

**THE THERAPEUTIC POTENTIAL OF ANIMAL FLOW IN MINDFULNESS AND
PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING**

*Dissertation Submitted to Kerala University in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the
Award of the Degree of
Master of Science in Counselling Psychology*

Submitted by

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2024 – 2026

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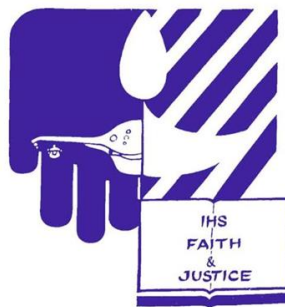
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LOYOLA COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
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Certificate

This is to certify that the research entitled **“The Therapeutic Potential of Animal Flow in Mindfulness and Psychological Wellbeing”** is a bonafide and authentic work carried out by Sharru Shivaani F under the guidance and supervision of Ms. Athmaja Panickar during the fourth semester of the M.Sc. Counselling Psychology Programme in the academic year 2024–2026.

Ms. Athmaja Panickar

Supervising Teacher

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Head of the Department (In-Charge)

Submitted for the examination held on:

Examiners:

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the research work entitled “*The Therapeutic Potential of Animal Flow in Mindfulness and Psychological Wellbeing*” submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Science in Counselling Psychology** is a record of original work carried out by me under the guidance and supervision of **Ms. Athmaja Panickar** during the academic year 2024–2026.

I further declare that this work has not been submitted either in part or in full for the award of any other degree, diploma, fellowship, or any other similar title in this or any other institution or university.

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M.Sc. Counselling Psychology

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Abstract

Animal Flow combines strength, mobility, coordination, flexibility, and mindfulness. Despite growing interest in movement-based interventions for psychological well-being, little research explores Animal Flow's therapeutic potential from a psychological perspective. This study examined experienced Animal Flow practitioners' psychological and emotional experiences and their connections to embodied mindfulness and psychological well-being.

A qualitative design was used, including semi-structured interviews of five certified Animal Flow practitioners who were recruited using purposive sampling. Data were transcribed verbatim and thematically analysed. Analysis yielded six themes: (1) Embodied Awareness and Mind–Body Integration, (2) Mindfulness and Attentional Engagement, (3) Emotional Regulation and Psychological Well-being, (4) Perceived Therapeutic Potential, (5) Personal Growth Through Practice, and (6) Challenges for Therapeutic Application. Participants indicated that Animal Flow improved body awareness, mind-body coordination, present moment awareness, stress reduction, emotional regulation, and personal development. Findings indicated participants viewed Animal Flow as holistic with potential therapeutic benefits for fostering mindfulness and psychological well-being. Physical limitations, learning difficulties and individual readiness were important factors. Based on the conclusions presented in this study, it appears that Animal Flow movement can function as the body-centered approach of mindfulness practice which facilitates the development of psychological well-being through a combination of movement, mindful awareness and emotional control. The study findings are beneficial for the literature dealing with movement-based therapies and contain the first qualitative evidence of the therapeutic potential of Animal Flow practice. Further investigation of this method in larger samples is required.

Keywords: Animal Flow, body-centered mindfulness, psychological well-being, emotional regulation, perceived therapeutic potential, thematic analysis, qualitative research.

Chapter I

Introduction

Mental health is widely recognised as a fundamental component of overall health and well-being. It encompasses not merely the absence of mental illness but also the ability to realise one's potential, cope effectively with the normal stresses of life, work productively, and contribute meaningfully to society (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022). Good mental health enables individuals to regulate their emotions, adapt to changing life circumstances, establish healthy interpersonal relationships, and maintain psychological resilience in the face of adversity. In recent decades, increasing rates of stress, anxiety, depression, and other psychological concerns have highlighted the growing need for approaches that promote mental well-being in addition to treating psychological disorders. Consequently, contemporary psychology has increasingly shifted towards preventive and health-promoting perspectives that emphasise strengthening psychological resources rather than focusing solely on psychopathology.

This shift has been strongly influenced by the emergence of Positive Psychology, which focuses on understanding the factors that enable individuals and communities to thrive. Rather than concentrating exclusively on psychological distress, Positive Psychology emphasises strengths, resilience, positive emotions, meaning, and optimal human functioning (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Within this perspective, psychological well-being extends beyond the absence of illness and includes the development of personal strengths, meaningful relationships, purpose in life, self-acceptance, autonomy, and personal growth (Ryff, 1989; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Keyes (2002) further proposed that complete mental health encompasses emotional, psychological, and social well-being, highlighting the importance of interventions that promote flourishing alongside the prevention of psychological difficulties. These developments have encouraged researchers to explore innovative approaches that foster well-being through holistic and integrative practices.

Among the approaches receiving increasing attention is mindfulness, which has become one of the most widely researched constructs in contemporary psychology. Mindfulness is commonly defined as the awareness that emerges through intentionally paying attention to present-moment experiences with openness, curiosity, and without judgement (Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Bishop et al., 2004). Traditionally, mindfulness has been cultivated through seated meditation practices in which individuals focus on their breathing, bodily sensations, thoughts, or emotions while observing them without reacting automatically. A substantial body of research has demonstrated that mindfulness-based interventions contribute to reduced stress, improved emotional regulation, enhanced self-awareness, increased resilience, and greater psychological well-being (Shapiro et al., 2011; Creswell, 2017). Despite these benefits, researchers have increasingly recognised that mindfulness is not restricted to seated meditation and can also emerge through purposeful engagement in physical movement.

This growing recognition has contributed to increasing interest in movement-based approaches to mental health. Contemporary research suggests that physical movement influences not only physical fitness but also cognitive functioning, emotional regulation, attention, and psychological well-being. Practices such as yoga, Tai Chi, Qigong, mindful walking, and Dance Movement Therapy integrate physical movement with mindful awareness, breathing, and body awareness, thereby promoting holistic well-being. Systematic reviews and meta-analyses have demonstrated that these interventions are associated with improvements in stress management, emotional regulation, body awareness, self-esteem, and overall psychological functioning (Cramer et al., 2013; Koch et al., 2019; Mehling et al., 2018). These findings have strengthened interest in understanding how embodied movement practices may contribute to mental health through mechanisms that extend beyond conventional exercise.

The growing interest in movement-based interventions has also contributed to the development of the concept of embodiment, which emphasises that human experience is fundamentally grounded in the body. From the perspective of embodied cognition, perception, emotion, cognition, and behaviour are shaped through continuous interactions between the body and the surrounding environment (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Wilson, 2002; Barsalou, 2008). Within psychology, embodied approaches suggest that bodily awareness and movement play an important role in emotional regulation, attention, and self-awareness. Rather than viewing the mind and body as separate entities, embodiment highlights their dynamic interaction in shaping human experience. Consequently, movement-based practices that encourage awareness of posture, breathing, balance, and bodily sensations may facilitate greater mind-body integration and contribute positively to psychological well-being.

Among contemporary embodied movement systems, Animal Flow has emerged as an innovative bodyweight movement practice that combines quadrupedal movement patterns, mobility, stability, strength, flexibility, coordination, and mindful movement. Developed by Mike Fitch in 2010, Animal Flow integrates elements from gymnastics, yoga, breakdancing, and functional movement into continuous sequences that require sustained attention, body awareness, and coordinated movement. Unlike conventional exercise programmes that often emphasise isolated muscle groups or repetitive movements, Animal Flow encourages practitioners to move through fluid transitions while maintaining conscious awareness of breathing, posture, and movement quality. This integration of physical challenge with sustained attentional focus has led many practitioners to describe Animal Flow as a movement experience that extends beyond physical fitness and promotes a deeper connection between the body and mind.

The potential psychological relevance of Animal Flow can also be understood through theoretical perspectives such as Polyvagal Theory, proposed by Stephen W. Porges (1995,

2007, 2011). Polyvagal Theory explains how the autonomic nervous system influences emotional regulation, stress responses, social engagement, and feelings of safety. According to the theory, physiological regulation plays an important role in shaping emotional experiences and psychological functioning. Movement-based practices that incorporate rhythmic movement, controlled breathing, and present-moment awareness have been proposed to support autonomic regulation and emotional well-being (Dana, 2018; Kolacz & Porges, 2018). Although Animal Flow has not been directly investigated within the framework of Polyvagal Theory, its emphasis on coordinated movement, body awareness, and focused attention suggests that it may provide a useful context for exploring embodied experiences related to psychological well-being.

Despite the increasing popularity of Animal Flow within fitness and movement communities, empirical research examining its psychological dimensions remains limited. Existing literature has predominantly investigated its effects on physical outcomes such as mobility, flexibility, strength, coordination, and functional movement performance. Comparatively little attention has been given to understanding practitioners' lived experiences of Animal Flow in relation to mindfulness, emotional regulation, body awareness, and psychological well-being. Furthermore, qualitative investigations exploring whether practitioners perceive Animal Flow as possessing therapeutic potential are scarce. This represents an important gap within the literature, particularly in counselling psychology, where growing emphasis has been placed on understanding embodied approaches that complement traditional psychological interventions.

In response to this gap, the present study adopts a qualitative approach to explore the lived experiences of certified Animal Flow practitioners and examine how they perceive the therapeutic potential of Animal Flow in relation to mindfulness and psychological well-being. Through semi-structured interviews and reflexive thematic analysis, the study seeks to

provide a deeper understanding of practitioners' experiences of embodied awareness, mindfulness, emotional regulation, personal growth, and perceived therapeutic value. By exploring these experiences, the study contributes to the emerging literature on Animal Flow while expanding understanding of embodied movement practices within the broader context of counselling psychology and psychological well-being.

Need and Significance of the Study

In recent years, there has been increasing recognition that promoting psychological well-being requires approaches that extend beyond the treatment of mental illness. As the prevalence of stress, anxiety, and lifestyle-related psychological concerns continues to rise, researchers and mental health professionals have sought interventions that not only reduce psychological distress but also enhance resilience, self-awareness, emotional regulation, and overall quality of life. This growing emphasis has encouraged the exploration of innovative movement-based and mindfulness-oriented approaches that promote holistic well-being.

The growing emphasis on promoting psychological well-being has shifted the focus of contemporary psychology beyond the treatment of psychological disorders towards understanding the factors that enable individuals to flourish and lead meaningful lives. The emergence of Positive Psychology has reinforced this perspective by highlighting the importance of fostering positive emotions, resilience, strengths, and overall well-being alongside addressing psychological distress (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Within this framework, psychological well-being is recognised as a multidimensional construct encompassing self-acceptance, purpose in life, personal growth, autonomy, positive relationships, and environmental mastery (Ryff, 1989). Consequently, there is an increasing need to explore innovative approaches that may contribute to these aspects of well-being while complementing existing psychological practices.

Mindfulness has become one of the most extensively researched approaches for promoting psychological well-being and emotional regulation. A growing body of evidence suggests that mindfulness-based interventions are associated with improvements in stress management, emotional regulation, resilience, self-awareness, and overall psychological functioning (Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Creswell, 2017). More recently, systematic reviews have highlighted the value of integrating mindfulness with principles of Positive Psychology, suggesting that such approaches may contribute to both hedonic well-being (happiness and life satisfaction) and eudaimonic well-being (meaning, purpose, and optimal functioning) (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Allen et al., 2021). Despite these advances, researchers have also recognised that mindfulness need not be cultivated solely through traditional seated meditation. This has encouraged growing interest in embodied and movement-based practices that integrate mindful awareness with physical movement and bodily experience.

Movement-based interventions, including yoga, Tai Chi, Qigong, and Dance Movement Therapy, have increasingly been investigated for their potential contributions to psychological well-being. These approaches acknowledge the interconnectedness of cognitive, emotional, and physiological processes and emphasise the role of body awareness, breathing, and movement in supporting emotional regulation and adaptive functioning (Mehling et al., 2011). In addition, theoretical perspectives such as Polyvagal Theory propose that physiological regulation and perceptions of safety influence emotional and social functioning, providing a conceptual framework for understanding how embodied practices may contribute to psychological well-being (Porges, 2007). Although the application of Polyvagal Theory continues to be discussed and critically evaluated within contemporary research, it offers a useful perspective for exploring possible mechanisms through which movement-based practices may support psychological functioning.

Collectively, these movement-based interventions demonstrate that purposeful movement can positively influence psychological functioning by strengthening the interaction between cognitive, emotional, and physiological processes. Their growing evidence base has encouraged researchers to investigate whether newer embodied movement practices may offer similar psychological benefits. Consequently, there is increasing interest in examining emerging movement systems such as Animal Flow, which integrate mindful attention with coordinated body movement and may provide additional insights into the relationship between movement, mindfulness, and psychological well-being.

Among the emerging movement systems, Animal Flow has gained increasing popularity within fitness, rehabilitation, and movement communities. Despite its increasing global popularity among certified instructors, rehabilitation professionals, and movement educators, empirical research examining its psychological dimensions remains limited. Most available literature has focused on physical performance outcomes such as mobility, flexibility, balance, and functional movement, leaving practitioners' subjective psychological experiences largely unexplored. Developed as a bodyweight movement practice, Animal Flow integrates mobility, stability, strength, coordination, flexibility, and mindful attention through continuous movement sequences. Consequently, there remains a significant gap in understanding whether and how Animal Flow may possess therapeutic potential within the domains of mindfulness and psychological well-being.

Given the limited psychological literature on Animal Flow, the present study adopts a qualitative approach to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of certified Animal Flow practitioners. Rather than attempting to establish the effectiveness of Animal Flow as a therapeutic intervention, this study seeks to understand whether practitioners perceive characteristics of the practice that may support mindfulness and psychological well-being. Exploring these experiences is particularly important in an emerging area of research where

empirical evidence is still developing, as qualitative inquiry provides rich insights into personal meanings, subjective experiences, and contextual factors that may not be captured through quantitative methods alone.

The significance of the present study extends across academic, professional, and practical contexts. Academically, it contributes to the growing body of literature on embodied approaches to mental health by examining an underexplored movement practice from a psychological perspective. Within counselling psychology, the study is expected to broaden understanding of movement-based practices that may complement existing therapeutic approaches by encouraging mindful awareness, body awareness, and emotional regulation. Importantly, this study does not propose Animal Flow as an established therapeutic intervention; rather, it explores whether practitioners perceive elements of the practice that may hold therapeutic potential. It is anticipated that the findings of the present study will provide preliminary evidence to inform future quantitative, mixed-methods, and intervention-based research examining the relationship between Animal Flow, mindfulness, and psychological well-being across diverse populations and settings. The study is also expected to contribute to the growing understanding of embodied movement within counselling psychology and provide an evidence-informed foundation for future research exploring Animal Flow as a complementary movement-based approach for promoting mindfulness and psychological well-being.

Statement of the Problem

In recent years, increasing attention has been directed towards identifying approaches that promote psychological well-being beyond the treatment of mental illness. Mindfulness-based interventions and movement-oriented practices have gained considerable recognition for their potential to enhance emotional regulation, body awareness, resilience, and overall psychological well-being. More recently, embodied approaches have emphasised the

integration of movement, bodily awareness, and physiological regulation as important components of psychological functioning.

Animal Flow is an emerging bodyweight movement system that combines quadrupedal movement, mobility, strength, coordination, flexibility, and mindful movement through continuous movement sequences. Although the practice has gained widespread popularity among fitness professionals, movement educators, and rehabilitation practitioners, existing research has primarily focused on its physical and functional benefits, including mobility, flexibility, balance, coordination, and movement efficiency. Comparatively little attention has been given to understanding the psychological experiences of Animal Flow practitioners, particularly in relation to mindfulness, emotional regulation, body awareness, and psychological well-being.

Furthermore, there is a limited body of qualitative research exploring how practitioners perceive the therapeutic potential of Animal Flow. While movement-based approaches such as yoga, Tai Chi, and Dance Movement Therapy have been investigated extensively within psychological research, Animal Flow remains relatively underexplored from a counselling psychology perspective. Consequently, there is limited understanding of whether practitioners perceive Animal Flow as a movement practice that supports mindfulness and psychological well-being or whether they identify characteristics that may hold therapeutic value.

In view of these gaps, the present study adopts a qualitative approach to explore the lived experiences of certified Animal Flow practitioners and examine how they perceive the therapeutic potential of Animal Flow in relation to mindfulness and psychological well-being. By exploring participants' subjective experiences, the study seeks to contribute to the emerging literature on Animal Flow and provide a deeper understanding of its perceived

psychological and therapeutic dimensions. The findings are expected to inform future research and contribute to the growing body of knowledge on embodied movement practices within counselling psychology.

Accordingly, the present study was undertaken to explore the therapeutic potential of Animal Flow in relation to mindfulness and psychological well-being

Keywords: Animal Flow, Mindfulness, Psychological Well-being, Therapeutic Potential, Embodied Movement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study was to explore the perceived therapeutic potential of Animal Flow in relation to mindfulness and psychological well-being through the lived experiences of certified Animal Flow practitioners. Although Animal Flow has gained increasing popularity as a movement-based practice, empirical research examining its psychological dimensions remains limited. Existing studies have predominantly focused on its physical and functional benefits, with comparatively little attention given to practitioners' experiences of mindfulness, body awareness, emotional regulation, and psychological well-being.

Using a qualitative research approach, the study sought to understand how certified Animal Flow practitioners perceive the influence of the practice on their psychological experiences. In particular, the study explored participants' experiences of embodied awareness, mindfulness, emotional regulation, personal growth, and the perceived therapeutic value of Animal Flow. Rather than evaluating Animal Flow as an established therapeutic intervention, the study aimed to understand whether practitioners perceived characteristics of the practice that may contribute to mindfulness and psychological well-being.

It is anticipated that the findings of the present study will contribute to the emerging literature on Animal Flow by providing qualitative insights into the lived experiences of certified practitioners. Furthermore, the study is expected to enhance understanding of embodied movement practices within counselling psychology and provide a foundation for future research exploring the relationship between Animal Flow, mindfulness, and psychological well-being.

