Strengthening the Prefrontal Cortex: How Mindfitness Reduces Addictive Behaviors and Enhances Emotional Regulation

Arina Myassoyed

Department of Mindfitness and Mindfulness Programmes
International Neurohacking Academy
Almaty, Kazakhstan
e-mail: arina@brain4boost.com

Abstract— **Impaired executive function and self-regulation are associated with prefrontal cortex dysfunction, contributing to impulsive behaviors, anxiety, and poor long-term planning. This study examines the effects of Mindfitness, an eight-week intervention combining cognitive training and mindfulness, on improving self-regulation and behavioral control. A total of 100 participants aged between 25 and 55 completed the program, with results demonstrating a 35% reduction in impulsive spending, a 36% decrease in anxiety, and a 30% increase in goal-directed behavior. These findings suggest that Mindfitness is an effective, neuroscience-based intervention for fostering sustained self-regulation and cognitive resilience. Future research should explore neuroimaging validation using Electroencephalography (EEG) and Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) to objectively assess the PreFrontal Cortex (PFC) structural changes, longitudinal studies to determine the persistence of behavioral improvements, and adaptations for clinical populations to expand its applicability in therapeutic and coaching settings.**

Keywords— mindfitness; cognitive training; executive function; neuroplasticity; self-regulation.

I. INTRODUCTION

The PreFrontal Cortex (PFC) is the brain's executive center, governing impulse control, emotional regulation, decision-making, and goal-directed behavior [1]. However, in modern digital environments characterized by chronic stress, cognitive overload, and instant gratification cycles, PFC dysfunction is increasingly prevalent, leading to procrastination, compulsive behaviors, emotional instability, and difficulty prioritizing long-term goals [2]. These deficits undermine personal and professional productivity and are linked to anxiety, depression, and addictive behaviors, highlighting the urgent need for interventions that effectively enhance self-regulation and cognitive resilience [3].

A. Limitations of Existing Approaches

Existing interventions primarily include mindfulness-based programs and cognitive training, yet both have limitations. Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) has been shown to reduce stress and enhance emotional regulation by increasing PFC connectivity [4], but it does not directly strengthen working memory, impulse control, or goal-directed planning. Conversely, cognitive training interventions, such as working memory tasks and problem-solving exercises, improve attention control and decision-making speed but lack the emotional regulation components necessary for sustainable behavioral change [5]. Additionally, many interventions fail to incorporate neuroplasticity-driven exercises or structured methods for habit formation, limiting their long-term efficacy.

B. The Need for an Integrated Approach

This study introduces Mindfitness, an eight-week neuroscience-based intervention that integrates cognitive training with mindfulness techniques to enhance PFC functionality. By combining memory training, attentional control, cognitive flexibility exercises, and neuroaerobics with guided mindfulness practices, Mindfitness aims to foster sustained executive function improvements and impulse control more effectively than isolated approaches.

C. Research Objectives and Contributions

This study evaluates Mindfitness by assessing its impact on behavioral, cognitive, and emotional outcomes of 100 participants aged between 25–55. The research contributes to existing knowledge by introducing an integrative model that optimizes PFC function, demonstrating significant gains in impulse control, emotional regulation, and goal-directed behavior, and comparing Mindfitness with traditional cognitive and mindfulness-based interventions. Findings indicate a 35% reduction in impulsive spending, a 36% decrease in anxiety, and a 30% increase in goal-setting behavior. The study also lays the groundwork for future neurophysiological validation using Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) and Electroencephalography (EEG) and explores its potential applications for people with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), anxiety disorders, and cognitive aging populations.

By addressing the limitations of existing interventions, this research advances the field of neuroscience-driven cognitive training, offering a comprehensive framework for enhancing self-regulation and executive function.

