Many studies have found dispositional mindfulness in older adults to have beneficial effects on cognition, like decreased stress levels and its consequent benefits to executive function. However, some existing studies find this characteristic to be detrimental to other aspects of cognition (e.g., implicit sequence learning), regardless of age. Here, we examined the effects of dispositional mindfulness on decision making as measured by the Iowa Gambling Task (IGT). Results were consistent with an emerging body of literature showing the tradeoffs of trait mindfulness. Future directions: examine the relationship between dispositional mindfulness and its role in psychological well-being.

Methods

- 83 older adults over the age of 65 (43 females, 40 males)
- Iowa Gambling Task
  - 4 decks of cards similar in size and appearance
  - $2000 endowment, 100 trials
  - Frequency of punishment:
    - Two “frequent” decks (A’ and C’)
    - Two “infrequent” decks (B’ and D’)
- Loss aversion (avoiding decks with frequent punishment)
  - Loss aversion = (B’+D’) / (A’+C’)

- Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS)
  - 15 item scale concerning day-to-day experiences
  - Rate how frequently or infrequently each statement is experienced
  - e.g., “I drive places on ‘automatic’ pilot and then wonder why I went there.”
  - Likert-type scale, 1-6, 1 denotes “almost always” and 6 “almost never”

Results

- Each session was divided into five 20 card-pull blocks.
- Results demonstrate learning loss aversion.

Discussion

- Older adults with higher levels of dispositional mindfulness were less likely to be sensitive to loss. Results were consistent with an emerging body of literature showing the tradeoffs of trait mindfulness on cognition. Older adults with this trait might be less sensitive to the frequency of punishment in the IGT.
  - Future directions: examine the relationship between dispositional mindfulness and other measures; for example, the Balloon Analogue Risk Task (BART), which assesses risk taking behavior in older adults.

References


Acknowledgements

Seth A. Kiser and the Cognitive Aging Lab