



MINDFULNESS IN TOUCH THERAPY: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

This study presents a literature review of mindfulness in touch therapy, based on the definition of mindfulness, the key terms that accompany it, and the practices involved. The literature review reveals the proven role of mindfulness in helping to alleviate psychological distress associated with an illness condition. This study uses the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to analyze previous relevant research on mindfulness in touch therapy. Meta-synthesis was conducted to answer the research question: how the practice of mindfulness is utilized in the field of touch therapy. The purpose of this SLR study is to gain a deeper understanding of mindfulness in touch therapy; improve understanding through a literature study of five selected studies; thoroughly examine the research and intensity of discussion; and provide evidence that the application of mindfulness is effective in supporting the process of touch therapy.

Keywords

Mindfulness; Touch Therapy

INTRODUCTION

The connection between mindfulness and health can be traced back to the pioneering work of Jon Kabat-Zinn, who introduced Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) in the late 1970s. This program laid the foundation for the scientific exploration of mindfulness as an effective therapy for reducing symptoms of anxiety, depression, and chronic pain (Lampe & Müller-Hilke, 2021). Mindfulness is the practice of maintaining moment-to-moment awareness of one's thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and the surrounding environment (Schuman-Olivier et al., 2020).

The growing demand for holistic approaches is supported by research showing that they can significantly improve mental health and overall well-being (Jitendra, 2020). Many individuals are looking for natural and biocompatible therapies that minimize side effects (Morawala et al., 2022). One such natural therapy is touch therapy. The basic principles of touch therapy involve a deep understanding of the mind-body connection. Research indicates that touch can influence a person's psychological state, such as reducing anxiety and enhancing feelings of well-being (Eckstein et al., 2020).

The formulation of the research problem is how mindfulness is practiced in touch therapy. The researcher aims to conduct a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) investigation to identify mindfulness in touch therapy. Meta-synthesis was conducted to answer the research question, namely how is mindfulness in touch therapy. The SLR method was carried out by conducting a thorough examination and evaluation of various articles related to mindfulness in touch therapy. Through a careful examination of relevant previous studies, this study can provide a clear and comprehensive description of all articles on mindfulness in touch therapy. Thus, the purpose of this SLR study is to gain a deeper understanding of mindfulness in touch therapy; improve understanding through a literature study of five selected studies; thoroughly examine the research and intensity of discussion; and provide evidence that mindfulness exists in touch therapy. This evidence can be a reference for further research. The results of this SLR study can make an important contribution to the field of touch-based therapy. The anticipated results of this investigation are expected to provide a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of mindfulness in touch-based therapy.

METHODS

This review aims to provide an in-depth understanding of Buddhist mindfulness meditation, supporting the process of touch-based therapy. This study employs the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, which involves collecting, evaluating, integrating, and presenting findings from various research studies on a specific research question or topic of interest. "Systematic" is because it adopts a consistent and widely accepted methodology (Pati & Lorusso, 2018). SLR is useful for researchers, as it helps plan new research, avoids unnecessary duplication of efforts and errors, and directs the investigation process (Biolchini et al., 2005). The SLR method in this study aims to map previous research on the application of Buddhist mindfulness meditation in education. This is intended to provide an understanding of the development of Buddhist mindfulness meditation in education.

In this study, researchers analyzed the documents collected and then processed using the PRISMA method. The PRISMA flowchart is a static infographic that describes the source, number, and collection of all records identified and filtered in a review (Haddaway et al., 2022). Data collection using the Dimension database on the website <https://app.dimensions.ai/>

RESULT

The review protocol was developed in accordance with the PRISMA guidelines. Keyword occurrence analysis was performed using VOSviewer software (Version 1.6.20). The review protocol and PRISMA article selection flowchart are shown in Table 1. The mapping procedure, based on PRISMA provisions, is illustrated in Figure 1.

Table 1. Protocol Overview

Article selection method	PRISMA Guidelines
Keywords	Mindfulness, Touch Therapy
Inclusion Criteria	1. Year Range: 2016 to 2025 2. Researcher and Research Category: All categories 3. Journal Article Language: English 4. Publication Type: Journal Article 5. Title Source: All sources 6. Journal List: All journals
Database	Dimension
Analysis Method	Keyword co-occurrence analysis
Search Strategy	(Mindful OR Mindfulness) AND (touch therapy OR touch for health OR health touch)

