
The Development Process of Practicing Mindfulness Meditation with Loving-Kindness for Enhancing Relationships in Families

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Abstract

This research article pursues three objectives: (1) to examine family problems, their causes, and effects on intra-family relationships; (2) to develop a mindfulness meditation practice process incorporating loving-kindness to enhance family relationships; and (3) to evaluate the outcomes of mindfulness meditation with loving-kindness for improving family relationships. The study employed qualitative methods, collecting data through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and follow-up evaluations with families participating in the MWL course at the Buddhamahametta Foundation. Structured interviews and observation checklists served as research tools, and data were analyzed using thematic and content analysis techniques.

The findings yielded three principal insights:

1. The research identifies emotional disconnection, communication breakdown, and reactive parenting patterns as primary sources of family problems.

2. The research demonstrates that integrating mindfulness meditation and loving-kindness practices, including walking meditation, sitting meditation, and parent appreciation activities, effectively improves emotional regulation, empathy, and relational harmony within families.

3. The research verifies that sustained practice of the MWL model fosters lasting emotional well-being, enhances trust, and strengthens emotional bonds between parents and children in daily life.

The proposed framework provides a systematic approach for applying Buddhist mindfulness and loving-kindness principles within family contexts, thereby promoting enduring emotional resilience and harmonious relationships. This research highlights the essential role of applied Buddhist practices in family well-being education and suggests opportunities for future development of holistic, mindfulness-based family interventions.

Keywords: Mindfulness Meditation; Loving-Kindness Practice; Family Relationships; Mindfulness for Families; Buddhamahametta Foundation

Introduction

Rapid technological advancements have fundamentally changed family communication, creating challenges for families to maintain meaningful face-to-face interactions and emotional connections. This shift has led to emotional detachment, reduced family quality time, and weakened family communication, ultimately impacting familial happiness and resilience. The United Nations, through the International Day of Happiness initiative, recognizes family happiness as central to societal well-being and stresses the need to promote peace and sustainable development for all, with particular focus on families. In this context, the main argument of this text is that promoting emotional resilience and mindful practices within families is essential to counteract the disruptive effects of digital technology on family relationships and to support family happiness in the digital age.

In April 2012, the United Nations held a high-level meeting on “Happiness and Well-Being: Defining a New Economic Paradigm,” initiated by Bhutan, a nation that prioritized Gross National Happiness over Gross Domestic Product since the 1970s. Subsequently, the UN General Assembly declared 20 March as the International Day of Happiness, emphasizing happiness and well-being as universal human goals and calling for a more inclusive and balanced approach to economic growth, as reflected in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The effectiveness of governance, social equity, and public services has been closely linked to families' and citizens' life satisfaction. Within families, cultivating an optimal home environment, including safe and stimulating physical conditions, developmentally appropriate materials, and nurturing caregiver interactions, is essential for children's brain development and socio-emotional growth (Maggi et al., 2005). Responsive caregiving in families that supports exploration, emotional validation, and social engagement not only fosters children's cognitive and emotional foundations but also contributes to families' future academic achievement and life success (Engle et al, 2007).

Activities that foster cognitive, social, and emotional development, such as reading, storytelling, counting, drawing, singing, and especially family play, are

critical for nurturing children's growth within the family unit. However, contemporary families face increasing challenges, including family stress, communication breakdowns, and disruptive effects of digital society, weakening emotional bonds among family members and reducing overall family well-being. Addressing these issues is key in Thailand's National 20-Year Strategy (2018–2037), particularly Strategy No. 2, which emphasizes improving family health and quality of life for Thai citizens through sustainable family-centered social development. Similarly, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 highlights the importance of peaceful, inclusive family environments and effective child protection within family systems as foundational to sustainable development. Globally, millions of children still experience emotional, physical, and sexual violence, making it essential to foster protective environments and emotional resilience within families. In response, mindfulness meditation has gained attention as a powerful tool for enhancing family psychological well-being, emotional regulation, and relational compassion. Rooted in Buddhist traditions and widely adopted in secular contexts, mindfulness, especially Loving-Kindness Meditation (LKM), offers an effective means of cultivating unconditional goodwill, empathy, and deeper connections, particularly within family relationships.