Theoretical Framework

The present study is grounded in four complementary theoretical perspectives that provide a conceptual foundation for understanding the relationship between Animal Flow, mindfulness, embodied awareness, and psychological well-being. Specifically, the study draws upon Embodied Cognition Theory (Wilson, 2002; Barsalou, 2008), Flow Theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), Ryff's Model of Psychological Well-being (Ryff, 1989), and Polyvagal Theory (Porges, 2011). Collectively, these theoretical perspectives explain how movement, attention, embodied awareness, emotional regulation, and psychological functioning interact, thereby providing an appropriate framework for understanding the lived experiences of certified Animal Flow practitioners.

Embodied Cognition Theory

Embodied Cognition Theory proposes that cognition is fundamentally shaped by the body's interaction with the surrounding environment. Wilson (2002) argued that thinking is inseparable from perception and that cognitive processes emerge through bodily engagement with the world. Similarly, Barsalou (2008) suggested that perception, memory, and cognition are grounded in lived physical experiences rather than existing independently of bodily action. Consequently, the theory emphasises the importance of body awareness and movement in shaping human cognition and psychological functioning.

Animal Flow is an embodied movement practice that requires continuous awareness of posture, movement quality, balance, coordination, and bodily sensations throughout practice. The integration of mindful movement with physical engagement makes Embodied Cognition Theory particularly relevant for understanding how practitioners experience heightened body awareness and mind-body integration. Accordingly, this theory provides an appropriate conceptual framework for interpreting participants' experiences of embodied awareness and the relationship between movement and psychological functioning.

Flow Theory

Flow Theory, proposed by Csikszentmihalyi (1990), explains the psychological state of complete absorption in an activity that balances an individual's skills with the challenges presented by the task. During a flow experience, individuals become fully immersed in the present moment, experience intense concentration, lose awareness of external distractions, and derive intrinsic enjoyment from the activity itself.

Animal Flow requires sustained attention, coordinated movement, and continuous adaptation between movement sequences, creating conditions that may facilitate flow experiences. The theory is therefore particularly relevant for understanding how practitioners experience present-moment awareness, focused attention, and deep engagement while practising Animal Flow. Flow Theory provides an appropriate framework for interpreting the relationship between mindful movement, attentional engagement, and psychological well-being.

Ryff's Model of Psychological Well-being

Ryff's Model of Psychological Well-being (1989) conceptualises well-being as a multidimensional construct that extends beyond the absence of psychological distress. The model identifies six interrelated dimensions of psychological well-being: self-acceptance,

autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relationships with others, purpose in life, and personal growth. Collectively, these dimensions represent optimal psychological functioning and human flourishing.

As the present study explores the perceived relationship between Animal Flow and psychological well-being, Ryff's model provides an appropriate theoretical framework for understanding participants' experiences of emotional regulation, confidence, resilience, personal growth, and overall well-being. The model supports the interpretation of how practitioners perceive the contribution of Animal Flow to multiple dimensions of psychological functioning.

Polyvagal Theory

Polyvagal Theory, developed by Porges (2011), explains the role of the autonomic nervous system in emotional regulation, stress responses, social engagement, and psychological well-being. The theory proposes that perceptions of safety influence autonomic functioning and, consequently, an individual's capacity for emotional regulation, adaptive behaviour, and social connection. According to Porges (2011), physiological regulation plays a central role in shaping psychological experiences.

Although Animal Flow has not been directly examined within the framework of Polyvagal Theory, the practice incorporates elements such as mindful movement, controlled breathing, body awareness, and sustained attentional engagement, all of which may be understood through a polyvagal perspective. Accordingly, Polyvagal Theory provides a useful conceptual framework for exploring practitioners' perceptions of grounding, emotional regulation, and psychological well-being in relation to Animal Flow.

Taken together, these four theoretical perspectives provide a comprehensive conceptual foundation for understanding the psychological experiences of Animal Flow

practitioners. While Embodied Cognition Theory and Flow Theory explain how mindful movement may facilitate body awareness, attentional engagement, and present-moment experience, Ryff's Model of Psychological Well-being and Polyvagal Theory offer complementary perspectives for understanding emotional regulation, personal growth, and overall psychological well-being. Collectively, these theories informed the conceptualisation of the present study and guided the interpretation of the qualitative findings.

Objectives of the Study

General Objective

To explore the perceived therapeutic potential of Animal Flow in relation to mindfulness and psychological well-being through the lived experiences of certified Animal Flow practitioners.

Specific Objectives

- To explore the lived experiences of certified Animal Flow practitioners in relation to mindfulness, body awareness, and mind-body integration during Animal Flow practice.
- To understand practitioners' perceptions of the influence of Animal Flow on emotional regulation and psychological well-being.
- To explore practitioners' perceptions of the therapeutic potential of Animal Flow, including experiences of personal growth and factors influencing its application.

Research Questions

Primary Research Question

How do certified Animal Flow practitioners perceive the therapeutic potential of Animal Flow in relation to mindfulness and psychological well-being?

Specific Research Questions

1. How do certified Animal Flow practitioners describe their experiences of mindfulness, body awareness, and mind-body integration during Animal Flow practice?
2. How do certified Animal Flow practitioners perceive the influence of Animal Flow on emotional regulation and psychological well-being?
3. How do certified Animal Flow practitioners perceive the therapeutic potential of Animal Flow in promoting psychological well-being and personal growth?
4. What challenges or considerations do certified Animal Flow practitioners identify in relation to practising Animal Flow and its perceived therapeutic application?

Definition of Key Words

Animal Flow: A ground-based bodyweight movement system developed by Mike Fitch that integrates quadrupedal movement, mobility, stability, strength, flexibility, coordination, and mindful movement through structured movement sequences (Fitch, 2015).

Mindfulness: The awareness that arises from intentionally paying attention to present-moment experiences with openness, curiosity and without judgement (Kabat-Zinn, 1994).

Psychological Well-being: A multidimensional state of positive psychological functioning characterised by self-acceptance, autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relationships, purpose in life, and personal growth (Ryff, 1989).

Therapeutic Potential: The perceived capacity of a practice or intervention to contribute to positive psychological outcomes, emotional regulation, and overall well-being without implying established clinical effectiveness.

Embodied Movement: A movement-based approach that emphasises the integration of bodily awareness, movement, cognition, and emotional experience, recognising the interconnectedness of the body and mind.

Body Awareness: The conscious perception and awareness of bodily sensations, posture, movement, and internal physiological experiences, enabling individuals to recognise and respond to physical and emotional states (Mehling et al., 2011).

Organization of the Dissertation

The present dissertation is organised into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the study by presenting the background of the research, the need and significance of the study, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the theoretical framework, the objectives, the research questions, the definitions of key terms, and the organisation of the dissertation.

Chapter 2 presents a comprehensive review of the literature related to Animal Flow, mindfulness, psychological well-being, embodied movement, and Polyvagal Theory. The chapter critically examines existing research, identifies gaps in the literature, and establishes the theoretical and empirical foundation for the present study.

Chapter 3 describes the research methodology adopted for the study. It outlines the qualitative research design, research paradigm, participants, sampling technique, inclusion and exclusion criteria, data collection procedures, interview process, ethical considerations, and the method of data analysis employed.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study and discusses them in relation to the research objectives, existing literature, and the theoretical framework. The findings are organised into themes and sub-themes that emerged through reflexive thematic analysis, followed by a cross-participant theme analysis and an integrated discussion of the results.

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the study, presents the conclusions drawn from the findings, discusses the implications of the research, acknowledges the limitations of the study, and offers suggestions for future research.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

Reviewing related literature is an essential component of any research study, as it provides the theoretical and empirical foundation upon which the study is developed. A comprehensive review enables the researcher to examine existing knowledge, identify methodological approaches, recognise gaps in the literature, and establish the rationale for the present investigation. It also facilitates the formulation of research objectives and research questions while positioning the study within the broader body of scholarly work.

Growing evidence highlights the important role of movement in promoting physical, psychological, and emotional well-being. Contemporary research suggests that movement-based practices influence cognitive functioning, attention, emotional regulation, body awareness, and psychological flexibility (Hanna-Pladdy, 2016; Ratey, 2008; Ulrich-Winters, 2010; Chesworth, 2011). Consequently, increasing attention has been directed toward understanding how movement-based interventions may contribute to mental health and therapeutic practice.

Animal Flow, developed by Mike Fitch, is a relatively recent movement system that integrates quadrupedal locomotion, body-weight training, mobility, stability, and coordinated movement patterns. Although the practice has gained popularity among fitness professionals and movement practitioners, the existing literature has primarily focused on its physical and functional outcomes. Comparatively little research has explored its potential psychological and therapeutic benefits, particularly from the perspective of practitioners' lived experiences.

The present study is situated within the broader theoretical perspectives of embodied movement, mindfulness, psychological well-being, and Polyvagal Theory, all of which emphasise the interconnected relationship between movement, cognition, emotion, and overall well-being. Examining Animal Flow through these perspectives provides a foundation

for understanding how movement may influence psychological functioning beyond physical fitness alone.

Despite the growing evidence supporting movement-based interventions such as yoga, Tai Chi, and Dance Movement Therapy, research specifically examining Animal Flow remains limited. Existing studies have largely emphasised its physical benefits, while little attention has been given to its potential therapeutic role in enhancing mindfulness and psychological well-being or to the lived experiences of certified Animal Flow practitioners. Addressing this gap is important for expanding the emerging literature on Animal Flow and for contributing to the broader understanding of embodied movement practices within counselling psychology.

Accordingly, this chapter reviews the available literature related to Animal Flow, embodied movement, body awareness, mindfulness, psychological well-being, emotional regulation, therapeutic movement practices, and Polyvagal Theory. The chapter concludes by identifying the existing gaps in the literature that provide the rationale for the present study.

Animal Flow: Concept, Principles, and Contemporary Perspectives

Animal Flow is a ground-based movement system developed by Mike Fitch in 2010. The system integrates quadrupedal movement, body-weight training, mobility, stability, flexibility, coordination, and locomotor movement patterns into a structured exercise approach (Fitch, 2015). Drawing inspiration from animal locomotion, gymnastics, yoga, breakdancing, and functional movement training, Animal Flow is designed to improve movement quality by encouraging individuals to move efficiently using their own body weight while maintaining awareness of posture, breathing, and movement execution (Fitch, 2015). Unlike many traditional exercise programmes that primarily emphasise physical

fitness or aesthetic outcomes, Animal Flow focuses on enhancing functional movement, movement efficiency, and whole-body coordination.

Animal Flow consists of six foundational components: wrist mobilisations, activations, form-specific stretches, travelling forms, switches and transitions, and Flow (Fitch, 2015). Wrist mobilisations prepare the wrists and upper body for weight-bearing activities, while activations are intended to improve neuromuscular control, core stability, and coordination. Form-specific stretches focus on improving mobility and flexibility, whereas travelling forms develop locomotion, balance, and whole-body movement control. Switches and transitions enable smooth movement between different positions, while the final component, Flow, combines previously learned movements into continuous and coordinated movement sequences (Fitch, 2015). Together, these components encourage practitioners to develop greater awareness of movement quality while coordinating multiple physical capacities simultaneously.

Although Animal Flow originated within the fitness and movement community, its characteristics share conceptual similarities with contemporary theories of embodied movement. Embodied perspectives emphasise that cognition, perception, and emotion are closely linked to bodily experience and interaction with the environment (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Csordas, 1990). In this context, Animal Flow requires practitioners to continuously integrate movement, posture, balance, breathing, and attentional focus, suggesting that the practice reflects several principles associated with embodied movement. However, this conceptual relationship has received limited empirical investigation and therefore warrants further research.

At present, scientific research examining Animal Flow remains limited. The available literature has primarily focused on describing the movement system and its functional

characteristics rather than evaluating its psychological outcomes. Existing reports suggest that Animal Flow may contribute to improvements in mobility, flexibility, coordination, balance, and movement efficiency (Fitch, 2015). However, these observations are largely descriptive, and there is currently insufficient empirical evidence to draw firm conclusions regarding its psychological or therapeutic effectiveness. Consequently, further research is needed to examine whether the movement characteristics of Animal Flow may also contribute to psychological processes such as mindfulness, emotional regulation, body awareness, and psychological well-being.

The increasing interest in movement-based approaches within psychology provides a useful context for examining Animal Flow. Research on movement interventions such as yoga, Tai Chi, and Dance Movement Therapy has demonstrated positive associations with body awareness, emotional regulation, mindfulness, and psychological well-being (Koch et al., 2019; Payne, 2017). Although Animal Flow shares several movement characteristics with these practices, comparatively little research has explored whether similar psychological experiences occur among Animal Flow practitioners. This represents an important gap within the current literature.

Despite the growing popularity of Animal Flow among movement professionals, trainers, and rehabilitation practitioners, empirical evidence regarding its psychological and therapeutic applications remains limited. Most existing literature has focused on its physical and functional benefits, while relatively little attention has been given to understanding practitioners' lived psychological experiences. Exploring these experiences may contribute to a broader understanding of Animal Flow as a contemporary embodied movement practice and provide valuable insights into its potential role in promoting mindfulness and psychological well-being. This gap forms the basis for the present study.

Embodied Movement and Mind-Body Integration

Embodiment has become an important concept within contemporary psychology, neuroscience, and movement sciences. Embodied theories propose that human experience—including perception, cognition, emotion, and behaviour—is shaped not only by the brain but also through continuous interaction between the body and the environment. Accordingly, bodily movement, posture, gestures, and sensory experiences contribute to how individuals perceive, interpret, and respond to the world around them. From phenomenological and embodied perspectives, the body is viewed as an active contributor to psychological functioning rather than merely a vehicle for mental processes (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Csordas, 1990).

Within psychology, embodiment has been closely linked to body awareness and mind–body integration. Body awareness refers to the conscious perception of internal bodily sensations, movement, posture, and spatial orientation. It encompasses interoception—the awareness of internal physiological states—as well as proprioception and kinesthetic awareness, all of which contribute to self-regulation and adaptive functioning (Mehling et al., 2011). Greater body awareness has been associated with improved emotional regulation, self-awareness, and psychological well-being.

A growing body of research suggests that movement-based interventions facilitate embodied processes by enhancing body awareness and strengthening the connection between the mind and body. Payne (2017) proposes that movement-oriented therapeutic approaches encourage individuals to reconnect with their bodily experiences, thereby supporting emotional regulation and psychological integration. Similarly, interventions that promote interoceptive awareness have been shown to improve individuals' ability to recognise and

regulate internal bodily states, particularly among people experiencing trauma and chronic stress.

Supporting these findings, Price and Hooven (2018) reported that body awareness interventions improve interoception, self-regulation, and psychological functioning. Increased awareness of bodily sensations enables individuals to recognise emotional responses more effectively and develop healthier coping strategies. Collectively, these findings suggest that body awareness serves as an important mechanism through which movement contributes to psychological well-being.

The relationship between embodied movement and psychological health has also been demonstrated through research on Dance Movement Therapy and other movement-based interventions. In a meta-analysis, Koch et al. (2019) reported that dance and Dance Movement Therapy significantly improved body awareness, emotional expression, quality of life, and several aspects of psychological functioning. Likewise, Van der Kolk (2014) argued that trauma often disrupts the connection between the mind and body, whereas movement-based interventions help individuals regain bodily awareness, restore a sense of safety, and improve emotional regulation.

Embodied movement practices have also been associated with grounding and present-moment awareness. By directing attention toward bodily sensations and movement, such practices encourage individuals to reconnect with their physical experiences and immediate environment. This process has been associated with reductions in stress, improvements in emotional regulation, and enhanced self-awareness (Payne, 2017; Koch et al., 2019). Consequently, embodied movement has become an increasingly important component of contemporary approaches to psychological well-being and therapeutic practice.

Collectively, the available literature demonstrates that embodied movement enhances body awareness, strengthens mind–body integration, and supports psychological well-being through increased awareness of bodily experiences. However, the majority of existing research has focused on interventions such as yoga, Tai Chi, mindfulness-based movement, and Dance Movement Therapy. Comparatively little research has examined whether similar embodied processes occur during Animal Flow practice. Given that Animal Flow integrates quadrupedal locomotion, body-weight control, mobility, balance, and continuous attentional engagement, it represents a promising movement practice through which embodied awareness may develop. Nevertheless, empirical research examining these relationships remains limited, highlighting the need for further investigation into practitioners' lived experiences of Animal Flow.

Mindfulness Through Movement

Mindfulness is commonly defined as the intentional and non-judgmental awareness of present-moment experiences (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). It involves purposefully paying attention to thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, and the surrounding environment with openness and acceptance. Bishop et al. (2004) further conceptualised mindfulness as comprising two key components: the self-regulation of attention toward present-moment experience and an attitude of curiosity, openness, and acceptance. Traditionally, mindfulness has been cultivated through seated meditation; however, contemporary research has demonstrated that mindfulness can also be developed through movement-based practices in which attention is intentionally directed toward bodily sensations, posture, breathing, balance, and movement.

From an embodied perspective, mindfulness extends beyond cognitive awareness to include conscious engagement with the lived body. Embodied theories suggest that awareness emerges through the interaction between bodily movement, sensory experience, and the

environment (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Csordas, 1990). Consequently, movement-based mindfulness encourages individuals to attend to bodily experiences while remaining anchored in the present moment. Rather than separating mental and physical processes, embodied mindfulness emphasises their continuous integration, allowing movement itself to become an object of mindful awareness.

A growing body of research supports the psychological benefits of mindful movement practices. Interventions such as yoga, Tai Chi, Qigong, Dance Movement Therapy, and mindful walking have consistently been associated with improvements in mindfulness, body awareness, emotional regulation, and overall psychological well-being, while reducing stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms (Cramer et al., 2013; Koch et al., 2019; Payne, 2017). These movement-based approaches encourage individuals to maintain awareness of breathing, bodily sensations, posture, and movement throughout practice, thereby promoting both interoceptive awareness and present-moment attention. Enhanced interoception has further been associated with improved emotional regulation, self-awareness, and adaptive psychological functioning (Mehling et al., 2011).

