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COMPARISON OF PERCEIVED STRESS IN BUDDHIST MONKS AND NON MEDITATOR LAYMEN

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ABSTRACT

Stress is the most common problem and a hindrance in the way to success. The present article is on assessment and comparison of the perceived level of stress in Buddhist monks who are regular meditators and non meditators laymen. Till date very few researches have been done on the relationship of meditation with the perceived stress. Therefore this topic has been chosen by the author to establish a concrete relationship between stress and mediation. The research was conducted on 80 subjects that included 40 Buddhist monks of Karmapa Gyoto monastery and 40 laymen from the same place Dharamshala but from different strata of the society and with a minimum education qualification of junior high school. The two groups were tested by using perceived stress scale- a ten item scale developed by Sheldon Cohen published in the year 1983. The research suggested that the perceived level of stress in monks is much lesser in comparison to layperson. People into any kind of spiritual activity like music, dancing, religious etc. have lower level of perceived stress. It was noted that Buddhist monks have low level of perceived stress in day to day life in comparison to laymen. We have also discussed research methodology based on the stress level. We can make suggestions at the end for the layperson to follow meditation for reducing the stress in day to day life.

KEYWORDS- research methodology, Stress level-low & high, Spirituality, t-test, .

INTRODUCTION

The word Spirituality is derived from the Latin spiritualitas, an abstract word related to spiritus. Living according to the knowledge is the meaning of being spiritual. To be spiritual means to know and to live according to the knowledge that positive people have presented to us in grace as the principle of personal, interpersonal, social and even cosmic transformation. Spirituality is not related to a particular religion rather it is in every religion. Being religious does not mean that the person is spiritual too. There are so many religions in the world but spirituality can exist within a non spiritual person as well. So a basic definition of spirituality is the quality of one's sensitivity to the things of the spirit or the life force. And what are these things of the spirit? These are things that

cannot be directly perceived by our senses but whose effects can be deduced or inferred by our observations, like love, justice, peace, etc. Basic to this understanding of spirituality is that, we consider human body is an amalgamation of physical body and something immaterial. There is always more to what we can perceive with our senses and know with our reasons. So the basic meaning of spirituality is that it is a term which encompasses everything of the universe that we cannot see directly with our eyes, directly perceived by the other senses and known by our mere reasons. That is spirituality in its basic meaning. "As per Bhagavad Gita meaning of spirituality means diving deep into inner self and realizing our true identity our soul as man, the spirit within". It is only through path of spirituality

human beings gained enlightenment (kaivalya jnana) and finally salvation (moksha).

Meditation is the state of mind, and spirituality is the state of being. These two are strongly connected with each other. Meditation helps in focusing of consciousness leading to increment in spirituality. Meditation is regarded very high in every religion but it is the heart of Buddhism. They believe in 24 hrs meditation. They consider that if one does everything with either awareness (vipasana) or focus (chanting) then he can be of great help to our own spirituality and can help himself by training his mind in such a manner that even in stressful situations the level of stress remains low. During meditation, we focus our attention and eliminate the stream of jumbled thoughts that may be crowding our mind and causing stress. This process results in enhanced physical and emotional well-being. By many it is considered a type of mind body medicine which helps in producing a tranquil state of mind. There are several ways of meditation so we can say it is an umbrella term for the relaxed state of being that leads to reduction in stress level in day to day life.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. The research "The Effects of Mindfulness Meditation Training on Multitasking in High-Stress Information Environment" by David M. Levy, Jacob O. Wobbrock studied the multitasking nature of three groups with 12-15 human resource personals. One group was underwent mindfulness based meditation, second underwent same training for 8 weeks and with resting period and last group underwent muscle relaxation training. It was seen that the group with mindfulness based meditation stayed in the task longer.
2. Siew E Chua, MRCPsych1, Vinci Cheung, "Stress and Psychological Impact on SARS Patients during the Outbreak", Can J Psychiatry, Vol 49, No 6, June 2004. At the peak of outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome 79 patients and 145 control group were assessed by pss. and a range of psychological response was noted. This study revealed that the affected group had more mood disorders in comparison to control group. This study helped a lot in guiding the methodology of the present research.
3. The effects of mindfulness-based stress reduction on sleep disturbance: a systematic review, Winbush NY1, Gross CR, Kreitzer MJ. **In this study** out of 38 articles 4 articles showed that Mindfulness is effective in correcting sleep disorder.
4. Mindfulness meditation may ease anxiety, mental stress, Julie Corliss, 2014, Harvard health publication. This article has studied

that mindfulness is quite useful in subsiding the psychological symptoms.