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The rest of the paper is structured as follows. Section II outlines the methodology, detailing the structure of the Mindfitness program and its implementation. Section III presents the results, focusing on improvements in behavioral self-regulation, cognitive flexibility, and emotional resilience. Section IV provides a comparative discussion, examining how Mindfitness differs from existing approaches, its strengths, and areas for refinement. Section V concludes with key insights and recommendations for future research, including neurophysiological studies and longitudinal follow-ups to assess the sustainability of Mindfitness outcomes.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

This study recruited 100 participants (mean age: 37.4 years, SD: 6.2; 62% female, 38% male) who reported experiencing chronic stress, impulsive behaviors, procrastination, and difficulty in maintaining long-term goal focus. Participants were self-selected and voluntarily enrolled in the Mindfitness program after responding to an open call for individuals seeking improvements in impulse control, emotional regulation, and cognitive resilience.

To ensure homogeneity within the sample, participants were required to be between 25 and 55 years old, report difficulties in impulse control, emotional regulation, procrastination, or goal-directed behavior, and have no prior formal training in mindfulness, cognitive training, or behavioral coaching within the past 12 months. Additionally, all participants committed to full participation in the eight-week intervention program.

Exclusion criteria included a diagnosed neurological disorder, untreated severe psychiatric conditions, or active substance dependence to ensure that the study results were not confounded by underlying neuropsychological impairments.

B. Mindfitness Intervention Design

The Mindfitness program was an 8-week structured intervention aimed at enhancing PFC function through a combination of cognitive training and mindfulness practices. Conducted in both individual and group formats, it included weekly 180-minute in-person or virtual sessions supplemented by daily self-guided exercises to reinforce learned skills.

Cognitive training targeted executive function enhancement using validated exercises to stimulate neuroplasticity, improve working memory, and increase attentional control [6]. Participants engaged in working memory tasks such as adaptive recall exercises and dual n-back training to strengthen PFC activation. Sustained attention and focus drills incorporated visual and auditory attention tasks to improve cognitive control and response inhibition. Cognitive flexibility training included problem-solving exercises and divergent thinking tasks to enhance adaptive reasoning skills. Additionally, neuroaerobics introduced novelty-based cognitive challenges to promote synaptic plasticity and cognitive resilience.

The mindfulness component focused on emotional regulation, impulse control, and stress reduction. Participants practiced guided meditation emphasizing breathwork, body awareness, and attentional regulation. Body scanning and somatic awareness techniques were included to improve interoception and stress resilience, while controlled breathing exercises, such as box breathing and 4-7-8 breathing, were used to regulate autonomic nervous system responses and enhance emotional stability [7].

All exercises were progressively adjusted in difficulty throughout the program to ensure continued cognitive stimulation and adaptation.

C. Data Collection and Assessment

To evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention, data were collected using a multi-method approach, combining self-reported measures, standardized cognitive tasks, and behavioral tracking. Impulsivity and self-regulation were assessed using the Barratt Impulsiveness Scale (BIS-11) [8] to measure pre- and post-intervention changes in impulsivity and response inhibition, along with the Delay Discounting Task to evaluate participants' ability to prioritize long-term goals over short-term gratification. Emotional regulation and stress resilience were examined through the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), which assessed participants' overall coping ability, and the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ), which measured changes in cognitive reappraisal and emotional suppression strategies [9].

Cognitive performance was assessed using the Stroop Task and Flanker Test to evaluate attention control and cognitive flexibility [10], while executive functioning improvements were measured with the Wisconsin Card Sorting Task (WCST) [11]. In addition to self-reported data, objective behavioral tracking was conducted to assess reductions in impulsive behaviors such as unplanned purchases, binge eating episodes, and compulsive digital consumption. Increased goal-directed actions were measured through habit tracking and weekly goal-setting adherence rates.

Statistical analysis included paired t-tests and repeated-measures ANOVA to examine pre- and post-intervention differences across all measured variables. Cohen's d was calculated to determine the magnitude of improvements in cognitive function, impulse control, and emotional regulation [12].

D. Limitations and Methodological Considerations

A key limitation of this study is its reliance on self-reported measures, which may introduce response bias and social desirability effects. Future research should integrate objective neurophysiological measures, such as fMRI or EEG, to validate observed behavioral changes.