The available literature suggests that movement-based mindfulness differs from traditional seated meditation by integrating awareness with purposeful physical activity. Rather than remaining still, individuals cultivate mindfulness while actively moving, requiring continuous attention to body position, balance, breathing, coordination, and movement quality. This combination of cognitive engagement and bodily awareness enables practitioners to remain anchored in the present moment while simultaneously developing greater awareness of their physical and emotional experiences.

Although empirical research specifically examining mindfulness in Animal Flow remains limited, the movement characteristics of Animal Flow closely resemble those described in the

mindful movement literature. The practice requires continuous attention to posture, movement sequencing, breathing, balance, coordination, and body positioning, all of which are considered important components of movement-based mindfulness. Consequently, Animal Flow may provide a context in which mindful awareness develops through sustained attentional engagement with movement rather than through traditional seated meditation. Supporting this perspective, Schmalzl et al. (2024) concluded that embodied movement practices enhance body awareness, attentional regulation, emotional well-being, and present-moment awareness. While these findings cannot yet be directly generalised to Animal Flow, they provide a theoretical foundation for exploring whether similar experiences are reported by Animal Flow practitioners.

Psychological well - being

Psychological well-being is a central concept within positive psychology and refers to optimal psychological functioning rather than merely the absence of mental illness. Positive psychology emphasises the development of human strengths, resilience, and flourishing, focusing on factors that enable individuals to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives (Seligman, 2011). Psychological well-being encompasses positive emotional functioning, effective adaptation, meaningful relationships, personal growth, autonomy, purpose in life, and the ability to manage life's challenges (Ryff, 1989).

Contemporary perspectives describe psychological well-being through two complementary approaches: hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. The hedonic perspective focuses on happiness, life satisfaction, and the experience of positive emotions, whereas the eudaimonic perspective emphasises personal growth, meaning in life, self-realisation, and living in accordance with one's values (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Ryff's (1989) multidimensional model further conceptualises psychological well-being through six interrelated dimensions:

self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. Together, these theoretical perspectives provide a comprehensive understanding of psychological well-being as a multidimensional construct that extends beyond emotional happiness alone.

A substantial body of research demonstrates that regular physical activity contributes positively to psychological well-being. Physical exercise has been associated with reductions in stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms while simultaneously enhancing mood, self-esteem, cognitive functioning, resilience, and overall life satisfaction (Biddle et al., 2019). These psychological benefits are believed to arise through multiple physiological and psychosocial mechanisms, including neuroendocrine regulation, improved autonomic functioning, increased self-efficacy, and enhanced social engagement. Consequently, physical activity is increasingly recognised as an important contributor to both mental health promotion and psychological well-being.

Beyond conventional exercise, movement-based interventions have received considerable attention for their ability to integrate physical activity with emotional awareness and mindful engagement. Practices such as yoga, Tai Chi, and Dance Movement Therapy have consistently demonstrated positive effects on emotional regulation, mindfulness, body awareness, self-compassion, resilience, and overall psychological well-being (Koch et al., 2019; Payne, 2017). Unlike many traditional forms of exercise, these interventions encourage individuals to cultivate awareness of bodily sensations, breathing, and movement quality while simultaneously engaging emotional and cognitive processes. This integrated approach has positioned movement-based practices as valuable complementary interventions for promoting psychological health.

The concept of flow also provides an important theoretical perspective for understanding psychological well-being. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1990), flow refers to a psychological state of complete absorption in an activity, characterised by intense concentration, intrinsic enjoyment, and a diminished awareness of time and external distractions. Individuals experiencing flow often report heightened satisfaction, increased motivation, and a sense of optimal functioning. The experience of flow has been associated with greater psychological well-being because it promotes engagement, mastery, personal growth, and meaningful participation in activities that are both challenging and rewarding.

Within this broader literature on movement and psychological well-being, Animal Flow represents an emerging movement practice that combines body-weight training, mobility, coordination, balance, and continuous attentional engagement. Although its movement characteristics resemble those of other embodied movement practices, empirical research specifically examining its influence on psychological well-being remains limited. Existing literature has predominantly focused on its physical and functional outcomes, with comparatively little attention given to its potential influence on emotional regulation, mindfulness, body awareness, or overall psychological well-being. Consequently, qualitative exploration of practitioners' lived experiences is required to better understand whether Animal Flow may contribute to these aspects of psychological functioning.

Polyvagal Theory and Movement-Based Therapeutic Practices

Polyvagal Theory, proposed by Porges (1995, 2007, 2011), provides a neurophysiological framework for understanding the relationship between the autonomic nervous system, emotional regulation, social behaviour, and responses to stress. The theory suggests that the autonomic nervous system operates through three hierarchical pathways: the ventral vagal complex, the sympathetic nervous system, and the dorsal vagal complex, each

associated with distinct physiological and behavioural responses to environmental demands (Porges, 2011). The ventral vagal system is associated with feelings of safety, emotional regulation, and social engagement, whereas sympathetic activation prepares the body for mobilisation through fight-or-flight responses. In situations of overwhelming threat, activation of the dorsal vagal pathway may contribute to immobilisation or shutdown responses (Porges, 2011).

A central concept within Polyvagal Theory is neuroception, which refers to the nervous system's unconscious evaluation of cues of safety, danger, or life threat. According to Porges (2011), perceptions of safety facilitate activation of the ventral vagal system, promoting emotional regulation, adaptive social engagement, and psychological well-being. Conversely, perceived danger may trigger defensive autonomic responses that influence emotional and behavioural functioning. This perspective has contributed to growing interest in therapeutic approaches that may support autonomic regulation by fostering experiences of safety and embodied awareness.

Movement-based interventions have increasingly been discussed within the context of Polyvagal Theory because many incorporate rhythmic movement, controlled breathing, attentional focus, and body awareness. These characteristics have been proposed as mechanisms that may support autonomic regulation and emotional well-being by encouraging physiological states associated with safety and regulation (Dana, 2018; Kolacz & Porges, 2018). Although further empirical research is needed to establish the specific physiological mechanisms involved, movement-based practices have been associated with improvements in emotional regulation, stress reduction, body awareness, and psychological well-being (Koch et al., 2019; Payne, 2017).

Within this broader context, Animal Flow may be viewed as an embodied movement practice that integrates coordinated whole-body movement, balance, mobility, sustained attentional engagement, and awareness of bodily movement. While Animal Flow has not been directly investigated within a Polyvagal Theory framework, several characteristics of the practice conceptually align with principles emphasised by the theory, including embodied awareness, present-moment attention, and coordinated movement. Consequently, Polyvagal Theory provides a useful theoretical framework for understanding how movement-based practices may contribute to emotional regulation and psychological well-being. However, empirical research specifically examining the relationship between Animal Flow and autonomic regulation remains limited, highlighting the need for further investigation.

Empirical Review: Movement-Based Practices, Mindfulness, and Psychological Well-being

Although empirical research specifically investigating Animal Flow remains limited, a growing body of evidence supports the psychological benefits of movement-based interventions that integrate mindful attention, body awareness, and coordinated movement. Research on practices such as yoga, Tai Chi, and Dance Movement Therapy has consistently demonstrated positive effects on mindfulness, emotional regulation, body awareness, and psychological well-being. These findings provide an important empirical foundation for exploring whether similar experiences may be reported by Animal Flow practitioners.

A recent scoping review by Schmalzl et al. (2024) examined movement-based mindfulness interventions and concluded that embodied movement practices enhance body awareness, attentional regulation, mindfulness, and psychological well-being across diverse populations. The review highlighted that movement-based approaches may be particularly beneficial for individuals who find traditional seated meditation difficult to maintain, suggesting that

mindful movement represents an accessible pathway for cultivating present-moment awareness.

Similarly, Koch et al. (2019) conducted a meta-analysis examining the effectiveness of Dance Movement Therapy and dance-based interventions. Their findings demonstrated significant improvements in body awareness, emotional expression, self-esteem, and quality of life, together with reductions in symptoms of anxiety and depression. These findings support the growing recognition of movement-based interventions as effective approaches for enhancing psychological functioning through embodied experience.

Research examining other movement-based practices has produced comparable findings. Cramer et al. (2013) reported that yoga interventions contributed to reductions in psychological distress and depressive symptoms while improving mindfulness and overall well-being. Likewise, Wang et al. (2014) found that Tai Chi practice was associated with improvements in mood, stress management, cognitive functioning, and quality of life. Collectively, these studies suggest that movement practices integrating mindful attention and body awareness can positively influence multiple dimensions of psychological health.

Despite these encouraging findings, empirical research specifically examining Animal Flow remains scarce. Existing literature has largely focused on its physical and functional outcomes, including mobility, flexibility, coordination, balance, and movement efficiency, with comparatively little attention given to its potential psychological or therapeutic benefits. Furthermore, most available studies investigating movement-based interventions have employed quantitative research designs, limiting understanding of how practitioners subjectively experience these practices.

Consequently, there remains a significant gap in the literature regarding the lived psychological experiences of Animal Flow practitioners. In particular, little is known about

how practitioners perceive the influence of Animal Flow on mindfulness, body awareness, emotional regulation, and psychological well-being. Addressing this gap through qualitative inquiry may provide a deeper understanding of the therapeutic potential of Animal Flow while contributing to the emerging literature on embodied movement practices within counselling psychology.

Research Gap

The existing literature demonstrates that movement-based interventions such as yoga, Tai Chi, and Dance Movement Therapy contribute positively to mindfulness, body awareness, emotional regulation, and psychological well-being. Theoretical perspectives including embodiment and Polyvagal Theory further provide a strong conceptual foundation for understanding how movement may influence psychological functioning. Collectively, these studies highlight the growing importance of embodied movement practices in promoting psychological health.

Despite this growing body of knowledge, important gaps remain in the literature. First, empirical research specifically examining Animal Flow is limited. Existing literature has primarily focused on describing the movement system and its physical and functional benefits, such as mobility, flexibility, coordination, and movement efficiency. Comparatively little attention has been given to its potential psychological and therapeutic benefits.

Second, there is a scarcity of qualitative research exploring the lived experiences of Animal Flow practitioners. While previous studies have established the psychological benefits of other movement-based interventions, little is known about how certified Animal Flow practitioners perceive the influence of the practice on mindfulness, body awareness, emotional regulation, psychological well-being, and its therapeutic potential. Understanding

these subjective experiences is important for developing a deeper understanding of Animal Flow beyond its physical characteristics.

Finally, although theories such as embodiment and Polyvagal Theory have been widely discussed in relation to movement-based interventions, their application to Animal Flow remains largely unexplored. Examining Animal Flow through these theoretical perspectives may provide further insight into the relationship between movement, embodied awareness, and psychological well-being.

Therefore, the present study seeks to address these gaps by qualitatively exploring the perceptions and lived experiences of certified Animal Flow practitioners regarding the therapeutic potential of Animal Flow in relation to mindfulness and psychological well-being. By focusing on practitioners' subjective experiences, the study aims to contribute to the emerging literature on Animal Flow and expand the understanding of movement-based practices within the field of counselling psychology.

Chapter III

Method

This chapter covers the method used for the current research. This chapter also contains details on research design, sampling procedure, participant selection process, recruitment strategies, data collection, research's trustworthiness, data preparation, and analysis of collected data, and ethical aspects. The rationale behind choosing a specific research method was based on the research question, which focuses on participants' experience and interpretation of the practice. Animal Flow's role in the development of mindfulness and improvement of psychological well-being was explored to uncover an individual's perception of this unique movement modality.

Due to the nature of the research questions and objectives, a phenomenological study design was chosen. Using an interpretivist research philosophy allowed for gaining an in-depth understanding of respondents' lived experiences and the meaning created by Animal Flow and its connection to mindfulness, emotional regulation, body awareness, and psychological wellbeing. The data were collected using semi-structured interviews. After that, the collected information was subjected to reflective thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2021). The following paragraphs describe the details of research methodology used in this study.

This section contains details on the methods used during the research. First of all, the data collection method, which was semi-structured interviews. Then, this section also contains information on thematic analysis and research's trustworthiness. Finally, this part of the paper covers such ethical aspects as informed consent, confidentiality, and privacy.

Research Design

The current study used a qualitative research design to explore how certified Animal Flow practitioners view the therapeutic benefits of Animal Flow in relation to mindfulness and psychological well-being. Qualitative research is suitable when the goal is to understand how people interpret their experiences in their natural settings rather than to measure

variables in a numerical way (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The study followed an interpretivist philosophy, which believes that reality is shaped by social interactions and that people form meanings based on their personal experiences and relationships (Saunders et al., 2019). Since this study aimed to understand the subjective experiences of practitioners rather than establish objective causal links, an interpretivist approach was fitting.

A phenomenological research design was used because it aims to grasp and describe the essence of individuals' lived experiences surrounding a specific phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). In this study, the focus was on the experience of practicing Animal Flow and its perceived effects on mindfulness and psychological well-being. A phenomenological approach let participants express their experiences in their own words, giving the researcher deeper insight into how they viewed body awareness, emotional regulation, mind-body integration, and the potential therapeutic benefits of Animal Flow.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing for flexibility in exploring participants' experiences while ensuring that all research goals were met. The interview format encouraged participants to provide detailed accounts of their experiences, leading to new insights during the conversations.

The interview data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021). This method was chosen because it offers a systematic yet adaptable way to identify, analyze, and interpret meaning patterns across qualitative data. Through a process of familiarization, coding, theme development, and refinement, the analysis produced six main themes and sixteen sub-themes that represented the common experiences of the participants.

Participants

The present study included five certified Animal Flow practitioners who were selected based on their knowledge and experience with the Animal Flow system. All participants had successfully completed formal Animal Flow certification and were actively practising or teaching Animal Flow during the period of data collection. Their direct experience with the practice enabled them to provide rich and meaningful insights into the perceived therapeutic potential of Animal Flow in relation to mindfulness and psychological well-being.

To protect participants' privacy and maintain confidentiality, all identifying information has been removed. Throughout the dissertation, participants are referred to using pseudonyms (Participant 1 to Participant 5). The participants represented diverse demographic and professional backgrounds while sharing the common experience of formal training and active engagement in Animal Flow practice.

Inclusion Criteria

Participants were included in the study if they:

- Were certified Animal Flow practitioners.
- Were actively practising or teaching Animal Flow at the time of data collection.
- Had sufficient experience with Animal Flow to reflect on its perceived therapeutic potential.
- Were able to communicate effectively in English or in Malayalam.
- Provided informed consent to participate in the study voluntarily.

Exclusion Criteria

Participants were excluded from the study if they:

- Had not completed formal Animal Flow certification.
- Had limited experience with Animal Flow and were unable to provide detailed reflections on their experiences.
- Were not actively practising or teaching Animal Flow during the study period.
- Were unwilling or unable to provide informed consent for participation in the study.
- Declined permission for the interview to be audio-recorded, as audio recording was essential for accurate transcription and thematic analysis.
- Were unable to participate in the semi-structured interview because of time constraints or other practical reasons.

Sampling Technique

The present study employed purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique commonly used in qualitative research to recruit participants who possess specific knowledge, experience, or characteristics relevant to the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). Purposive sampling enables researchers to obtain rich, detailed, and information-rich data from individuals who can provide meaningful insights into the research topic.

Purposive sampling was considered appropriate for the present study because the aim was to explore the perceived therapeutic potential of Animal Flow through the lived experiences of certified Animal Flow practitioners. As these practitioners have received formal training and have substantial experience with the practice, they were well positioned

to describe its influence on mindfulness, body awareness, emotional regulation, mind-body integration, and psychological well-being.

Five certified Animal Flow practitioners who met the eligibility criteria were recruited for the study. Although the sample size was relatively small, it was considered appropriate for phenomenological research, which prioritises obtaining rich, in-depth accounts of participants' lived experiences rather than achieving statistical generalisation (Moustakas, 1994). The sample also allowed for detailed exploration of participants' perspectives while maintaining sufficient depth during data analysis.

Recruitment Strategy

Participants were recruited using a purposive recruitment strategy to ensure that individuals possessed the knowledge and experience necessary to address the research objectives. Certified Animal Flow practitioners were identified through professional networks, social media platforms, and the official Animal Flow community. Potential participants who appeared to meet the inclusion criteria were contacted individually and provided with a brief explanation of the purpose of the study.

Those who expressed interest in participating received a Participant Information Sheet outlining the objectives of the research, the nature of their involvement, the expected duration of the interview, and the ethical safeguards implemented to protect their rights and confidentiality. Participants were also informed that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without providing a reason and without any negative consequences.

Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before the commencement of data collection. Interview dates and times were then arranged based on the participants' convenience. Throughout the recruitment process, care was taken to ensure that

participants did not feel pressured or coerced into participating. Their privacy and confidentiality were maintained by assigning pseudonyms (P1–P5), which were used in all transcripts, analyses, and reporting of findings.

Data Collection

Data for the present study were collected through semi-structured interviews. This method was selected because it allows participants to describe their lived experiences in detail while providing the researcher with the flexibility to explore emerging ideas and clarify responses during the interview process (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are considered appropriate for qualitative research because they provide a balance between structure and flexibility, allowing participants to describe their experiences in their own words while enabling the researcher to explore relevant topics in greater depth (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The interview schedule consisted of open-ended questions designed to explore the participants' experiences of practising Animal Flow and their perceptions of its therapeutic potential in relation to mindfulness and psychological well-being. Follow-up questions and prompts were used, where appropriate, to encourage participants to elaborate on their responses and provide richer descriptions of their experiences. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was conducted online via Google Meet.

Semi-structured interviews were considered appropriate for the present study because they facilitated an in-depth exploration of participants' lived experiences while allowing sufficient flexibility to pursue emerging ideas and clarify responses during the interview process.