Loving-Kindness Meditation (LKM) has demonstrated numerous psychological benefits for families, including the promotion of positive emotions, reduction of negative affect, and enhancement of emotional resilience among family members. Given these advantages, exploring LKM within the family context offers a compelling opportunity, as familial relationships are central to individual and collective well-being. Although existing literature richly documents mindfulness and loving-kindness practices, research specifically applying these methods within families remains limited. This study addresses that gap by examining the development process of mindfulness meditation combined with loving-kindness practices to enhance family happiness and relational harmony. By fostering greater family awareness of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors through mindfulness and cultivating familial compassion through loving-kindness, family members can improve their interactions within the family unit. Nevertheless, integrating these practices into diverse family systems presents unique challenges, requiring sensitivity to varying levels of familial openness, family dynamics, and specific relational needs within families. Tailoring mindfulness and loving-kindness interventions to accommodate these

family complexities is critical for their effective implementation and long-term success within family settings.

Objectives

1. To study family problems, causes, and effects related to relationships within the family
2. To develop the process of Mindfulness meditation practice with Loving-kindness to enhance relationships within the family
3. To evaluate the outcome of practicing mindfulness meditation with Loving-Kindness for enhancing relationships within the family.

Literature Review

Concepts of problems, causes, effects, and needs in families

Family happiness is adversely affected by global events, undermining children's emotional, behavioral, and cognitive development and leading to diminished self-worth, social isolation, academic failure, anxiety, and sadness (Dioquino, 2024). Parental estrangement or unresolved custody disputes may give rise to feelings of hopelessness, financial difficulties, and persistent mental health issues. Contemporary families face challenges in balancing professional and familial obligations, leading to health deterioration and distress. Depression and anxiety hinder family communication, bonds, and support systems (Carbonell et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic escalated health threats, social seclusion, and economic instability, thereby diminishing family functioning and relationship satisfaction (Kim et al., 2024).

When family communication deteriorates, emotional bonds weaken and relationships may become hostile and emotionally disconnected (Ansar et al., 2024). Sirisankanan and Kananurak (2025) reported that parental emotional instability and financial strain are associated with elevated family dysfunction and adverse developmental outcomes for children. Emotional abuse, manipulation, and neglect can further damage mental health and relational security, contributing to anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation (Hoffmann & Heim, 2024). Waseem et al. (2024) similarly note that compounded stressors—family conflict, financial problems, and communication breakdown—undermine well-being and stability. Walters et al. (2024) emphasize the value of family-

centered therapeutic approaches that strengthen bonding, communication, and resilience through attentive, compassionate listening.

Concepts of Buddhist peaceful mean to enhance relationships in Families

Enhancing family relationships and happiness through Buddhist concepts of peace involves integrating the Brahmavihara principles, Loving-Kindness (Metta), Compassion (Karuna), Sympathetic Joy (Mudita), and Equanimity (Upekkha), into daily interpersonal dynamics. The Brahmavihara Sutta (AN10.208) emphasizes that cultivating these qualities transforms consciousness, fostering emotional stability and universal compassion. Practices such as self-directed Metta meditation and family Metta sessions promote self-compassion and deepen familial bonds, while Karuna nurtures understanding and alleviation of suffering, Mudita fosters shared joy in each other's successes, and Upekkha encourages emotional balance during conflicts. Together, these principles contribute to peaceful coexistence, conflict resolution, and the creation of a harmonious, supportive family environment, ultimately strengthening emotional resilience, communication, and overall mental well-being.

The Noble Eightfold Path (SN45.8; Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2000), a cornerstone of Buddhist philosophy, offers a comprehensive guide to ethical living, mental discipline, and wisdom aimed at alleviating suffering (dukkha) and attaining liberation (nibbāna). Divided into wisdom (right view, right intention), ethical conduct (right speech, right action, right livelihood), and mental discipline (right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration), the Path presents a practical framework for personal and relational transformation. In the family context, applying principles such as Right Speech (through compassionate, truthful communication) and Right Action (through ethical, supportive behaviors) can foster trust, emotional security, and lasting harmony. Integrating the Eightfold Path into familial interactions cultivates compassion, respect, mindfulness, and cooperation, thereby strengthening emotional bonds, facilitating conflict resolution, and promoting sustainable family happiness and well-being.