5. Impact of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) on sleep, mood, stress and fatigue symptoms in cancer outpatients. Carlson, L. & Garland, S. (2005). 63 cancer patients (heterogenous crowd), 8 weeks of MBSR and participants reported that their sleep quality has improved.

METHODOLOGY

Objective:-

To study and compare the perceived stress in Buddhist monks who are regular meditators with non meditator laymen.

Hypothesis:-

There is significant difference between the level of perceived stress among Buddhist monks and non meditator laymen.

Sample:-

The data was collected from the Buddhist monks of Gyoto monastery Yol, Kangra, Himanchal Pradesh. Locals of Dharamshala (non meditator) were also assessed for the same.

The subjects were selected on the basis of below mentioned criteria.

Inclusion Criteria:-

1. Age group between the 18-60 years.
2. More than five years of mediation has been taken into account.
3. For Non meditators- locals were assessed including the nursing officers working in Military hospital Yol cantt.

Exclusion Criteria:-

1. Below five years of meditation period is not considered for group one.

Sample size: 80 subjects (40 monks and 40 layperson)

Demographic area: Dharamshala, Himanchal Pradesh

Tool Used: Perceived stress scale

Reliability of PSS 10-item scale:-

Sheldon Cohen and his colleagues in the 1980s created the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) as a quick and simple instrument to measure how stressful the subject perceives their life in past one month. It is designed to use among the population with at least junior high school education. Reliability of pss is given below is 0.72.

Measure:-

Stress in both the groups was measured by using perceived stress scale. The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) is the most widely used psychological instrument for measuring the perception of stress. It is a measure of the degree to which situations in one’s life are appraised as stressful. Items were designed to tap how unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overloaded respondents find their lives. The pss consists of 10 items out of which 4 items are importance.

Procedure:-

The present study was conducted on 80 subjects by administering perceived stress scale. Purposely 40 laymen and 40 Buddhist monks of Dharamshala, Himanchal Pradesh was taken for the study to compare the level of stress. The Buddhist monks with good knowledge of English were contacted considering the different age groups and

period of meditation (5-30). They were explained and requested to answer the PSS items truthfully and assured that the response will be kept confidential. The data later on was tabulated and t test was done to analyze the difference between two groups. The second group included few music lovers, few nursing officers from Yol cantt Dharamshala, house wives etc. So the sample was stratified random sample. Both the genders were included and 18-60 years of age was considered for the assessment of stress.

DATA ANALYSIS

Group comparison on nominal variables was analyzed by t test. The mean for group of Buddhist monks was 3.175 ± 0.389 whereas for non meditators 10.825 ± 1.081 . The difference of means $d = -7.65$, $SE = 0.568$. Hence $p < 0.001$, reveals significant difference among the two groups.

