

EVALUATION OF THE MINDFUL MAMAS COURSE (Cohorts 1-6)

By Dr Sam McCann on behalf of Citizens UK & PACT

Highlights

After attending the Mindful Mamas course, average wellbeing score increased in all groups of attendees. The impact was particularly strong amongst attendees with a high risk of depression before the course. Attendees reported that establishing a supportive and judgement free community, re-establishing an identity outside of parenthood and developing confidence were keys aspects of the course that lead to improvements in wellbeing. An additional notable benefit was improved relationships with children. The empowering, parent-focused and collaborative ethos of Mindful Mamas was highlighted by attendees as being at the centre of its success.

Summary

Mindful Mamas is a 6-week wellbeing course which is parent-focused and co-produced with attendees. The aim of the course is to improve the mental wellbeing of local mothers with young children, experiencing challenges and barriers to support. This evaluation was conducted to assess the effectiveness of the course across six cohorts of attendees, at sites in Lambeth and Southwark, from March 2022 to July 2023.

The evaluation used a mixed methods approach. Improved wellbeing was assessed quantitatively by comparing scores on the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS), before and after attending the Mindful Mamas course. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sub-sample of attendees from Cohorts 1, 2 and 5 to assess the impact of the course qualitatively. Finally, we evaluated the longer-term impact of attending Mindful Mamas, through a parent case study.

Among attendees from all cohorts who completed the pre and post course survey (n=42), the mean WEMWBS score increased from 49 points in the pre-course survey to 58 points in the post-course survey. A paired t-test indicated that this increase in wellbeing was highly significant ($p < 0.001$).

In qualitative analysis, four key themes were identified in relation to improved wellbeing among attendees. These themes were 1. Peer Support, 2. Identity Beyond Motherhood, 3. Self-Confidence and 4. Practical Mindfulness Tools. In terms of benefit to others, one key theme was identified which related to improved relationships with children through increased patience and prioritisation of quality time. Finally, relating to the co-designed aspect of the course, one theme emerged which centred on the benefit of feeling valued and important as a result of the process.

The parent case study highlighted the sustained and broad impact of the Mindful Mamas course more than one year after attendance. We heard that the strong social connections developed within the Mindful Mamas course were maintained in the long term and helped to alleviate feelings of isolation. Newfound self-confidence, and a desire to support other mums in the community, inspired community volunteering and employment in community organisations.

In conclusion, this evaluation provides both quantitative and qualitative evidence of improvements in maternal wellbeing following the Mindful Mamas course. In addition, this evaluation gives evidence of wider positive impact of the Mindful Mamas course for families of attendees and the

broader local community. The main limitations of this evaluation is the absence of a control group and the absence of longer term quantitative outcomes.

Introduction

In the UK around 20% of women will experience mental health difficulties during or after pregnancy[1]. Social disadvantage, which includes factors such as poverty[2], lack of social support [3] or having a minority ethnic background[4], can be detrimental to maternal mental health. Therefore, provision of services and support should prioritise this group. Supporting mothers of young children not only benefits women directly, but also has added benefit for their children. Almost 4 million children in the UK were living in poverty in 2020/21 [5] and there is good evidence that economic and social adversity impacts early child development, with lasting effect[6]. Emotional regulation and good relationships with caregivers can moderate the impact of social adversity on developmental outcomes [7], but both factors rely heavily on maternal wellbeing [8].

Parents and Communities Together (PACT) is a community-led project which aims to empower and support parents within socially disadvantaged communities in the UK. 'Mindful Mamas' is a wellbeing course, delivered in 2-hour long sessions, weekly across 6 weeks. Prior to starting each course, an additional 2-hour co-production workshop is held with each cohort. The course is delivered by PACT in Southwark and in Partnership with Max Roach in Lambeth. At both sites, the course is delivered from community-based sites.

Mindful Mamas aims to support maternal wellbeing through developing skills, self-confidence and social networks in vulnerable groups. It is co-produced with parents and tailored to the needs of each group. Topics covered include building confidence, managing emotions and mindfulness practice. Mindful Mamas started in February 2022 and, to date, six cohorts of mothers have completed the course.

Evaluation Aim

The primary aim of this report is to assess the impact of attending the Mindful Mamas course on maternal wellbeing through quantitative and qualitative methods.

The secondary aim is to explore the wider and lasting impact of the course on families of attendees and their communities.

Quantitative evaluation

Methods

Attendees completed the Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS © NHS Health Scotland, University of Warwick and University of Edinburgh, 2006, all rights reserved) before and after attending the Mindful Mamas course. WEMWBS consists of 14 wellbeing related questions scored on a five-point Likert scale (1='none of the time', 2='rarely', 3='some of the time', 4='often' 5='all the time). Higher scores on the WEMWBS indicated better wellbeing. Although the WEMWBS is not a screening tool for clinical outcomes, it has been reported by the developers of the tool that a score of 40 or below may indicate a high risk of depression [9] .

Participants were excluded from the analysis if the pre- and/or post-course survey data was not available. Participants were also excluded if responses within a single survey were less than 75% complete. Where data met the inclusion criteria, but were incomplete, missing items were imputed using the median of the remaining items, so that total scores could be computed. If a single item had been completed incorrectly, with more than one response (e.g. both 'often' and 'some of the time' were ticked for a single item) the lowest scoring response was used for that item.

The total scores followed the normal distribution (Appendix 1), therefore a paired t test was used to determine whether there was a significant difference between scores pre and post course. A standardised mean difference was then calculated by dividing the mean difference in scores by the standard deviation of the difference in scores, to allow direct comparison between the impact of Mindful Mamas and other similar interventions.