Data Collection Procedure

Prior to data collection, participants were contacted and provided with information regarding the purpose of the study, the nature of their participation, and the ethical considerations involved. Those who agreed to participate provided informed consent before the interviews were conducted.

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted at a mutually convenient date and time. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher first established rapport with each participant before commencing the interview. The interviews followed a flexible conversational format, with the interview guide serving as a framework while allowing participants the freedom to discuss aspects of their experiences that they considered significant.

With participants' permission, all interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accurate capture of the information shared. Following each interview, the recordings were transcribed verbatim to facilitate detailed analysis. Throughout the data collection process, the researcher also maintained field notes and reflective observations to document contextual information and initial impressions that supported the subsequent analysis.

Participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential and that they could withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences.

Trustworthiness, Accuracy, and Researcher's Bias

In qualitative research, the quality and rigour of a study are established through trustworthiness rather than the concepts of validity and reliability commonly used in quantitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four criteria for ensuring trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The present study adopted these criteria to enhance the accuracy, consistency, and integrity of the

research process. In addition, the researcher remained reflexive throughout the study to minimise the influence of personal assumptions and bias.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the extent to which the findings accurately represent the participants' lived experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To enhance credibility, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted, allowing participants to describe their experiences freely and in detail. Open-ended questions and follow-up probes were used to obtain rich and comprehensive responses. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim to ensure that the data accurately reflected their perspectives. Verbatim quotations were also included in Chapter 4 to support the interpretation of the findings.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings may be applicable to similar contexts or populations. Although qualitative research does not aim for statistical generalisation, detailed descriptions of the research context, participant characteristics, sampling strategy, and data collection procedures were provided to enable readers to determine the relevance of the findings to other settings.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the consistency and stability of the research process over time. To ensure dependability, a systematic research procedure was followed throughout the study. The same semi-structured interview guide was used with all participants while allowing sufficient flexibility to explore individual experiences in greater depth. The procedures for participant recruitment, data collection, transcription, coding, theme development, and data analysis were documented to maintain consistency and transparency.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the findings are derived from the participants' experiences rather than the researcher's personal opinions or assumptions. Throughout the study, the researcher maintained an objective approach during data collection and analysis. The findings were grounded in the participants' narratives, and interpretations were supported using verbatim quotations to demonstrate the connection between the data and the resulting themes.

Researcher's Bias and Reflexivity

As qualitative research acknowledges the active role of the researcher in the research process, reflexivity was maintained throughout the study. The researcher remained aware of personal assumptions and prior knowledge related to Animal Flow and continuously reflected on how these perspectives could influence data collection and interpretation. Every effort was made to approach the interviews with openness and neutrality, allowing participants to express their experiences without influence or judgement. During data analysis, themes were developed inductively from the participants' accounts, ensuring that the findings reflected their lived experiences rather than the researcher's preconceived expectations.

Data Preparation

Following the completion of the interviews, the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim to ensure that participants' responses were accurately captured. Each transcript was carefully reviewed alongside the corresponding audio recording to verify accuracy and minimise transcription errors. This process helped preserve the authenticity and richness of the participants' narratives.

To maintain confidentiality, all personally identifiable information was removed from the transcripts. Each participant was assigned a unique identifier (Participant 1–Participant 5),

which was used consistently throughout the analysis and reporting of the findings. The anonymised transcripts were then organised systematically to facilitate the coding and analysis process.

The researcher immersed in the data by reading and re-reading each transcript several times to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences. During this stage, preliminary notes, observations, and initial reflections were recorded to identify meaningful patterns and ideas that informed the subsequent coding process. The prepared data served as the foundation for the thematic analysis conducted in the study.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the semi-structured interviews were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a flexible and systematic method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (themes) within qualitative data. It is particularly suitable for studies that aim to explore participants' experiences and perspectives while remaining grounded in their narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021).

Phase 1: Familiarisation with the Data

Following data preparation, the researcher became thoroughly familiar with the data by reading and re-reading each interview transcript while referring to the audio recordings when necessary. This process enabled a deeper understanding of the participants' narratives, allowing initial observations and meaningful patterns to emerge. During this stage, preliminary notes and reflections were recorded to support subsequent analysis.

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes

After becoming familiar with the data, the researcher systematically coded the interview transcripts by identifying meaningful segments relevant to the research objectives. Coding involved assigning labels to participants' words, phrases, and experiences that reflected important ideas related to Animal Flow, mindfulness, psychological well-being, and its perceived therapeutic potential. Numerous initial codes were generated across the five interview transcripts.

Phase 3: Searching for Themes

The initial codes were examined for similarities and relationships and were subsequently organised into candidate themes. Related codes were grouped together to develop potential themes that represented recurring patterns across participants' experiences while remaining grounded in the data.

Phase 4: Reviewing Themes

The preliminary themes were carefully reviewed by comparing them with the coded extracts and the complete dataset. This process ensured that each theme accurately represented the participants' narratives and that there was a clear distinction between themes. Where necessary, themes were refined, combined, or reorganised to improve clarity and coherence.

Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes

Following the review process, each theme was clearly defined and appropriately named to capture its central meaning. Representative quotations from the interview transcripts were identified to illustrate each theme and to ensure that the findings remained closely connected to the participants' lived experiences.

Phase 6: Producing the Report

The final themes were interpreted in relation to the research objectives and interpreted in relation to the research questions and supported by relevant literature and theoretical perspectives. The findings were presented using participants' verbatim quotations to support the interpretations and provide an authentic representation of their experiences regarding the perceived therapeutic potential of Animal Flow in mindfulness and psychological well-being.

Following the iterative process of coding, reviewing, and refining the data, six themes and eighteen sub-themes were developed. These themes represented recurring patterns across participants' narratives and captured their lived experiences of Animal Flow in relation to mindfulness, psychological well-being, therapeutic potential, personal growth, and perceived challenges. The themes are presented and discussed in detail in Chapter 4

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were maintained throughout the research process to ensure the rights, dignity, and well-being of all participants. Prior to data collection, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the nature of their involvement, and the procedures to be followed. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from each participant before the interviews were conducted. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the appropriate institutional authority before the commencement of the research.

Participants were informed that they had the right to decline to answer any question and could withdraw from the study at any stage without providing a reason or facing any negative consequences. This ensured that participation remained voluntary throughout the research process.

To protect participants' privacy and confidentiality, all identifying information was removed from the interview transcripts, and each participant was assigned a unique identifier (P1–P5). The audio recordings, transcripts, and related research materials were stored securely and were accessible only to the researcher and the research supervisor.

The interviews were conducted in a respectful and supportive manner, allowing participants to share their experiences comfortably and without coercion. Care was taken to minimise any discomfort or distress during the interviews. The data collected were used solely for academic and research purposes and have been presented in a manner that protects participants' anonymity while accurately representing their experiences

Chapter IV

Result and Discussion

The present chapter presents the findings of the study, *Exploring the Therapeutic Potential of Animal Flow in Relation to Mindfulness and Psychological Well-being*. The findings are based on semi-structured interviews conducted with five certified Animal Flow practitioners. The interview transcripts were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021) reflexive thematic analysis. Through repeated familiarisation with the data, systematic coding, and organisation of patterns of meaning, six major themes and eighteen sub-themes were identified.

The themes represent the participants' lived experiences and perceptions of Animal Flow, particularly in relation to embodied awareness, mindfulness, emotional regulation, psychological well-being, personal growth, and its perceived therapeutic potential. Verbatim quotations from participants are presented throughout the chapter to illustrate each theme while preserving the authenticity of their experiences.

The chapter begins with a review of the research question, followed by the demographic characteristics and brief case descriptions of the participants. It then presents the thematic findings generated through the analysis, followed by a cross-participant analysis, discussion of the findings in relation to existing literature and the theoretical framework, implications of the study.

Review of Research Question

The primary research question guiding the present study was: *"How do certified Animal Flow practitioners perceive the therapeutic potential of Animal Flow in relation to mindfulness and psychological well-being?"*

To address this research question, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five certified Animal Flow practitioners. The interviews explored participants' experiences and perceptions of Animal Flow across multiple domains, including embodied awareness,

mind-body integration, mindfulness, emotional regulation, psychological well-being, perceived therapeutic potential, personal growth, and challenges associated with the practice. The interview data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021) reflexive thematic analysis, resulting in the identification of six major themes and eighteen sub-themes. These themes form the basis for the presentation of the findings in this chapter.

Participant Demographic Characteristics

Table 4.1

Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Practice Experience	Certification
P1	Male	27	More than 1 year	Level 1
P2	Male	30	6 years	Level 3
P3	Female	27	3 years	Level 1
P4	Female	42	6.5 years	Level 3
P5	Male	43	Since 2020	Level 1

Five certified Animal Flow practitioners participated in the present study. The participants varied in terms of age, years of Animal Flow practice, and certification level, providing a range of perspectives on the therapeutic potential of Animal Flow. All participants were certified Animal Flow practitioners with practical experience in practising and/or teaching Animal Flow. To maintain confidentiality and protect participants' identities, pseudonyms in the form of participant codes (P1–P5) were used throughout the presentation of the findings.

Participant Profiles

To put the extracted information into perspective, a brief description of each participant is provided below. The description includes the type of interview conducted, the length of the interview, the engagement level of the participants, and the type of information that was provided. This information gives a basis of understanding for the following analysis of themes.

Participant Profile – P1

Participant 1 (P1) was a 27-year-old male certified Animal Flow Level 1 practitioner with more than one year of practice experience. The interview was conducted face-to-face (offline) and lasted approximately 30 minutes. Throughout the interview, P1 was cooperative and willingly shared his experiences of practising Animal Flow. His responses primarily focused on the development of body awareness, stress reduction, grounding, learning experiences, and the challenges encountered during the initial stages of practice.

Participant Profile – P2

Participant 2 (P2) was a 30-year-old male certified Animal Flow Level 3 practitioner with six years of practice experience. The interview was conducted face-to-face (offline) and lasted approximately 25 minutes. P2 provided concise, focused, and accurate responses, answering the interview questions directly while drawing from his extensive experience as an Animal Flow practitioner. His responses contributed valuable insights into mind-body coordination, stress management, therapeutic potential, and physical limitations associated with the practice.

Participant Profile – P3

Participant 3 (P3) was a 27-year-old female certified Animal Flow Level 1 practitioner with three years of practice experience. The interview was conducted face-to-face

(offline) and lasted approximately 28 minutes. P3 actively engaged throughout the interview and openly reflected on her personal experiences with Animal Flow. She described the influence of the practice on mindfulness, emotional regulation, creativity, confidence, and personal growth, while also discussing the challenges encountered during the learning process.

Participant Profile – P4

Participant 4 (P4) was a 42-year-old female certified Animal Flow Level 3 practitioner with 6.5 years of practice experience. The interview was conducted online via Google Meet and lasted approximately 1 hour and 10 minutes. P4 was highly enthusiastic and actively engaged throughout the interview, providing detailed and reflective responses supported by numerous personal and professional experiences. She demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of Animal Flow and explained its concepts with considerable depth, offering rich insights into mind-body integration, mindfulness, therapeutic applications, emotional regulation, and long-term personal transformation.

Participant Profile – P5

Participant 5 (P5) was a 43-year-old male certified Animal Flow Level 1 practitioner who had been practising Animal Flow since 2020. The interview was conducted online and lasted approximately 35 minutes. P5 participated enthusiastically and openly shared his experiences of practising and teaching Animal Flow. His responses were detailed and informative, particularly regarding the therapeutic potential of Animal Flow, movement-based mindfulness, holistic well-being, personal transformation, and motivation for continued practice.

Overall, all participants were highly cooperative and provided in-depth information on their experience with practicing Animal Flow. Although the interviews varied in both

length and detail, all interviewees were able to contribute significantly to the exploration and discussion of the therapeutic potential of the program in terms of mindfulness and psychological benefits.

Findings

The interview transcripts were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021) reflexive thematic analysis. The six themes and eighteen sub-themes emerged from the transcripts through initial codes applied to transcripts. The analysis was performed by becoming more familiar with the dataset, coding, and evaluating themes that recurred throughout the participants' stories.

These themes highlight participants' views on the benefits of using Animal Flow practice as a pathway to achieve mindfulness and psychological wellbeing. Each theme includes sub-themes and verbatim quotes that reflect how participants interpreted their experiences while performing Animal Flow as a means to enhance mindfulness.

Table 4.2

Six Major Themes and Sub-themes on the Therapeutic Potential of Animal Flow in Mindfulness and Psychological Wellbeing

Theme	Sub-themes
Theme 1. Embodied Awareness and Mind–Body Integration	1. Heightened Body Awareness 2. Mind–Body Coordination 3. Awareness Developed Through Practice

Theme	Sub-themes
	1. Focused Attention
Theme 2. Mindfulness and Attentional Engagement	2. Flow State 3. Present-Moment Awareness; Quietening of Thoughts
Theme 3. Emotional Regulation and Psychological Well-being	1. Stress Reduction 2. Emotional Regulation 3. Improved Mood and Psychological Relief
Theme 4. Perceived Therapeutic Potential of Animal Flow	1. Movement as a Therapeutic Experience 2. Holistic Well-being; Grounding 3. Self-awareness
Theme 5. Personal Growth Through Practice	1. Learning and Skill Development 2. Confidence and Sense of Achievement 3. Personal Growth and Transformation
Theme 6. Challenges and Considerations for Therapeutic Application	1. Physical Limitations 2. Learning Challenges 3. Individual Readiness and Motivation

The thematic analysis generated six major themes and several related sub-themes that captured participants' experiences of practising Animal Flow. Together, these themes illustrate how participants perceived Animal Flow as an embodied movement practice that fostered awareness, mindfulness, emotional regulation, and psychological well-being, while

also highlighting its perceived therapeutic potential, opportunities for personal growth, and practical challenges.

Presentation of Themes

The six themes and eighteen sub-themes identified through the thematic analysis are presented below. Each theme is discussed individually and supported by representative quotations from participants. The quotations have been selected to illustrate the experiences and meanings shared by the participants while maintaining the richness of the original narratives.

Theme 1: Animal Flow as an Embodied Practice: Developing Awareness Through Movement

This theme explores how participants experienced Animal Flow as a movement practice that enhanced awareness of their bodies. Participants described becoming more conscious of their posture, movement quality, muscle activation, balance, coordination, and overall bodily sensations. Many noted that this awareness developed progressively with continued practice.

Sub-theme 1.1: Heightened Body Awareness. Participants reported increased awareness of muscles, posture, and movement quality, noting that Animal Flow activated unconventional muscle groups not typically engaged in conventional workouts.

Participant P1:

"We can feel our body getting stretched. For a person doing it for the first time, it is new. While doing it, the areas that are not yet activated are activated, which is like the wrist. So, a strain is there that needs our focus. Then comes the quads. Like it's not like how we normally work out. We will feel a different kind of activation."

Participant P2:

"Bodily sensations are tactile, as practitioners simultaneously engage balance, strength, flexibility, and mobility. However, once mastery is achieved, breathing naturally aligns with the movement flow without requiring conscious effort. The body automatically adjusts breathing patterns according to the movement being performed and the posture being maintained."

Participant P3:

"I feel like focus is lot on Core Strength so anyone who has been working out or used to being active will be able to do this easier than someone because for someone new what I that it requires a lot of attention like they need to actively think about what they're doing if they even need to get the smallest thing right but for people who have like a movement background it's easier for them to pick it up because they already know the flow of their body and they used to connecting their mind and their body and things like that."

Participant P4:

"So initially, during the first half of my journey, the bodily sensations were mostly the lactic acid building up. I would feel the burn in my big muscle groups like quads. For the tuck handstand, I definitely struggled with balance because the balance is on the hand. There were lactic acid burns in my quads, and I could not squat. That was another thing with me—I could not do a full squat or a deep squat before Animal Flow. So for the first 4 years of my Animal Flow practice, the moves involving deep squats were very difficult for me, and I would really feel discomfort going deeper and deeper into the ground. But then after four years, my hips got the mobility that I had lost over the years, and then I was able to do a lot more deep squatting."

Participant P5:

"I think I feel more relaxed while doing it when I'm performing any kind of flow. I feel more controlled. Like I feel that my body is more under my control, my breath is under my control. I move in a way where I can understand each and every engagement of the muscle. So it's not stressful at all. In fact, it releases all the stress from the body. I feel more relaxed when I do it."

Key Finding

Animal Flow activates unconventional muscle groups (quads, wrists, core, upper body strength, flexibility, mobility), requiring focused attention and developing tactile somatic awareness involving balance, strength, flexibility, mobility, and core strength simultaneously. Physical sensations change over time - initially lactic acid burns and quad discomfort, then mobility improvement (deep squat capability after 4 years P4, flexibility improvement P5), progression to upper body strength focus and "body more into my control" (P5), with "each and every engagement of the muscle" understood.

Sub-theme 1.2: Mind–Body Coordination. Participants described integration of physical movement with mental focus, experiencing strong mind-body connections where mental awareness and physical movement interact simultaneously.

Participant P4:

"The activation is a very important component of Animal Flow. This component is called 'neurological warm-up.' It's a warm-up, and it's not just for the warm-up phase—it's also used in the flow. So you can say that this mind-body connection is present throughout the flow. However, this happens only for someone who is experienced. For someone who is just learning for the first time, this may not be there because it's too much cognitive load for them to even think about how their body is moving. It's very difficult to connect. I think Animal Flow takes mind-body to a completely different level. You will realize when you do

some of the activations—no matter how fit you think you are, they're very difficult. Personally, in the workshops that I conduct, I don't even call it activations. I call it 'ego crushers.' I say, 'Now get ready for ego-crushing ground,' because everyone's ego gets crushed and they can't do it. It's because they're not used to connecting their mind to their body. We can think of everything very physically, but when you actually start focusing on the move, you know how difficult it gets."

