

# Principles of Clarity: Effects of a novel mindfulness workshop on improving well-being



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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there have been many studies showing that long term meditation can improve mental well-being. Although clearly powerful, meditation does not appeal to everyone, because it is sometimes seen as too time consuming, too spiritual, or religious. We have therefore been looking into other approaches for delivering mindfulness to the community, with the goal of producing “transformative” effects in a short amount of time. Here, we studied the effectiveness of an intensive and interactive workshop called “**Principles of Clarity**” (POC), created by Professor Dobkins at UC San Diego (USA). This workshop incorporates principles from neuroscience, Buddhism, cognitive behavioral therapy, and positive psychology, and is led as either an 8- or 16-hour course. *POC is interactive and dynamic, consisting of: 1) short lectures, 2) group discussion, 3) didactic conversation between the leader and participants, and 4) partnering up in exercises. Much like the way a Yoga teacher demonstrates a pose before adjusting others in that pose, one essential ingredient of the POC method is that the leader “performs” real (or hypothetical) situations to demonstrate the practice of shifting from fear-based “story-telling” to clarity, love and freedom.*

Here, we asked whether:

- 1) improvements in well-being can be seen from the POC workshop
- 2) improvements depend on age
- 3) improvements are seen in both western (USA) and eastern (Hong Kong) cultures

## PARTICIPANTS

	Age (years)	% Female	N
<b>USA</b>			
Young (16 hours)	19.4	92%	68
Middle (16 hours)	34.2	56%	22
Older (16 hours)	71.0	76%	45
<b>Hong Kong</b>			
Middle (8 hours)	28.8	67%	33

## QUESTIONNAIRES (filled out both PRE and POST Workshop)

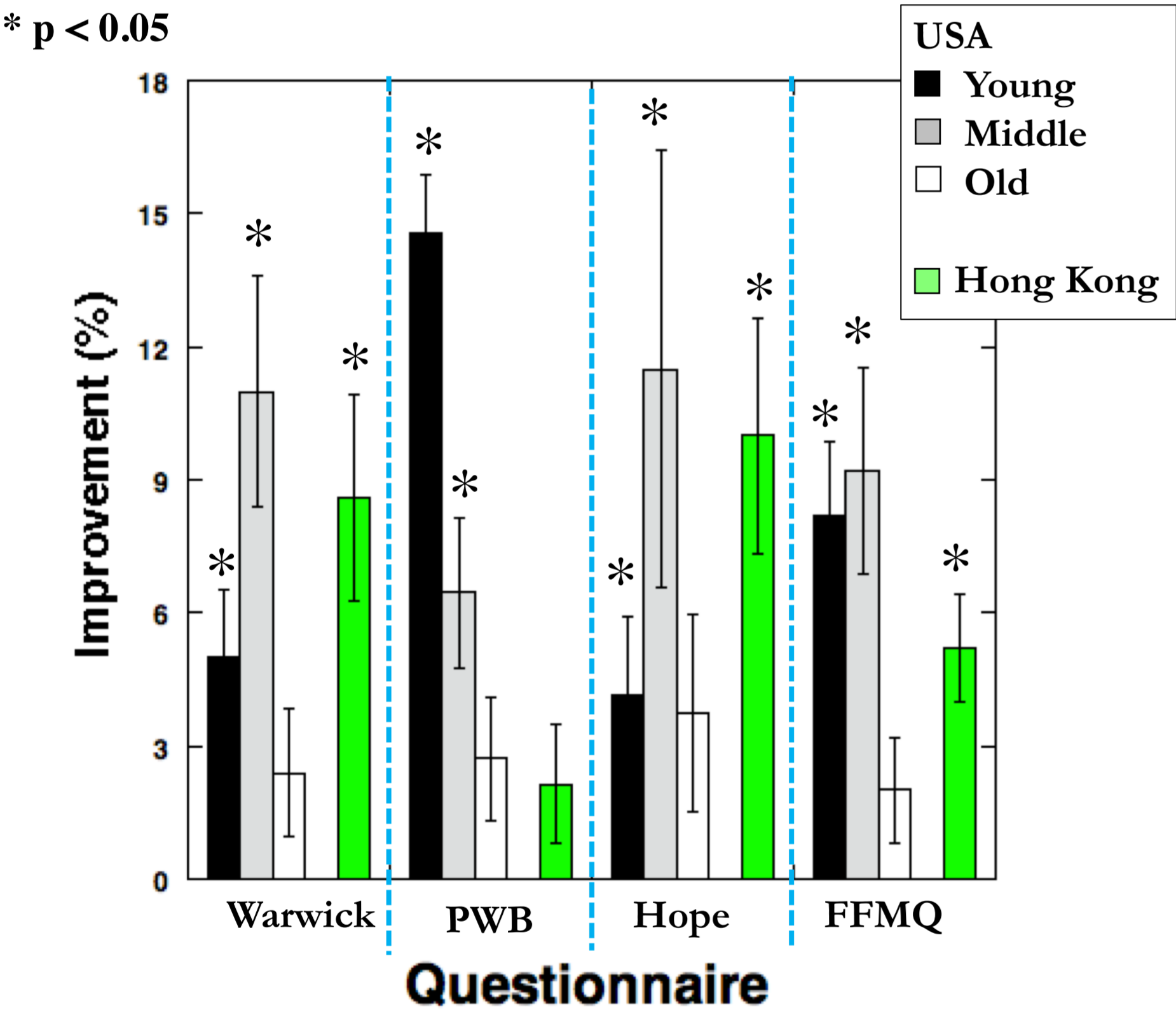
- 1) Warwick-Edinburgh, 14 items (Tenant et al., 2007), which assesses eudaimonic and hedonic mental well-being. Max score = 5
- 2) Subjective Well-Being (PWB), 18 items (Ryff & Keyes, 1995), which consists of six subscales: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental master, purpose in life, and personal growth. Max score = 7
- 3) State Hope, 6 items (Synder et al., 1996), which consists of two subscales: initiating and maintaining actions and generating routes to achieve goals. Max score = 8
- 4) Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ), 39 items (Baer et al, 2006), which consists of five subscales: observing, describing, non-Reactivity, non-judgment and awareness. Max score = 5

