this process as a fundamental shift in how they related to themselves and their daily experiences.

One participant reflected:

I became more aware of my emotions and learned that I don't have to act on every feeling immediately. (P13)

Similarly, another participant described becoming less impulsive in everyday situations:

Before the course I reacted quickly, but now I stop and think before responding. (P17)

Participants frequently reported improvements in emotional regulation and an increased ability to manage difficult emotional experiences. Several described feeling calmer and more balanced in situations that would previously have provoked stress, anxiety, or frustration. As one participant explained:

The course helped me calm down and deal with situations in a more balanced way. (P20)

Others highlighted changes in attention and awareness that extended beyond emotional functioning:

I started paying attention to things that I never noticed before, both in myself and in my surroundings. (P8)

Many participants also described behavioral changes in daily life. They reported becoming more deliberate in their actions, more thoughtful in decision-making, and more capable of pausing before responding automatically to challenging situations.

Taken together, participants' accounts suggest that mindfulness practice contributed to a broad process of personal transformation involving emotional regulation, cognitive awareness, behavioral flexibility, and a more reflective approach to everyday life.

Theme 4: Interpersonal and Group Processes

Participants frequently described the social dimensions of the mindfulness program as an important part of their experience. Beyond the mindfulness exercises themselves, the group setting provided opportunities for shared learning, reflection, and interpersonal growth.

Participants often emphasized that listening to the experiences of others helped them normalize their own challenges and gain new perspectives. The group context provided opportunities for mutual support, learning, and the development of greater awareness in relationships both within and outside the course.

One participant reflected on the value of hearing others' experiences:

Hearing other people's experiences helped me realize that many of us struggle with similar things. (P14)

Similarly, another participant emphasized the importance of group discussions:

The discussions after the exercises were very important because everyone brought a different perspective. (P20)

Participants also reported changes in the way they interacted with others outside the course. Many described becoming more attentive listeners and more aware of other people's viewpoints. One participant explained:

I learned to listen more carefully instead of immediately preparing my response. (P13)

For some participants, mindfulness also influenced family relationships. They reported becoming more present with family members, responding more calmly during disagreements, and communicating more thoughtfully.

The group atmosphere itself was frequently described as supportive and psychologically safe. As one participant noted:

The group felt like a safe place where people could speak openly without being judged. (P6)

Together, these accounts suggest that the benefits of mindfulness extended beyond individual experience and contributed to meaningful changes in social and relational functioning.

Theme 5: Cultural and Religious Negotiation of Mindfulness

A distinctive feature of participants' accounts involved the relationship between mindfulness, religion, and culture. Many participants reflected on how mindfulness practices related to their religious beliefs and cultural values.

Participants frequently described a process of interpretation and adaptation through which mindfulness became connected to familiar religious and cultural concepts. For some, questions regarding compatibility emerged early in the course, whereas others immediately recognized similarities between mindfulness and existing spiritual practices.

One participant described the central role of spirituality in their life:

I consider myself a religious person and try to maintain that spiritual aspect in my daily life. (P9)

Several participants initially questioned whether mindfulness was compatible with their religious traditions. However, these concerns often diminished as they gained experience with the practices. As one participant explained:

At first I wondered whether mindfulness was compatible with religion, but later I found many similarities with prayer and reflection. (P13)

Others described mindfulness as supporting rather than challenging their existing religious commitments:

Being religious is an important part of my life, and I felt that mindfulness supported rather than contradicted that. (P9)

Participants also discussed broader community attitudes toward mindfulness. As one participant observed:

Some people in the community have misconceptions about meditation, but after participating I saw it differently. (P20)

These reflections highlight the importance of cultural adaptation and contextualization when implementing mindfulness programs within religious and culturally distinctive communities. Rather than perceiving mindfulness as a foreign practice, many participants ultimately interpreted it through culturally familiar religious and spiritual concepts. The process marked a transition from a more mechanical understanding of religious virtues, often motivated by fear of God, to a deeper appreciation of their meaning and relevance in everyday life.

Theme 6: Program Evaluation and Future Engagement

Participants generally evaluated the mindfulness program positively. Many described the course as meaningful, useful, and personally beneficial. Positive evaluations frequently focused on both the content of the program and the quality of facilitation.

Participants frequently emphasized the value of learning practical skills that could be applied beyond the classroom setting. Many described mindfulness as becoming integrated into daily life and reported ongoing use of techniques learned during the course.