Results

Of the 61 Mindful Mamas attendees, 42 completed the pre and post course survey. A summary of attendees by Cohort and location is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

Cohort Number	Location	Total Attendees	Completed Surveys (% attendees)
Cohort 1	Southwark	16	12 (75)
Cohort 2	Southwark	10	9 (90)
Cohort 3	Lambeth	6	5 (83)
Cohort 4	Southwark	13	7 (54)
Cohort 5	Southwark	11	7 (63)
Cohort 6	Lambeth	5	2 (40)

Demographics

Demographic information was available for Cohorts 1-5 (n=28) and is summarised for all attendees combined (Figures 1-3) and by Cohort (Appendix 2).

Attendee age ranged from 20 to 40+ years old. Just over half of attendees were aged between 30-39 (Figure 1). Around 85% of attendees belonged to minority ethnic groups, with 42% identifying as Latin American and 37% identifying as Black African/ Black Caribbean / Black British (Figure 2). Just over one in ten attendees self-reported a disability (Figure 3).

Figure 1. Attendee Age

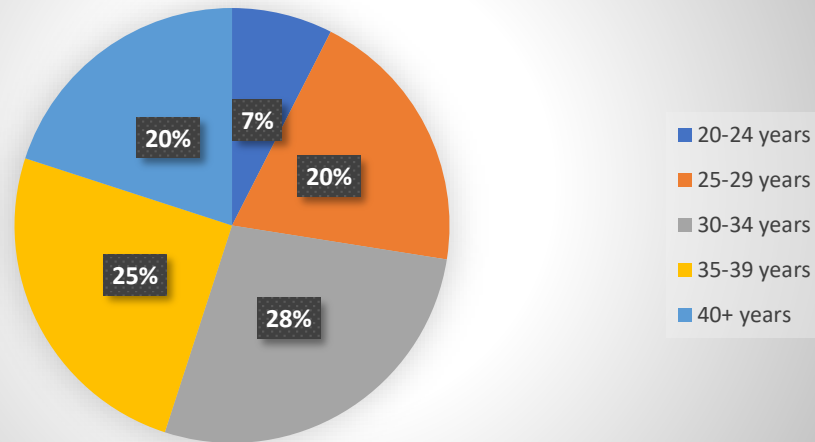


Figure 2. Attendee Ethnicity

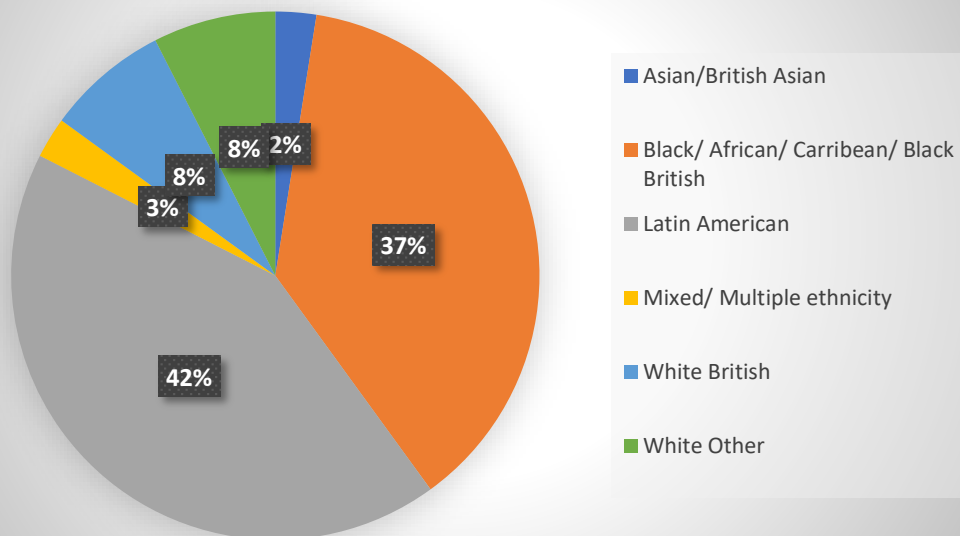
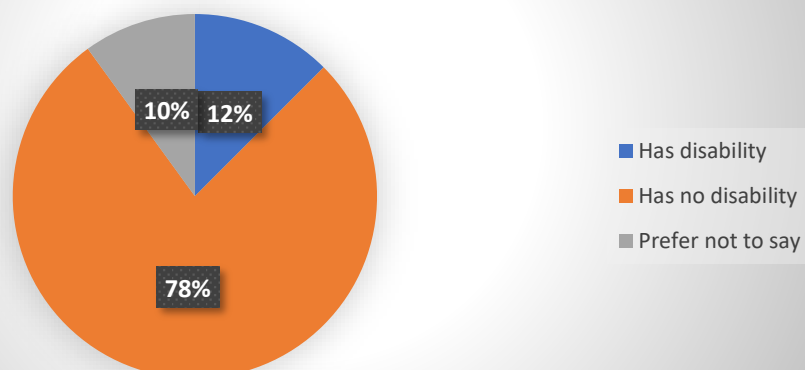


