

How can mindfulness help us improve interethnic relations?

Mindfulness can be defined as the skill of living in the present moment. The pioneer of introducing this technique to the scientific realm, Jon Kabat-Zinn, asserts that mindfulness is paying attention in a particular way: intentionally, in the present moment, and without judgment.

The latest trend in combating prejudice and enhancing interethnic relations involves the application of mindfulness-based programs, especially among the youth in schools. The outcomes of such interventions have shown significant reductions in the frequency of negative stereotypes and biases towards members of other ethnic groups, along with an increased willingness to engage with minority ethnic group members, even in highly conflicted areas.

Why is this the case? Research has indicated a substantial connection between practicing mindfulness and heightened intercultural sensitivity. The development level of key mindfulness dimensions—such as focusing on the present moment, non-judgment, and self-acceptance—can predict individuals' degree of intercultural sensitivity. It is assumed that by actively and purposefully striving to experience the present moment more fully, we deter the automatic activation of stereotypes and biases we may hold. This notion is supported by neuropsychological research revealing that engaging in mindfulness practices activates distinct brain centers compared to when we are on "autopilot."

However, in the fight against prejudice, it is not solely reliant on mindfulness practice and self-work as individuals. Active changes to institutional rules and systemic patterns that (re)produce inequalities and interethnic conflicts are also imperative.

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