

Transforming Emotional Well-Being through Mindfulness, Wisdom and Loving-Kindness (MWL) Inspired by Buddhamahametta: A Study of Thai Migrants in Australia*



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Abstract

Thai migrants in Australia face unique challenges that significantly impact their emotional well-being, including language barriers, cultural adaptation difficulties, relationship tensions, and psychological adjustment. This mixed-methods study investigated how mindfulness practices could transform the emotional well-being of this population through a brief, accessible online intervention. Twenty Thai migrants across Australia participated in a two-week mindfulness program that integrated mindfulness, wisdom, and loving-kindness practices with contemporary approaches to emotional regulation. Using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with nine specialists, four key mindfulness practices were developed tailored to participants' specific needs: mindful bowing, asking for forgiveness, practice with Dhamma music, and loving-kindness meditation. The program was delivered entirely online via Zoom, eliminating geographical barriers to participation. Emotional well-being was assessed using the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS), showing substantial increases in positive affect dimensions (Achievement/Resilience +74%, Contentment +45%, High-Energy States +39%) and significant reductions in negative affect dimensions (Distress -61%, Irritability -60%, Self-Conscious Emotions -52%, Anxiety -48%). Qualitative findings revealed five key transformation mechanisms: enhanced awareness, shift from external control to internal regulation, cultural-spiritual integration, development of self-compassion, and improved emotional processing. These findings culminated in a comprehensive Mindfulness Practice Model for Emotional Well-being that illustrates the dynamic, cyclical nature of emotional transformation through mindfulness.

Keywords: Mindfulness; Wisdom; Loving-Kindness; Emotional Well-Being; Cultural Adaptation

Introduction

Migration represents a significant life transition that often challenges individuals' emotional well-being and psychological resources. Thai migrants in Australia navigate a complex set of adjustments, including language barriers, cultural differences, altered family

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dynamics, and socioeconomic pressures (Blignault et al., 2022). These challenges can lead to emotional distress, with migrants being particularly vulnerable to anxiety and depression due to these compounded pressures (Brito-Pons et al., 2018; Holmes et al., 2021).

The migration experience for Thai nationals to Australia presents unique challenges. Unlike migrants from English-speaking countries, Thai migrants face significant linguistic hurdles that extend beyond mere communication difficulties to affect their sense of identity and self-confidence. Additionally, cultural differences between collectivistic Thai society and more individualistic Australian culture create value conflicts that can manifest in family relationships, workplace interactions, and social integration (Berry, 2005; Bhugra and Becker, 2005).

Mindfulness, the practice of maintaining moment-by-moment awareness of thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surroundings without judgment, has shown promise in enhancing emotional well-being across diverse populations (Germer et al., 2022). However, limited research has examined adapted mindfulness interventions specifically designed for Thai migrants or explored the potential of brief, online mindfulness programs for geographically dispersed migrant communities.

The approach taken in this study draws from the work of Jiwattanasuk, Vasuratna and Deegalle (2025), who demonstrated the effectiveness of Buddhamahametta-inspired mindfulness, wisdom, and loving-kindness (MWL) practices for multicultural meditation practitioners. Their framework provides a valuable foundation for addressing the specific needs of Thai migrants navigating the complexities of living in a foreign country.

Objectives of the Research

This study aimed to:

1. Investigate the specific emotional challenges faced by Thai migrants in Australia.
2. Develop a mindfulness program tailored to address these challenges.
3. Evaluate the program's effectiveness in enhancing emotional well-being.

Research Methodology

The mixed-methods approach has been employed conducted in three phases. Phase 1 used qualitative methods (in-depth interviews) to understand the challenges faced by Thai migrants and identify emotional well-being needs. Phase 2 involved focus group discussions with specialists to develop and refine the mindfulness program. Phase 3 combined quantitative measurement (PANAS questionnaire) with qualitative methods (post-intervention interviews) to evaluate the program's effectiveness.

The 1st Step: Documentary Study

The research began with a documentary study reviewing Buddhist scriptures (Tripitaka), academic literature, and contemporary research on mindfulness, and well-being. This provided the theoretical grounding for program development.