**Improvement Score = (POST – PRE)/MAX SCORE for that questionnaire.**  
(NOTE: Dividing by the Max Score allows us to compare improvement across the different questionnaires)

## RESULTS

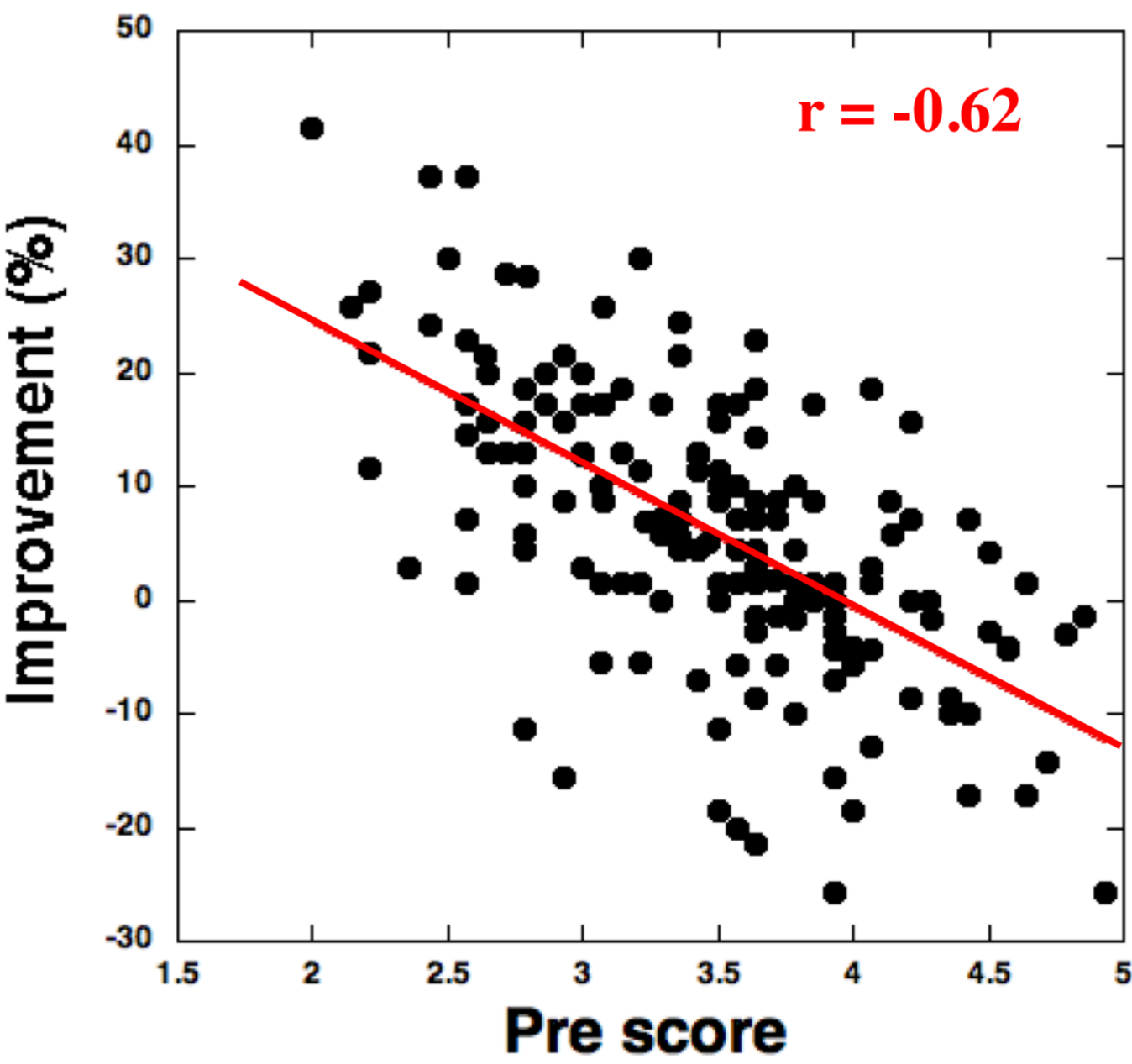
### A) Mean Improvement Scores

(± 1 SE)



- 1) Improvement: All groups showed improvement (\* denotes p < 0.05)
- 2) Age (USA): Older people showed *less* improvement than young and middle-aged people (with the exception of Hope, all p < 0.05)
- 3) Culture: When combining young and middle ages in the USA samples (23.0 years), the HK group (28.8 years) showed *less* improvement than the USA (PWB and FFMQ, p < 0.001)