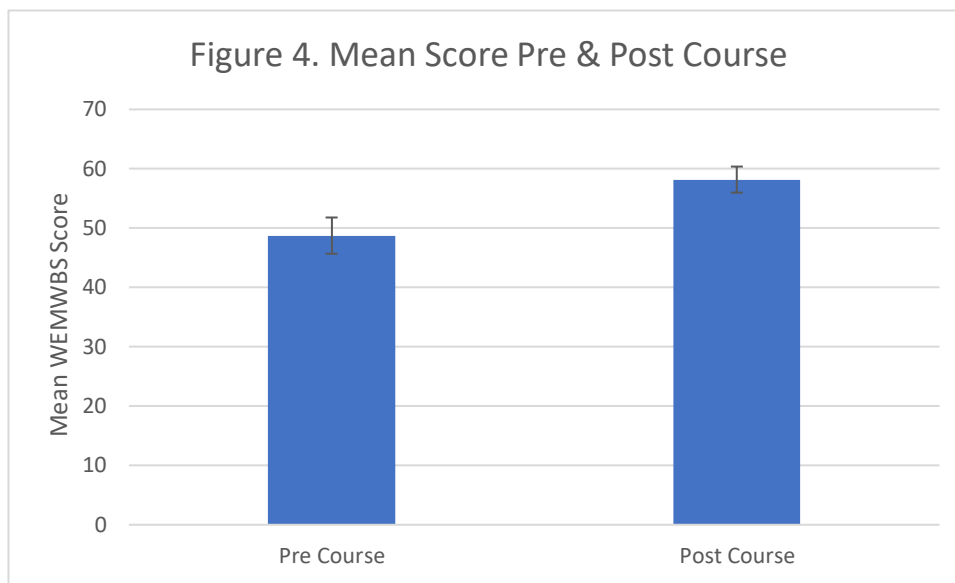
Figure 3. Attendee Self-Reported Disability



Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale

The mean WEMWBS scores in the pre-course and post-course assessments were 49 (SD=10.1) and 58 (SD=7.2) respectively (Figure 4). A paired t test showed that the increase in score was highly significant ($p < 0.0001$). WEMWBS scores increased consistently across all cohorts (Appendix 3). The standardised mean score was 1.2 which is considered a large effect size.

In the pre-course survey 14% (6/42) attendees scored 40 or below, indicating a high risk of depression. Following the course, 100% attendees scored over 40 points. Further, the mean difference in score among this high-risk group was 16 points and the standardised mean difference was 4.9, suggesting the course was particularly beneficial to the most vulnerable attendees.



The graph shows the mean score (and 95% confidence intervals) in the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale before and after attending Mindful Mamas for cohorts 1-6 (n=42)

Discussion

This evaluation has used quantitative data to show a robust and significant positive impact of the Mindful Mamas course on maternal wellbeing.

The WEMWBS, which was the primary quantitative outcome within this evaluation, has been used extensively to evaluate wellbeing related interventions previously. A rapid review commissioned by What Works Centre for Wellbeing in 2022 [10] identified 14 studies that used the WEMWBS to evaluate change in wellbeing score before and after interventions focused on resilience, wellbeing and self-management. Although these interventions shared similarity of focus with Mindful Mamas, they were conducted in a wide range of target groups (e.g. undergraduate students, cancer patients, prisoners) and only one was specifically targeted at parents [11]. Overall, these interventions were very successful in improving wellbeing, with 11 out of 14 reporting a statistically significant increase in wellbeing. The average standardised mean difference in scores was 0.72 indicating a large effect size overall. The most effective of the 14 interventions had a standardised mean change in score of

2.2. Mindful Mamas can be viewed as among the most effective interventions, as only 3 of the 14 interventions reported a standardised mean change greater than that of Mindful Mamas (1.2).

Although the WEMWBS is not a clinical tool, scores of 40 points or less have previously been related to a high risk of depression [9]. Just over 10% of Mindful Mamas attendees scored 40 or below in the pre-course survey. WEMWBS scores increased substantially more among this high-risk group compared to other attendees, suggesting the course was particularly beneficial to individuals at a high risk of depression. In the post-course WEMWBS all attendees scored over 40 points indicating the high risk of depression had been alleviated. When considering only this high-risk group of attendees, Mindful Mamas outperformed all 14 interventions with a standardised mean difference of 4.3. However, the high-risk group consisted of a small number of individuals, therefore this result should be interpreted cautiously.

Of the 14 reported interventions, the three with the greatest effect on wellbeing each share some important features with Mindful Mamas. These features include both aspects of design (tailoring of the course for attendee needs [12] and peer facilitation [13] [11]) and the content (focus on gratitude and positive thinking, goal setting and developing deployable skills [13] [11]) suggesting these features may be important to the success of this type of programme.

Limitations

The greatest limitation to this quantitative evaluation is the lack of a control group for comparison, however the replication of findings across all cohorts strengthens the evidence of impact. Longer term wellbeing outcomes would also be of benefit.

Qualitative Evaluation

Methods

Post-Course Interviews.

One-to-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sub-sample of attendees in Cohort 1 (n=6), Cohort 2 (n=2) and Cohort 5 (n=3) after attending the full course. Interviews were conducted using online conferencing software (Zoom), by telephone, or in person, with the method chosen by each interviewee. Interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewee and either automatically transcribed within the conferencing software or transcribed manually by the interviewer after the interview.

Interviewees were asked five questions relating to their experiences at Mindful Mamas. These questions are detailed in Table 2.