The 2nd Step: Field Study

Field research was conducted remotely, with each of the 20 Thai migrants participating from their own homes across various locations in Australia. This approach accommodated participants in remote areas and those with varied work schedules across different time zones, while allowing immediate application of mindfulness techniques to real-life stressors in their daily environments.

The 3rd Step: Key Informants

Twenty Thai migrants living in Australia participated in the study. Participants ranged in age from 25 to 74 years, with most (55%) between 40-54 years old. They resided across four Australian states: New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, and South Australia. Occupations varied widely, including retired individuals, aged care workers, office employees, business owners, part-time employees, massage therapists, and others.

Additionally, nine experts; including meditation masters, mindfulness experts, and long-term expatriates who have extensive experience living abroad, were selected for a focus group to validate the model.

The 4th Step: Research Instruments and Methods

1) In-Depth Interviews

Conducted in all three phases to explore participants' emotional well-being challenges, assess program needs, and evaluate post-intervention experiences. Interviews were audio-recorded and analysed using thematic analysis.

2) Focus Group Discussion

Nine experts reviewed and validated the mindfulness interventions. Their feedback led to key improvements, including flexible practice durations, post-session debrief, and the application of Standardise Emotional Well-Being Measurement.

3) Interventions

Participants engaged in a two-week mindfulness program delivered via Zoom in two weekly 90-120-minute sessions. These four mindfulness practices were adopted and inspired by Mindfulness, Wisdom, and Loving-Kindness (MWL) practices that Buddhahammetta applied for multicultural meditation practitioners. Given the documented effectiveness of these practices for practitioners navigating multiple cultural contexts (Jiwattanasuk, Vasuratna, and Deegalle, 2025), they were considered ideal for Thai migrants in Australia.

3.1) Mindful Bowing: This practice involved slow, deliberate bowing movements while maintaining complete awareness of bodily sensations, thoughts, and emotions. The movements created an "embodied mindfulness" that grounded participants in the present moment while connecting them to cultural and spiritual dimensions of their identity. Through mindful bowing to the Buddha, practitioners express deep gratitude and foster spiritual connections, as documented in previous research (Jiwattanasuk et al., 2024).



3.2) Mindful Appreciation - Asking for Forgiveness: This practice addressed emotional burdens by creating space for self-compassion through reflection on regrets, followed by requests for forgiveness. This approach enabled individuals to learn from and accept their shortcomings while cultivating compassion towards both themselves and others. These findings align with previous research showing similar outcomes in comparable cultural contexts (Jiwattanasuk, Vasuratna, and Deegalle, 2025). For Thai migrants who may carry cultural guilt about leaving family behind or failing to fulfill traditional obligations, this practice proved particularly healing and restorative to emotional well-being.

3.3) Mindful Practice with Dhamma Music: This innovative approach enhanced experiences by integrating Dhamma music into mindfulness practices. Participants practiced while listening attentively to the music, noticing both physical sensations and emotional responses without judgment. For Thai migrants, familiar Dhamma music served as both a cultural anchor and a contemplative tool. The rhythmic elements supported focused attention while the familiar melodies and meaningful lyrics provided comfort and inspiration.

3.4) Mindfulness and Loving-kindness Meditation: This cornerstone practice systematically cultivated compassion and positive emotions. The practice began with directing kind wishes toward oneself, then progressively extending these wishes to loved ones, neutral persons, difficult people, and eventually all beings; helping counteract the isolation often accompanying migration experiences.

The program was delivered via Zoom in two weekly 90-120-minute sessions. The virtual format eliminated geographical barriers to participation, allowing inclusion of Thai migrants from diverse regions of Australia without requiring travel.

4) Post Intervention Measurements

Emotional well-being was assessed using the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS), administered at baseline, Week 1, and Week 2. The PANAS consisted of 20 items across two primary dimensions: Positive Affect (PA) and Negative Affect (NA), each rated on a 5-point Likert scale.