One participant summarized the experience as follows:

This was one of the most meaningful experiences I have had, and I would definitely recommend it to others. (P14)

Similarly, another participant highlighted the lasting impact of the practices:

I plan to continue practicing because I felt the benefits in my daily life. (P17)

The facilitator was also frequently identified as an important contributor to participants' positive experiences. As one participant noted:

The facilitator created an atmosphere where everyone felt comfortable participating. (P20)

Although evaluations were overwhelmingly positive, participants also offered constructive suggestions for improvement. Some expressed a desire for a longer program, additional sessions, or more opportunities for continued practice.

One participant commented:

I wish the course had been longer because I felt we were only beginning to learn the skills. (P12)

Overall, participants viewed the mindfulness program as a valuable and meaningful experience that contributed positively to their wellbeing, self-awareness, and daily functioning. Many expressed a desire to continue practicing mindfulness and recommended that similar programs be made available to others within their communities.

Discussion

The present study explored participants' experiences of a community-based mindfulness program delivered within a Bedouin-Arab community. Using reflexive thematic analysis, six overarching themes were identified, capturing participants' motivations for participation, experiences of learning mindfulness practices, psychological and behavioral changes, interpersonal processes, cultural and religious interpretations, and evaluations of the program. Together, the findings suggest that mindfulness was

experienced not only as a set of techniques but as a process of learning, self-discovery, and adaptation that extended beyond the formal course setting.

Learning mindfulness as experiential knowledge

One of the most prominent findings concerned the process through which participants learned mindfulness. Participants frequently described entering the course with limited understanding of mindfulness and often with uncertainty regarding its purpose. Over time, however, mindfulness became meaningful through direct experience rather than theoretical instruction alone.

Breathing exercises, body awareness practices, walking meditation, and sensory awareness activities were repeatedly described as turning points in participants' understanding of mindfulness. Rather than viewing mindfulness as an abstract concept, participants came to understand it through embodied experience. This finding is consistent with conceptualizations of mindfulness as an experiential mode of knowing that develops through practice rather than intellectual understanding alone (Crane et al., 2017; Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Shapiro et al., 2006).

Participants also emphasized that learning mindfulness was gradual and sometimes challenging. Difficulties maintaining attention, managing distractions, and sustaining regular practice were common. Nevertheless, many participants described these challenges as integral to the learning process itself. Rather than viewing distraction as a sign of failure, participants increasingly came to understand it as an expected aspect of mindfulness practice and an opportunity to repeatedly return attention to present-moment experience. This interpretation is consistent with contemporary conceptualizations of mindfulness as an ongoing process of attentional training rather than the achievement of a sustained state of concentration (Lindsay & Creswell, 2019).

Psychological, cognitive, and behavioral transformation

The most substantial theme concerned participants' descriptions of personal transformation. Participants reported increased awareness of thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, and habitual reactions. Many described becoming more attentive to internal experiences and less likely to respond automatically to challenging situations.

These findings align with theoretical models proposing that mindfulness enhances self-regulation through increased awareness and reduced automaticity (Shapiro et al., 2006). Participants frequently reported pausing before reacting, observing emotions without immediately acting upon them, and making more deliberate decisions. Such changes suggest the development of greater psychological flexibility and self-regulatory capacity (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010).

Importantly, participants did not describe mindfulness solely as a cognitive process. Rather, changes were experienced simultaneously at emotional, behavioral, and interpersonal levels. Improvements in emotional regulation were accompanied by increased calmness, self-compassion, patience, and

resilience. Several participants also reported applying mindfulness in daily routines, work environments, academic settings, and family interactions.

The findings therefore support the view that mindfulness may function as a broad process of psychological transformation that extends beyond symptom reduction (Baer et al., 2019). Participants' accounts suggest that mindfulness became integrated into everyday life as a way of relating differently to thoughts, emotions, and experiences, reflecting processes of decentering, reperceiving, and psychological flexibility that have been identified as important mechanisms of long-term mindfulness practice (Bernstein et al., 2015).

Mindfulness Within a Religious and Cultural Context

A particularly noteworthy finding concerned participants' efforts to interpret mindfulness within existing religious and cultural frameworks. Some participants initially questioned whether mindfulness practices were compatible with their religious beliefs, while others viewed mindfulness primarily as a human or psychological practice.