Participant P5:

"It's a great form of therapy as it helps me to connect my mind and muscles and brings me into my movement at the same present moment. It's very therapeutic. Like, people go through a lot of issues nowadays—there are so many things going on in their heads. They are having issues with their jobs, with their families, their personal lives, their relationships. But when you start practising Animal Flow, you get into that moment where you forget all those things and just get connected to yourself."

"I'm completely connected. I'm fully aware while doing it. So whenever I'm doing it alone, or if I'm doing it in a group with a set of friends, or let's say with a set of other flowists—at that moment, my body moves very subconsciously. At that time, my subconscious mind takes over. So at times, it's like I'm not even trying hard to do any of it. It just flows, it just keeps on going, so I really don't have to put a lot of effort towards anything now."

Participant P2:

"Great, it's a nice experience between my body and my mind, it's a great connection. You can't focus on one thing, it's both of it. While focusing so much on the form, you feel like your mind is working more than your body. In terms of just movement, you don't think

about anything else, you just wanna make that movement really good, you are working so much on that."

Key Finding

Animal Flow creates simultaneous mind-body engagement where mental focus on form requires more brain activity than physical effort, with practitioners experiencing "peace" in mind through body engagement. "Activation" is neurological warm-up bridging mind-body gap, motor neuron unit connects mind to muscle, "ego crushers" for beginners too difficult to connect mind-body initially. Developing progressively from initial cognitive study to automatic flow with integrated mind-body awareness, with animal Flow taking mind-body to "completely different level," helping "connect your mind and muscles and brings into your movement at the same present moment," with practitioners "completely connected, fully aware."

Sub-theme 1.3: Awareness Developed Through Practice. Participants reported that bodily awareness and movement quality improved progressively over time through repeated practice, with initial difficulty progressing to mastery.

Participant P4:

"So my first 4 years were complete frustration, and it was very hard. But somehow after 4 years, because I stuck with the system long-term, the frustration reduced. Now it has become a way for me to offload my stress from other areas of my life. So now, whenever I get very frustrated with other things like work-life issues, if I do Animal Flow, I feel that it temporarily switches off. Like you know the concept of 'me time'—I feel that with Animal Flow."

Participant P5:

"Initially, I had challenges in performing the flow because I was not very flexible. So it took me some time to get a hang of it, but I realised that by practicing it more and more and more, I kept getting better. Okay, that was one of thing."

Participant P1:

"When I first started practicing, I practiced with people who were not beginners, so they used a kind of language. It was difficult for me to understand, and that made me feel I didn't want to join. But still, with practice with them, I studied all the call-outs. And then I was able to understand that, and then I liked Animal Flow and could connect it with yoga. It is also related to mobility and strength. From the first time onward, I was able to do all the holdings and everything. Only difficulty was the call-outs. So I was able to continue it."

Key Finding

Participants consistently described body awareness and movement proficiency as developing gradually through sustained practice. Initial experiences were characterised by frustration, physical limitations, and difficulty understanding movement patterns; however, continued engagement led to increased confidence, improved mobility and flexibility, greater familiarity with Animal Flow techniques, and enhanced movement quality. Over time, participants reported that regular practice transformed Animal Flow into a meaningful practice that supported both skill development and stress management.

Theme Summary

Overall, this theme demonstrates that Animal Flow was experienced as an embodied movement practice that enhanced bodily awareness and strengthened mind–body integration. Participants described becoming increasingly aware of muscle activation, posture, balance, breathing, and movement quality. This awareness developed gradually through continued

practice, leading to improved coordination, mobility, physical control, and a deeper connection with the body.

Theme 2: Cultivating Mindfulness and Present-Moment Awareness Through Flow

This theme refers to participants' experiences of sustained attention, present-moment awareness, and reduced mental distractions while practising Animal Flow. Participants consistently described Animal Flow as promoting focused attention and helping them remain present during movement. Although some distinguished Animal Flow from traditional meditation, they reported experiencing reduced distractions, complete immersion in movement, and enhanced concentration while practising.

Sub-theme 2.1: Focused Attention. Participants reported sustained concentration on movement and technique, noting that Animal Flow requires 100% focus and forces practitioners to be fully aware.

Participant P5:

"Awareness and attention are definitely important. Animal Flow pushes you to connect more with yourself because unless you are fully connected and aware, you won't be able to perform the movements correctly. If you want to execute a movement perfectly, you really need to stay focused. You have to understand how the rotation is happening, how the movement is happening, and what kind of stretch you should feel while performing a move like the Scorpion Reach. You need to be completely aware of what you are doing; otherwise, you won't be able to perform the movement properly. In that way, the workout itself pushes you to become more aware, and that's what makes it so effective because it helps you feel more connected to yourself."

Participant P4:

"The first aspect is the cognitive demand. Especially if you're attending a group class or learning with someone, you cannot practice Animal Flow while being mentally absorbed in something else. Animal Flow has its own language, and you need to pay attention to that language and interpret it correctly. For example, the instructor might say, 'right arm crab reach,' and you cannot use your left arm instead. After the right arm movement, another movement follows, so if you accidentally use the wrong arm, the entire flow is disrupted. Because of this, you are naturally forced to pay close attention to the instructor and the movement call-outs. This cognitive engagement is essential for practicing Animal Flow effectively."

Key Finding

Participants consistently described Animal Flow as a movement practice that demands sustained attention and active cognitive engagement. They reported that successful performance requires continuous focus on movement execution, body positioning, and instructional cues, preventing distraction and encouraging present-moment awareness. This heightened attentional engagement not only enhanced movement accuracy but also fostered a deeper sense of self-awareness and connection with the body.

Sub-theme 2.2: Flow State and Present-Moment Awareness. Participants described becoming fully immersed in the movement experience, experiencing "zen mode" where they were "completely zoned," "subconscious mind starts working," and "just flows."

Participant P5:

"Whenever I'm doing Animal Flow, I'm completely in the moment. At that point in time, any other thoughts running through my head just fade away, and my full awareness shifts to my practice. In fact, I prefer to disconnect from everything else and simply be present in that moment while doing Animal Flow. The only thought that comes to my mind is

how to perform the next movement correctly and smoothly. That's the only thing I'm focused on, and it cuts me off from all other distractions."

"At that moment, my body moves almost subconsciously. It's as if my subconscious mind takes over. Sometimes I don't even feel like I'm trying too hard to perform the movements—it just flows naturally and keeps going. I really don't have to put a lot of conscious effort into it anymore."

Participant P4:

"There's another aspect that comes into play when you're in flow mode. In Animal Flow, there are choreographed sequences, which are mostly what you see on Instagram. These are pre-planned, and the flow is already built, much like a dance choreography. However, there is another mode called *Free Flow*. In Free Flow, you don't know what you're going to do next. You're simply on the floor, and one movement naturally follows another without consciously deciding what comes next.

It's like asking someone to come to the centre of a room and start dancing without giving them any time to prepare or think about what they're going to do. They simply move based on their experience. That's what Free Flow is.

From my experience as a practitioner, Free Flow is very challenging, and I don't practice it very often because of the immense amount of cognitive effort it requires. The level of focus it demands is extremely high. I can't be thinking about anything else. Even if I'm dealing with work-related stress or family problems, there's simply no space in my mind for those thoughts while I'm in Free Flow. At that moment, I'm completely zoned in and fully immersed in the movements I'm performing."

Participant P2:

"Nothing, nothing arises for me. I just keep on flowing. I just don't think about anything while I am flowing."

Participant P3:

"Personally, I enter this zone whenever I'm doing Animal Flow, especially when I'm practicing by myself. It usually happens when I'm trying to create movement patterns and put different movements together. It feels like you're creating something with your mind. You learn all these individual movements, and then it's up to you to decide how to combine them. For example, one movement might flow well into another, while a different combination works better somewhere else. As you continue linking one movement after another, it gradually becomes a seamless flow."

Key Finding

Participants described entering a flow state characterized by complete present-moment engagement, automatic and effortless movement, and the absence of distracting thoughts. As practice progressed, movements became more natural and intuitive, allowing practitioners to creatively combine learned movements into seamless flow sequences. Participants also emphasized that advanced free flow requires intense cognitive engagement, sustained attention, and complete immersion, often resulting in a loss of awareness of time and external distractions.

Sub-theme 2.3: Quietening of Thoughts. Participants reported reduced mental distractions and increased mental clarity during practice, experiencing "complete awareness" that "cuts me out from all the other distractions."

Participant P5:

"Whenever I practice Animal Flow, I am completely present in the moment. At that time, any other thoughts running through my mind gradually fade away, and my entire awareness shifts to my practice. I prefer to disconnect from everything else and simply be present while doing Animal Flow. The only thoughts I have are about performing the movement correctly and how to execute it well. Other than that, it completely cuts me off from all other distractions."

Participant P4:

"I think, in that sense, Animal Flow offers a kind of therapeutic support because it gives you a break from your problems. At that moment, you have something else to focus on, which is figuring out how to perform the flow. It's like you're given a different task, and your attention shifts completely to that instead of whatever was bothering you."

Key Finding

Participants perceived Animal Flow as providing temporary therapeutic relief by redirecting their attention away from personal worries and toward the cognitive demands of movement. The need to focus on executing the flow correctly occupied their attention, reduced intrusive thoughts and external distractions, and created a mental break from everyday stressors, thereby promoting present-moment awareness and psychological relief.

Theme Summary

Overall, this theme illustrates that Animal Flow promoted mindfulness through sustained attention, present-moment awareness, and immersion in movement. The cognitive demands of executing movements and responding to call-outs reduced external distractions and redirected attention toward the practice. With greater experience, movements became more intuitive and automatic, allowing participants to enter flow-like states characterised by concentration, creativity, and a temporary quietening of thoughts.

Theme 3: Emotional Regulation and Psychological Well-being Through Movement

This theme reflects participants' experiences of improved emotional regulation, reduced stress, and enhanced psychological well-being associated with Animal Flow practice. Animal Flow was perceived as supporting emotional wellbeing by reducing stress, improving mood, and helping participants cope with difficult emotions. Several participants described using Animal Flow as a strategy to manage personal challenges, regulate emotions, and restore psychological balance.

Sub-theme 3.1: Stress Reduction. Participants reported feeling calmer and less stressed after practice, using Animal Flow as immediate stress relief tool.

Participant P4:

"Now, whenever I feel very frustrated because of things like work-related or personal issues, I do Animal Flow, and it feels like everything temporarily switches off. You know the idea of having 'me time'? That's exactly what Animal Flow has become for me."

"After eight years of practice, Animal Flow has become my fallback. Whenever I feel like I can't do anything else, I turn to Animal Flow. Those 20 minutes of practice are enough to save my day."

Participant P5:

"As I mentioned earlier, I feel much more relaxed. My stress gets released, and I completely disconnect from all distractions, allowing me to be fully present in the moment. I become more aware of myself, and that makes me feel deeply relaxed. It takes away my anxiety, and afterward, I feel more energized and refreshed. At the same time, I also feel much calmer—very calm."

Participant P2:

"Whenever I feel stressed or mentally overwhelmed, I do Animal Flow, and it helps me feel better. Every time I feel sad, I practice Animal Flow at night, and it always makes me feel good."

"Whether it's a breakup, difficult business situations, or other personal problems in life, whenever I face something challenging, I turn to Animal Flow."

Participant P1:

"Personally, I have noticed an improvement in my stress levels, especially over the long term. The benefits were not immediate, but with continued practice, I experienced a significant reduction in stress."

Key Finding

Participants consistently described Animal Flow as an effective strategy for reducing stress and managing emotional distress. They reported using the practice during challenging life situations, such as relationship difficulties, work-related stress, business setbacks, and other personal problems. Animal Flow was perceived as promoting immediate relaxation, reducing anxiety, fostering a sense of calm, and restoring energy. While some participants experienced immediate emotional relief, others noted that the stress-reducing benefits became more evident through consistent long-term practice.

Sub-theme 3.2: Emotional Regulation. Participants described managing negative emotions through movement, using Animal Flow as strategy to regulate emotions and restore psychological balance.

Participant P3:

"My first thought is always to get the movement right. Sometimes I practice Animal Flow when I'm in a bad mood, and it helps me calm down. It allows me to reassess the

situation, brings me back into reality, and helps me become calm and focused again. There have been many occasions where I have used Animal Flow as a form of therapy to help myself regulate my emotions."

Participant P5:

"Sometimes, while I'm practicing, nothing else comes into my mind. I see it almost like a form of dance. Whenever I have worries or problems, I put on my headphones, disconnect from my surroundings, and simply keep flowing. I enter what I would describe as a 'zen mode.' Whenever I'm stressed or unable to find solutions to problems—whether related to family or work—I start practicing Animal Flow. Once I get into that state, my mind begins to work differently, and I come back feeling more open-minded and often with new ideas."

Key Finding

Participants consistently described Animal Flow as an effective strategy for emotional regulation. The practice helped them manage negative emotions such as stress, frustration, sadness, and mental overwhelm by promoting a calmer and more focused state of mind. Participants reported that Animal Flow enabled them to step back from emotional distress, reassess situations with greater clarity, and regain psychological balance. Several also described entering a "zen-like" state during practice, which facilitated mental clarity, creative thinking, and problem-solving by temporarily shifting attention away from distressing thoughts and toward purposeful movement.

Sub-theme 3.3: Improved Mood and Psychological Relief. Participants reported enhanced emotional wellbeing, relaxation, and positive affect, experiencing mood improvement and psychological relief through Animal Flow practice.

Participant P4:

"My first four years were filled with frustration because it was very difficult. But since I stayed with the practice over the long term, that frustration gradually reduced. Now Animal Flow has become a way for me to release stress from other areas of my life. Initially, it may create stress because you're learning something new, but later it becomes a stress buster."

"Personally, I haven't found the calming effects to be chronic; they are more acute. I experience them while I'm practicing, but once the session is over, the effect gradually fades. That's why I feel I need to keep practicing regularly. I often describe it as a temporary painkiller—you have to keep taking the dose. For me, that's about 20 minutes of Animal Flow every day."

Participant P5:

"I feel much more relaxed. My stress gets released, and I completely disconnect from distractions, allowing me to stay fully present in the moment. It reduces my anxiety, and afterward I feel more energized, refreshed, and at the same time, much calmer."

Key Finding

Participants reported that regular Animal Flow practice contributed to improved mood and psychological well-being by promoting relaxation, reducing stress and anxiety, and enhancing positive emotional states. Although the practice was initially experienced as physically and mentally challenging, continued engagement transformed it into an effective source of psychological relief. Participants also perceived these benefits as primarily immediate or short-term, emphasizing that consistent and regular practice was necessary to maintain the positive effects on mood and emotional well-being.

Theme Summary

Overall, this theme highlights the role of Animal Flow in supporting emotional regulation and psychological well-being. Participants used the practice to manage stress, sadness, frustration, and emotional overwhelm, often reporting greater calmness, mental clarity, improved mood, and psychological relief. Although some benefits were immediate and temporary, regular practice was perceived as important for maintaining these positive emotional effects.

Theme 4: Understanding the Therapeutic Potential of Animal Flow

This theme captures participants' perceptions of Animal Flow as a movement-based practice capable of promoting psychological health, mindfulness, and overall well-being. Participants interpreted Animal Flow as having therapeutic value beyond physical exercise. They described it as a holistic practice that fostered self-awareness, grounding, psychological wellbeing, and personal growth through the integration of movement and mindful attention.

Sub-theme 4.1: Movement as a Therapeutic Experience. Participants perceived Animal Flow as a therapeutic movement practice that supported their mental and emotional well-being. They described it as helping them become more present, emotionally balanced, and psychologically refreshed through purposeful movement and focused attention.

Participant P2:

"I would 100 percent say it has therapeutic potential. It feels very therapeutic. I feel more like myself, and it's almost as if my dopamine levels return to their baseline whenever I practice Animal Flow."

Participant P5:

"It has therapeutic potential, big time. I believe movement-based therapies are far more accessible for many people than simply sitting and meditating. Animal Flow is one example, but the same can be seen in practices like yoga, Tai Chi, or other movement-based activities. These practices bring you into the present moment. The more aware you become, the more relaxed you feel."

Participant P4:

"I absolutely believe Animal Flow has therapeutic potential. However, I don't think it's unique to Animal Flow alone—any movement system can be therapeutic. Animal Flow adds an extra cognitive element because it has its own language and requires constant attention. That intense focus makes you forget your existing problems. One of my clients who experiences depression told me that Animal Flow feels as effective as therapy. Unlike medication, which made her feel emotionally muted, Animal Flow made her feel activated and invigorated. However, I believe these effects are more immediate than long-lasting."

Participant P3:

"There have been many occasions where I have used Animal Flow as a form of therapy to help myself calm down."

Participant P1:

"For a healthy person, I definitely think it has therapeutic potential. It helps us feel grounded because we are constantly connected to the floor while mimicking animal movements."

Key Finding

All five participants perceived Animal Flow as having therapeutic potential for enhancing psychological well-being. They described the practice as promoting relaxation,

emotional regulation, grounding, and present-moment awareness through movement and sustained cognitive engagement. Participants emphasized that the therapeutic value lay not only in the physical movement itself but also in the focused attention required during practice, which temporarily shifted attention away from psychological distress. While several participants viewed these benefits as immediate and restorative, some noted that consistent practice was necessary to sustain the positive psychological effects.

Sub-theme 4.2: Holistic Well-being. Participants described Animal Flow as promoting holistic well-being by simultaneously benefiting their physical, emotional, and psychological health. They highlighted the integration of movement, body awareness, emotional balance, and a sense of personal accomplishment, contributing to an overall feeling of wellness.

Participant P5:

"It's a great form of therapy because it helps connect your mind and muscles while bringing you fully into the present moment through movement. People go through so many difficulties with work, family, relationships, and other personal issues, but when you start practicing Animal Flow, you become so immersed in the movement that you temporarily forget those concerns. In that moment, when you're simply with yourself, everything feels okay, and it helps reduce unnecessary overthinking."