For more nuanced analysis, the research categorised the 20 PANAS items into seven emotional dimensions:

Positive Affect dimensions:

1. High-Energy Positive States (excited, enthusiastic, alert, active)
2. Achievement/Resilience (emotionally strong, proud, determined, attentive)
3. Contentment/Well-being (cheerful, inspired)

Negative Affect dimensions:

1. Anxiety/Fear States (scared, nervous, jittery, afraid)
2. Distress/Sadness (distressed, upset, lonely)
3. Self-Conscious Negative Emotions (guilty, ashamed)
4. Agitation/Irritability (irritable)

Additionally, post-intervention interviews were conducted to explore participants' experiences, perceived changes, and application of mindfulness in daily life.

The 5th Step: Data Collection

Data were collected using both qualitative and quantitative methods. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions with participants and specialists provided qualitative insights into emotional challenges and intervention effects. Quantitative data were collected using the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS), administered at baseline, Week 1, and Week 2 to track changes in emotional well-being.

The 6th Step: Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative interview data, identifying patterns in participants' experiences and perceptions of change. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, calculating percentage changes in PANAS dimensions across the three measurement points. Integration of quantitative and qualitative data was conducted to develop a comprehensive understanding of the intervention's impact.

The 7th Step: Summary and Presentation of Results

Results were structured around the research objectives. The study provided a detailed overview of challenges faced by Thai migrants in Australia, developed a tailored mindfulness model, and demonstrated substantial improvements in emotional well-being through the mindfulness practice.

Research Results

From the 1st objective, the research result was found that Thai Migrants in Australia face significant emotional well-being challenges in the workplace, which can be grouped into five main categories: 1) Language and Communication Barriers: Difficulties with English proficiency affected workplace confidence, family communication, and daily interactions, contributing to feelings of inadequacy, frustration, anxiety, and isolation; 2) Cultural Adaptation and Identity Challenges: Navigating cultural differences, particularly in multicultural households and workplaces, created tensions and a sense of displacement; 3) Family and Relationship Dynamics: Relationship tensions exacerbated by cultural differences, high expectations for children, separation from family in Thailand, and caregiving responsibilities significantly impacted emotional well-being; 4) Psychological and Emotional Adjustment: Many participants experienced overthinking, excessive worry, self-comparison, self-criticism, and difficulties with emotional regulation; and 5) Socioeconomic and Practical Challenges: Financial insecurity, employment uncertainty, health concerns, and inadequate support systems created ongoing stress and uncertainty.

From the 2nd objective, the structured mindfulness program inspired by Buddhahammetta's MWL practice was developed to meet the specific needs of Thai migrants in Australia. The program development process, informed by interviews and expert focus

group discussions, resulted in three key design principles: 1) Standardise Emotional Well-Being Measurement: To adopt the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) for all pre- and post-intervention assessments to ensure reliability; 2) Flexible Practice Durations: To allow a facilitator to adjust the length of each mindfulness exercise in real time, accommodating participants' varying attention spans, energy levels, and logistical constraints without compromising the integrity of the practice; and 3) Post-Session Debrief: Incorporate a brief debriefing period after each practice to address participant questions, reinforce key concepts, and offer guidance for independent home practice.

From the 3rd objective, the aggregated PANAS data demonstrated substantial improvements in emotional well-being across the two-week intervention period. By Week 2, participants experienced remarkable reductions in all negative affect dimensions: Distress (61% reduction), Irritability (60% reduction), Self-Conscious Negative Emotions (52% reduction), and Anxiety (48% reduction). Concurrently, positive affect dimensions showed significant increases: Achievement/Resilience (74% increase), Contentment (45% increase), and High-Energy Positive States (39% increase). Most notably, Achievement/Resilience reached near-maximum levels (4.7 out of 5) by Week 2, suggesting substantial enhancement of participants' psychological resources for navigating challenges.