Figure 1. Stress level of those monks who do meditation

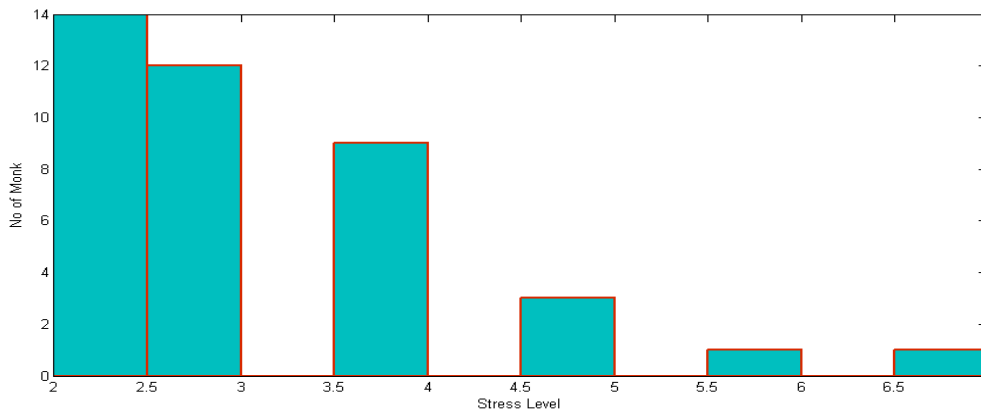
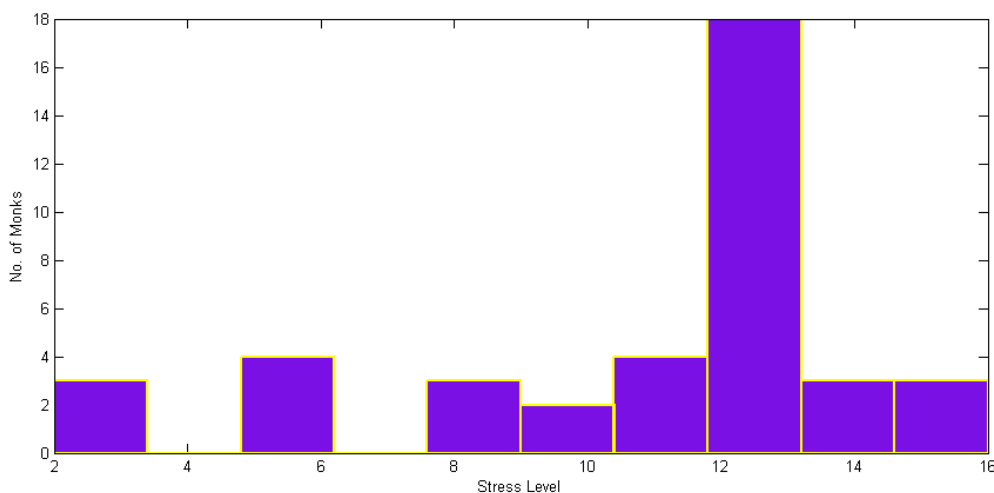


Figure 2. Stress level of Non-meditators



RESULT

A total of 80 PSS scale were used in the test. Our final sample comprised of 40 laymen non meditators and 40 Buddhist monks who meditate. All of them were Indian and Tibetans residing in

India. The two groups were equally balanced for age, sex, educational level. Stress Levels in Buddhist monks is mostly low and in very few it is medium but in laymen stress level is high and in very few it is medium. In the monks with meditation period of more than 10 years pss score

is between 3-4 whereas in monks with a meditation period of less than 10 years have scored 6-8 on PSS. In laymen who are religious and follow one or the other type of meditation technique have score between 06- 08. SE = 0.568.

Hence there is a significance difference between the PSS results of two groups. (Perceived Stress Scale [PSS] score is medium when 06- 8, high when 9-16 and low when score 0-5. Both groups reported different stress level with group 2 i.e. layperson being significantly more affected (perceived Stress Scale = 9-16) while for group 1 i.e. monks PSS = 0-5.

DISCUSSION

Meditation has great effect on the stress level and stress coping on individuals irrespective of the threshold of stress. Two groups of 40 each were studied one who was daily meditators and others who didnot believe in meditation. Meditation helps in lowering down the level of stress. The ten item scale of perceived stress has explained easily that the meditators group appraise the situation in positive manner as the hardness factor increases and individual is able to have an internal locus of control because of which they are able to control the stressful situation in an efficient manner.

In this research author is able to establish a concrete relation between meditation and stress. Those who are indulged in meditation, have a better control over their stressful situations. They do not perceive the situation stressful many a time, so their level of stress remained low. On the other hand the group of non meditator perceives even a small tough condition very stressful. It is the perception that conditions mind and helps in mind training. Monks with more years of mediation practice have lower level of stress than the monks with less years of mediation practice. Non meditators involved in activities like music, dancing, performing rituals also revealed less level of perceived stress

Once mind is trained one can tackle even the difficult situation as easy. So many stress relieving program and schedules are followed all over the world but still the best and easiest technique is meditation. Meditation helps in mind conditioning and taming mind leads to positive appraisal of a situation. Hence one can be stress free in stressful situation.

LIMITATION

1. Low sample size
2. Different meditative techniques could be studied.
3. There can be a difference of different types of occupation.
4. Ethnic and religious background can also have an impact on the level of stress.

CONCLUSION

Meditation acts as a buffer at times, when the individual is in a stressful situation. Meditation is known to help in the release of feel good factors i.e endorphins, produces hypo metabolic state and increases the positive attitude towards the situation. As a result of which the individual is able to have a better control on the level of stress in taxed situation also. Since in the present scenario not even a single moment is without stress, so one needs to detoxify body and mind.

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