

# The Right Mindfulness (sammā-sati) Wellness Program: Ameliorating Burnout and Promoting Well-being

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## Abstract

This qualitative study investigates the problems, causes, and impacts of burnout among Vietnamese employees in Japan and examines the role of Right Mindfulness (sammā-sati) in addressing these challenges. Drawing on Buddhist teachings, the research develops a tailored Wellness Program grounded in Right Mindfulness to mitigate burnout and enhance well-being. Data were collected through 17 in-depth interviews and a focus group with 9 experts, providing rich insights for program design. The program incorporates mindful breathing, self-awareness, and non-judgmental observation as core practices. Key findings reveal that applying Right Mindfulness significantly ameliorates burnout, reduces stress, fosters mental health, and improves overall well-being. This study contributes to the academic discourse by integrating Buddhist contemplative practices into workplace mental health strategies, offering a culturally sensitive approach for migrant employees. The findings have practical implications for scholars, practitioners, and organizations seeking evidence-based interventions to reduce burnout and promote employee well-being.

**Keywords:** Right Mindfulness (Sammā-Sati) Wellness Program; Burnout; Well-Being; Mental Health; Vietnamese Employees

## Introduction

Globalization has transformed economic, political, and cultural systems, creating new opportunities while intensifying workplace challenges (Steger, 2017, p. 5). One critical outcome is the rising prevalence of occupational burnout, now recognized by the World Health Organization (2019, p. 11) as an occupational phenomenon with serious implications for individual well-being and organizational performance. Burnout is defined as a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged job stress, impairing cognitive functioning, emotional stability, and productivity. Initially conceptualized by Freudenberger (1974, p. 159) and later expanded by Maslach et al. (2001, p. 397) into three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment, burnout reflects systemic workplace deficiencies rather than isolated psychological issues.

Japan exemplifies this crisis, where rigid work cultures and long hours have led to

psychosomatic disorders and, in extreme cases, karoshi (death from overwork) (Nishiyama & Johnson, 1997). Despite labor reforms, sociocultural expectations continue to impose heavy psychological burdens. Vietnamese migrant workers in Japan face additional stressors, including cultural and linguistic barriers, isolation, and high-pressure environments, making them highly vulnerable to burnout (Uezato et al., 2024). Existing support systems rarely address these culturally specific needs, revealing a significant research gap in effective, context-sensitive interventions.

To address this gap, the present study investigates Right Mindfulness (Sammā-Sati), a core Buddhist principle outlined in the *Ānāpānasati-sutta* (Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995), as a holistic approach to mitigating burnout. Right Mindfulness emphasizes focused attention and non-judgmental awareness, fostering psychological balance and resilience (Bodhi, 2000; Walshe, 1987). This research develops the Right Mindfulness Wellness Program, integrating theoretical foundations with qualitative insights from 17 interviews and a focus group of 9 experts. By examining the intersection of Buddhist contemplative practices and occupational health, this study contributes to burnout intervention literature by offering a culturally tailored, evidence-based strategy for promoting mental health and well-being among migrant employees.

### Objectives of the Research

1. To investigate the problems, causes, and impacts of burnout among Vietnamese employees in Japan, and to explore the Buddhist concept of Right Mindfulness (sammā-sati).
2. To develop a Right Mindfulness (sammā-sati)-based wellness program aimed at ameliorating burnout and promoting well-being among Vietnamese employees in Japan.

### Methodology

#### Key-informants

Purposive sampling facilitated the selection of 17 key informants for the initial research phase. These individuals, including employees within these fields, possessed extensive expertise in Buddhism, medical doctor, psychology, and modern science. Contemporary perspectives on ameliorating burnout and promoting well-being were elicited through in-depth interviews with three groups: Prominent Buddhist Scholars, Mindfulness Masters, and Psychologists. This investigation explored the intersection of Western psychological paradigms and Buddhist principles.

#### Research Instruments

In-depth interviews will be meticulously conducted with a diverse group of experts, including Buddhist scholars, mindfulness masters, and psychiatrists. These interviews will be structured to gather rich qualitative data on their experiences, perceptions, and insights regarding the efficacy of Right Mindfulness (sammā-sati) interventions for ameliorating burnout and promoting well-being. The thoroughness of this process ensures that the data collected will be of the highest quality and reliability.



The interviews will be structured around a semi-structured interview guide, allowing for flexibility while ensuring that key themes are explored. The researchers will adopt a neutral and non-directive approach during the interviews, encouraging the participants to share their experiences and insights freely. The interview guide will be designed to elicit detailed responses on topics such as the theoretical underpinnings of Right Mindfulness, its potential benefits for mental and physical health, and practical considerations for implementing effective mindfulness-based interventions in various settings.