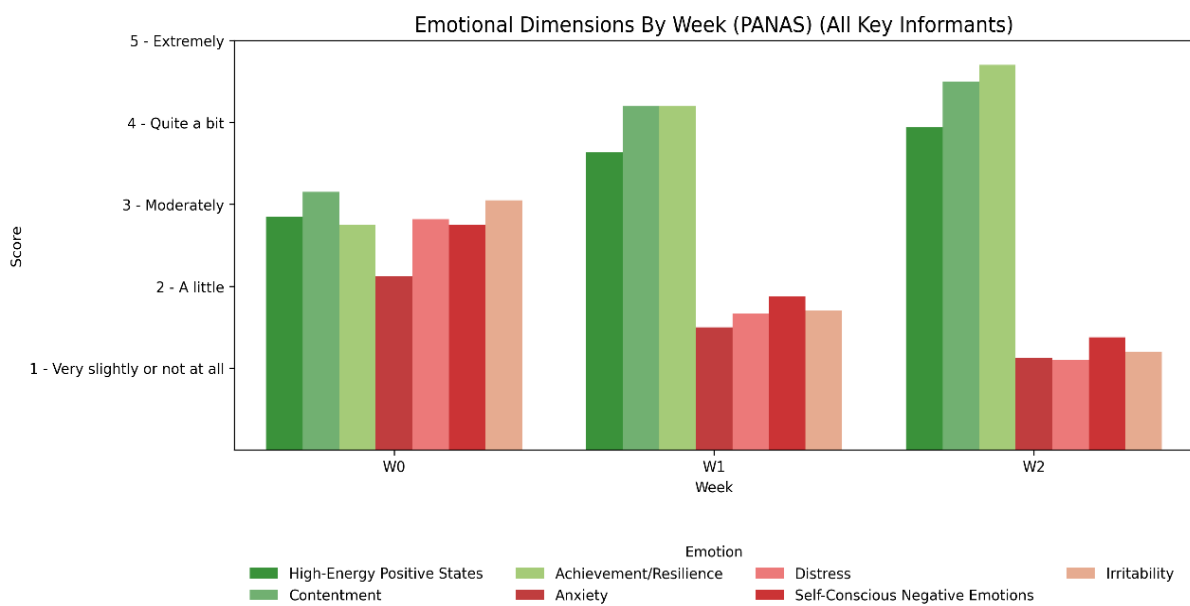


Figure 1: Average Key Informant PANAS Questionnaire Result

Post-intervention interviews revealed several consistent themes explaining the mechanisms through which the mindfulness practice enhanced emotional well-being:

1) Development of Awareness: Participants reported enhanced ability to observe thoughts and emotions without automatically reacting to them. One participant described this transformation: "Before the program, I would react immediately to any stressful situation. Now,

I have learned to recognize the onset of negative emotions and to pause before these emotions can escalate."

2) Shift from External Control to Internal Regulation: Many participants described transitioning from attempting to control external circumstances to focusing on internal emotional regulation. A participant who was deeply worried about a son with depression explained: "I have learned that maintaining a positive mindset and taking care of my emotional health gives me the strength and wisdom to support my son better."

3) Cultural-Spiritual Integration: Participants reported a deeper connection to Buddhist practices and values, which appeared to strengthen their cultural identity while supporting emotional regulation. One participant expressed: "I now feel a deeper love for the Buddha, which has nurtured a greater sense of compassion in my heart."

4) Development of Self-Compassion: Participants reported developing greater self-compassion and acceptance. A participant who had struggled with divorce-related self-doubt explained: "This non-reactive awareness has helped me release the self-criticism that once held me back. I have learned to accept my circumstances as they are."

5) Enhanced Emotional Processing: Interviews revealed improved emotional articulation and processing abilities. One participant provided a detailed narrative of applying mindfulness learning to a workplace conflict, reflecting: "Although I was initially very upset by the incident, I have since reflected on it and learned a valuable lesson that it is more important to maintain my inner peace."

The New Body of Knowledge

Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings led to the development of a comprehensive Mindfulness Practice Model for Emotional Well-being. This model conceptualizes how mindfulness practices enhance emotional well-being for Thai migrants living in a foreign country.

The Mindfulness Practice Model for Emotional Well-being consists of five interconnected components that interact continuously to form a dynamic system of emotional well-being development:

1. Mindfulness Practice (Core Component)

At the centre of the model lies Mindful Practice - the capacity to observe thoughts, emotions, and sensations with non-judgmental attention. The mindfulness practices employed in this research were tailored to address the unique challenges faced by Thai migrants in Australia while honouring their cultural and spiritual heritage.

2. Dual Process: Negative Reduction and Positive Enhancement

A distinctive finding was the bidirectional emotional transformation facilitated by mindfulness. Rather than simply reducing negative emotions or increasing positive ones, the

practices simultaneously worked in both directions, creating a comprehensive transformation of participants' emotional landscape.