The Saṅgha Sutta (AN 4.32; Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2012), which presents the Saṅghavattthu ("four bases of social cohesion"), offers a practical framework for fostering harmonious family relationships through generosity (dāna), benevolent speech (piyavācā), beneficial conduct (atthacariyā), and impartiality (samānattatā). These principles underscore that familial respect and unity are nurtured through ethical action rather than hierarchical authority. Applied within

families, generosity cultivates trust, pleasant speech supports healing communication, beneficial conduct encourages altruistic care, and impartiality strengthens mutual respect. Teachings from Thai meditation masters such as Phra Ajahn Jayasaro (2013), Ajahn Chah (2002), and Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (1994) reinforce these principles as vital for sustaining emotional bonds and resilience in family life.

Integrating the Saṅgahavatthu alongside the Brahmavihāras and the Noble Eightfold Path offers a comprehensive Buddhist framework for mindfulness-based family interventions, promoting emotional connection, ethical conduct, and sustainable relational well-being.

Research works related to the Development process of practicing mindfulness meditation with Loving-Kindness for enhancing relationships in families

Mindfulness is being employed in family therapy to help therapists and clients cope with pain beyond the Western ideal of a problem-free life. Gehart and McCollum (2007) present a Buddhist-inspired approach that views suffering as a learning opportunity, supports nonjudgmental observation of feelings, and encourages purposeful action even while feeling awful. Like story therapy, this strategy fosters acceptance without passivity, allowing therapists to "befriend problems" and use more adaptable, inventive, and cooperative treatments. Finally, this idea encourages resilience and understanding in therapy rather than pain relief.

Buddhist psychological perspectives suggest that practices such as ānāpānasati (mindfulness of breathing) and mettā bhāvanā (loving-kindness meditation) can strengthen attentional stability, emotional regulation, and prosocial orientation (Rana, 2015). According to Jiwattanasuk et al. (2025), the Buddhamahametta Foundation's Mindfulness–Wisdom–Loving-Kindness (MWL) program indicates that tailored contemplative training can enhance empathy, acceptance, and resilience, thereby supporting mental well-being. Brody et al. (2018) further suggest that mindfulness-informed family therapies can improve emotion regulation and promote healthier relational patterns. Together, these approaches indicate that mindfulness and loving-kindness practices may contribute to family well-being by cultivating awareness, emotional flexibility, and compassionate communication.

Conceptual Frameworks

This research undertakes a comprehensive review of literature on mindfulness and loving-kindness meditation for families, along with the exploration of Buddhist peaceful principles to inform the development of a specialized Mindfulness, Wisdom, and Loving-Kindness (MWL) curriculum at the Buddhamahametta Foundation. The goal is to design a structured, family-centered program that integrates mindfulness and loving-kindness practices rooted in Buddhist teachings, with its effectiveness evaluated in terms of families' well-being, emotional regulation, prosocial behavior, and psychological resilience.

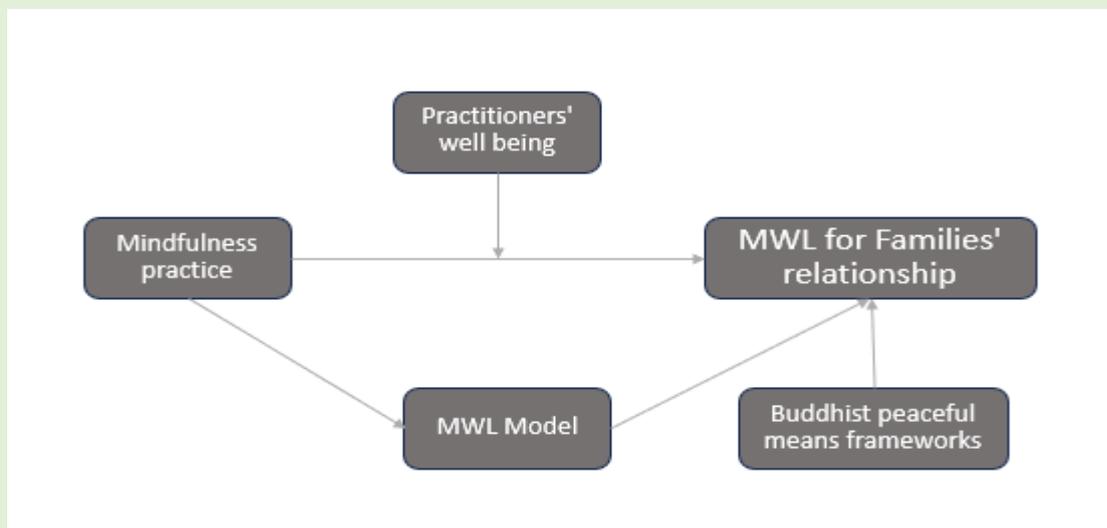


Figure 1: Conceptual Frameworks

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative case study methodology across three phases to explore family relationship dynamics and develop a tailored Mindfulness with Loving-Kindness (MWL) meditation program. Conducted at the Buddhamahametta Foundation in Chiang Rak Noi, Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya, the research integrates Buddhist principles and contemporary mindfulness theories to ensure both theoretical rigor and practical relevance.