Participant P2:

"I feel much more like myself. It's almost as if my dopamine levels return to their baseline whenever I practice Animal Flow."

Participant P3:

"From a psychological well-being perspective, creating flows, especially while moving to music, gives me a sense of accomplishment. When I successfully create and perform a flow, I feel like I have achieved something, and that makes me feel good about myself."

Key Finding

Participants perceived Animal Flow as supporting holistic well-being by integrating physical movement with emotional and psychological functioning. The practice fostered mind-body connection, reduced overthinking, enhanced positive emotions, and promoted a sense of accomplishment and personal satisfaction. Participants also described feeling more connected to themselves, psychologically refreshed, and emotionally balanced after practice, suggesting that the combined physical, cognitive, and emotional engagement contributed to an overall sense of well-being.

Sub-theme 4.3: Grounding and Self-awareness. Participants described Animal Flow as fostering a stronger sense of grounding and self-awareness by encouraging complete engagement with the body and the present moment. They reported feeling more connected to themselves, more aware of their movements, and mentally calmer through sustained attention during practice.

Participant P5:

"When you're simply with yourself, it makes you feel like everything around you is okay. You stop overthinking about things that may not even need your attention. Practicing Animal Flow, especially alone, makes you feel more aware, calmer, and more relaxed. It creates a feeling that everything around you is just fine."

"Animal Flow definitely develops awareness and attention. Unless you're fully connected and aware of what you're doing, you won't be able to perform the movements

correctly. You need to stay completely focused on how the movement is happening, how your body is rotating, and where you should feel the stretch. The practice itself pushes you to become more aware, and that's what makes you feel more connected to yourself."

Participant P1:

"For a healthy person, I believe it has therapeutic value. One reason is that it feels grounding because it connects us to the ground while we mimic the movements of animals."

Key Finding

Participants described Animal Flow as enhancing grounding and self-awareness by fostering a deeper connection with their body, movement, and the present moment. The practice encouraged sustained awareness of bodily sensations and movement patterns, reduced overthinking, and promoted a sense of calm and inner stability. Participants also perceived the physical connection with the ground and the mindful execution of animal-inspired movements as strengthening their sense of presence and connection with themselves.

Theme Summary

Overall, this theme reflects participants' perceptions of Animal Flow as having therapeutic value beyond physical exercise. The practice was described as promoting grounding, self-awareness, present-moment engagement, emotional balance, and holistic well-being. Participants believed that its therapeutic potential arose from the integration of physical movement, sustained attention, cognitive engagement, and connection with the body.

Theme 5: Growth Through Practice: Learning, Confidence, and Personal Transformation

This theme reflects participants' perceptions of personal development, increased confidence, and positive transformation resulting from sustained Animal Flow practice. Participants

described Animal Flow as a gradual learning process that contributed to increased confidence, skill development, creativity, and personal growth. Continued practice fostered discipline, self-efficacy, and a sense of accomplishment, with some participants reporting meaningful changes in their lifestyle and identity.

Sub-theme 5.1: Learning and Skill Development. Participants described learning Animal Flow as a gradual and demanding process that required patience, persistence, and continuous practice. Although many initially experienced frustration, physical limitations, and difficulty understanding the movement patterns and terminology, they reported that these challenges gradually diminished with consistent practice. Over time, participants developed greater movement proficiency, flexibility, mobility, and confidence, allowing them to engage more deeply with the practice.

Participant P4:

"My first four years were full of frustration. It was very difficult, but because I stayed committed to the system for a long time, that frustration gradually reduced. Now Animal Flow has become a way for me to offload the stress from other areas of my life."

Participant P5:

"Initially, I found Animal Flow challenging because I wasn't very flexible. It took me some time to get used to it, but the more I practiced, the more I improved."

Participant P1:

"When I first started, I practiced with people who were already experienced, and they used terminology that I couldn't understand. At first, I even felt like I didn't want to continue. But I kept practicing, learned all the call-outs, and gradually started enjoying Animal Flow. I

could relate it to yoga because it also focuses on mobility and strength. The movements themselves weren't difficult for me; understanding the call-outs was the main challenge."

Participant P3:

"Learning Animal Flow is not easy. When I first watched others practicing, I thought it looked simple and believed I could do it easily. But once I actually started, I realised how challenging it was. It takes a lot of practice before you become good at it."

Key Finding

Participants consistently described Animal Flow as a skill that develops progressively through sustained practice rather than immediate mastery. Early experiences were characterised by frustration, physical limitations, unfamiliar terminology, and the cognitive demands of learning new movement patterns. However, regular practice enabled participants to improve their flexibility, mobility, movement competence, and understanding of the practice. This gradual progression from initial challenge to greater proficiency fostered confidence and allowed participants to experience the broader physical and psychological benefits of Animal Flow.

Sub-theme 5.2: Confidence and Sense of Achievement. Participants described experiencing increased confidence and a strong sense of achievement as they became more proficient in Animal Flow. Successfully completing practice sessions, mastering movements, and maintaining consistency gave them a sense of personal satisfaction and reinforced their motivation to continue practicing. They also perceived these accomplishments as contributing positively to their psychological well-being.

Participant P4:

"For me my animal flow practise if I do my AF practice Cactus, and if it is not minimum 20 minutes then for me my personal baseline is 20 minutes personal baseline of Usually I exceeded but On a very difficult day All that I'll aim for is 20 minutes and if I can get that if I can get that I feel so satisfied with myself that you know despite how troubling my day was I was still able to do my 20 minutes of af and I know the 20 minutes would have been my body because it was all body flow is three dimensional right 3 dimensional body weight so you will get enough in 20 minutes of AF as compared to one hour of a gym a typical gym so I would have the personal satisfaction at this 20 minutes have saved my day."

Participant P3:

"From a psychological well-being perspective, creating flows, especially while moving to music, gives me a sense of accomplishment. Matching the movements with the music and completing the flow makes me feel like I have achieved something. At the end of the session, I feel good because I know I have accomplished something meaningful."

Key Finding

Participants reported that mastering Animal Flow movements and maintaining a consistent practice fostered confidence, self-efficacy, and a sense of personal accomplishment. Successfully completing practice sessions, even on difficult days, generated feelings of satisfaction and reinforced their commitment to the practice. Participants also perceived these achievements as enhancing their motivation, self-confidence, and overall psychological well-being.

Sub-theme 5.3: Personal Growth and Transformation. Participants described Animal Flow as contributing to meaningful personal growth beyond physical fitness. Through consistent practice, they reported developing greater discipline, resilience, and a broader understanding of health and well-being. Many participants reflected on positive

changes in their attitudes, habits, and perspectives, describing how the practice influenced different aspects of their personal and professional lives.

Participant P3:

"When I first started, I was in a very difficult phase of my life. Although it wasn't only because of Animal Flow, movement played a huge role in helping me change. It taught me discipline because consistency builds discipline. Earlier, I was never consistent with anything, but developing this habit gradually changed different areas of my life. The person I was three years ago is definitely not the person I am today, and Animal Flow has been an important part of that journey."

Participant P5:

"When I first started Animal Flow, I was simply looking for something new to learn. I never expected it to completely change the way I thought about fitness. Earlier, I was focused only on strength training and building muscle. But through Animal Flow, I realised that real fitness is not just about becoming stronger. It is also about mobility, flexibility, control, and being able to move functionally. It changed my perspective so much that I now share the same philosophy with my clients, helping them understand that fitness is about moving well rather than just looking strong."

Participant P4:

"At one point, I fell badly while practicing and fractured my kneecap, which took six months to heal. That kept me away from Animal Flow for a long time. Even now, I make sure I practice for at least 20 minutes every day. Completing those 20 minutes, especially on difficult days, gives me a great sense of satisfaction because I know I have done something meaningful for myself. Those 20 minutes often feel like they have saved my day."

Key Finding:

Participants perceived Animal Flow as facilitating personal growth and transformation through the development of discipline, resilience, and healthier perspectives toward movement and well-being. Regular practice encouraged consistency, fostered positive lifestyle changes, and reshaped participants' understanding of fitness beyond physical strength to include mobility, flexibility, functional movement, and overall well-being. Participants also described becoming more resilient in overcoming setbacks and viewed Animal Flow as an important contributor to their personal development and long-term self-improvement.

Theme Summary

Overall, this theme demonstrates that sustained Animal Flow practice contributed to learning, confidence, discipline, and personal transformation. Participants described progressing from initial difficulty and frustration toward greater competence and mastery. Over time, the practice fostered a sense of achievement, resilience, consistency, and broader changes in their attitudes toward movement, fitness, and personal well-being.

Theme 6: Challenges and Individual Differences in Experiencing Animal Flow

This theme reflects participants' experiences of barriers and limitations that may influence engagement with Animal Flow and its potential therapeutic application. While participants acknowledged the benefits of Animal Flow, they also recognised its challenges and limitations. Physical demands, particularly on the wrists and joints, the initial learning curve, and individual motivation influenced participants' experiences and perceptions of its therapeutic applicability.

Sub-theme 6.1: Physical Limitations. Participants identified physical limitations, particularly wrist, knee, and joint-related conditions, as important factors that could restrict

participation in Animal Flow. Given that the practice involves weight-bearing movements and requires adequate joint stability and mobility, participants believed that individuals with existing injuries or musculoskeletal conditions may find certain movements challenging. However, some participants also noted that gradual conditioning, appropriate progression, and modifying movements could improve accessibility for certain individuals.

Participant P2:

"I had a wrist injury, so I couldn't practice Animal Flow for a long time because it is very intense on the wrists. Unless your wrists are healthy, you cannot flow. The same applies to the knees. If your knees are not healthy, it becomes very difficult."

Participant P5:

"I think it is less suitable for people who have joint-related conditions, especially arthritis. It is not a cure for these problems. Similarly, people with recent injuries should avoid practicing until they have recovered."

Participant P1:

"If someone has a wrist injury, it can be difficult because Animal Flow places body weight on the wrists. Initially, there may be pain, but with gradual practice, the wrists become conditioned. However, practice should be done within appropriate time limits."

Participant P3:

"Anyone with joint problems or injuries, especially involving the wrists or knees, may find Animal Flow difficult unless they first strengthen those areas before beginning the practice."

Participant P4:

"People with attention-related difficulties, such as ADHD, may find it challenging because Animal Flow requires sustained attention to the movement call-outs. Similarly, individuals with physical disabilities, such as a missing limb, may require the practice to be modified, as they may not be able to perform the full range of movements."

Key Finding:

Participants consistently identified wrist, knee, and other joint-related conditions as the primary physical challenges that may limit participation in Animal Flow. The weight-bearing nature of the practice was perceived as demanding adequate joint strength and mobility, making it less suitable for individuals with acute injuries or chronic musculoskeletal conditions. Participants also highlighted that gradual conditioning, movement modifications, and individualized progression may improve accessibility for some individuals. In addition to physical considerations, attention-related difficulties, such as ADHD, were perceived as potential challenges due to the cognitive demands of following movement sequences and call-out instructions.

Sub-theme 6.2: Learning Challenges. Participants described the initial learning process as one of the main challenges in practicing Animal Flow. They reported that understanding the movement patterns, terminology, and sequencing required time, concentration, and repeated practice. Although the practice initially appeared difficult, participants believed that consistent engagement gradually improved their confidence and movement proficiency.

Participant P1:

"When I first started practicing, I trained with people who were already experienced, and they used terminology that I found difficult to understand. At first, this made me feel like I did not want to continue. However, I kept practicing, learned the movement call-outs, and

gradually began to enjoy Animal Flow. I was able to relate it to yoga because of its emphasis on mobility and strength. The movements themselves were manageable; the main challenge was understanding the call-outs."

Participant P3:

"Learning Animal Flow is difficult. When I first watched people practicing, I thought it looked easy and believed I could do it. But once I actually started, I realised that it was not easy at all. It takes a lot of practice before you become good at it."

Participant P5:

"Initially, even as an instructor, I found it challenging because many people thought Animal Flow was very difficult. I usually compare it to learning how to drive. On the first day, you don't know how to change gears or accelerate, but with practice it gradually becomes automatic. Animal Flow is similar. At first, you need to put in conscious effort and stay aware of every movement, but with repeated practice, your body begins to perform the movements naturally. The key is simply to trust the process and keep practicing." practicing it more and more, you will keep getting better yourself will get better. You won't even get to know that what just happened matches so it's just to stay in the process. Just stick to the process."

Key Finding:

Participants perceived the learning process as one of the primary challenges of Animal Flow, particularly during the beginner stage. Difficulties in understanding movement terminology, sequencing, and coordination initially made the practice seem demanding. However, participants consistently emphasised that these challenges diminished with repeated practice, allowing the movements to become more automatic over time. Persistence,

consistent practice, and trust in the learning process were viewed as essential for developing confidence and proficiency in Animal Flow

Sub-theme 6.3: Individual Readiness and Motivation. Participants highlighted that the benefits of Animal Flow depend not only on the practice itself but also on an individual's willingness to learn, remain consistent, and engage actively in the process. They emphasized that curiosity, perseverance, and motivation play an important role in overcoming initial challenges and experiencing the full benefits of the practice. Participants also suggested that understanding the principles behind Animal Flow enhances commitment and long-term engagement.

Participant P5:

"I think Animal Flow is something that everybody should try because unless people experience it themselves, they won't understand its importance. It is not enough just to practice it; people should also understand the science behind it and why the movements are designed the way they are. Once you understand the purpose and start experiencing the benefits, you get hooked to it. After that, you naturally want to keep improving and become better with every practice."

Participant P1:

"Animal Flow may not be suitable for everyone because of certain physical concerns, but if people are willing to learn, they can definitely do it. In the end, it largely depends on the person's willpower."

Participant P4:

"At one point, I fell badly and fractured my kneecap, which took six months to heal. Naturally, I had to stop practicing Animal Flow during that period. However, once I recovered, I returned to the practice and continued with it."

Key Finding

Participants emphasized that individual readiness, motivation, and perseverance are important factors influencing engagement with Animal Flow. They believed that developing an understanding of the purpose and principles of the practice, together with consistent effort and willingness to learn, encouraged long-term commitment and personal growth. Even when faced with physical setbacks or initial difficulties, participants viewed persistence and intrinsic motivation as essential for continuing the practice and experiencing its therapeutic benefits.

Theme Summary

Overall, this theme highlights the practical challenges and individual differences that may influence engagement with Animal Flow. Physical limitations, particularly wrist, knee, and joint-related concerns, were identified as important barriers. Participants also noted that the initial learning curve, movement terminology, cognitive demands, motivation, and willingness to persist shaped the extent to which individuals could experience the benefits of the practice.

Cross-Participant Theme Analysis

Although each participant described unique personal experiences of practising Animal Flow, several common patterns emerged across the interviews. The cross-participant analysis illustrates the extent to which each participant contributed to the six major themes identified through the thematic analysis. This comparison highlights both the shared and distinctive experiences that informed the development of the themes.

Table 4.3***Cross-Participant Theme Analysis***

Theme	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Theme 1: Embodied Awareness and Mind–Body Integration	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Theme 2: Mindfulness and Attentional Engagement	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Theme 3: Emotional Regulation and Psychological Well-being	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Theme 4: Perceived Therapeutic Potential of Animal Flow	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Theme 5: Personal Growth Through Practice	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Theme 6: Challenges and Considerations for Therapeutic Application	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

The cross-participant analysis demonstrates that all six major themes were represented across the five participants, although the depth and emphasis of individual experiences varied. Themes related to embodied awareness, mindfulness, emotional regulation, and the perceived therapeutic potential of Animal Flow were consistently reflected across all participants, suggesting a high degree of convergence in their experiences. Differences were primarily observed in the richness and depth of the narratives. Participants with greater practice experience, particularly P2, P4, and P5, provided more detailed reflections on

advanced movement awareness, therapeutic applications, and the long-term integration of Animal Flow into their personal and professional lives. In contrast, participants with comparatively fewer years of practice contributed valuable insights into the learning process, skill development, and the gradual development of embodied awareness and confidence. Overall, the cross-participant analysis strengthens the credibility of the findings by demonstrating that the identified themes emerged consistently across participants while also reflecting individual variations in their experiences and interpretations of Animal Flow.

Discussion

Theme 1: Embodied Awareness and Mind–Body Integration

The present study identified Embodied Awareness and Mind–Body Integration as the first major theme, comprising three interconnected sub-themes: heightened body awareness, mind–body coordination, and awareness developed through practice. Participants consistently described becoming increasingly aware of their bodily sensations, posture, muscle activation, breathing, balance, and movement quality during Animal Flow practice. Rather than perceiving movement as purely physical, participants experienced a close integration between cognitive attention and bodily movement, with this awareness becoming more refined through sustained practice. These findings suggest that Animal Flow extends beyond conventional physical exercise by encouraging practitioners to consciously engage with their bodies throughout movement.

The findings are consistent with the literature on embodied movement, which proposes that cognition, perception, and emotional experience are fundamentally shaped through bodily interaction with the environment (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Csordas, 1990). From an embodied perspective, movement is not merely a physical action but an important means through which individuals develop awareness of themselves and their surroundings.

Participants' descriptions of becoming increasingly aware of muscle engagement, posture, balance, and breathing support this perspective, indicating that Animal Flow promotes an integrated awareness of both body and mind. The findings therefore reinforce the view that bodily movement serves as an important foundation for psychological experience rather than functioning independently from cognitive processes.

The findings also support previous research on body awareness and interoception. Mehling et al. (2011) proposed that body awareness involves the conscious perception of internal bodily sensations, movement, posture, and physiological states, all of which contribute to emotional regulation and adaptive functioning. Similarly, participants in the present study reported progressively developing greater awareness of their movements, breathing, and muscular engagement, suggesting that regular Animal Flow practice may facilitate increased interoceptive and kinesthetic awareness. Participants also described improvements in flexibility, mobility, and movement control over time, indicating that embodied awareness developed progressively rather than occurring immediately after beginning practice.