3. Internal Resources

Through mindfulness practice, participants developed three key internal psychological resources:

3.1 Self-Compassion: Participants cultivated kinder relationships with themselves, reducing self-criticism and harsh self-judgment.

3.2 Emotional Regulation: Participants developed sophisticated skills for managing emotional states across contexts.

3.3 Spiritual Connection: Participants reported deeper spiritual engagement that provided meaning amid migration challenges.

4. External Applications

The internal resources developed through mindfulness practice were actively deployed across three key life domains:

4.1 Family Relationships: Enhanced emotional awareness and regulation skills improved family interactions, particularly in intercultural contexts.

4.2 Workplace Functioning: Improved focus, enhanced ability to navigate workplace cultural differences, and reduced reactivity to challenging situations.

4.3 Intercultural Navigation: Enhanced capabilities for navigating cultural differences in various social contexts.

5. Flourishing

The culmination of the mindfulness intervention was reflected in a state of Thai Migrant Flourishing, characterised by:

5.1 Balanced emotional state with minimal negative affect and substantial positive affect.

5.2 Enhanced ability to manage emotional responses amid ongoing challenges.

5.3 Regular experiences of joy, contentment, and satisfaction despite migration challenges.

5.4 Development of emotional stability and confidence in navigating cross-cultural contexts.

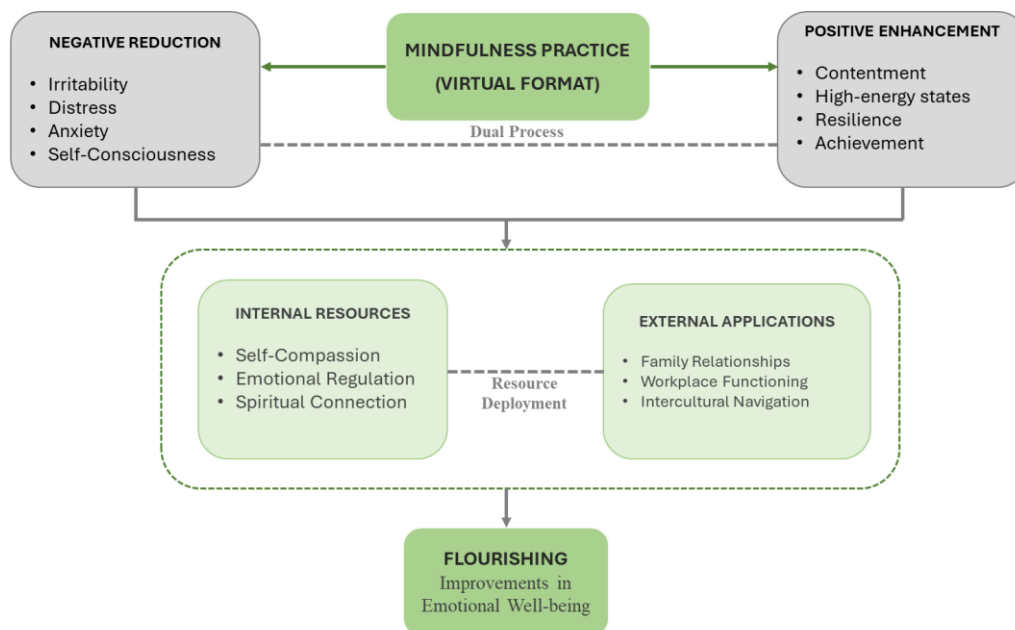


Figure 2: Mindfulness Practice Model for Emotional Well-being

The Mindfulness Practice Model for Emotional Well-being represents a dynamic system rather than a linear progression. As participants engaged in mindfulness practices, they experienced reductions in negative affect and enhancements in positive affect. These emotional shifts generated internal psychological resources that could be applied across various life domains, creating a self-sustaining cycle of emotional well-being enhancement.