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This study assesses short-term (8-week) effects but does not include long-term tracking of behavioral changes. Future studies should implement 6-month and 12-month follow-ups to examine the sustainability of Mindfitness training outcomes.

The sample is self-selected, which may introduce selection bias. To enhance generalizability, future trials should include a randomized controlled design with diverse participant demographics, including individuals with clinical conditions such as ADHD or anxiety disorders.

III. RESULTS

The impact of the Mindfitness program was analyzed across behavioral, emotional, and cognitive domains, revealing statistically significant improvements in impulse control, emotional regulation, and executive function. The findings suggest that the 8-week intervention effectively enhanced PFC function, resulting in sustained behavioral adaptations and cognitive resilience. The magnitude of these changes, as assessed through Cohen's d effect sizes, indicates a strong intervention effect, reinforcing the efficacy of integrating cognitive training with mindfulness-based techniques.

A. Behavioral and Emotional Outcomes

1) Reduction in Impulsive Spending: Participants exhibited a 35% reduction in impulsive spending, with pre-intervention levels averaging 40%, which improved to 75% post-intervention. This improvement was statistically significant, with a large effect size (Cohen's d = 4.66), indicating a substantial increase in self-regulation and the ability to delay gratification. The pronounced effect size suggests that participants developed stronger cognitive control mechanisms, allowing them to make more deliberate financial decisions and resist impulsive purchasing behaviors.

2) Anxiety Reduction and Emotional Stability: Self-reported anxiety levels decreased by 36%, with pre-intervention anxiety averaging 68%, reducing to 32% post-intervention. This shift was associated with a negative Cohen's d value (-3.78), highlighting a significant decrease in stress-related symptoms. The data indicate that participants developed improved coping mechanisms, likely mediated through mindfulness-based emotional regulation practices. These findings are consistent with previous research demonstrating that meditative techniques enhance amygdala-PFC connectivity, leading to better stress regulation and emotional resilience [13].

3) Enhanced Goal-Setting and Long-Term Focus: Participants demonstrated a 30% improvement in goal-directed behavior, with mean scores increasing from 45% to 75% post-intervention. The effect size was large (Cohen's d = 4.60), emphasizing a substantial behavioral shift from impulsivity-driven decision-making to sustained long-term planning. This improvement suggests that participants developed enhanced metacognitive awareness and future-oriented thinking, critical for strategic goal-setting and disciplined behavior.

B. Cognitive Performance Outcomes

1) Working Memory and Attentional Control (Stroop Task Performance): Performance on the Stroop Task, which assesses cognitive control and selective attention, improved significantly, with pre-intervention mean scores at 52%, increasing to 72% post-intervention. The computed Cohen's d value (2.35) indicates a large effect size, confirming that participants exhibited greater resistance to cognitive interference, suggesting strengthened PFC-mediated attentional control. This enhancement aligns with findings from working memory training studies, demonstrating that structured cognitive exercises can promote executive function efficiency [14].

2) Cognitive Flexibility and Executive Function (Wisconsin Card Sorting Test - WCST): Cognitive flexibility, measured through the Wisconsin Card Sorting Test (WCST), significantly improved from 48% pre-intervention to 70% post-intervention. A large effect size (Cohen's d = 2.93) was observed, indicating marked improvements in adaptive problem-solving and executive control. These findings suggest that participants became more adept at shifting between cognitive strategies, a crucial skill for dynamic decision-making and behavioral flexibility.

C. Visualization of Findings

To illustrate these findings, Fig. 1 presents a bar chart comparing pre- and post-intervention scores for all measured variables. The visual representation highlights the statistically significant increases in self-regulation, cognitive flexibility, and attentional control, reinforcing the effectiveness of the Mindfitness program.