Source: Authors' development based on PRISMA guidelines

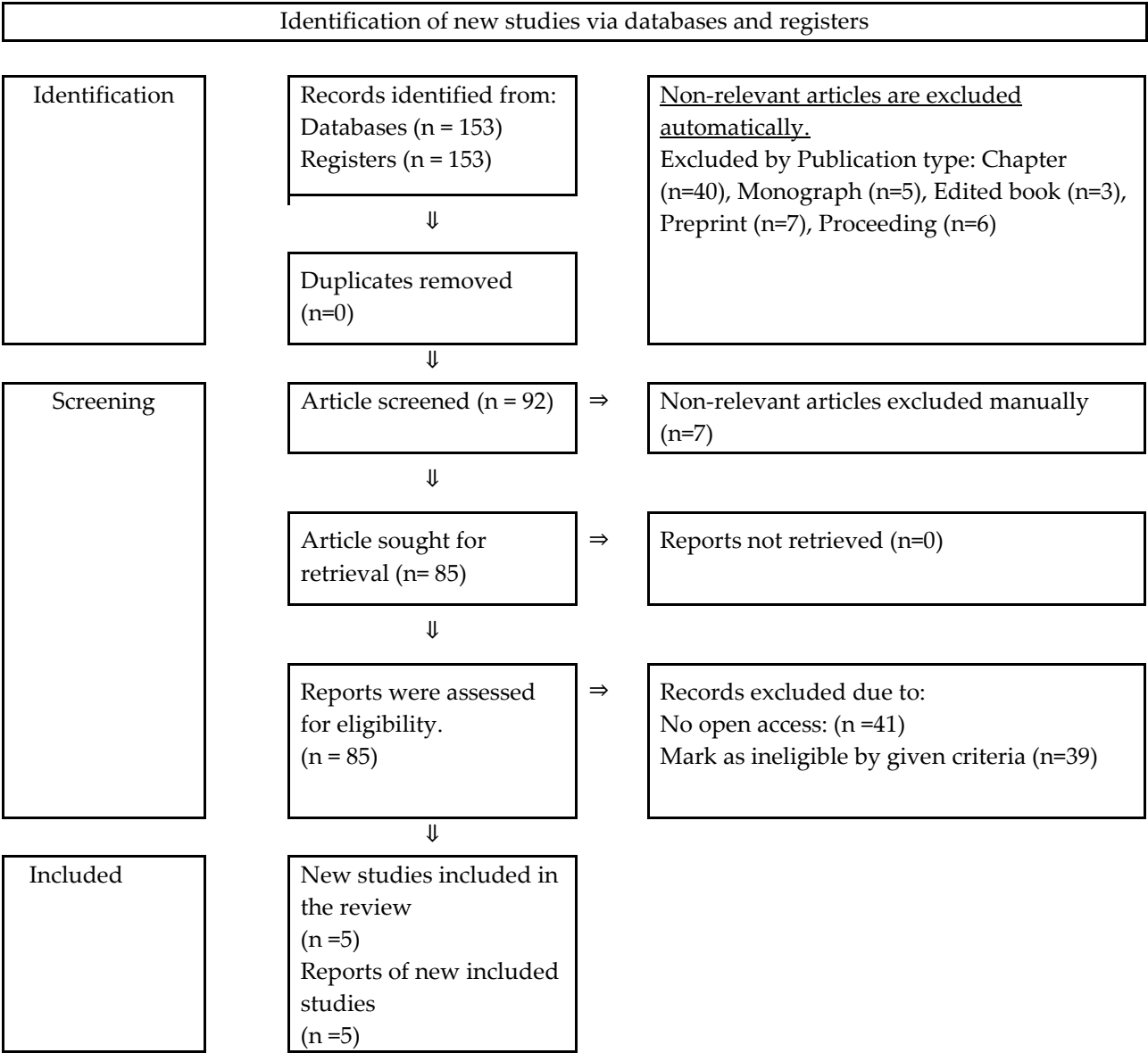


Figure 1. PRISMA model article selection flowchart

In this analysis, new studies were identified through the Dimensions database. The total number of articles identified from Dimensions when accessed on January 13, 2025, was 153. Before screening, some records were removed based on the inclusion criteria. Sixty-one articles were removed because they did not meet the research category requirements. After the screening process, 92 articles remained for processing. Seven articles were excluded because they were not directly related to mindfulness and touch therapy. A total of 41 articles were excluded because they were not available under open access. Then, further screening was carried out on the reports that had been assessed. A total of 39 reports were excluded because they did not meet the researcher's criteria, which involved a combination of the words "mindfull" or "mindfulness" in the title and "touch" in the abstract, or vice versa, or reports that discussed mindfulness and touch in the article. The final result of this analysis was the inclusion of five new study reports in this study.