Discussion of Research Results

From the research result of the 1st objective, Thai migrants in Australia were found to face significant emotional well-being challenges in five domains: language barriers, cultural adaptation, family dynamics, psychological adjustment, and socioeconomic pressures. These challenges reflect the emotional toll of migration, which disrupts support systems and identity. The findings align with Berry's (2005) acculturation stress theory and Bhugra and Becker's (2005) work on language and identity. They also echo Ward and Geeraert's (2016) ecological framework, emphasizing the role of environmental and social contexts in shaping adaptation.

From the research result of the 2nd objective, a structured mindfulness program inspired by Buddhamahametta's MWL (Mindfulness, Wisdom, and Loving-Kindness) practices effectively addressed the emotional challenges faced by Thai migrants. Drawing on Jiwattanasuk et al.'s (2025) multicultural mindfulness framework, the program incorporated four culturally rooted practices—mindful bowing, forgiveness, Dhamma music, and loving-kindness meditation. These practices served as a bridge between traditional values and modern needs. The program's success is supported by Hinton et al. (2013), who emphasized the power of culturally-adapted interventions, and Spijkerman et al. (2016), who found online mindfulness delivery to be effective.



From the research result of the 3rd objective, the program significantly improved emotional well-being, reducing negative affect (e.g., distress by 61%, irritability by 60%) and increasing positive affect (e.g., achievement/resilience by 74%). These results support Fredrickson's (2004) broaden-and-build theory, highlighting how mindfulness fosters emotional transformation by reducing reactivity and enhancing positive states. The five mechanisms—awareness, internal regulation, cultural-spiritual integration, self-compassion, and emotional processing—align with Germer et al.'s (2022) multidimensional view of mindfulness. The resulting Mindfulness Practice Model for Emotional Well-being builds on Brito-Pons et al. (2018), demonstrating a dynamic, culturally grounded pathway to emotional growth.

Conclusion

The research contributes to the understanding of mindfulness interventions for migrant populations in three key ways. First, it demonstrates that brief, accessible mindfulness programs can produce substantial benefits without requiring extensive time commitments. Second, it illuminates the bidirectional nature of emotional transformation, with practices simultaneously reducing negative emotions while cultivating positive emotional states. Third, the successful virtual delivery addresses a crucial gap in serving geographically dispersed migrant populations.

The Mindfulness Practice Model for Emotional Well-being developed through this research offers a framework for understanding how mindfulness enhances emotional well-being in cross-cultural contexts. It illustrates the dynamic interplay between mindfulness practice, emotional transformation, internal resource development, and external applications.

Suggestions

From the results of the research, the researcher has the following suggestions:

1. The Suggestions from the Research

From the research result of the 1st objective, it was found that Thai migrants in Australia face significant emotional well-being challenges across five domains: language barriers, cultural adaptation, family tensions, psychological adjustment, and socioeconomic challenges. Therefore, Thai community organizations should establish regular mindfulness groups at a convenient location or via online intervention to support the emotional well-being of Thai migrants. This approach enables Thai migrants to manage stress or challenges better while living in a foreign country.

From the research result of the 2nd objective, it was found that a structured mindfulness program inspired by Buddhahammetta's MWL practices effectively addresses Thai migrants' challenges. Therefore, the Thai community group should offer regular mindfulness practices incorporating the MWL practices. Thai Australia Association should

develop a mobile application featuring short guided sessions that Thai migrants can conveniently follow in their daily lives.

From the research result of the 3rd objective, it was found that the mindfulness program significantly enhanced emotional well-being through five transformation mechanisms. Therefore, the related institute should implement regular "Mindfulness for Well-being" workshops. Thai community welfare organizations should create a "Mindfulness Mentor" program matching experienced practitioners with newly arrived migrants for personalized support.

2. The Suggestions for Future Research

The future research should involve the following issues:

2.1 Longitudinal studies examining the long-term effects of mindfulness practices on Thai migrants' emotional well-being, specifically investigating whether the benefits observed within the two-week intervention persist over extended timeframes.

2.2 Comparative research employing randomized designs to evaluate the effectiveness of different delivery methods (in-person, online, or hybrid) for mindfulness interventions targeting Thai migrants.

2.3 Domain-specific investigations exploring how mindfulness practices affect particular aspects of Thai migrants' lives, such as workplace performance, family relationships, and physical health outcomes.

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