Phase 1 involved in-depth interviews with parents and children to examine familial conflict, emotional detachment, and communication breakdowns, supported by family stress theory and Buddhist ethics. Insights from Phase 1 informed a focus group with Buddhist educators and participants to co-develop the MWL curriculum. Post-course interviews assessed emotional and relational

shifts, while follow-up interviews evaluated the sustained impact of MWL practices. Throughout, Buddhist teachings on mindfulness (*sati*) and loving-kindness (*mettā*), combined with contemporary meditation research, guided the analysis and course refinement.

Phase 2 employs a qualitative methodology to achieve Research Objective 2: enhancing familial relationships through the implementation of the Mindfulness with Loving-Kindness (MWL) Program. Building upon the curriculum developed in Phase 1, this phase focuses on applying and evaluating the MWL program's impact on family well-being. Families participated in a structured course integrating mindfulness, wisdom, and loving-kindness practices within a Buddhist framework. Post-course assessments gathered qualitative data on emotional, communicative, and relational shifts, enabling an evaluation of the program's effectiveness in promoting sustainable family harmony.

Phase 3 addresses Research Objective 3: evaluating the effects of mindfulness meditation on familial relationships. This phase emphasizes the long-term impact of the Mindfulness with Loving-Kindness (MWL) Program through qualitative follow-up interviews with participating families. The data collected assess the sustainability of emotional regulation, communication improvements, and relational well-being, providing insights into the enduring influence of mindfulness and loving-kindness practices within the family context.

Research Results

Objective 1: To study family problems, causes, and effects related to relationships within the family.

The findings from Phase 1, based on interviews with parents and children across six families and a focus group of nine mindfulness and family well-being experts, revealed that ineffective communication, emotional alienation, and a lack of mutual understanding were the principal challenges undermining family relationships.

Table 1: Summary of Key Themes for the in-depth interview

THEME	DESCRIPTION
Parental Expectations	Pressure to perform academically or behave according to adult expectations.
Emotional Mismanagement	Stress, anger, and lack of emotional regulation among adults and children.
Communication Breakdown	Poor listening, generational gaps, and digital distraction weaken connection.
Emotional Distance and Withdrawal	Emotional disconnect, avoidance, and lack of safe space for expression.
Impact on Family Harmony	Ongoing tension, reduced trust, and strained parent-child relationships.

Parents cited work-related stress, financial strain, and reduced quality time as major contributors to emotional exhaustion and reactive communication styles, while children expressed feelings of dismissal, criticism, and emotional suppression. The focus group emphasized that these issues reflect deeper systemic dysfunctions rooted in a lack of mindfulness and emotional regulation, where communication often regresses into emotionally charged reactivity or prolonged avoidance. Both interview and focus group insights align with psychological literature, which shows that emotional disengagement within families is strongly associated with anxiety, depression, and poor social adjustment in children.

Furthermore, Buddhist teachings highlighted in the literature, including the principles of *sati* (mindfulness), *mettā* (loving-kindness), and *yoniso manasikāra* (wise attention), reinforce that the absence of present-moment awareness and compassion contributes to familial suffering and emotional disconnection. Empirical and doctrinal evidence jointly affirm that persistent emotional invalidation, unresolved parental stress, and punitive communication create long-term psychological harm. These findings validate the first research objective by clearly identifying the root causes and emotional consequences of familial dysfunction, thereby establishing the urgent need for interventions grounded in mindfulness, wisdom, and loving-kindness. This theoretical and empirical understanding directly informed the development of the MWL program, aiming to repair emotional bonds, foster mindful communication, and cultivate enduring familial harmony.

Objective No. 2: To develop the process of Mindfulness meditation practice with Loving-kindness to enhance relationships within the family

To achieve the second objective, the study developed and implemented the Mindfulness with Loving-Kindness (MWL) course, based on insights from Phase 1 and supported by Buddhist principles and contemporary mindfulness research.