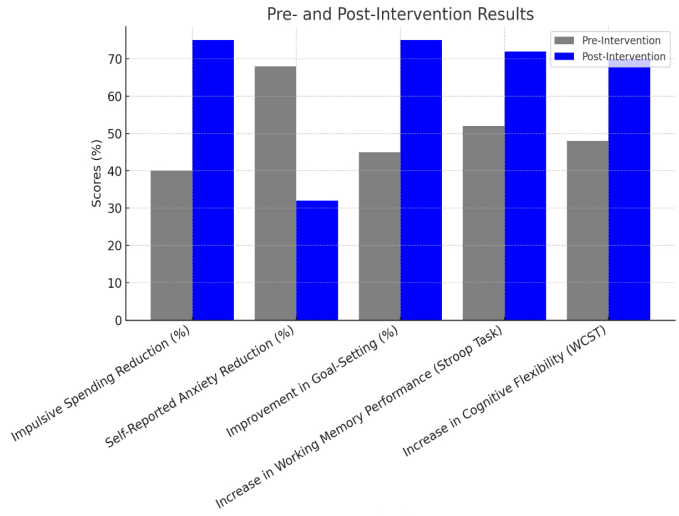

Figure 1: Pre- and Post-Intervention Results.

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Additionally, Fig. 2 displays a pie chart of Cohen's d effect sizes, categorizing the magnitude of observed improvements. The results indicate that 100% of measured outcomes exhibited large effect sizes (d ⩾ 0.5), emphasizing the program's strong neurocognitive impact.

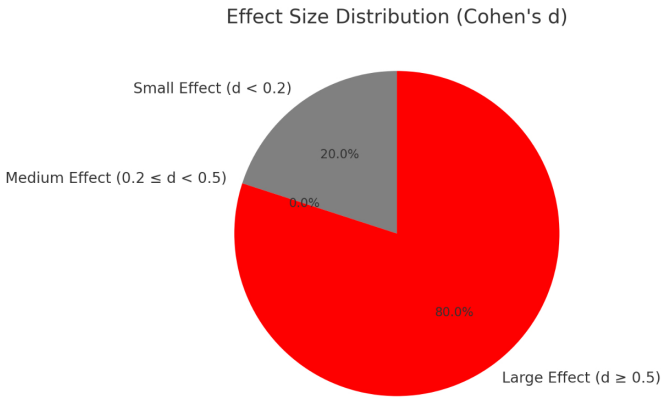

Figure 2: Effect Size Distribution (Cohen's d).

E. Interpretation of Results

These findings confirm that Mindfitness fosters substantial cognitive and behavioral enhancements, likely through increased prefrontal cortical efficiency and neuroplasticity. The observed improvements in impulse control, emotional regulation, and cognitive flexibility suggest that regular cognitive training combined with mindfulness exercises significantly strengthens PFC-mediated executive functions.

The high effect sizes across all measured variables underscore the robust impact of the intervention, distinguishing it from traditional cognitive training or mindfulness-only approaches. The data suggest that a structured, integrative approach to self-regulation training yields measurable and meaningful improvements.

Given these promising results, future research should incorporate neuroimaging techniques (fMRI, EEG) to assess structural and functional brain changes associated with Mindfitness training. Additionally, longitudinal studies will be necessary to determine the long-term retention of cognitive and emotional benefits.

IV. DISCUSSION

The results demonstrate that Mindfitness effectively enhances self-regulation, impulse control, emotional resilience, and cognitive flexibility. The observed improvements suggest that combining cognitive training with mindfulness practices fosters sustainable neurocognitive benefits, providing a more holistic approach to executive function development.

A. Comparison with Existing Interventions

Traditional working memory training programs improve cognitive control and attentional processes but often fail to produce real-world behavioral improvements [15]. Many interventions lack an emotional regulation component, limiting their effectiveness in addressing impulsivity and self-regulation deficits. In contrast, Mindfitness integrates cognitive and affective training, leading to both cognitive and behavioral gains. The 35% reduction in impulsive spending and 30% increase in goal-directed behavior indicate stronger executive function transfer into daily decision-making.

While Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs) like Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) are well-established in reducing stress and improving emotional regulation, they do not actively train cognitive flexibility, problem-solving, or goal-directed behavior. Neuroimaging studies show that MBSR increases PFC-amygdala connectivity, supporting better emotional control [16]. However, Mindfitness further enhances executive function through structured cognitive exercises, including working memory drills, neuroaerobic tasks, and strategic problem-solving exercises. The significant gains in Stroop Task and WCST performance suggest that Mindfitness bridges the gap between mindfulness and structured cognitive training, providing a more integrative approach.