Table 2

1. What was the most useful thing you learnt on the course? <i>(Follow up: How have you used this new information/ skill in your life)</i>
2. How has your confidence changed during the course, if at all? <i>Follow up: In what parts of your life have you noticed this change? What has this allowed you to do? What difference has this change made to you?</i>
3. How do you feel about talking about your mental health, well being or feelings with other people? <i>(Follow-up: Looking back on the start of the course, have you noticed any change?)</i>
4. Have you noticed any changes in how you are with your child/ children since being on the course? <i>(Follow-up: If yes, what kind of changes have you noticed? What do you think caused these changes?)</i>
5. Did you take part in the co-production workshop at the start of the course? Or did you contribute to the content of the course? <i>(Follow-up: If yes, how did you feel about having a say in the content of the course?)</i>

Content analysis was used to identify the most common themes across participant responses in three main topics; 1. Benefit to attendees, 2. Benefit to others, 3. Co-design Experiences. Initially, all 11 interviews were coded using NVivo 14. Codes were then grouped together into broader themes, which were ranked based on the number of interviewees who spoke to each theme. The top 6 themes are included in detail within the results, each of which was discussed by more than half of the 11 interviewees. Direct quotations are used to illustrate each theme through the words of the interviewees.

Parent Case Study

One additional in-depth unstructured interview was conducted with a parent who attended Mindful Mamas in 2022. The interview was conducted by phone call and recorded with consent. The narrative of the interview was summarised, including quotes from the interviewee, to tell the story of a journey through Mindful Mamas and beyond from one parent's perspective.

Results and Discussion

Topic 1 Benefits to the attendees

Theme 1. Opening Up, Supporting Each Other and Creating Community

The most common theme discussed, which was mentioned by all 11 interviewees, was that they felt more able to open up and speak freely about their feelings and experiences.

"I've become more confident. I'm more comfortable in sharing my thoughts and sharing how I felt."

Despite the short duration of the course, the group was seen as a safe space and a judgement free zone.

"With the mums in the course, I was feeling so confident to speak with all of them. It's very strange because never meet these girls before the course! I was so happy because to speak with them and open my head and my mind."

The welcoming, supportive and open atmosphere within the group sessions meant that interviewees benefited not only from speaking up themselves, but also from listening to the experiences of others going through similar challenges, which made them feel understood and less alone.

"Most of the mums there was like in the same my situation... It's like, I'm not feeling alone in my situation"

"I always used to think it's just me going through stuff. Because no one ever talks about it. But ... when you're hearing their stories, it makes you feel a bit better that you are not the only one."

"It helps to talk. It helps to listen to hear someone always has a similar experience to you. You can relate."

Many attendees commented that Mindful Mamas had helped to establish strong bonds within the group. This created a sense of community that continued after the course had ended.

"Having that WhatsApp group and having the opportunities to also meet up every once in a while after the course, even if it's just once a month. So think that it sort of builds that ongoing support"

This sense of community and is particularly important given that many of the attendees reported feeling isolated or having no social support system before the course.

“I’m new in the country so I don’t have friends here.”

“I don’t have family here around. I was quite isolated.”

Low social support is a well-known risk factor for depression, anxiety and other mental health issues during and after pregnancy [3]. Therefore, programmes such as Mindful Mamas which are able to boost social support may reduce and prevent the need for clinical mental health services during this vulnerable period.

Theme 2. More than a Mum

The second theme, which was discussed by 10 of the 11 interviewees was centred around each interviewee redefining themselves as their own person outside of their role as a parent. Many interviewees commented that parenthood can take over your identity, but that the course reminded them that they are more than a parent.

“You’re so used to doing things for others and asking for things for your kids or doing things for your kids, your partner, everyone else..., you kind of get a bit lost.”

“it has reminded me that I am still me” “just realizing you’re not just a mum, you are still who you are before you were a mum and you can’t forget that.”

Some interviewees mentioned that the course helped them address feelings of guilt and reassured them that fulfilling their own needs was not selfish, but essential.

“It has done me really good. And it has reminded me that I am still me and to do things for myself now and then.” “What I realised was that it was okay to ask for things for myself.”

Interviewees discussed many ways in which they were taking time for themselves. Acts of self-care including painting nails and doing hair or make up were often mentioned, as were creative endeavours such as colouring (Table 3).

Table 3 Examples of “Taking time for themselves”

1	<i>“Now I kind of take time to do my nails. I take time to sort of recharge more often.”</i>
2	<i>“Since the course I’ve started, I’ve actually, every two weeks, I’ve gone out with my best friend for like dinner or drinking, socialising away from the kids. And... doing my nails is taking some time out for myself.”</i>
3	<i>“Yeah, so at least once a week I try to do something for myself like whether it’s pampering myself or just relaxing longer in the shower. Just little things like that. Once the kids are in bed, enjoy me time.”</i>
4	<i>“I have some adult colouring books that I just sit down. I’ll put on something to watch. It’ll be in the background and I find it very calming to do adult colouring books”</i>
5	<i>“But now I do my hair for myself. I paint my nails. Sometimes I just go to the mirror and make up even though I’m not going out!”</i>
6	<i>“Now I have time for me. Yeah, sometimes and try to read a book or when I’m going to the shopping put beauty even only for going to the shopping”</i>

This sentiment also came through when discussing the course itself. Some interviewees said the reason Mindful Mamas was so beneficial was because it was a dedicated space for Mums, without their children.

“when you're here you are given that space to, be YOU and not just a mum. Not being distracted by your kids. And, you know, it's an amazing space for us to have, a mini vacation from our kids.”

Previous studies have also reported that in caring roles such as parenting, carers often feel pressure to address the needs of others ahead of their own. However, research shows that individuals in caring roles who practice more self-care are less likely to feel stressed or burdened by their role [14]. Self-care strategies are therefore incredibly important in maintaining the wellbeing of parents and preventing burnout.