Figure 2: MWL course for families' relationship development

The one-day experiential course integrated walking, sitting, and loving-kindness meditations, along with mindful family communication, to directly address emotional disconnection and communication breakdowns. Pre-course interviews revealed strained family environments characterized by emotional suppression, reactive parenting, and a lack of open communication. Following the MWL course, post-test interviews with 12 parents and 8 children demonstrated significant improvements: parents reported increased emotional regulation and reflective listening, while children reported feeling safer and more valued when sharing their emotions. Collaborative practices, such as paired loving-kindness exercises and mindful eating, provided concrete experiences that deepened emotional bonds within the family unit.

The positive outcomes of the MWL course were further validated by existing scholarly literature, which emphasizes the effectiveness of mindfulness and loving-kindness interventions in enhancing emotional regulation, empathy,

and relational harmony. The integration of Brahmavihāra practices within the course aligned with evidence showing that cultivating compassion, joy, and equanimity significantly improves interpersonal dynamics. Comparisons with programs such as the Mindfulness-Enhanced Strengthening Families Program reinforced that even brief, well-structured interventions can lead to lasting emotional benefits.

Thus, the Phase 2 findings confirm the MWL program's practical relevance and effectiveness, illustrating that integrating Buddhist meditative practices into family-centered activities can systematically strengthen emotional connections and improve family well-being, fully accomplishing Research Objective 2.

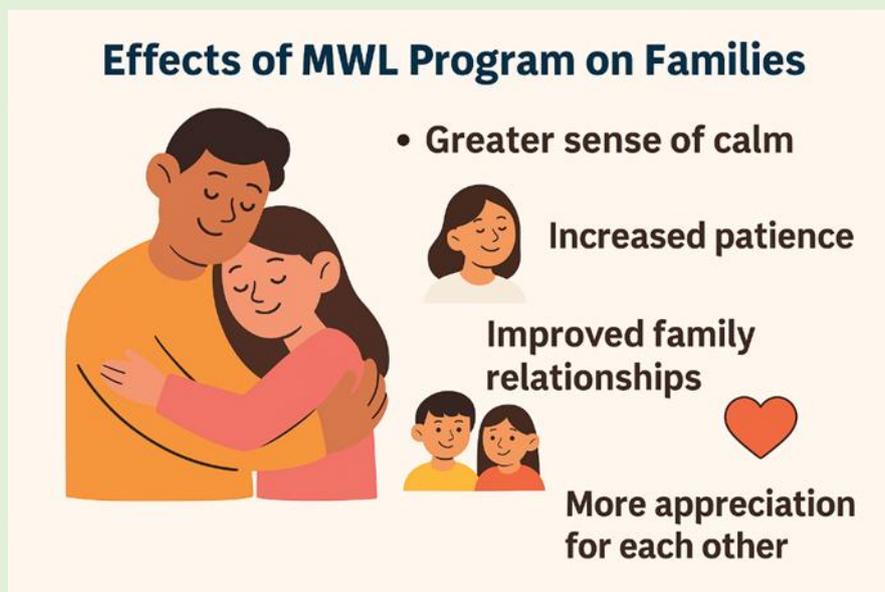


Figure 3: Effects of the MWL course on families

Objective No. 3: To evaluate the outcome of practicing mindfulness meditation with Loving-Kindness for enhancing relationships within the family.

The Phase 3 assessment, conducted two weeks after the MWL one-day course, demonstrated that mindfulness and loving-kindness practices produced sustained positive effects on family relationships. Interviews with six families revealed notable improvements in communication, emotional responsiveness, and relational dynamics. Parents reported a calmer, more collaborative home environment, characterized by greater attentiveness, respect, and emotional support, while children reported feeling safer and more connected when expressing their thoughts. Participants frequently applied MWL techniques such

as mindful breathing, loving-kindness recitations, and forgiveness dialogues to manage emotional stress and prevent conflicts, indicating an enhanced capacity for emotional regulation and compassionate communication in daily family life.