Over time, however, many participants identified similarities between mindfulness and familiar religious practices such as prayer, reflection, attentiveness, and spiritual awareness. Rather than replacing existing beliefs, mindfulness was frequently interpreted through them. This observation is consistent with growing scholarship suggesting that mindfulness can be meaningfully integrated into diverse religious traditions and does not necessarily require the abandonment of pre-existing spiritual frameworks (Rothman & Coyle, 2018; Thomas et al., 2017).

At the same time, participants' accounts suggest that cultural adaptation played an important role in the acceptability of mindfulness. Mindfulness was often understood through locally meaningful examples, metaphors, and practices. These findings support broader arguments that mindfulness interventions may be strengthened when they are implemented in culturally responsive ways that allow participants to connect mindfulness practices with their own values and lived experiences (Bautista et al., 2022).

Community-Based Mindfulness in a Bedouin-Arab Population

The present study contributes to a relatively limited literature examining mindfulness in Arab and Muslim communities. Participants frequently described the group setting as an important aspect of their experience. Opportunities for sharing experiences, learning from others, and participating in a supportive environment were perceived as central components of the program.

These findings may be particularly relevant within collectivist cultural contexts, where interpersonal relationships and communal belonging play important roles in everyday life (Gearing et al., 2013). Participants often described mindfulness not only as an individual practice but also as something that influenced relationships, communication, family interactions, and community engagement.

The findings further suggest that community-based mindfulness programs may provide culturally acceptable opportunities for discussing emotional wellbeing, self-awareness, and psychological growth. Several participants described introducing mindfulness concepts to family members, students, colleagues, or friends, suggesting that the effects of mindfulness may extend beyond individual participants and influence wider social networks. This observation is consistent with research indicating that health-related knowledge and practices are often transmitted through interpersonal networks and community relationships, particularly within collectivist and minority communities (Movsisyan et al., 2021).

Implications for Culturally Adapted Mindfulness Programs

The findings have several practical implications. First, mindfulness programs implemented in culturally diverse settings should allow participants sufficient space to interpret mindfulness through their own cultural and spiritual frameworks. Participants appeared to benefit when mindfulness was presented as a flexible practice rather than as a fixed ideology (Movsisyan et al., 2021).

Second, the importance of group processes suggests that community-based formats may be particularly effective in collectivist contexts. Opportunities for discussion, reflection, and shared learning were frequently identified as meaningful components of the program.

Third, the findings highlight the value of culturally familiar facilitators who can introduce mindfulness practices in ways that feel relevant and accessible to participants. Trust, cultural sensitivity, and contextual understanding may play important roles in facilitating engagement with mindfulness practices in communities where mindfulness remains relatively unfamiliar (Woods-Giscombé & Gaylord, 2014).

Collectively, the findings suggest that mindfulness programs implemented in culturally diverse communities may benefit from emphasizing experiential learning, creating opportunities for shared reflection, and allowing participants to connect mindfulness practices to personally meaningful cultural and spiritual frameworks. Such approaches may enhance both engagement and the long-term integration of mindfulness into everyday life.

Limitations

Several limitations should be considered. First, the study relied on a relatively small sample of participants from a single Bedouin-Arab community. Although participants represented diverse educational and occupational backgrounds, the sample consisted largely of individuals with postsecondary education and professional or academic aspirations who voluntarily enrolled in a mindfulness program. As such, the participants are unlikely to be representative of the broader Bedouin-Arab population, which continues to experience substantial socioeconomic disadvantage and lower levels of educational attainment relative to the general population. The findings therefore reflect a

specific subgroup within a particular cultural context and may not generalize to other populations or communities.

Second, the study relied on retrospective interviews conducted after completion of the program. Participants' accounts may therefore reflect processes of reflection and reconstruction rather than direct reports of experiences as they occurred.

Third, participants self-selected into the mindfulness program and most completed the majority of sessions. Consequently, the sample may have included individuals who were more open to contemplative practices, personal development, or psychological self-exploration than members of the broader community. Similarly, the perspectives of individuals who chose not to enroll, attended only a small number of sessions, or withdrew from the program are not represented in the present analysis. Future research may benefit from examining the experiences of participants who discontinue mindfulness programs or who remain skeptical about mindfulness throughout participation.

Fourth, the study focused on participants' subjective experiences rather than objective measures of behavioral or psychological change. Although participants described meaningful personal transformations, the study was not designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the program or determine whether perceived changes were maintained over time.