To facilitate a comprehensive analysis, the interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcribed data will be subjected to thematic analysis, a qualitative research method that involves identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns within the data. This process will be conducted in a systematic manner, ensuring that the analysis is rigorous and the findings are reliable. This analysis will enable the researchers to uncover key themes, generate insights, and develop a deeper understanding of the factors contributing to Right Mindfulness interventions' success. The Interview Form for Key Informants consists of 4 sections:

**Section 1:** General information of the interviewee

**Section 2:** Questions related to 'The Effects of Right Mindfulness (sammā-sati) on Ameliorating Burnout and Promoting Well-Being for Vietnamese Employees in Japan'

**Section 3:** Designing the Wellness Program of Right Mindfulness (sammā-sati)

**Section 4:** Additional suggestions

#### **Data Collection**

Our investigation into the potential of Right Mindfulness (sammā-sati) in promoting employee well-being and ameliorating burnout, involving seventeen domestic and international experts, has yielded significant findings. These experts, each with a wealth of knowledge and experience in their respective fields, participated in in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Conducted in a private and comfortable setting, the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and confidentiality. Discussions explored the influence of Right Mindfulness on psychological, physical, and social aspects of well-being, as well as the underlying mechanisms for burnout amelioration. The rich qualitative data gathered through this process provides a critical foundation for designing and implementing the Wellness Program of Right Mindfulness (sammā-sati) of the study, highlighting the significance of the research findings.

#### **Data Analysis**

The qualitative data obtained from both focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews will undergo a rigorous thematic analysis, following the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This systematic process will include data familiarization, initial code generation, theme identification, theme review, and theme definition.

To ensure trustworthiness and validity, strategies such as member checking, peer debriefing, and maintaining an audit trail will be employed. Researcher roles in coding will be clearly delineated, and inter-coder reliability checks will be conducted to enhance consistency.

All qualitative data will be handled ethically, with strict adherence to confidentiality protocols and secure data storage.

The insights derived from this analysis will provide a nuanced understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives, highlighting both benefits and challenges associated with the Right Mindfulness (sammā-sati) Wellness Program. These findings will directly inform the iterative refinement of the program's design, ensuring optimal implementation and maximizing its impact on practitioners.

## Results

Seventeen in-depth interviews with key informants (three meditation masters, six Buddhist scholars or experts in Buddhism, and eight psychologists) were analyzed thematically to understand proximal causes and lived impacts of burnout among Vietnamese employees. Three overarching themes, emotional strain, cultural dissonance, and coping behavior, captured convergent patterns across accounts.

**Emotional Strain:** Participants consistently described cumulative work-related strain characterized by sustained overload, time pressure, and fragmented attention. Interviewees linked this strain to emotional exhaustion, irritability, and sleep disturbance. Reports highlighted the sense of “always being on,” with persistent rumination beyond work hours and diminished capacity to recover between shifts. Several informants emphasized somatic correlates such as tightness in the chest and headaches accompanying cognitive fatigue. The perceived erosion of joy at work, experienced as blunted positive affect and fading motivation, was often coupled with self-criticism when productivity dipped, further fueling the exhaustion cycle.

**Cultural Dissonance:** A second theme focused on tensions between traditional cultural norms and contemporary workplace logics. Respondents pointed to the expectation of deference to hierarchy, conflict avoidance, and collective harmony juxtaposed with performance metrics, rapid change, and assertive communication styles. This dissonance manifested as emotional ambivalence: employees sought to maintain harmony while also needing to raise concerns or limit unrealistic requests. Many described role conflict when family obligations and filial piety met long hours and weekend work. Some reported silent compliance, accepting additional tasks to avoid “losing face,” which paradoxically increased overload and reduced perceived control, intensifying burnout risk.

**Coping Behavior:** Coping responses clustered into three patterns:

- 1) Overextension as coping: Doubling down on work, such as staying late or skipping breaks, to “prove worth,” which provided short-term control but worsened fatigue and errors.

- 2) Avoidant strategies: Emotional suppression, disengagement, and excessive screen time outside work. While these offered temporary relief, participants noted rebound anxiety, poorer sleep, and relational withdrawal.

- 3) Emergent mindfulness-adjacent practices: Some interviewees experimented with informal breathing, short pauses, or mindful walking during commutes. These unsystematic



practices offered brief respite but were described as inconsistent and difficult to sustain without structure, guidance, or a supportive environment.