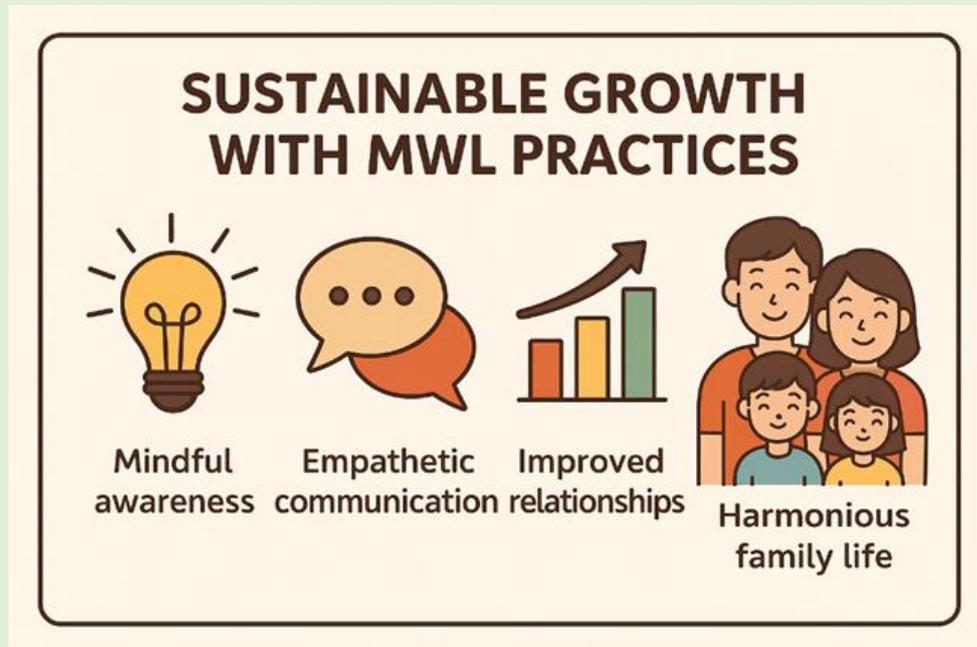


Figure 4: Benefits of the MWL course in the long term

These findings align with the existing academic literature, which affirms the long-term benefits of mindfulness and loving-kindness practices in transforming interpersonal relationships. Research consistently shows that mindfulness enhances emotional awareness and reduces reactivity, while loving-kindness meditation fosters empathy, relational warmth, and prosocial behaviors. Buddhist teachings on *mettā* and *karuṇā* further emphasize the importance of ongoing internal cultivation for sustaining interpersonal harmony and resilience. The enduring transformations reported by participants, including improved emotional articulation and reciprocal respect, validate the MWL course's effectiveness as a succinct yet impactful intervention, thereby achieving the aims outlined in Research Objective 3 and supporting the broader theoretical framework of Buddhist-informed family interventions.

Discussion

The findings for Research Objective 1 revealed that familial conflicts between parents and children primarily arise from emotional estrangement, ineffective communication, unresolved disputes, and misinterpretations of behavior. These issues are often intensified by daily stressors such as

occupational pressures, academic demands, and generational differences, leading to emotional exhaustion for parents and feelings of neglect for children. Consistent with the findings of Hoffman and Heim (2024) and Buddhist teachings such as those in the Sammaditthi Sutta, the study confirms that emotional neglect and disrespectful communication within families significantly increase the risk of anxiety, depression, and emotional disconnection among children, highlighting the need for interventions promoting ethical communication and mindful emotional engagement.

The results addressing Research Objective 2 demonstrated that the development and implementation of the Mindfulness with Loving-Kindness (MWL) curriculum successfully provided families with practical tools to enhance mindful awareness, empathy, and emotional connection. This success stems from the ability of mindfulness and loving-kindness practices to slow emotional reactivity, foster present-moment awareness, and nurture compassionate engagement between family members. In alignment with Buddhist frameworks such as the Four Foundations of Mindfulness and the Saṅgahavatthu, the MWL course structure, emphasizing walking meditation, loving-kindness chanting, and parental appreciation, effectively promoted family cohesion and emotional healing.

Regarding Research Objective 3, the findings indicated that families continued to experience long-term improvements in emotional communication, mutual understanding, and relational well-being following the MWL intervention. Sustained mindfulness and loving-kindness practices contributed to reshaping cognitive and emotional patterns, reducing habitual reactivity, and fostering greater self-awareness within family interactions. The enduring impact observed aligns with established research on mindfulness-based interventions, which highlights emotional stability and strengthened interpersonal bonds as key outcomes. From a Buddhist perspective, these results reflect the cultivation of dhamma (wholesome qualities), demonstrating that internal transformation through mindfulness and compassion leads to harmonious family relationships.

