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The Effect of Guided Meditation on Student Doctor-Patient Interactions

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Introduction

Mindfulness techniques have been shown to reduce stress, especially in work environments. Healthcare professionals are exposed to copious amounts of stress in their field of work and need to know how to de-stress in order to maintain their learning, performance, and well-being. High levels of stress are prevalent in medical students and other health profession student populations¹. This stress can emanate onto the patients in a healthcare setting. Tools are needed to achieve balance between work, study, rest, and mental health for both the physician and patient. Mindfulness is process of intentionally paying attention to each moment with curiosity, openness, and acceptance of each experience without judgement². Guided meditation, a subset of mindfulness, is a type of meditation in which you are gently guided by an expert into a meditative state. Guided meditation requires no prior experience for participation. Mindfulness can reduce the stress of the healthcare workers, which has the potential to generate better physician-patient relationships and improved patient satisfaction.

Purpose

To investigate whether guided meditation has an effect on student doctors that translates into more positive interactions with patients.

Methods

Eleven 3rd and 4th year student doctors from Rowan-Virtua SOM were recruited for the study via email. Students participating in clinical rotations engaging with patients daily qualified to participate. Students were randomly assigned to the control or experimental group based on when they signed up to participate in the study. The experimental group was sent a reminder email Monday to Friday to complete a 5-minute meditation video. At the end of each week, both groups were sent an email to Qualtrics to fill out an 8-question survey using a 5-point Likert scale about their interactions with patients throughout the week. This study was completed over a period of 3 weeks. Student doctors ages 18-90 were eligible to participate.

Results

We had a total of 6 consistent respondents over the course of the 6-weeks. 3 of them being the control group and the other 3 being the experimental group. The number of times the guided meditation video was completed was recorded (Figure 1).