**Impacts on Functioning and Well-Being:** Across interviews, burnout was associated with diminished concentration, reduced patience in interpersonal exchanges, and attenuated sense of meaning at work. Participants also reported spillover effects into family life such as irritability and less availability, and health behaviors such as skipped meals and reduced physical activity. Importantly, several informants emphasized that when individuals experienced guided, consistent practice, emotional regulation improved and strain became more workable. This insight directly informed program design in Objective 2.

Drawing on expert interviews and the needs identified in Objective 1, we designed a comprehensive Wellness Program of Right Mindfulness aimed at ameliorating burnout and promoting well-being. Expert consensus held that a minimum two-day duration is required to produce perceptible shifts in mental states and help participants internalize foundational skills. The program prioritizes quality and intensity of practice and the seamless integration of mindfulness into daily routines. **Conceptual Foundation and Design Logic:**

**Targeting emotional strain:** Formal practices such as sitting and walking meditation and mindful breathing cultivate attentional stability and non-reactive awareness to address rumination, hyperarousal, and affective depletion identified in Objective 1.

**Addressing cultural dissonance:** The program integrates Right Mindfulness within familiar cultural and contemplative frames such as chanting and Dhamma talks, providing culturally consonant pathways to self-regulation while honoring relational harmony and respect for elders and teachers.

**Transforming coping behavior:** Structured, guided routines replace overextension and avoidance with skillful, repeatable practices, while individual meditation interviews tailor guidance to personal challenges such as perfectionism and boundary setting.

**Core Components:**

**Meditation Sessions (Sitting and Walking):** Alternating sitting and walking meditation periods, each at least 30 minutes, with progressive extension as stability develops. Sitting practice cultivates grounded breath awareness and observation of thoughts and emotions; walking practice fosters embodied presence and continuity of attention in movement.

**Mindfulness in Breathing (Sixteen Exercises):** The program systematically trains the Sixteen Exercises of Mindful Breathing, organized into four domains:

- 1) Body (*kāyā*): relaxation and awareness of posture and breath-body connection.
- 2) Feelings (*vedanā*): recognizing pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral tones; cultivating joy; transforming suffering.
- 3) Mind (*citta*): observing the mind's states; strengthening concentration and balance.
- 4) Mind-objects (*dhamma*): insight into impermanence, non-self, and interdependence.

These practices develop inner stability, emotion regulation, and insight, aligning directly with the emotional strain and meaning erosion noted in Objective 1.

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Mindfulness in Daily Activities: Continuous awareness is extended to eating, walking, showering, brushing teeth, using the bathroom, and preparing for sleep.

This operationalizes practice in life, converting routine moments into micro-interventions that counteract avoidance, reactivity, and autopilot behaviors reported by participants.

Dhamma Talks (Daily): Short, thematically targeted talks translate the Sixteen Exercises into practical, workplace-relevant applications such as mindful pauses before difficult conversations and meeting transitions, addressing cultural dissonance by framing skills in familiar ethical-contemplative language.

Meditation Interviews (Individual Consultations): Beginning on Day 2, participants receive personalized guidance from experienced instructors to troubleshoot obstacles such as agitation or sleepiness and fit practices to context such as commuter walking practice and mindful micro-breaks.

**Figure 1** Daily Schedule for The Wellness Program of Right Mindfulness (sammā-sati)

Time	Activities
05.00 hrs	Morning wake-up bell / do personal missions with mindfulness
05.30 hrs	Morning Chanting / Practice Wellness Program on Right Mindfulness (sammā-sati)
07.00 hrs	Breakfast / and Mindfulness Eating
08.30 hrs	Practice Wellness Program on Right Mindfulness (sammā-sati)
10.30 hrs	Lunch / and Mindfulness Eating
12.00 hrs	Body Scan Meditation
13.00 hrs	Walking / Sitting Meditation / Meditation interview
16.00 hrs	Shower / Personal missions with mindfulness / Contemplation of minor activities and Mindfulness Breathing
17.00 hrs	Dinner / and Mindfulness Eating
18.30 hrs	Drinking Tea Meditation / Listening to Dhamma Talks
20.00 hrs	Practice Wellness Program on Right Mindfulness (sammā-sati)
21.00 hrs	Sleep with mindfulness / Contemplation of minor activities and Mindfulness Breathing

To Integration features recommended by experts included consistent alternation between sitting and walking to sustain engagement and balance arousal, at least 30-minute practice units to deepen concentration, targeted Dhamma talks aligned with the four domains of practice, and individual consultations from Day 2 to personalize progress and address barriers.

Linking Components to Objective 1 Findings

Emotional strain → Regulation and restoration:

Breath-based concentration and body scan directly address hyperarousal and sleep disturbance; structured alternation prevents over-efforting while consolidating attentional control.