Knowledge from Research

This study contributes new insights into the intersection of Buddhist mindfulness, loving-kindness meditation, and family relationship enhancement. By systematically developing and evaluating the Mindfulness with Loving-Kindness (MWL) program, the research offers a culturally grounded, practical

framework for promoting emotional well-being within families. The findings demonstrate not only immediate improvements in emotional communication but also sustainable behavioral changes, bridging traditional Buddhist teachings with contemporary family needs. Key new knowledge generated from the study includes:

1. A Buddhist-Based Framework for Family Reconnection

The MWL program introduced a family-centered meditation approach that combined walking, sitting, and loving-kindness meditations, along with mindful communication. It created a “common emotional space” that fostered trust, emotional openness, and reflective dialogue among parents and children, realigning family interactions with Buddhist ethical principles.

2. Evidence of Behavioral Change and Sustainable Impact

The study found enduring behavioral changes two weeks post-intervention. Families continued practicing mindfulness and loving-kindness techniques, leading to improved emotional regulation and compassionate communication. This confirms that MWL practices can form part of a sustainable “shared ethical culture” within family life.

3. Bridging Tradition and Practice: A Model for Applied Buddhist Education

The MWL course effectively translated core Buddhist doctrines, such as the Five Precepts and the Brahmavihāras, into accessible family activities. This created a replicable model for temples, foundations, and schools to integrate mindfulness education in a developmentally appropriate and relationally focused manner.

4. Children as Active Mindfulness Practitioners

The study revealed that children are not passive recipients but active agents in mindfulness practice when suitably facilitated. Children demonstrated emotional awareness, self-regulation, and the ability to rebuild emotional connections with their parents, challenging assumptions about children's capacity to engage in meditative practices.

5. Contribution to Thai Buddhist Contemplative Practice Research

This research expands the field of Thai Buddhist contemplative studies by demonstrating the viability of mindfulness and loving-kindness practices for lay families, not just monastic practitioners. It also pioneers a child-inclusive meditation model that integrates traditional Buddhist values, such as the Five Precepts and Brahmavihāras, with contemporary family well-being frameworks.

Conclusion.

This qualitative case study examined parent–child relationship problems and developed a context-responsive contemplative intervention for Thai families. Across three phases, interviews with parents and children from six families, consultation with a focus group of nine experts, and an implementation-and-follow-up evaluation, the study identified a recurrent pattern of stress-amplified miscommunication: parental overload and reactive speech, children’s perceptions of neglect, and unresolved emotional grievances that accumulated into avoidance, conflict escalation, and relational distancing. These findings indicate that family conflict is not solely a matter of “discipline” or “attitude,” but a systemic interaction among daily stressors, emotional regulation capacity, and communication norms.

In response, the study developed and piloted the Mindfulness with Loving-Kindness (MWL) course, integrating mindfulness, wise attention, and mettā practice with structured reflection and communication exercises. Participant feedback and post-program observation suggested improvements in emotional awareness, calmer interaction, and greater willingness to listen and repair after conflict. In particular, brief, guided practices helped families interrupt automatic reactivity and replace blame-oriented exchanges with respectful speech, empathy, and constructive problem-solving. The course design also highlighted the importance of ongoing home practice and follow-up support to consolidate gains beyond the training setting.

Overall, the study contributes a practical model for strengthening family relationships by translating Buddhist ethical and contemplative principles into an applied family well-being program. For practice, community organizations and family service providers may adapt MWL as a preventive and restorative approach, while future research should test the model with larger and more diverse samples, include comparative designs with secular mindfulness programs, and examine longer-term outcomes for family functioning and child well-being.

Suggestions

Based on the findings, the following practical and research recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness and future development of the Mindfulness with Loving-Kindness (MWL) program:

Practical Recommendations

1. Families should integrate simple MWL practices, such as mindful breathing, walking meditation, and gratitude sharing, into daily routines to strengthen emotional bonds.

2. Institutions like the Buddhamahametta Foundation could regularly offer MWL courses with online support materials, expanding access across different family types and age groups.

3. Educators and mental health practitioners should embed MWL techniques into parenting workshops and counseling programs to support emotional resilience in families.

Recommendations for Further Research

1. Longitudinal studies should assess the long-term impacts of MWL practices over several months using both qualitative and quantitative methods.

2. Future research should test the MWL program across diverse cultural and socio-economic contexts to determine its adaptability and universality.

3. Comparative studies should evaluate MWL against secular mindfulness models to highlight the role of Buddhist ethical principles in enhancing family well-being.

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