### B) Improvement is Predicted by Pre Scores

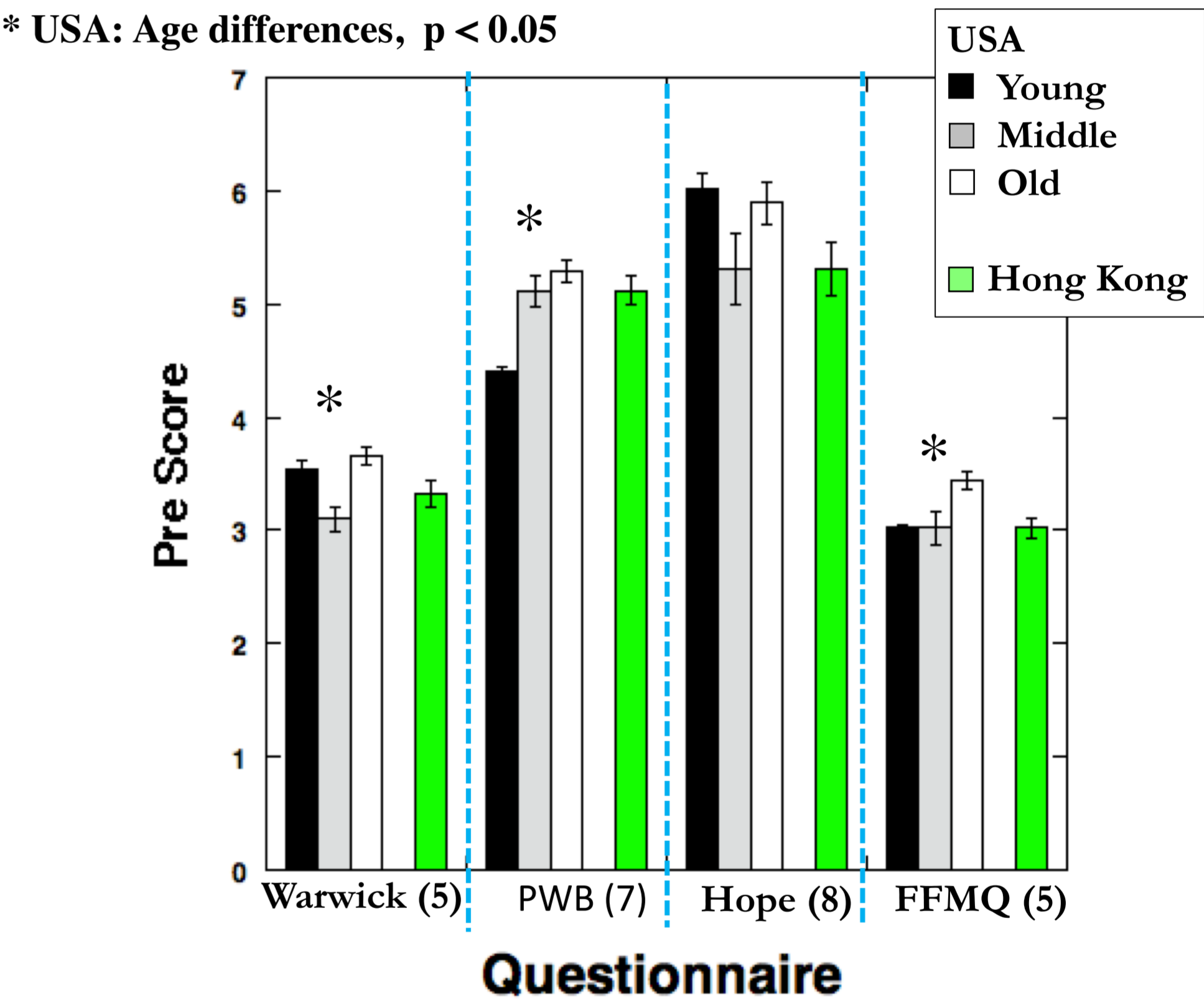


Higher Pre-scores predict lower Improvement Scores (p < 0.001 for all measures, example data shown for the *Warwick* questionnaire).

\* This may be driven by “regression to the mean”, which needs to be considered in intervention studies.

### C) Mean Pre Scores

(± 1 SE)



It is important to address whether one group improves more than another due to that group *starting lower* in their Pre-scores. For example, on the PWB questionnaire, the youngest age might have shown the largest improvement (see Panel A) because they started with significantly lower Pre-scores than the two older groups (p < 0.001). It might therefore be appropriate to include Pre-scores as a predictor variable in the statistical model.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Psychological well-being was improved after taking the POC workshop, in all ages tested (20 – 70 years) and in both the West and the East. Improvements were smaller in the oldest group (71 years), which could be due to them starting at higher levels of well-being. Improvements were also smaller in the East, which might be due to the workshop being only half as long here (8 vs. 16 hours). In sum, although there may be some variation across groups, dynamic and interactive workshops (like POC) can be an effective approach in delivering mindfulness-based interventions to the community in a relatively short time, with potentially long-lasting effects.

### Some Caveats:

- 1) We did not have a wait-list control group and therefore some of the improvement might be due to the fact that the participants were self-selected. Still, these preliminary results suggest that the POC workshop is effective, and future studies will compare to a control group.
- 2) It will be important to determine whether the improvement is *long-lasting*. Preliminary data (not shown here) suggest effects that last to at least 5 months later.

**Spreading the Satsang Method:** POC is much like a leader-facilitated “Satsang” (from Sanskrit, meaning “sitting with true people”). We would like to propose a novel model of “spreading Mindfulness and well-being” using the Satsang method, which acts very much like the avid spread of Yoga. Nobody owns Yoga, yet more and more people are taking yoga teacher training (YTT), allowing them to lead their own groups, and also train others, and so on. In the same way, we suggest that the Satsang method of Mindfulness can spread by training others to facilitate a POC-style workshop, and so on. We would love to hear your feedback!