Mind-domain exercises cultivate equanimity, countering irritability and cognitive fatigue.

Cultural dissonance → Culturally consonant practice:

Inclusion of chanting, tea meditation, and Dhamma framing respects hierarchical and communal sensibilities, reducing resistance and supporting uptake.

Mind-objects exercises contextualize stressors within impermanence and interdependence, reframing conflict and role tension without negating harmony norms.

Coping behavior → Skillful substitution:

The schedule's micro-practices such as mindful eating and showering replace avoidant scrolling and autopilot routines with short, repeatable regulation moments.

Meditation interviews offer corrective feedback, supporting adherence and preventing the overextension pattern such as pushing too hard in practice.

Experts converged on a minimum two-day immersion to achieve perceptible mental shifts and to build a foundation for transfer into work settings. The design emphasizes depth over breadth, privileging consistent cycles of practice, reflection through talks and interviews, and application in daily activities to consolidate learning and counter relapse into habitual coping.

## Discussion

The present study explored the causes and impacts of burnout among Vietnamese employees. To address these challenges, it developed a culturally grounded intervention, the Wellness Program of Right Mindfulness (sammā-sati). The findings contribute to the growing literature on occupational health by highlighting the interplay between emotional strain, cultural dissonance, and coping behaviors in shaping burnout experiences and demonstrating how mindfulness-based interventions can be adapted to local cultural contexts.

The thematic analysis revealed that emotional strain was primarily driven by sustained workload, time pressure, and cognitive fragmentation, consistent with prior research linking job demands to emotional exhaustion (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Cultural dissonance emerged as a salient factor, underscoring the tension between collectivist norms and individual performance expectations. This finding aligns with cross-cultural stress models, which suggest that incongruence between cultural values and organizational practices exacerbates psychological strain (Hofstede, 2011). Coping behaviors ranged from maladaptive strategies such as overextension and avoidance to nascent mindfulness practices, indicating vulnerability and opportunity for intervention.

The impacts of burnout extended beyond the workplace, affecting family relationships and health behaviors. These spillover effects reinforce the systemic nature of burnout and the need for interventions that address intrapersonal and contextual dimensions.

The development of the Wellness Program was informed by expert consensus and grounded in the Sixteen Exercises of Mindful Breathing, a traditional Buddhist framework (Anālayo, 2018; Thich Nhat Hanh, 2020). The program targets the core mechanisms identified in Objective 1: emotional regulation, cultural consonance, and coping transformation by integrating formal meditation, mindful breathing, and daily-life mindfulness. Including chanting, tea meditation, and

Dhamma talks reflects a deliberate effort to embed the intervention within familiar cultural and spiritual practices, thereby enhancing acceptability and adherence.

The program's structure, a two-day intensive immersion, addresses the need for depth and continuity, as recommended by experts. This dosage is consistent with evidence suggesting that concentrated mindfulness training can produce meaningful changes in attentional control and emotional regulation within short time frames (Creswell, 2017).

The findings underscore the importance of culturally sensitive approaches to burnout intervention. While mindfulness-based programs have demonstrated efficacy in diverse settings (Lomas et al., 2019), their adaptation to local cultural and spiritual traditions may amplify engagement and sustainability. Integrating Buddhist principles into workplace well-being initiatives offers a model for harmonizing global evidence-based practices with indigenous wisdom.

Organizations should consider implementing structured mindfulness programs that go beyond isolated sessions and encompass daily routines and relational contexts. Embedding mindfulness into organizational culture may mitigate the structural drivers of burnout, such as role conflict and performance pressure, while fostering resilience and collective well-being.

Several limitations warrant consideration. First, the study relied on qualitative data from a purposive sample of experts and practitioners, which may limit generalizability. Second, the intervention design has not yet been empirically tested for effectiveness in workplace settings. Future research should employ mixed-methods designs to evaluate the program's impact on burnout, psychological well-being, and organizational outcomes. Longitudinal studies are needed to assess the durability of effects and the mechanisms underlying change.

## Conclusion

This study advances understanding of burnout in a Vietnamese context and offers a culturally attuned mindfulness-based intervention as a promising avenue for prevention and remediation. By addressing emotional strain, cultural dissonance, and maladaptive coping through structured and culturally resonant practices, the Wellness Program of Right Mindfulness holds potential for enhancing employee well-being and organizational health.

## Suggestions

Despite the valuable contributions of the present study to the understanding of mindfulness-based interventions, certain limitations must be acknowledged. However, these limitations also highlight the potential for future research to build upon this study's findings.