The present findings are further supported by movement-based literature demonstrating that embodied practices strengthen mind–body integration. Payne (2017) suggested that movement-oriented approaches encourage individuals to reconnect with bodily experiences, thereby promoting emotional integration and psychological awareness. Likewise, Koch et al. (2019) reported that Dance Movement Therapy and other movement-based interventions improve body awareness, emotional functioning, and overall psychological well-being. Although Animal Flow differs in its movement structure and training methodology, participants described similar experiences of increased body awareness, coordinated movement, and greater conscious engagement with their bodies. T

These similarities suggest that Animal Flow may share important embodied mechanisms with other established movement-based interventions.

A particularly noteworthy finding of the present study was that embodied awareness developed gradually through continued practice. Participants frequently described an initial period characterised by physical discomfort, cognitive overload, and frustration before experiencing greater movement efficiency, body awareness, and confidence. This gradual progression highlights that embodied awareness is not an immediate outcome but rather develops through repeated engagement with increasingly familiar movement patterns. Such findings extend previous literature by illustrating the developmental nature of embodied awareness within the context of Animal Flow, where continued practice appears to strengthen both physical competence and mind–body integration.

Overall, the findings suggest that Animal Flow may provide an embodied movement experience that facilitates heightened body awareness and strengthens the integration of cognitive attention with physical movement. While previous research has largely focused on established practices such as yoga, Tai Chi, and Dance Movement Therapy, the present study contributes to the emerging literature by demonstrating that certified Animal Flow practitioners perceive similar embodied experiences within this contemporary movement system. These findings support the growing body of literature suggesting that movement-based practices may contribute to psychological functioning through enhanced body awareness and mind–body integration, while also highlighting the need for further empirical research examining these processes specifically within Animal Flow.

Theme 2: Mindfulness and Attentional Engagement

The second theme identified in the present study was Mindfulness and Attentional Engagement, comprising the sub-themes of focused attention, flow state, and quietening of

thoughts. Participants consistently described Animal Flow as a practice that required sustained concentration on movement execution, body positioning, breathing, and movement transitions. The cognitive demands of coordinating complex movement sequences encouraged participants to remain fully engaged in the present moment, reducing external distractions and intrusive thoughts. Several participants further described experiencing a state of complete immersion in the practice, where movements became increasingly automatic and attention remained centred on the ongoing activity.

These findings are consistent with the conceptualisation of mindfulness proposed by Kabat-Zinn (1994), who defined mindfulness as paying attention to the present moment intentionally and without judgement. Participants' descriptions of directing their full attention towards movement execution, bodily sensations, and breathing closely reflect this understanding of mindful awareness. Rather than engaging in formal seated meditation, participants experienced mindfulness through movement, suggesting that Animal Flow may provide an alternative pathway for cultivating present-moment awareness. Similarly, Bishop et al. (2004) proposed that mindfulness involves sustained self-regulation of attention and an openness to present-moment experiences. The present findings support this perspective, as participants described maintaining continuous attention on movement quality while becoming increasingly aware of their bodily experiences during practice.

The findings also align with previous research examining mindfulness through movement. Schmalzl et al. (2024) reported that movement-based mindfulness interventions enhance body awareness, attentional regulation, and present-moment awareness while promoting psychological well-being. Likewise, movement practices such as yoga, Tai Chi, and Dance Movement Therapy have been shown to cultivate mindfulness by integrating bodily awareness with focused attention (Cramer et al., 2013; Koch et al., 2019). Although Animal Flow differs from these practices in its emphasis on quadrupedal movement and

dynamic locomotion, participants reported remarkably similar experiences of sustained attention, embodied awareness, and reduced mental distraction. These similarities suggest that mindful attention may represent a common mechanism across diverse movement-based practices.

A particularly noteworthy finding was participants' descriptions of experiencing a flow state during Animal Flow practice. Several participants described becoming completely absorbed in movement, with distracting thoughts fading into the background as their attention became fully directed towards the activity. Some participants further explained that, with continued practice, movements became increasingly automatic, allowing them to perform complex sequences with minimal conscious effort. These descriptions closely resemble Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) concept of flow, which refers to a state of complete absorption in an activity characterised by intense concentration, intrinsic enjoyment, and a diminished awareness of time and external distractions. The findings therefore suggest that Animal Flow may facilitate experiences that resemble psychological flow, particularly among experienced practitioners who have developed greater movement proficiency.

Another important finding was the quietening of thoughts experienced during practice. Participants frequently reported that the cognitive demands of Animal Flow redirected their attention away from daily worries, work-related stress, and personal concerns. Rather than attempting to suppress unwanted thoughts, participants described becoming naturally absorbed in the movements, leaving little cognitive capacity for unrelated concerns. This finding is consistent with previous research suggesting that mindful movement promotes attentional regulation and reduces cognitive distraction by anchoring awareness in present-moment bodily experiences (Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Schmalzl et al., 2024). It also supports the broader literature demonstrating that movement-based practices can provide temporary psychological relief by interrupting cycles of rumination and promoting focused engagement.

Overall, the findings indicate that Animal Flow may facilitate mindfulness through sustained attentional engagement, embodied awareness, and complete immersion in movement. Participants consistently perceived the practice as requiring continuous cognitive involvement while simultaneously reducing mental distractions and promoting present-moment awareness. These findings extend the existing literature by suggesting that Animal Flow, although relatively unexplored within mindfulness research, shares several characteristics with established mindful movement practices. Consequently, the present study contributes to the growing understanding of movement as a pathway for cultivating mindfulness and attentional engagement while highlighting the need for further research examining these processes within the context of Animal Flow.

Theme 3: Emotional Regulation and Psychological Well-being

The third theme identified in the present study was Emotional Regulation and Psychological Well-being, comprising the sub-themes of stress reduction, emotional regulation, and improved mood and psychological relief. Participants consistently described Animal Flow as an effective strategy for managing stress, regulating emotions, and enhancing their overall psychological well-being. Many reported practising Animal Flow during periods of work-related stress, relationship difficulties, and emotional distress, describing feelings of calmness, relaxation, renewed energy, and improved emotional balance following practice. While several participants experienced immediate psychological benefits, others noted that these positive effects were maintained only through consistent and regular engagement with the practice.

These findings are consistent with the broader literature demonstrating the psychological benefits of physical activity and movement-based interventions. Biddle et al. (2019) reported that regular physical activity contributes to improved mood, increased

resilience, reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression, and enhanced overall psychological well-being. The present findings support these observations, as participants consistently described experiencing reduced stress, greater emotional stability, and improved mood following Animal Flow practice. However, unlike conventional forms of physical exercise, participants emphasised that the psychological benefits of Animal Flow were closely connected to the integration of movement, focused attention, and body awareness rather than physical exertion alone.

The findings also align with previous research examining movement-based therapeutic approaches. Payne (2017) proposed that embodied movement interventions facilitate emotional awareness and regulation by encouraging individuals to reconnect with bodily experiences. Similarly, Koch et al. (2019) found that Dance Movement Therapy promotes emotional expression, body awareness, and psychological well-being while reducing symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression. Participants in the present study described comparable experiences, reporting that Animal Flow enabled them to manage difficult emotions, regain emotional balance, and approach stressful situations with greater clarity. These similarities suggest that Animal Flow may share important therapeutic characteristics with other established movement-based practices, despite its distinct movement patterns and training principles.

An important finding emerging from the present study was participants' perception that Animal Flow created a temporary psychological space in which emotional distress became less prominent. Participants frequently described becoming fully engaged in movement, allowing them to temporarily disengage from personal worries and negative emotions. Rather than avoiding emotional experiences, participants appeared to regulate them by redirecting their attention towards purposeful movement and present-moment awareness. This interpretation is consistent with embodied perspectives suggesting that movement can

influence emotional processes through increased body awareness and attentional regulation (Mehling et al., 2011; Payne, 2017).

The findings may also be interpreted within the framework of psychological well-being proposed by Ryff (1989). Ryff conceptualised psychological well-being as encompassing multiple dimensions, including personal growth, environmental mastery, self-acceptance, autonomy, purpose in life, and positive relationships. Although the present study did not directly assess these dimensions, participants' descriptions of improved emotional balance, increased self-awareness, and enhanced coping abilities suggest experiences consistent with several aspects of Ryff's model, particularly environmental mastery and personal growth. Similarly, Ryan and Deci (2001) argued that psychological well-being extends beyond the absence of psychological distress and involves optimal functioning, self-development, and meaningful engagement in life. Participants' accounts of feeling calmer, more emotionally balanced, and better able to cope with everyday challenges reflect this broader understanding of psychological well-being.

A noteworthy aspect of the findings was participants' recognition that the psychological benefits of Animal Flow were largely dependent on continued practice. Rather than describing Animal Flow as a permanent solution to stress or emotional difficulties, participants viewed it as an ongoing self-regulation strategy that required regular engagement to maintain its positive effects. This finding highlights the dynamic nature of psychological well-being and supports previous literature suggesting that the benefits of movement-based interventions are strengthened through consistent participation rather than isolated practice.

Overall, the present findings suggest that Animal Flow may contribute to emotional regulation and psychological well-being by combining physical movement with sustained attention, body awareness, and present-moment engagement. Participants consistently

perceived the practice as helping them manage stress, regulate emotions, improve mood, and restore psychological balance during challenging life situations. By demonstrating these experiences within the context of Animal Flow, the present study extends the existing literature on movement-based interventions and provides qualitative evidence supporting its potential as a complementary approach for promoting emotional well-being within counselling psychology.

Theme 4: Perceived Therapeutic Potential of Animal Flow

The fourth theme, Perceived Therapeutic Potential of Animal Flow, explored participants' perceptions of Animal Flow as a movement-based practice capable of supporting psychological health and overall well-being. This theme comprised the sub-themes of movement as a therapeutic experience, holistic well-being, and grounding and self-awareness. Participants consistently described Animal Flow as extending beyond conventional exercise, perceiving it as a practice that promoted emotional regulation, present-moment awareness, grounding, and a stronger connection with themselves. Rather than viewing Animal Flow solely as a method of improving physical fitness, participants regarded it as an activity that supported both psychological and emotional well-being through mindful engagement in movement.

These findings are consistent with the growing body of literature suggesting that movement-based interventions possess therapeutic value beyond their physical benefits. Payne (2017) proposed that embodied movement interventions facilitate psychological healing by encouraging individuals to reconnect with bodily experiences, thereby enhancing emotional awareness and self-regulation. Similarly, Koch et al. (2019) demonstrated that Dance Movement Therapy contributes to improvements in emotional expression, body awareness, self-esteem, and psychological well-being. Participants in the present study

described comparable experiences, reporting that Animal Flow helped them regulate emotions, become more present, and experience a sense of psychological relief. Although Animal Flow differs from Dance Movement Therapy in its structure and objectives, the present findings suggest that both practices may promote psychological well-being through embodied movement and sustained attentional engagement.

Participants also perceived Animal Flow as promoting holistic well-being, reflecting the interconnected nature of physical, psychological, and emotional health. Rather than separating physical exercise from mental well-being, participants described improvements across multiple domains, including movement quality, emotional balance, self-awareness, confidence, and overall functioning. This holistic perspective is consistent with positive psychology, which conceptualises well-being as a multidimensional construct involving optimal functioning rather than merely the absence of psychological distress (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, 1989). Participants' experiences suggest that Animal Flow may contribute to several dimensions of psychological well-being by integrating movement, awareness, and purposeful engagement within a single practice.

An important finding of the present study was participants' repeated descriptions of grounding and self-awareness. Participants reported that remaining physically connected to the ground while performing quadrupedal movements enhanced their awareness of bodily sensations and encouraged them to remain fully engaged in the present moment. Several participants described feeling calmer, more centred, and more connected to themselves during practice. These experiences are consistent with theories of embodiment, which propose that conscious engagement with bodily movement enhances self-awareness and influences emotional and cognitive functioning (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Csordas, 1990). Similarly, Mehling et al. (2011) suggested that increased body awareness promotes greater emotional awareness and adaptive self-regulation. The present findings extend these

perspectives by demonstrating that participants perceived Animal Flow as facilitating grounding through continuous bodily engagement and mindful attention to movement.

The findings may also be interpreted through the lens of Polyvagal Theory (Porges, 2011). Although the present study did not directly assess physiological markers of autonomic regulation, participants consistently described experiences of calmness, emotional balance, grounding, and enhanced self-awareness while practising Animal Flow. These subjective experiences conceptually align with Polyvagal Theory, which proposes that feelings of safety, bodily regulation, and adaptive engagement contribute to emotional regulation and psychological well-being. Importantly, the present findings should not be interpreted as evidence that Animal Flow directly influences autonomic nervous system functioning. Rather, they suggest that participants' experiences are conceptually consistent with theoretical perspectives emphasising the role of embodied movement in supporting emotional regulation and psychological health.

A noteworthy contribution of the present study is that participants did not describe Animal Flow as replacing traditional psychological interventions. Instead, they viewed it as a complementary practice that could support emotional well-being alongside other therapeutic approaches. Several participants compared Animal Flow with practices such as yoga, Tai Chi, and meditation, highlighting its unique emphasis on coordinated movement, cognitive engagement, and body awareness. These findings suggest that participants perceived Animal Flow as a movement-based practice capable of complementing existing approaches to promoting mindfulness and psychological well-being rather than functioning as a stand-alone therapeutic intervention.

Overall, the findings indicate that certified Animal Flow practitioners perceive the practice as having meaningful therapeutic potential that extends beyond physical

conditioning. Participants consistently associated Animal Flow with emotional regulation, grounding, self-awareness, holistic well-being, and enhanced psychological functioning. While empirical research specifically investigating the therapeutic applications of Animal Flow remains limited, the present study contributes to the emerging literature by providing qualitative evidence that experienced practitioners perceive Animal Flow as a valuable movement-based practice capable of supporting mindfulness and psychological well-being. These findings also suggest that further research is warranted to examine its potential application within counselling psychology and other mental health settings.

Theme 5: Personal Growth Through Practice

The fifth theme identified in the present study was Personal Growth Through Practice, encompassing the sub-themes of learning and skill development, confidence and sense of achievement, and personal growth and transformation. Participants consistently described Animal Flow as a gradual learning process that extended beyond physical skill acquisition. Although the initial stages of learning were characterised by frustration, unfamiliar movement patterns, and physical challenges, sustained practice enabled participants to develop greater confidence, discipline, resilience, and self-efficacy. Over time, participants reported that these changes extended beyond the practice itself, positively influencing their perspectives on health, movement, and personal development.

These findings are consistent with Ryff's (1989) model of psychological well-being, which identifies personal growth as one of the core dimensions of optimal psychological functioning. Ryff proposed that personal growth involves continued development, openness to new experiences, and the realisation of one's potential. Participants in the present study described Animal Flow as a continuous learning journey that required perseverance, commitment, and adaptation. As they gradually mastered increasingly complex movement

patterns, they experienced not only improvements in physical competence but also meaningful psychological growth. These findings suggest that Animal Flow may contribute to psychological well-being by providing opportunities for continuous learning and self-development.

The findings also align with the perspectives of Ryan and Deci (2001), who distinguished psychological well-being from the mere absence of psychological distress. Their eudaimonic approach emphasises personal development, competence, autonomy, and meaningful engagement as essential components of well-being. Participants frequently described feelings of accomplishment after mastering difficult movements or maintaining a regular practice routine. Rather than focusing solely on physical outcomes, they emphasised the satisfaction derived from overcoming challenges, developing new skills, and becoming more confident in their abilities. These experiences reflect important aspects of eudaimonic well-being, where growth occurs through sustained engagement in meaningful activities.

Participants' descriptions of confidence and achievement are also consistent with Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) theory of flow. Flow theory proposes that individuals experience enjoyment and intrinsic motivation when challenges are balanced with their developing skills. Several participants described progressing from initially struggling with Animal Flow movements to eventually performing them with confidence and enjoyment. As their competence increased, participants reported greater satisfaction, motivation, and willingness to continue improving. These findings suggest that the progressive nature of Animal Flow may facilitate experiences of mastery and intrinsic motivation, encouraging continued engagement with the practice.

The findings may further be understood from the perspective of positive psychology. Seligman (2011) proposed that well-being is supported through positive emotions,

engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. Participants' accounts of successfully mastering challenging movements, maintaining consistent practice, and recognising personal progress closely reflect the components of engagement and accomplishment within the PERMA framework. Moreover, participants described changes that extended beyond the practice itself, including greater discipline, healthier attitudes towards movement, and increased confidence in everyday life. These findings suggest that Animal Flow may contribute to broader aspects of flourishing by encouraging individuals to engage in meaningful, goal-directed activities that promote both personal achievement and self-development.

A particularly important finding of the present study was that participants perceived personal growth as a gradual and ongoing process rather than an immediate outcome. They acknowledged that meaningful progress required persistence, consistency, and patience, with psychological benefits becoming more evident through long-term practice. This developmental perspective highlights that the value of Animal Flow lies not only in achieving movement proficiency but also in the process of continually challenging oneself, adapting to difficulties, and developing resilience. Such findings extend the existing literature by illustrating how practitioners perceive sustained movement practice as contributing to long-term personal development alongside physical improvement.

Overall, the findings indicate that Animal Flow may support personal growth by fostering learning, confidence, resilience, and a sense of accomplishment through continued practice. Participants consistently described the practice as influencing not only their physical abilities but also their attitudes, self-confidence, and broader understanding of health and well-being. By highlighting these lived experiences, the present study contributes to the growing literature on movement-based practices and suggests that Animal Flow may

represent a meaningful pathway for promoting personal growth and psychological flourishing within the broader context of counselling psychology.