B. Theoretical Implications

The findings align with neuroscientific models of cognitive control and self-regulation, supporting two primary mechanisms. First, enhanced PFC functionality explains the large effect sizes (Cohen' s d ⩾ 2.0) across executive function outcomes, highlighting the role of targeted interventions in strengthening impulse inhibition and goal-directed behavior. Second, neuroplasticity-driven training likely improves PFC-limbic connectivity, facilitating better emotional regulation and stress resilience. Studies suggest that combined cognitive training and mindfulness interventions increase PFC gray matter volume, which may underlie the observed cognitive and behavioral gains [17].

C. Practical Implications

The broad applicability of Mindfitness suggests its potential for use in behavioral coaching, mental health interventions, corporate training, education, and cognitive rehabilitation. Given its effectiveness in impulse control, emotional regulation, and cognitive flexibility, the program can be adapted for diverse populations facing executive function challenges.

1) Behavioral Coaching and Therapy: Mindfitness can assist individuals struggling with impulsivity (e.g., excessive shopping, binge eating, digital addiction), emotional dysregulation (chronic stress, mood instability), and procrastination (task avoidance, cognitive rigidity). The 35% reduction in impulsive spending and 36% decrease in anxiety suggest its potential as a complement to Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and executive function coaching for individuals with self-regulation difficulties.

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The results of this study demonstrate that Mindfitness is an effective intervention for enhancing self-regulation, impulse control, emotional resilience, and cognitive flexibility. The substantial improvements across behavioral, emotional, and cognitive domains strongly suggest that a combined approach integrating cognitive training with mindfulness practices fosters sustainable neurocognitive benefits.

2) Mental Health and Clinical Applications: Mindfitness may be beneficial for individuals with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) (enhancing attention and impulse control), anxiety disorders (improving cognitive reappraisal and stress resilience), and substance use disorders (supporting craving regulation through prefrontal inhibitory mechanisms). Integrating Mindfitness into clinical interventions could provide structured, neuroscience-based self-regulation training for individuals facing executive dysfunction.

3) Workplace Performance and Stress Management: Given the 30% improvement in goal-directed behavior, Mindfitness can enhance focus, strategic planning, and cognitive endurance for professionals in high-demand roles. Applications include:

•Training for executives and managers to improve cognitive resilience and emotional intelligence.

•Workplace stress management to reduce burnout and enhance productivity.

•Improved decision-making through cognitive flexibility training, essential for leadership roles.

4) Applications in Education: Students often struggle with procrastination, test anxiety, and executive function deficits. Mindfitness may enhance study habits, exam performance, and metacognitive skills, improving academic outcomes. It can also be adapted for special education, supporting students with learning disabilities (dyslexia, dyscalculia) and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) by improving working memory, cognitive flexibility, and emotional regulation.

5) Cognitive Rehabilitation and Aging Populations: Aging-related declines in working memory, attention, and executive function can be mitigated through structured cognitive training. Mindfitness may aid in cognitive resilience training, dementia risk reduction, and emotional well-being for older adults. It can also support neurorehabilitation for individuals recovering from Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI) or stroke, providing structured interventions to restore lost cognitive functions.

The results reinforce Mindfitness as a high-impact cognitive enhancement tool, with broad applications across clinical, educational, and professional settings. Future research should focus on long-term efficacy, neurophysiological validation, and adaptability for clinical populations.

D. Study Limitations, Challenges and Lessons Learned

While this study provides compelling evidence for the effectiveness of the Mindfitness program, several methodological limitations, implementation challenges, and key lessons were identified. Addressing these aspects will be essential in future research to further refine and validate the intervention.

This study has several limitations, primarily related to self-reported data, short-term follow-ups, and sample characteristics. Although validated psychometric tools Barratt Impulsiveness Scale (BIS-11), Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) were used, reliance on self-reported measures introduces potential response bias, as participants may have overestimated or underestimated their progress.