To enhance the applicability of future investigations, it is recommended that future research should seek to explore the underlying psychological and neurocognitive mechanisms that contribute to the observed outcomes. This emphasis on understanding the mechanisms behind the observed outcomes underscores the potential of this study to contribute significantly to the field. Special attention might be given to examining the relationships between Right Mindfulness (*sammā-sati*) and further variables such as sleep disorders, obsessive-compulsive

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behaviors, and psychological trauma.

This study offers to develop the Wellness Program of Right Mindfulness (sammā-sati) on ameliorating burnout and promoting well-being. The program's grounding in traditional Buddhist Right Mindfulness (sammā-sati), integrated with contemporary psychological frameworks, underscores its potential as a holistic and authentic intervention. Although preliminary, the findings contribute meaningfully to mindfulness-based mental health interventions, significantly adding to our knowledge and understanding. As the relevance of mindfulness continues to grow in discussions surrounding burnout, stress, mental health, and well-being, the development and application of programs such as Right Mindfulness (sammā-sati) hold considerable promise for fostering sustainable psychological health and human flourishing, informing the audience about the potential impact on mental health.

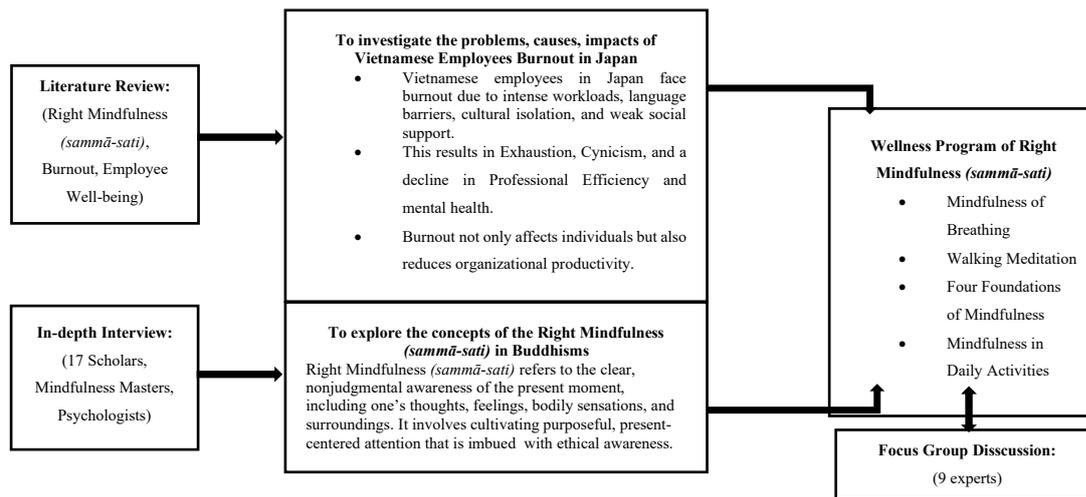
### **New Body of Knowledge**

The body of knowledge emerging from this study offers a comprehensive and in-depth exploration of Right Mindfulness (sammā-sati) within both Mahayana and Theravada Buddhist traditions, emphasizing its practical application in contemporary psychological interventions. By integrating traditional Buddhist teachings with modern burnout amelioration and well-being frameworks, this research bridges ancient contemplative wisdom with contemporary scientific perspectives.

Key insights into the structure and implementation of the Wellness Program of Right Mindfulness (sammā-sati) have been developed through the integration of expert recommendations from Meditation Masters, Buddhist scholars, and Psychologists. The intervention framework incorporates essential components, including the Sixteen Exercises of Mindful Breathing, sitting and walking meditation, chanting, Dhamma talks, and mindfulness in daily activities. The Wellness Program of Right Mindfulness (sammā-sati) significantly contributes to promoting well-being and reducing three domains of burnout: Exhaustion, Cynicism, and enhancing Professional Efficacy. Additionally, the study highlights the optimal duration and intensity of practice necessary to foster meaningful psychological and emotional transformations, while underscoring the importance of addressing burnout throughout the intervention. This holistic and integrative approach aims to promote Well-being, and cultivate a sustainable mindfulness practice.

Moreover, the program fosters a deep sense of mindfulness beyond the structured retreat setting, built for participants who expressed interest in incorporating mindfulness techniques into their daily routines. This sustained engagement highlights the practical relevance and long-term applicability of the Right Mindfulness (sammā-sati) in promoting mental well-being, productivity, and overall work-life balance. Ultimately, these findings underscore the program's potential for lasting transformative impact, reinforcing its role as a scientifically informed and spiritually grounded intervention for holistic well-being.

**Figure 1** Conceptual Framework Derived From Research Findings



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