Theme 3 Confidence & Setting Boundaries

As well as discussing increased confidence in speaking up and sharing their experiences (Theme 1), 8 of the 11 interviewees also mentioned improvements in other aspects of their self-confidence. For some, this was confidence to join in activities they would normally avoid. For others it was asserting themselves and their boundaries.

“We did dancing – I don’t dance! But you get involved and ... every time I left there I felt a bit better.”

“now I'm confident enough to step back and be like, you know, what, that's your issue, not mine.”

“when people want to ask you for favours ... I'm very likely to say yes to everything. And it just helps to sometimes be able to say actually, no”

“Before this time, all I want to do is to please people and forget completely about myself... But now I will walk up to you and say, this is this and this is that.”

Others discussed improved confidence in their skills as a parent or work-related skills.

“I'm feel now more confident with my role of mum.”

“it became apparent that I'm capable of achieving more, doing more, it just became a self aware moment that I can actually do certain stuff if I put my mind to it.”

Confidence and self-esteem are protective against depression [15] and beneficial to parent-child relationships [16]. In turn, good parent-child relationships have been shown to mitigate the impact of other environmental stressors on child development [17] giving triple benefit to mother and child.

Theme 4 Practicing Mindfulness

Just over half of the interviewees mentioned specific mindfulness tools that had benefited them in their daily lives. These practices centred on creativity, reflection, being present and relaxing (Table 4). These findings support other recent research which has shown that a brief mindfulness based wellbeing programme for expecting and new mothers was related to reduced anxiety and more responsive parenting [18].

Table 4 Examples of Mindfulness Practice

1	<i>“I bought my mindful journal for happiness. Everyday, morning and before bed I’m writing something from my day... This helps me to reflect, to be present in my day. To notice things.”</i>
2	<i>“Having a moment for yourself, but as small as like five minutes, but being mindful and enjoying the moments”</i>
3	<i>“One of the weeks we go out you to the to the garden and then the exercise was to observe flowers... when I feel bad I can just observe what is around ...just look and forget the bad things”</i>
4	<i>“One of my favourite subjects, one was the yoga tea, where we just kind of focused on our tea.</i>
5	<i>“I look back on all the questions and stuff that we did in the booklets that Ellie gave us. It just sort of makes you feel better every day.”</i>
6	<i>“a lot of things like techniques for a being present in the moment and enjoy in the moment”.</i>

Topic 2 Benefits to Others

Theme 5 Patience and Enjoyment with Children

Although some interviewees discussed improvements in relationships with partners, friends or family, most commented on the changes in their relationships with their children. Five interviewees said they were now more patient with their children. Some specifically mentioned that mindfulness techniques had helped them to have more patience.

“But now I understand he's just a child, he is learning. I have more patience with him” “You know, sometimes even when I have to repeat something, two or three times, I'm more patient.”

“When my daughter is angry or she's crying.... I breathe and wait ...and take a moment, Calm.”

Parental self-regulation is fundamental to positive and nurturing parenting practices. It also supports the development of emotional regulation in young children, which is beneficial to mental health across the lifespan [19].

Three interviewees said that as a result of reduced stress and feeling less overwhelmed, they were enjoying more quality time with their children.

“But now my mindset is like, let's go out, let's play. And then when we come back, I'm going to clean the house.”

“Before I just gave him toys. Now we play together, we laugh together, do things together. Even when I'm cooking, yeah, I'll bring him closer to me. So, the bonding is more than before.”

Topic 3 Co-Design Experiences

Theme 6 Feeling Valued

The co-design element of Mindful Mamas was viewed by many as a fundamental part of the success of the course. Seven interviewees commented on feeling empowered, valued and listened to as a result in being involved in the design process. Much of the value of the co-design came down to the interviewees noticing that their opinions and ideas had been incorporated into the course. A selection of interviewee comments are included below to illustrate these sentiments.

“It's like when you cook, you are happy to eat because you know what you put inside, it's so sweet, and you're excited to eat. “

“There's so many elements of your life where it's dictated by other people. And sometimes you feel like you don't have any agency...When someone values you and says, we're thinking of doing a course, and we want it to be something that you think is important... Just giving you that voice was very, appreciated”

“Everything that we said was what was manifested. Getting us together to get our ideas and what we would really like before putting it shows that we were actually valued.”

“it's really important because it means that the parents are being heard, and the parents are getting what they need”

Parent Case Study (name has been changed to maintain anonymity)

Maria's Story

For Maria, becoming a Mum was a difficult and isolating experience. Having moved to London shortly before having children, she didn't have the support of family and didn't know any other Mums in the area. The combination of lockdown and high nursery costs also left her without a job, which added to the isolation and impacted her self-esteem.

"I tell you, I was really, really isolated. My self-esteem was - I didn't have it. I was trying to look for a job because I lost mine for the lockdown. ...I was talking in an interview and I had a blank, I couldn't talk. So, it was really bad to be honest."

Thankfully, things changed course for Maria when a parent at her daughter's nursery told her about PACT and encouraged her to join the Mindful Mamas course. She decided to go along to the sessions and, since then, she hasn't looked back.

One of the main things that made Maria feel comfortable was the warm welcome she received from the staff and the other Mums, especially when practicing her English. In Mindful Mamas she found a safe space to share her experiences, connect with others and learn tools to help her deal with the everyday challenges of life as a parent. Critically, she had found a place where she felt important and valued as a person and a woman, not just a parent.

"To be honest, that changed my life ...

I started to get out more with other mums, I started to know other cultures and other people in the same situation. I felt like I was at home in family. It was amazing."