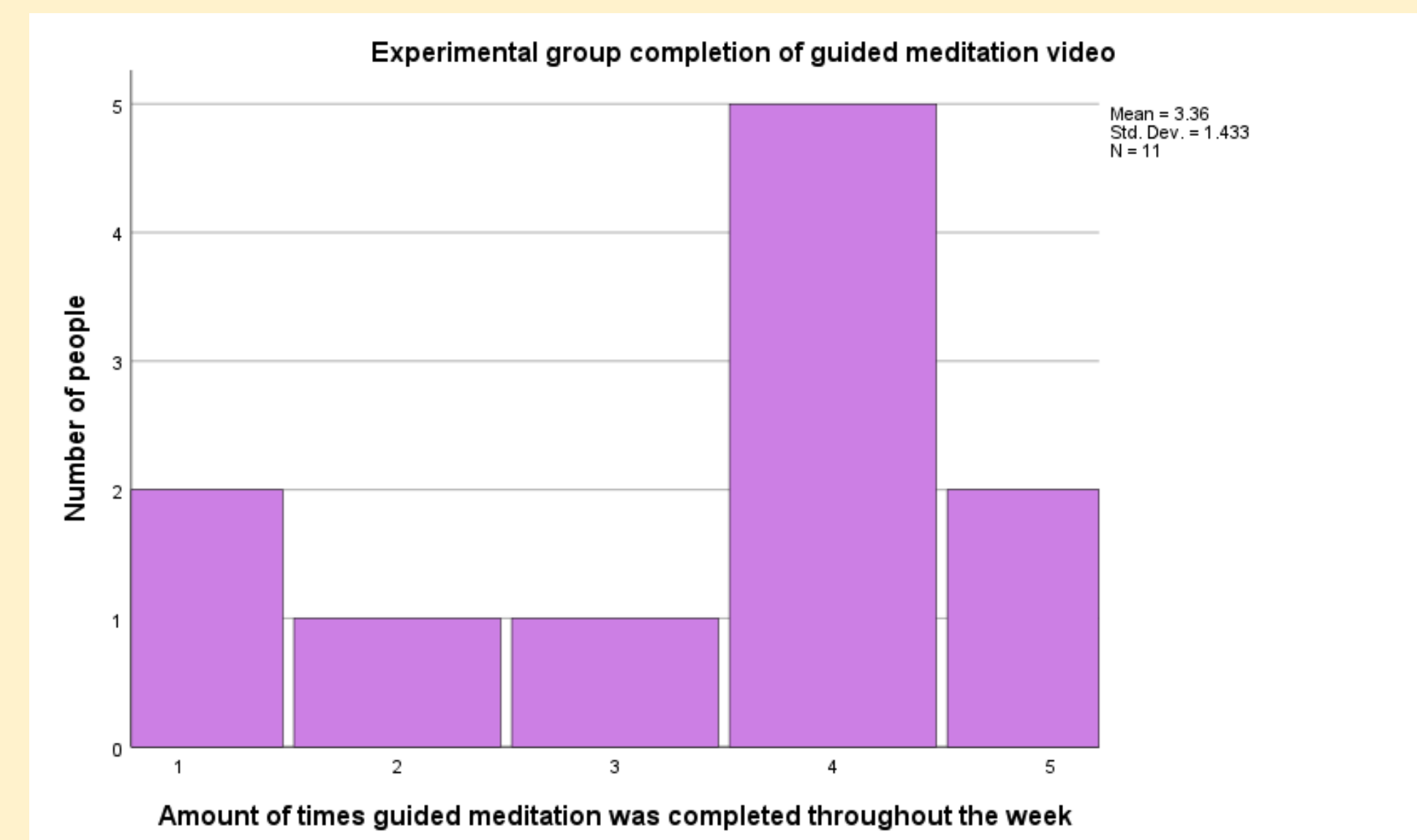


Figure 1

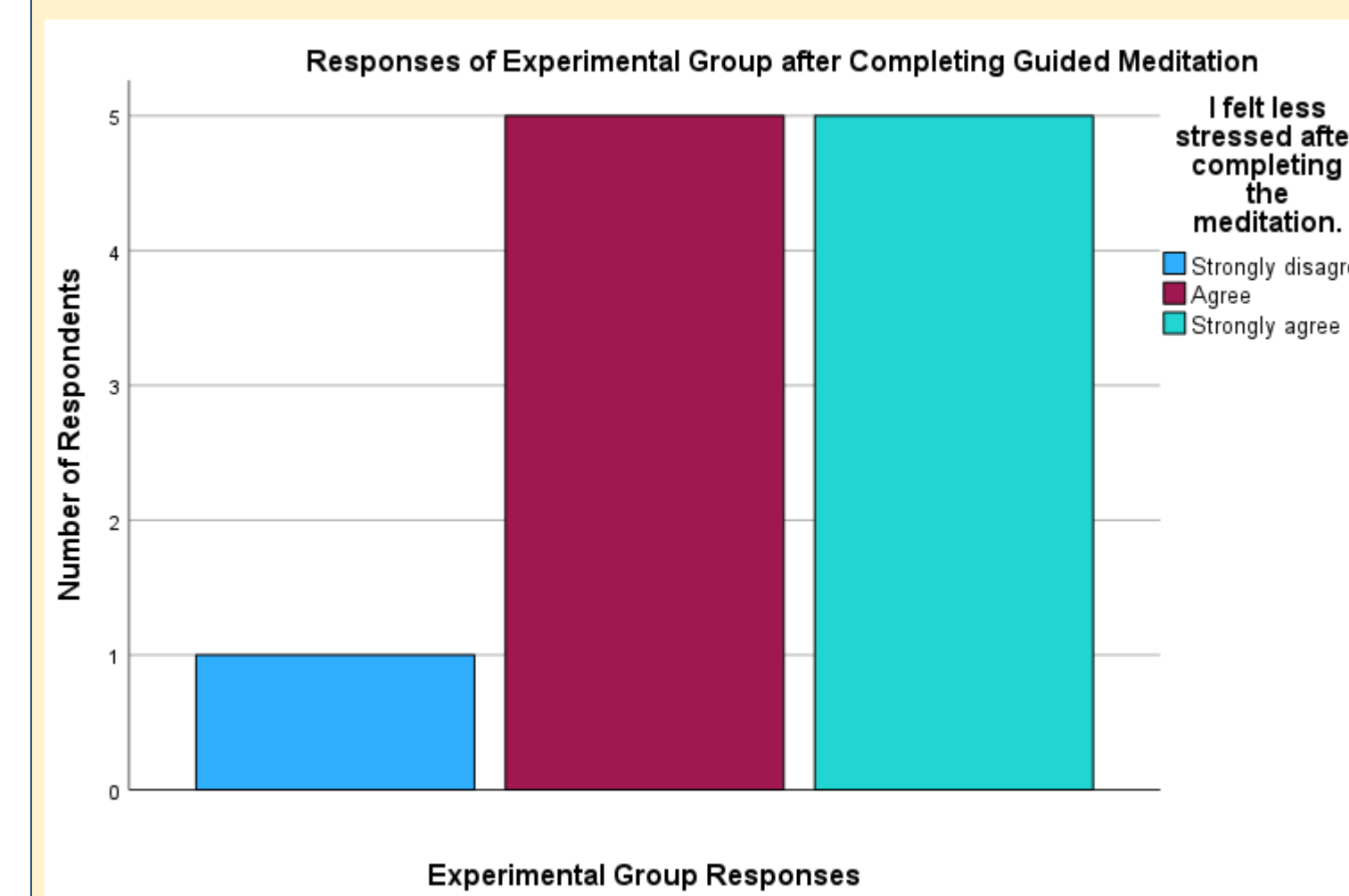


Figure 2

The experimental group was more likely to select strongly disagree or disagree when asked if they felt impatient during their patient encounters

while the control group selected disagree or neither disagree or agree (Figure 3). The experimental group was more likely to select agree when asked if they felt calm throughout the day when compared to the control group. The additional survey questions consisted of feelings of frustration throughout the day, feeling calm throughout the day, feeling like they understood their patients, and feeling better about interactions with patients this week yielded similar results between the control and experimental groups.