Finally, although reflexive thematic analysis seeks to generate rich interpretations of participants' experiences, alternative thematic constructions of the data are possible. Consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach, the themes should therefore be understood as interpretive representations of participants' experiences rather than objective features inherent in the data.

Future Directions

The present findings suggest several directions for future research. First, future studies could examine how mindfulness is experienced among individuals who discontinue mindfulness programs or remain skeptical throughout participation. Such perspectives may provide a more comprehensive understanding of barriers to engagement and cultural adaptation.

Second, comparative research across different Arab and Muslim communities could help clarify which aspects of participants' experiences are specific to the Bedouin-Arab context and which reflect broader processes of mindfulness adaptation within Muslim populations.

Third, longitudinal studies are needed to examine the long-term sustainability of mindfulness practices following program completion and to investigate how participants continue to integrate mindfulness into their personal, interpersonal, and cultural lives over time.

Finally, although the present study employed reflexive thematic analysis, narrative approaches may provide deeper insight into individual pathways of cultural and religious adaptation. Future research

could therefore explore how participants construct personal stories of change, spirituality, and self-development in relation to mindfulness practice.

Conclusion

The present study demonstrates that mindfulness was experienced by Bedouin-Arab participants as a process of experiential learning, personal transformation, and cultural adaptation. Participants described developing greater awareness, emotional regulation, and intentionality while simultaneously integrating mindfulness into existing religious, cultural, and interpersonal contexts. The findings suggest that mindfulness-based programs can be implemented successfully within culturally distinct communities when delivered in ways that are responsive to local values, identities, and social realities. More broadly, the study highlights the importance of examining not only whether mindfulness is effective, but also how mindfulness is experienced, interpreted, and integrated into participants' everyday lives.

Declarations

Ethical Approval

The study was approved by the XXXX University Institutional Review Board (IRB). All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study prior to participation. All participants were informed about the aims of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

One of the authors served as the facilitator of the mindfulness program. To reduce potential bias, interviews were conducted by an independent interviewer and all analyses were reviewed collaboratively by the research team.

Use of Artificial Intelligence Tools

Data analysis was supported by Perplexity (Perplexity AI), which was used to assist in the generation of initial descriptive codes. ChatGPT (OpenAI) was used to assist with transcript review, translation, and manuscript preparation, mainly for language editing purposes. All substantive analytic decisions,

interpretations, and conclusions were made by the authors, who assume full responsibility for the content of the manuscript.

Author Contribution

Writing-original draft preparation: RT. Data analysis: RT, RAP, and FKA. Mindfulness program development and facilitation: FKA. Writing-review and editing: RT, RAP, and FKA. All authors approved the final version of the manuscript

Data Availability

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are not publicly available due to ethical and confidentiality considerations. Given the qualitative nature of the interviews and the potential risk of participant identification, the data cannot be shared publicly. De-identified excerpts supporting the findings are included in the article. Additional information may be available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request and subject to approval by the relevant ethics committee.

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Figures

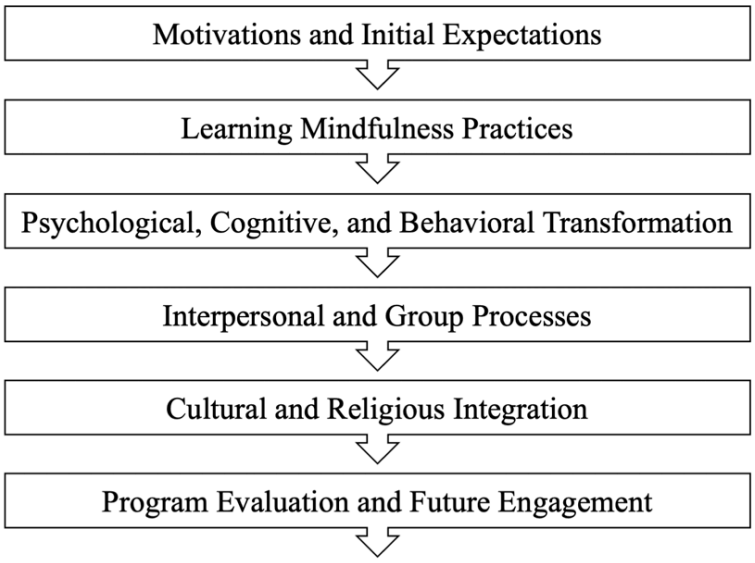


Figure 1

Thematic Journey of Participants' Experiences in the Mindfulness Program