"They are not treating me as a mum, they are treating me as a person. Sometimes we forget, ourselves. We are Mums, daughters, friends ... but we forget ourselves as a woman... It is amazing, how important you feel. So that is the special thing about PACT."

As she continued to practice mindfulness and became more embedded in the PACT community, Maria noticed big changes in her family life too, having more patience with her daughter and enjoying more quality time together.

Over a year after first completing the Mindful Mamas course, Maria is still engaged with the PACT community and no longer feels isolated. With newfound self-confidence and a desire to support other Mums, she has also taken up a paid role as a PACT Parent Facilitator. As part of a parent-led team, she developed and delivered a course focused on building strong peer support groups within other community organisations. She was also involved in the parent led components of the PACT evaluation and has volunteered at more recent PACT courses.

Not only does Maria now feel confident enough to get back into the world of work, thanks to the additional skills she has developed as a parent leader, she is now applying for more senior positions!

For Maria, attending Mindful Mamas was a huge turning point, and the support of the PACT community has been nothing less than transformational.

Overall Conclusions

Quantitative results show that Mindful Mamas is significantly and consistently beneficial to the Wellbeing of individuals who attend. Those with a high risk of depression before the course showed greatest improvement. Qualitative results show that establishing a supportive and judgement free community, re-establishing an identity outside of parenthood and developing confidence were key aspects of the course that lead to improvements in wellbeing. A key additional benefit was improved relationships with children. The empowering, parent-focused and collaborative ethos of Mindful Mamas is at the centre of its success.

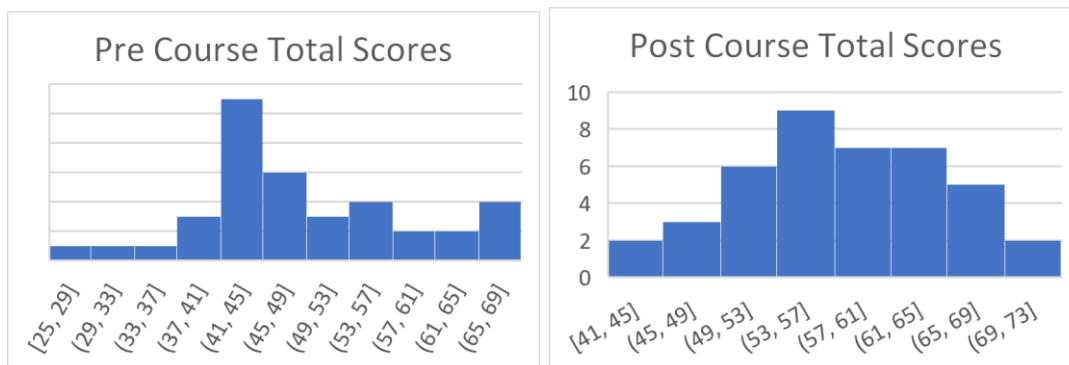
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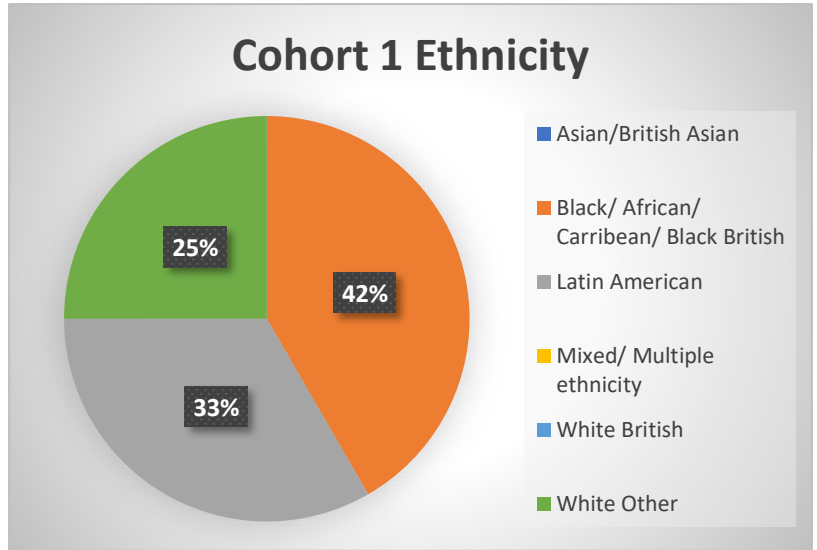
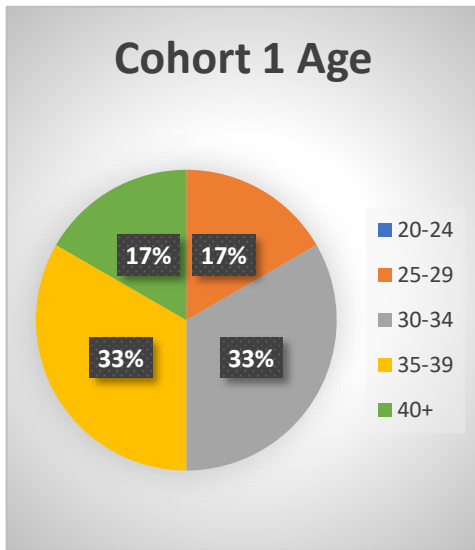
Appendices