The use of the VOSviewer application as a means to analyze various types of interconnected networks between articles (van Eck & Waltman, 2014). Analysis of events with keywords is used to obtain results. As shown in Figure 2, VOSviewer has grouped the keywords into one group. Each group is marked with a different color, indicating that keywords in a particular group are connected. The size of the circle reflects the number of citations received by the journal. Journals that are located close together in the visualization tend to have stronger relationships, based on co-citations, than journals that are far apart (van Eck & Waltman, 2014).

Further data analysis using the Dimension database reveals that the graph below shows an increase in articles published in this field from 2016 to 2024, with the increase particularly noticeable starting from 2020 (Figure 2). The results from VOSViewer (Figure 3) indicate that research in the field of mindfulness and therapy has been growing until 2022 (green) and then decreased in the following years (yellow).

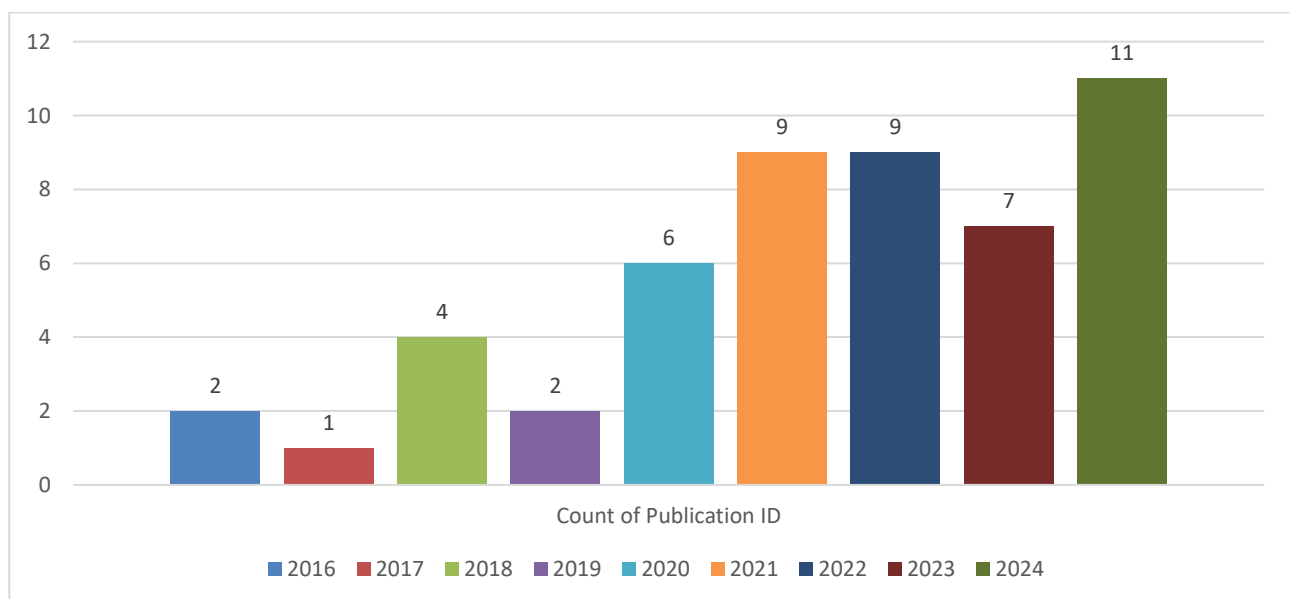


Figure 2. Article Publication Trends 2016-2024 (source: Dimension database)