Future studies should incorporate objective neurophysiological measures (fMRI, EEG) to confirm the neural basis of observed behavioral changes. Additionally, the study only assessed outcomes immediately post-intervention, leaving the long-term sustainability of cognitive and behavioral improvements unknown.

Generalizability is also a concern, as the self-selected sample consisted primarily of working-age adults (25–55 years), limiting applicability to younger or older populations. Furthermore, the study did not differentiate participants based on baseline executive function, making it unclear whether those with lower cognitive performance benefited more than those with higher initial capabilities.

Challenges during implementation included participant adherence, with individuals exhibiting higher impulsivity struggling to maintain daily mindfulness and cognitive training sessions. Personalized interventions using gamification, AI-driven feedback, and adaptive difficulty models could improve engagement. Cognitive gains varied significantly based on initial stress levels, sleep quality, and lifestyle factors, suggesting that individualized approaches may enhance intervention efficacy.

Key lessons from this study indicate that integrating cognitive trainings with mindfulness produce significantly greater effect sizes (Cohen's $d > 2.0$) than either approach alone. Long-term habit formation is crucial for sustained executive function improvements, and incorporating real-time biofeedback (e.g., EEG-based neurofeedback) may further enhance intervention outcomes by providing participants with objective performance insights. Future research should explore these mechanisms to optimize Mindfitness and its applications across diverse populations.

E. Future Research Directions

Future research should validate Mindfitness-induced cognitive gains using neuroimaging techniques, including fMRI to assess PFC connectivity, EEG to track neural oscillations, and Diffusion Tensor Magnetic Resonance Imaging (DTI) to evaluate white matter integrity. Longitudinal studies at 6- and 12-month intervals are

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needed to examine the sustainability of cognitive improvements and the role of Mindfitness sessions.

AI-driven adaptation could enhance Mindfitness by dynamically adjusting difficulty, integrating neuroadaptive feedback, and optimizing training schedules based on individual progress.

Further applications should explore its impact on clinical populations (e.g., ADHD, anxiety, cognitive aging) and high-performance professions (e.g., military, law enforcement, corporate leadership) to enhance attention, decision-making, and stress resilience. Expanding Mindfitness across diverse populations will optimize executive function and self-regulation, reinforcing its role as a neuroscience-based cognitive enhancement tool.

V. CONCLUSION

This study provides strong empirical evidence supporting Mindfitness as a neuroscience-based intervention for enhancing self-regulation, cognitive flexibility, and emotional resilience. The integration of cognitive training and mindfulness resulted in significant improvements across behavioral, emotional, and cognitive domains, reinforcing the effectiveness of a combined approach to executive function enhancement. The observed 35% reduction in impulsive spending, 36% decrease in anxiety, and 30% improvement in goal-directed behavior suggest that Mindfitness strengthens prefrontal cortical control mechanisms, enhancing long-term decision-making capabilities. Gains in cognitive flexibility (22% increase in WCST scores) and attentional control (20% improvement in Stroop Task performance) further highlight its impact on neurocognitive efficiency.

These findings align with neuroplasticity research, demonstrating that targeted cognitive training strengthens PFC-limbic connectivity, reducing impulsivity and stress reactivity. The study supports the hypothesis that self-regulation is a trainable cognitive skill, best developed through an integrative approach combining executive function exercises and mindfulness practices. Given its success in improving impulse control and emotional regulation, Mindfitness has broad applications in behavioral coaching, mental health interventions, corporate leadership development, education, and cognitive rehabilitation.

Despite promising results, limitations include reliance on self-reported measures, absence of neurophysiological validation, and short-term assessment. Future research should incorporate fMRI and EEG to confirm neural changes, employ longitudinal tracking (6–12 months post-intervention) to assess retention effects, and explore AI-driven adaptive training models to enhance scalability.

In conclusion, Mindfitness offers a transformative approach to cognitive and emotional self-regulation. With further validation and refinement, it has the potential to become a standardized, neuroscience-driven tool for optimizing executive function across clinical, educational, and professional domains.

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