Theme 6: Challenges and Considerations for Therapeutic Application

The sixth theme identified in the present study was Challenges and Considerations for Therapeutic Application, comprising the sub-themes of physical limitations, learning challenges, and individual readiness and motivation. While participants consistently described numerous physical and psychological benefits associated with Animal Flow, they also recognised that the practice may not be equally accessible or appropriate for everyone. Participants highlighted wrist, knee, and joint-related limitations, the complexity of learning movement sequences, and the importance of motivation and perseverance as factors influencing successful engagement with the practice. These findings demonstrate that, although Animal Flow possesses perceived therapeutic potential, its application requires consideration of individual differences and physical capabilities.

The findings are consistent with previous literature on movement-based interventions, which suggests that the effectiveness of embodied practices is influenced by participants' physical abilities, prior movement experience, and readiness to engage in the practice (Payne, 2017; Koch et al., 2019). Similar considerations have been reported in studies examining yoga, Tai Chi, and Dance Movement Therapy, where movement modifications and gradual progression are recommended to accommodate individuals with varying physical abilities and health conditions. Participants in the present study similarly emphasised that Animal Flow should be adapted according to an individual's physical condition, particularly for those experiencing joint injuries, musculoskeletal conditions, or reduced mobility. These findings suggest that individualised progression and appropriate movement modifications may enhance both safety and accessibility.

An important finding was participants' recognition that Animal Flow involves a substantial learning curve, particularly during the initial stages of practice. Several participants described difficulties understanding movement terminology, sequencing, and coordination before gradually becoming more confident through repeated practice. This observation aligns with theories of motor learning, which suggest that acquiring complex movement skills requires repeated practice, feedback, and progressive refinement over time. Rather than viewing these early difficulties as barriers to success, participants generally perceived them as a natural and expected part of the learning process. This gradual progression further supports the findings presented in Theme 5, where confidence and personal growth emerged through continued engagement with the practice.

Participants also emphasised the importance of individual readiness and intrinsic motivation in determining the extent to which the benefits of Animal Flow are experienced. They suggested that curiosity, willingness to learn, and consistent practice were essential for overcoming initial challenges and developing long-term engagement with the movement system. These findings are consistent with the broader literature on behaviour change and positive psychology, which highlights motivation, persistence, and active participation as important contributors to sustained engagement and personal development (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Seligman, 2011). Rather than attributing successful practice solely to physical ability, participants perceived motivation and commitment as equally important factors influencing progression and therapeutic outcomes.

Another noteworthy finding was participants' acknowledgement that Animal Flow should not be viewed as a universal intervention suitable for all individuals. Although participants strongly believed in its therapeutic potential, they also recognised that certain populations, such as individuals with acute musculoskeletal injuries, severe joint conditions, or significant attentional difficulties, may require modifications or alternative approaches.

This balanced perspective strengthens the credibility of the findings by demonstrating that participants recognised both the benefits and limitations of the practice. Such reflections are consistent with person-centred approaches within counselling psychology, which emphasise adapting interventions according to individual needs, abilities, and circumstances rather than applying a single approach universally.

Overall, the findings indicate that the therapeutic potential of Animal Flow is influenced by both the characteristics of the practice and the characteristics of the individual engaging in it. While participants perceived Animal Flow as promoting mindfulness, emotional regulation, and psychological well-being, they also emphasised that these benefits are more likely to be experienced when individuals are physically prepared, adequately supported during the learning process, and motivated to engage consistently. These findings contribute to the emerging literature by highlighting that the successful therapeutic application of Animal Flow requires consideration of individual differences, gradual progression, and appropriate adaptation rather than assuming universal applicability. Consequently, future applications of Animal Flow within counselling psychology and movement-based interventions should adopt a flexible and individualised approach that prioritises both safety and accessibility.

Chapter V

Summary and Conclusion

The present study was undertaken to explore the therapeutic potential of Animal Flow in relation to mindfulness and psychological well-being. In recent years, increasing attention has been given to movement-based interventions that integrate physical movement with psychological processes to promote overall well-being. Practices such as yoga, Tai Chi, and Dance Movement Therapy have been widely recognised for their benefits in enhancing body awareness, emotional regulation, mindfulness, and psychological health. In comparison, Animal Flow is a relatively recent movement system that combines quadrupedal movement, mobility, strength, coordination, and mindful movement. Despite its growing popularity among fitness and movement professionals, research on Animal Flow has primarily focused on its physical benefits, with limited attention given to its psychological and therapeutic potential. This gap in the literature provided the rationale for the present study.

The present study aimed to explore the therapeutic potential of Animal Flow in relation to mindfulness and psychological well-being from the perspective of certified Animal Flow practitioners. Specifically, the study sought to understand practitioners' lived experiences of engaging in Animal Flow and to examine how they perceived its influence on body awareness, mind-body integration, mindfulness, emotional regulation, psychological well-being, and personal growth. In addition, the study explored participants' perceptions of the therapeutic value of Animal Flow as well as the challenges and considerations associated with its practice. Guided by these objectives, the study addressed the following research question: "How do certified Animal Flow practitioners perceive the therapeutic potential of Animal Flow in relation to mindfulness and psychological well-being?"

To address the research question, the study adopted a qualitative research design within an interpretivist paradigm, allowing for an in-depth exploration of participants' subjective experiences and perceptions. A purposive sampling technique was used to recruit five certified Animal Flow practitioners with varying levels of experience and certification.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in both face-to-face and online formats, depending on participants' availability and convenience. All interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent, transcribed verbatim, and analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis. The analysis involved familiarisation with the data, systematic coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition, and report writing, resulting in the identification of six major themes and eighteen related sub-themes.

The thematic analysis generated six major themes and eighteen related sub-themes that collectively described participants' experiences of practising Animal Flow. The findings indicated that participants perceived Animal Flow as an embodied movement practice that enhanced body awareness, strengthened mind–body integration, and promoted mindfulness through sustained attentional engagement. Participants also reported that the practice supported emotional regulation, reduced stress, improved mood, and contributed to overall psychological well-being. Furthermore, Animal Flow was perceived as possessing therapeutic potential by fostering grounding, self-awareness, holistic well-being, and personal growth through continued practice. At the same time, participants recognised that factors such as physical limitations, the complexity of learning the movements, and individual readiness and motivation influenced engagement with the practice and its perceived benefits. Overall, the findings provide qualitative evidence that Animal Flow is perceived by certified practitioners as a movement-based practice with the potential to support mindfulness and psychological well-being while extending beyond its physical and fitness-related applications.

Conclusion

The present study sought to explore how certified Animal Flow practitioners perceive the therapeutic potential of Animal Flow in relation to mindfulness and psychological well-

being. The findings indicate that participants consistently perceived Animal Flow as more than a physical exercise programme. Rather, they described it as an embodied movement practice that integrates physical movement with mindful awareness, contributing to enhanced body awareness, emotional regulation, and overall psychological well-being. Through sustained engagement with the practice, participants reported becoming increasingly aware of their bodily sensations, movement patterns, and present-moment experiences, supporting a stronger integration between the mind and body.

The findings further suggest that Animal Flow encourages mindfulness by requiring sustained attention, concentration, and active engagement during movement. Participants described experiencing reduced mental distractions, greater present-moment awareness, and flow-like states while practising, enabling them to temporarily disengage from everyday stressors and focus fully on the movement experience. These experiences were perceived as contributing to emotional balance, reduced stress, improved mood, and enhanced psychological well-being.

An important conclusion of the present study is that participants perceived Animal Flow as possessing meaningful therapeutic potential. Rather than viewing it solely as a fitness programme, they described it as a movement-based practice that promoted grounding, self-awareness, holistic well-being, and personal growth. At the same time, participants recognised that the benefits of Animal Flow were influenced by factors such as physical capability, readiness to learn, motivation, and regular practice. These findings suggest that while Animal Flow may offer valuable psychological benefits, its application should be individualised and adapted according to the needs and abilities of practitioners.

The present study also contributes to the emerging literature on Animal Flow by providing qualitative insights into the lived experiences of certified practitioners. Although

previous literature has largely focused on the physical and functional benefits of Animal Flow, this study highlights its perceived psychological and therapeutic dimensions. By exploring practitioners' experiences, the study extends current knowledge regarding the potential role of Animal Flow as an embodied movement practice that may complement approaches aimed at enhancing mindfulness and psychological well-being.

Overall, the findings provide qualitative evidence that certified Animal Flow practitioners perceive the practice as a meaningful movement-based approach that supports embodied awareness, mindfulness, emotional regulation, psychological well-being, and personal growth. While further empirical research is required to establish its effectiveness across different populations and settings, the present study suggests that Animal Flow holds promise as a complementary practice within the broader field of counselling psychology and movement-based interventions.

Implications of the Study

The findings of the present study have several important implications for counselling psychology, movement-based interventions, and future research. Participants consistently perceived Animal Flow as a movement practice that supported body awareness, mindfulness, emotional regulation, and psychological well-being. These findings suggest that Animal Flow may have value as a complementary approach within counselling and mental health settings, particularly for individuals who benefit from embodied or movement-based interventions.

From a counselling psychology perspective, the study highlights the potential importance of integrating movement-based approaches into therapeutic practice. Participants described Animal Flow as facilitating present-moment awareness, emotional regulation, grounding, and self-awareness, all of which are recognised as important components of psychological well-being. While Animal Flow should not be considered a replacement for established

psychological therapies, it may complement existing therapeutic approaches by providing clients with an additional means of developing body awareness, managing stress, and enhancing emotional regulation.

The findings also contribute to the growing body of knowledge on embodied movement practices. Much of the existing literature has focused on interventions such as yoga, Tai Chi, and Dance Movement Therapy, whereas research examining the psychological dimensions of Animal Flow remains limited. By exploring the lived experiences of certified Animal Flow practitioners, the present study provides qualitative evidence that expands current understanding of Animal Flow as an embodied movement practice with perceived psychological and therapeutic benefits. This contributes to the emerging literature and provides a foundation for future empirical investigations.

The study also has practical implications for professionals working in movement, health, and wellness settings. Fitness professionals, movement educators, and wellness practitioners may consider incorporating principles of mindful movement, body awareness, and intentional attention into their practice. The findings suggest that these elements may contribute not only to physical development but also to psychological well-being and personal growth when implemented appropriately and according to individual needs.

Finally, the present study highlights the importance of adopting a holistic approach to well-being that recognises the interconnectedness of physical movement, cognitive processes, emotional regulation, and psychological health. The findings encourage further exploration of embodied movement practices within counselling psychology and support the continued development of movement-based approaches that promote overall well-being through the integration of mind and body.

Limitations of the Study

Like all research, the present study has certain limitations that should be considered while interpreting the findings. First, the study involved a relatively small sample of five certified Animal Flow practitioners. Although the sample size is appropriate for qualitative research and allowed for an in-depth exploration of participants' lived experiences, the findings cannot be generalised to all Animal Flow practitioners or the wider population.

Second, all participants were certified practitioners with prior experience and training in Animal Flow. Their perspectives may differ from those of beginners or individuals who have recently started practising Animal Flow. Consequently, the findings primarily reflect the experiences of experienced practitioners and may not represent the perceptions of individuals at different stages of learning.

Third, the study employed a qualitative research design, relying on participants' self-reported experiences and perceptions. While this approach provided rich and detailed insights into their lived experiences, the findings are inherently subjective and may have been influenced by individual interpretations, personal beliefs, and recall of experiences.

Furthermore, the study explored the perceived therapeutic potential of Animal Flow rather than objectively measuring psychological outcomes. No standardised psychological assessments or physiological measures were used to evaluate changes in mindfulness, emotional regulation, or psychological well-being. Therefore, the findings should be understood as participants' subjective experiences rather than objective evidence of effectiveness.

Finally, the study was conducted within a specific context and at a single point in time. As participants' experiences may evolve with continued practice or differ across cultural and clinical settings, further research involving more diverse populations and longitudinal designs would contribute to a broader understanding of the therapeutic potential of Animal Flow.

Suggestions for Future Research

The present study provides valuable insights into the perceived therapeutic potential of Animal Flow in relation to mindfulness and psychological well-being. However, it also highlights several opportunities for future research. Since the present study employed a qualitative design with a relatively small sample of certified Animal Flow practitioners, future studies may include larger and more diverse samples to enhance the breadth of understanding and allow for greater transferability of findings.

Future research may also explore the experiences of individuals with varying levels of Animal Flow experience, including beginners, intermediate practitioners, and non-certified participants. Comparing these groups may provide a deeper understanding of how the psychological and therapeutic benefits of Animal Flow develop over time and with continued practice.

In addition, quantitative and mixed-methods research designs may be employed to complement qualitative findings. Future studies may use standardised psychological measures to examine the effects of Animal Flow on variables such as mindfulness, emotional regulation, psychological well-being, stress, anxiety, depression, and quality of life.

Longitudinal studies would also be valuable in examining whether the perceived psychological benefits of Animal Flow are maintained over extended periods of regular practice.

Future research may further investigate the therapeutic application of Animal Flow among clinical populations, including individuals experiencing anxiety disorders, depression, stress-related conditions, or trauma. Examining its effectiveness within therapeutic and counselling settings may provide greater insight into its potential role as a complementary intervention in mental health care.

Finally, future studies may explore the physiological mechanisms underlying Animal Flow by incorporating objective measures such as heart rate variability, autonomic nervous system activity, or other psychophysiological indicators. Such research would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between embodied movement, mindfulness, emotional regulation, and psychological well-being.

Overall, continued research is needed to strengthen the evidence base for Animal Flow and to further examine its potential as an embodied movement practice that may complement existing approaches to promoting psychological well-being and mental health.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Informed Consent Form

Title of the Study

The therapeutic potential of animal flow in mindfulness and psychological wellbeing

Research Details

Name of the Reasearcher:

Course / Program:

Institution:

Supervisor:

Purpose of the Study

You are invited to participate in a research study that aims to explore the perceived therapeutic potential of Animal Flow in relation to mindfulness and psychological well-being. The study seeks to understand the lived experiences and perceptions of certified Animal Flow practitioners regarding the influence of Animal Flow on mindfulness, body awareness, emotional regulation, and psychological well-being.

Nature of Participation

- Participation involves taking part in a semi-structured interview.
- The interview includes questions related to your experiences of practising Animal Flow.
- The interview is expected to last approximately 30–45 minutes.

Audio Recording

- With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded to ensure accurate data collection.
- The recordings will be used solely for academic research purposes.
- You may decline audio recording or withdraw your consent at any stage without any negative consequences.

Voluntary Participation and Right to Withdraw

- Participation in this study is entirely voluntary.
- You may decline to answer any question you do not wish to answer.
- You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

- All information shared during the interview will be treated as strictly confidential.
- No personally identifying information will appear in the dissertation or any academic publication arising from this study.
- Pseudonyms or participant codes (e.g., P1, P2) will be used to maintain anonymity.
- The collected data will be securely stored and used solely for academic research purposes.

Risks and Benefits

- No significant risks are anticipated from participating in this study.
- Although there may be no direct personal benefit, your participation will contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between Animal Flow, mindfulness, and psychological well-being.

Consent Statement

Please read the following statements carefully before signing.

I confirm that:

- I have read and understood the information provided above. ☐
- I understand the purpose and procedures of the study. ☐
- I understand that my participation is voluntary. ☐
- I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. ☐
- I consent to the interview being audio-recorded. ☐
- I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. ☐

Participant Details

Participant Code: _____

Age: _____

Years of Animal Flow Practice: _____

Certification Level: _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's Declaration

I confirm that the nature and purpose of the study have been explained to the participant and that all questions raised by the participant have been answered satisfactorily.

Researcher: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B - Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

Title of the Study

The therapeutic potential of animal flow in mindfulness and psychological wellbeing

Section A: Practice Background

1. Describe your journey with Animal Flow, including how you began and the duration of your practice.

Section B: Awareness and Attentional Engagement During Practice

2. Describe your experience of awareness and attention while practising Animal Flow.

3. What types of thoughts, focus, or mental states arise during Animal Flow movements?

Possible Probes:

- Thinking about a recent Animal Flow practice session, how would you describe what was happening in your mind during the movements?
- Describe the usual context in which you practise Animal Flow (e.g., physical surroundings, alone or with others). How does this context influence your experience of the practice?

Section C: Body Awareness and Mind–Body Integration

4. Describe your experience of bodily sensations, breathing, and movement during Animal Flow practice.

5. How do you experience the relationship between your mind and body while engaging in Animal Flow?

Possible Probes:

- How do your thoughts, emotions, and physical movements interact during practice?
- How aware are you of your breathing and bodily sensations while performing the movements?

Section D: Emotional Experience and Psychological Well-being

6. What has been your experience of emotional states or stress levels in relation to Animal Flow practice?

7. Describe any situations in which Animal Flow has influenced your emotional or psychological experiences.

Possible Probes:

- Can you describe a specific situation where Animal Flow affected your emotional state?
- Have you noticed any changes in your mood, stress levels, or emotional regulation after practising Animal Flow?

Section E: Meaning and Therapeutic Interpretation

8. How do you personally understand or interpret the idea of Animal Flow having therapeutic potential?

Possible Probes:

- Based on your experience, how do you view Animal Flow in relation to mental or emotional well-being?
- What role do you think Animal Flow may play in supporting psychological well-being?

9. What role, if any, does Animal Flow play in your psychological well-being in everyday life beyond physical activity?

Possible Probes:

What factors influence your continued engagement with Animal Flow practice?

Section F: Changes Over Time

10. Describe any changes or continuities in your mental or emotional experiences from when you first began practising Animal Flow to the present.

Possible Probes:

You may refer to an example from your personal life or practice experience.

Section G: Challenges and Considerations

11. What challenges, limitations, or difficulties have been part of your experience with Animal Flow practice?

12. In what situations, or for whom, do you think Animal Flow may be less applicable as a therapeutic approach?

Section H: Closing Question

13. Is there anything else about your experience with Animal Flow that you consider important to share?