Appendix 1: Distribution of Pre and Post Course WEMWBS Scores

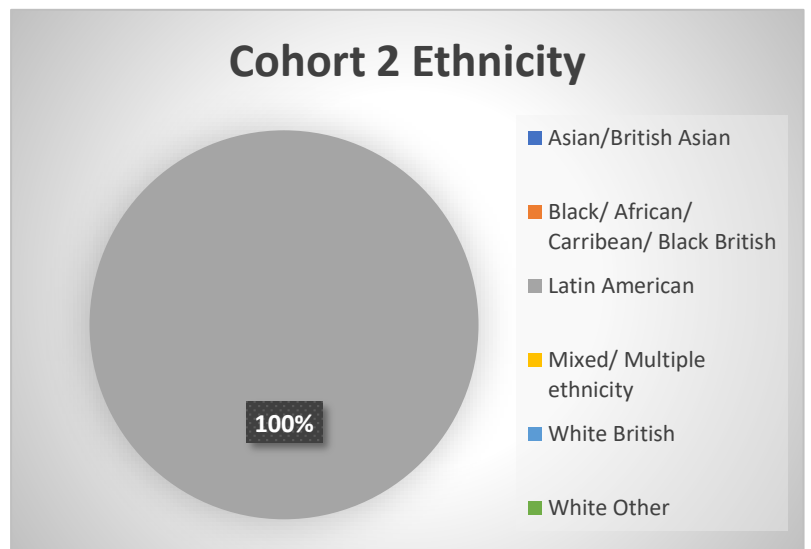
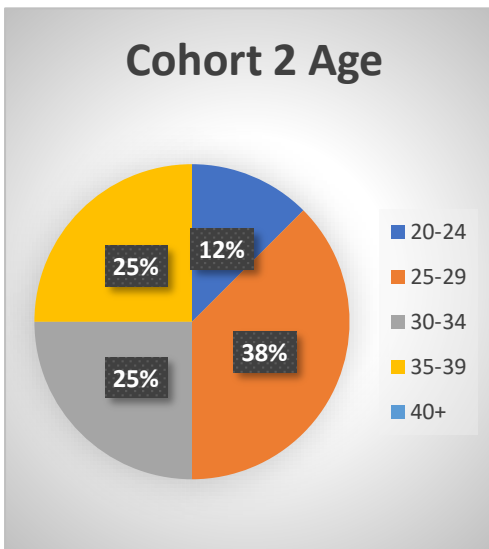


Appendix 2. Demographic Information by Cohort (1-5)