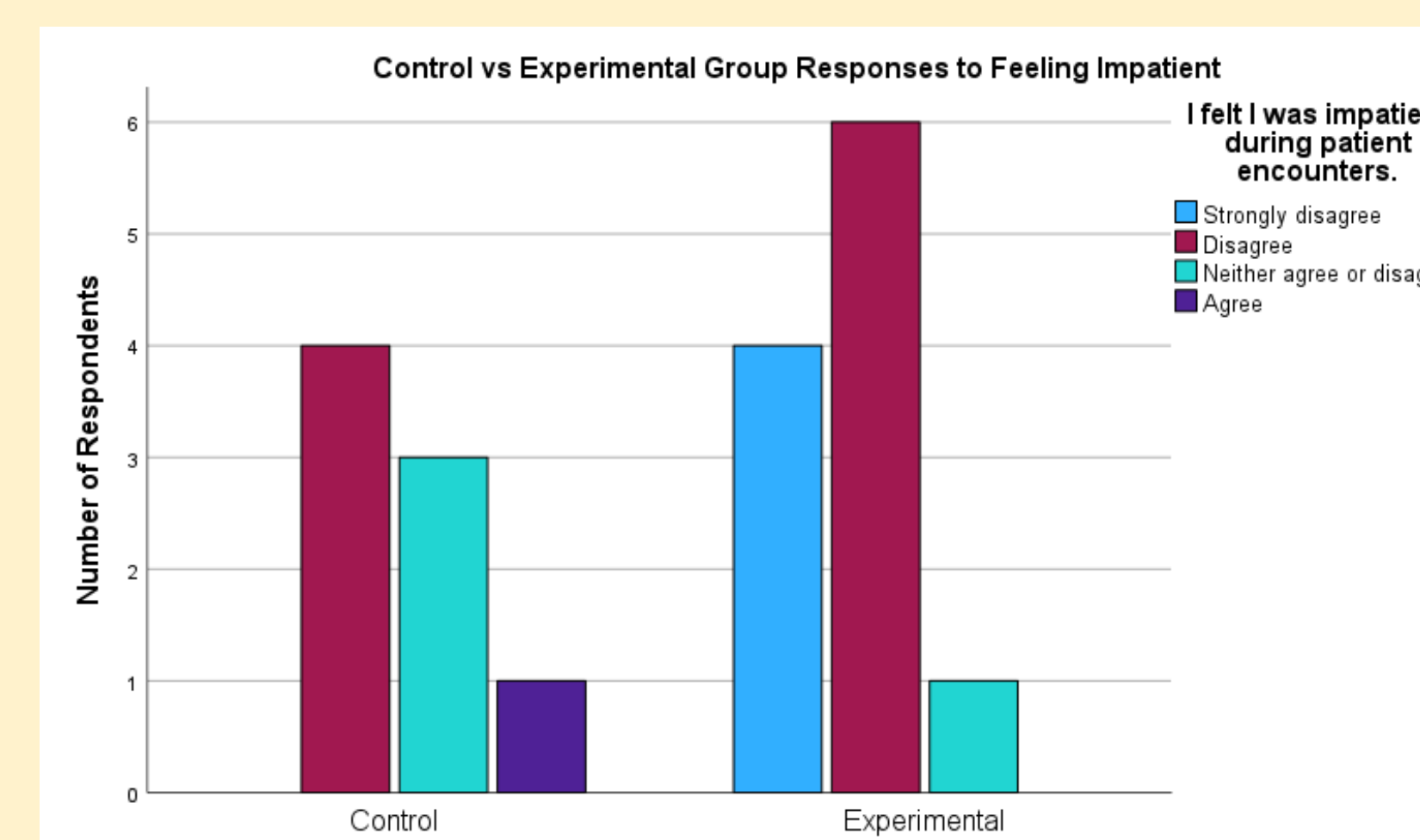


Figure 3

Discussion

For the survey question “I felt I was impatient during patient encounters”, the experimental group chose strongly disagree (n=4), disagree (n=6), and neither agree or disagree (n=1) while the control group chose disagree (n=4), neither agree or disagree (n=3), and agree (n=1). Similarly, for “I felt frustrated throughout the day” the experimental group was more likely to choose strongly disagree (n=4) or disagree (n=5) while the control group was more likely to choose disagree (n=4) or agree (n=2). This shows that the control group was less likely to feel impatience with patients and more likely to feel frustration throughout the day when compared to the experimental group. Both groups answered similarly to the rest of the survey questions. The sample size was small, starting off with n=11 and ending with n=6 due to inconsistent responses.

Conclusion and Future Direction

Data showed that most of the responses between control and experimental group were similar. However, with the 2 survey questions of “I felt I was impatient during patient encounters” and “I felt frustrated throughout the day”, the control group was more likely to choose disagree or neither agree or disagree while the experimental group was more likely to choose strongly disagree or disagree. The experimental group felt less frustrated and less impatient while interacting with patients. In future projects on this topic, more participants should be recruited to have a sample size of at least 30 so the results could be statistically significant.

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