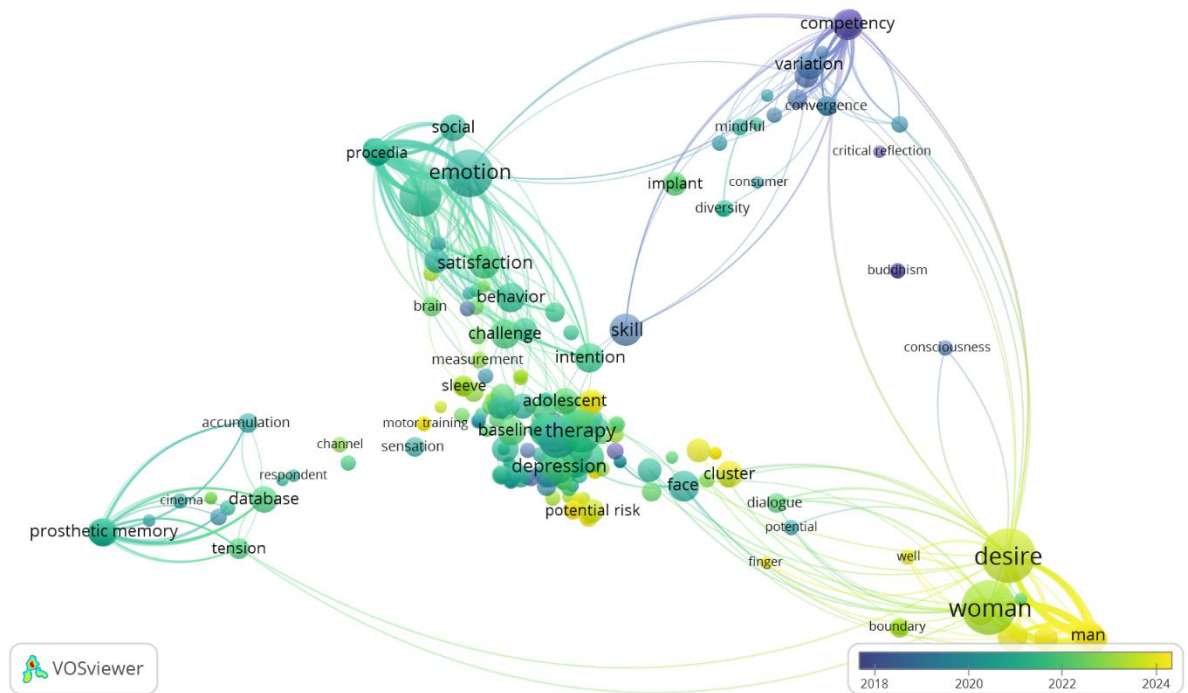


Figure 3. Visualization of shared overlays based on keywords (source: VOSviewer results)

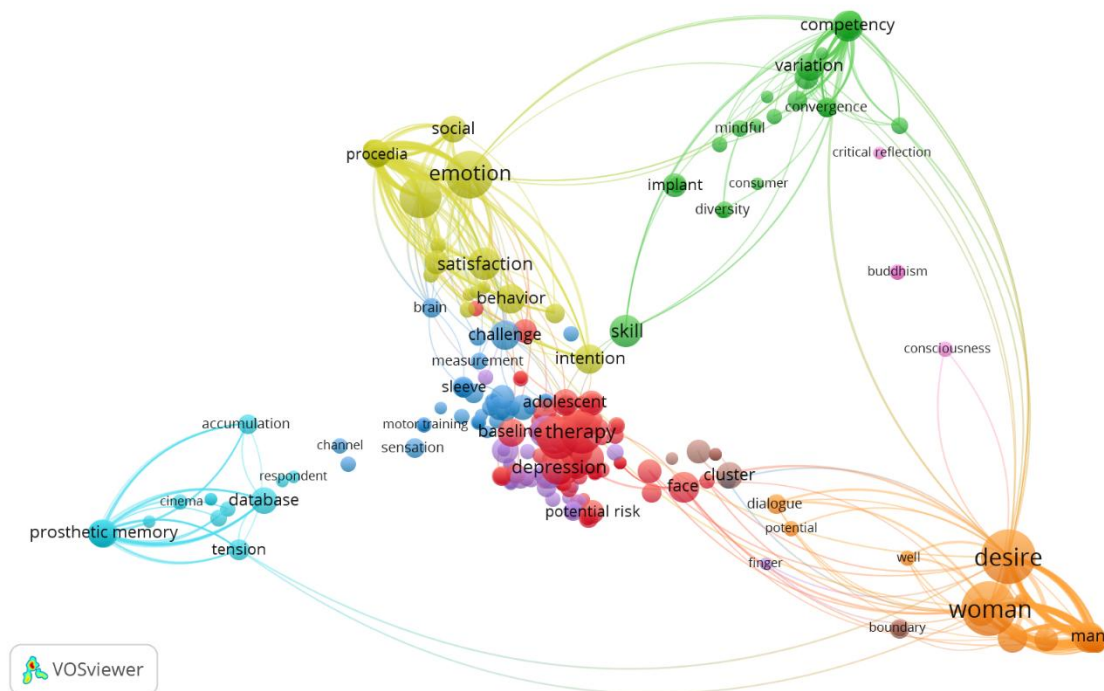


Figure 4. Visualization of the co-occurrence network based on keywords (source: VOSviewer results)

The visualization of the co-occurrence network, based on keywords, in Figure 4 reveals several distinct groups of research keywords. Therapy has been widely studied, but the connection with mindfulness is still minimal. This suggests that there is still room for

further research on the relationship between mindfulness and therapy. The table below (Table 2) presents five journals.