Cohort 1

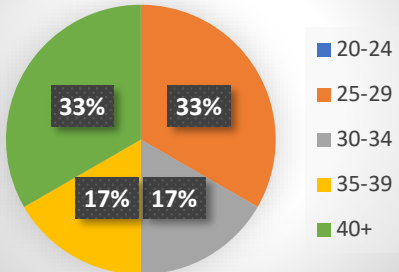


Cohort 2

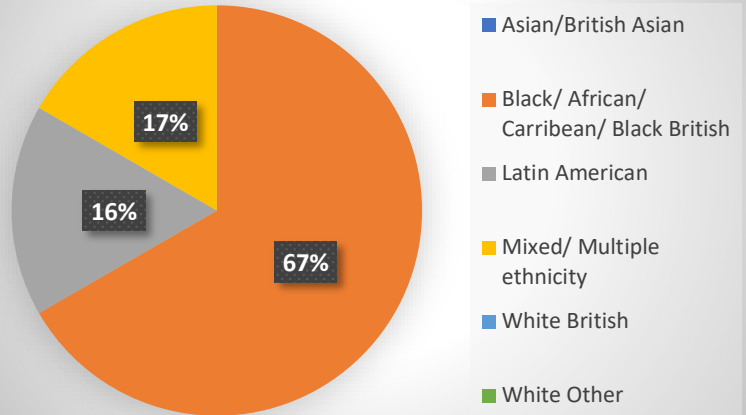


Cohort 3

Cohort 3 Age

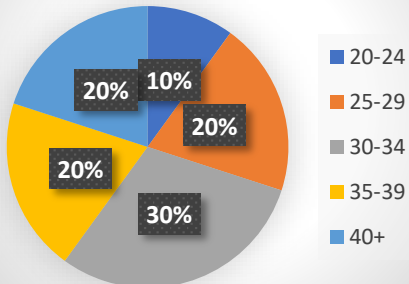


Cohort 3 Ethnicity

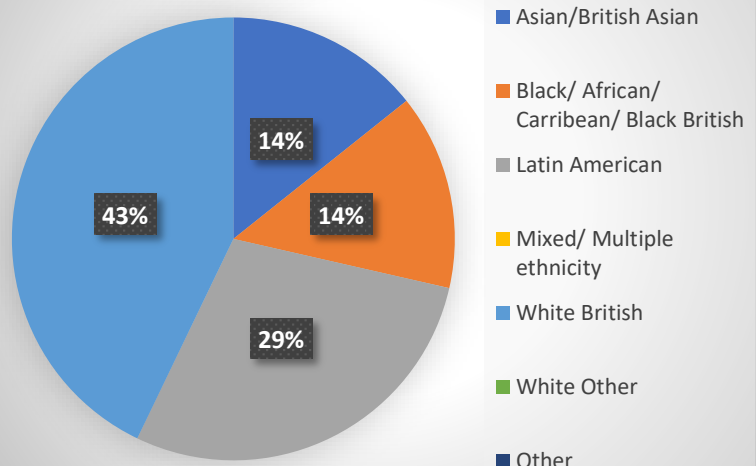


Cohort 4

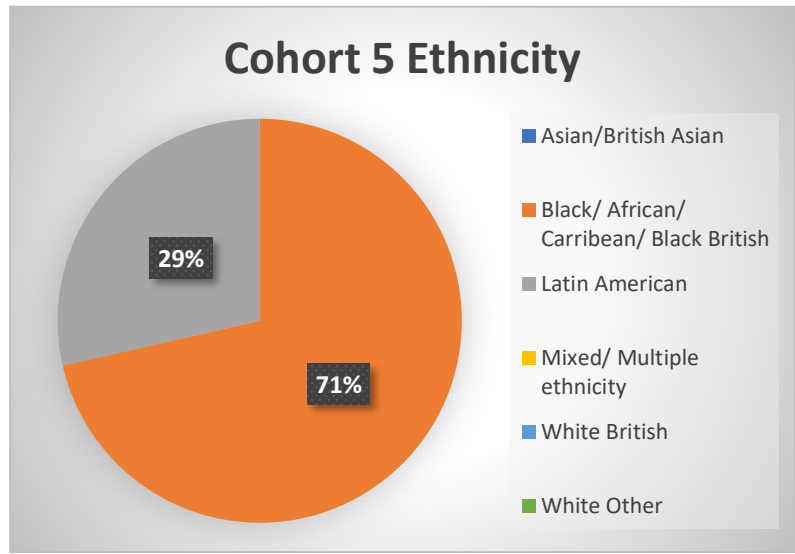
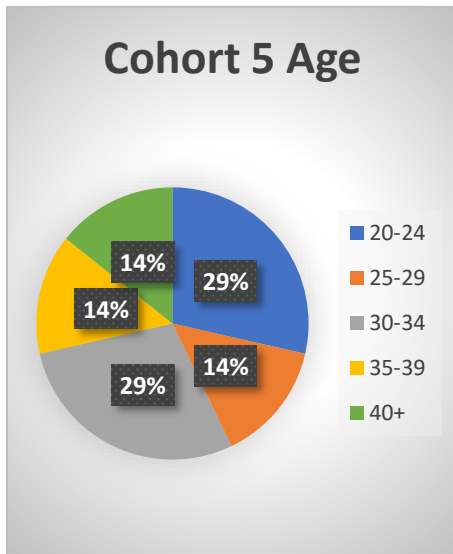
Cohort 4 Age



Cohort 4 Ethnicity



Cohort 5

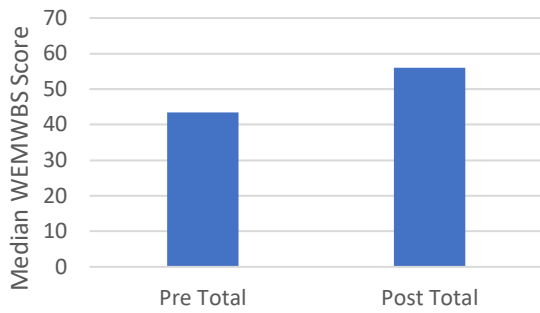


Cohort 6

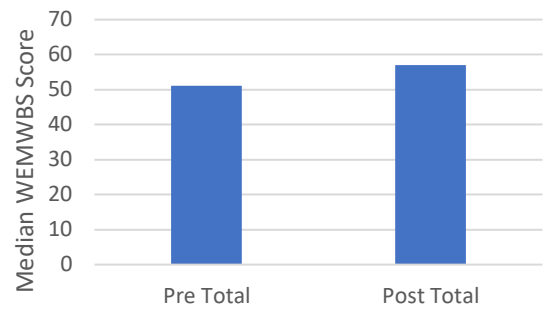
No demographic information collected.

Appendix 3 Pre and Post Course WEMWBS Scores

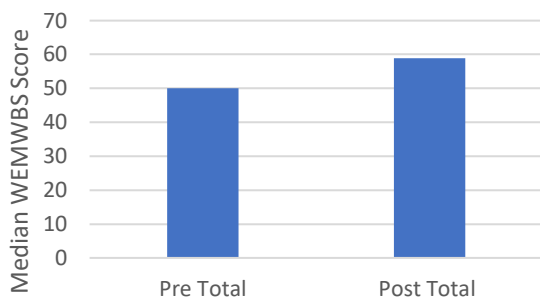
Cohort 1 WEMWBS Scores



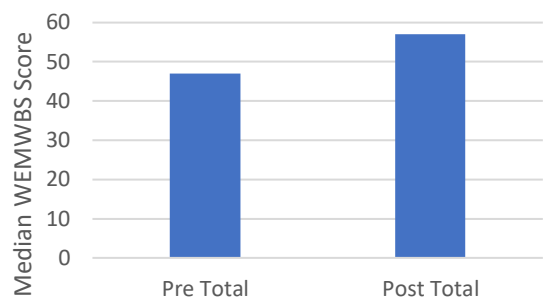
Cohort 2 WEMWBS Scores



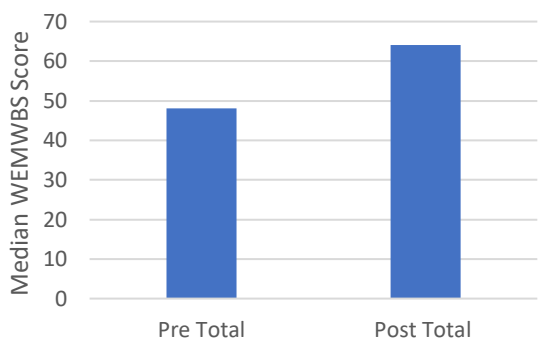
Cohort 3 WEMWBS Scores



Cohort 4 WEMWBS Scores



Cohort 5 WEMWBS Score



Cohort 6 WEMWBS Score