Table 2. Five selected journals (source: Dimension)

Author, Year	Title	Methods	Sample	Result
Maine et al., 2022	<i>'Touch for Health' based kinesiology interventions: An innovative qualitative research exploring clients' perspectives</i>	qualitative with phenomenological design	13 individuals recruited from a kinesiology-based "Touch for Health" (TFH) practice. These participants had undergone a TFH intervention and had experience in the practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - increased self-awareness of emotions, internal dialogue, and behavior. A deeper understanding of motivations, values, and habits - The TFH intervention provided a better physical experience and improved participants' emotional and mental well-being. - Changes in behavior and activity after the intervention. Increased attention to personal health and implementation of stress management strategies.
Carpenter et al., 2022	<i>Mechanical Affective Touch Therapy for Anxiety Disorders: Feasibility, Clinical Outcomes, and Electroencephalography Biomarkers From an Open-Label Trial</i>	Mix method: Quantitative and qualitative	22 adults with several criteria: minimum moderate anxiety symptoms and ages 18-59 years.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduction of anxiety and depression symptoms after 4 weeks of intervention with Mechanical Affective Touch Therapy (MATT) - MATT affects brain activity as measured by EEG. - Increased body awareness and sensory experience
Ben-Arye et al., 2020	<i>Enhancing Palliative Care With Mindful Touch: Impact of a Manual and Movement Therapy Training Program in an International</i>	Qualitative research was conducted with participants before and after the training program.	30 healthcare professionals (HCPs) from various backgrounds and countries	Touch therapy enhances nonverbal communication with patients and can be applied in palliative care practice. Therapy also enriches the professional identity of health care providers and influences

Chan et al., 2022	<i>Multidisciplinary Integrative Oncology Setting Effects of mindfulness-based intervention programs on sleep among people with common mental disorders: A systematic review and meta-analysis</i>	Qualitative: literature review and meta-analysis	Ten studies met the inclusion criteria.	the personal and professional growth of participants. Mindfulness-based intervention (MBI) programs, including Mindfulness-Based Touch Therapy (MBTT), are effective in improving sleep problems in individuals with depression or anxiety disorders.
Susman et al., 2024	<i>Daily micropractice can augment single-session interventions: A randomized controlled trial of self-compassionate touch and examining their associations with habit formation in US college students</i>	Quantitative	35 students online with the criteria of being 18 years and above and being able to speak English	Participants who underwent the intervention experienced a significant increase in self-compassion levels compared to the control group.

DISCUSSION

The mind-body approach used in touch, including muscle feedback, creates a mindfulness-like experience, where attention and awareness of the body and feelings are the primary focus. It serves as a complement to medical treatments (Maine et al., 2022). The integration of mindfulness into touch therapy leverages the sense of present-moment awareness as a tool to improve mental and emotional well-being (Carpenter et al., 2022). Combining mindfulness with touch therapy can create a practical, holistic approach to treating emotional and physical issues, including poor sleep quality in depression and anxiety (Chan et al., 2022). Brief, gentle, mindful touch therapy sessions can provide significant benefits for mental health (Susman et al., 2024).

Individuals who practice more frequently show more positive changes in self-compassion and mental well-being (Susman et al., 2024). This suggests that the outcomes of mindfulness-based touch therapy are dependent on the frequency of its application. Mindfulness helps healthcare professionals stay connected with patients at various stages of the care journey and contributes to the personal and professional growth of healthcare professionals (Ben-Arye et al., 2020). This provides dual benefits for both healthcare professionals and patients.

CONCLUSION

Touch therapy, through various therapeutic methods, supports the improvement of mental and physical health. The application of mindfulness in touch therapy enhances the therapeutic results by increasing awareness in the present moment during the therapy process and fostering a deeper connection with the patient.

After going through the screening and analysis process and reading the articles, it can be concluded that out of 153 articles detected through the dimension application, only five relevant articles were selected from the period of 2016-2025. The five selected articles show a variety of research methods on mindfulness in the field of touch therapy. The research results from each article in Table 2 are also quite distinct from one another. The results of VOSViewer regarding the co-occurrence network based on keywords produced the most keywords related to therapy, but the relationship to mindfulness was still relatively small. The results of the literature review suggest that there are opportunities for further research on mindfulness in touch therapy, given the positive impacts observed in previous studies.

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