

A Comparative Study on the Emotional Stability of Meditation Practitioners and Non-Practitioners

Madhava Chandran K^{1*}, Vijayaraghavan N² and Radhakrishnan NP³

¹Social Researcher, Kozhikode, Kerala, India

²Founder Director, Satyananda Yoga Research Centre, (SYRC), Kozhikode

³Managing Trustee, SYRC, Kozhikode

*Corresponding author: Dr. Madhava Chandran K, Anugrah, Ayyappa Nagar, Chevayur, Kozhikode, Kerala, India. Phone: + 919446397971. chandmadhava@gmail.com

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Abstract

Objective: To analyse the effect of meditation on emotional stability of the practitioners, when compared to people who do not practice meditation.

Methodology: The study was carried out among 50 breath awareness based meditation practitioners (experimental group) of Satyananda Yoga Research Centre, Kozhikode, Kerala, India and 50 non-meditators from Kozhikode (control group) using a questionnaire containing the measure of emotional stability, which includes five negative emotional parameters and three positive parameters experienced during the past one month. The data was analysed as score, percentage of respondents reporting and through statistical test.

Results: The findings of the study indicate the effect of meditation practice in helping the respondents to experience positive emotions more and reduce the experience of negative emotions, when compared to people who do not practice meditation. This is also established from the comparatively higher and statistically significant total emotional stability score of the meditators, when compared to the score of non-meditators. The scores for three positive emotional parameters and five negative parameters under the study are also found to be comparatively more for meditators than non-meditators, with statistically significant difference in the scores.

Conclusions: People who practice meditation are able to maintain more emotional stability in their life through better experience of positive emotions and less experience of negative emotions, when compared to those who are not practicing meditation.

Keywords: Meditation, Practitioners, Non-Practitioners, Emotional Stability

Introduction

Emotional stability is the capacity to maintain one's emotional balance under stressful circumstances. It is the opposite of emotional instability and neuroticism. Emotionally stable persons tolerate minor stresses and strains of everyday life without becoming emotionally upset, anxious, nervous, tense or angry.

A study found that the emotion level of the practitioners is stabilised through meditation [1]. Regular concentrative meditation improved emotional stability [2]. Practice of yoga, which also involves meditation as one component has been reported to contribute to regulation of emotions, with its influence on both cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression items related

to emotion regulation [3]. Yoga helps to increase the regulation of emotions [4].

Methodology

This study was carried out among 50 breath awareness-based meditation practitioners (experimental group) of Satyananda Yoga Research Centre, Kozhikode, Kerala, India and 50 non-meditators from Kozhikode (control group) using a questionnaire containing the measure of emotional stability which includes five negative emotional parameters and three positive parameters experienced during the past one month [5]. The data was analysed as score, percentage of respondents reporting and through statistical test.

Results

Table 1 shows the frequency of experiencing various emotional parameters by the meditators.

Table 1: Emotional parameters experienced by the meditators

| Emotional parameter* | Respondents (%) reporting | | | | Total (%) |
|---|---------------------------|------------------|--------|------------|-----------|
| | Always | Most of the time | Rarely | Not at all | |
| I felt depressed | Nil | 33 | 45 | 22 | 100 |
| I was tense | Nil | 15 | 67 | 18 | 100 |
| I worried a lot | Nil | 35 | 39 | 26 | 100 |
| I felt moody | Nil | 19 | 67 | 14 | 100 |
| I got nervous easily | Nil | 10 | 45 | 45 | 100 |
| I was able to relax and handle stress well | 15 | 85 | Nil | Nil | 100 |
| I was emotionally stable without getting easily upset | 19 | 58 | 23 | Nil | 100 |
| I remained calm in tense situations | 23 | 52 | 25 | Nil | 100 |

*Experienced during the past one month

Table 2 shows the frequency of experiencing various emotional parameters by the non-meditators.

Table 2: Emotional parameters experienced by the non-meditators

| Emotional parameter* | Respondents (%) reporting | | | | Total (%) |
|---|---------------------------|------------------|--------|------------|-----------|
| | Always | Most of the time | Rarely | Not at all | |
| I felt depressed | 20 | 50 | 30 | Nil | 100 |
| I was tense | 10 | 42 | 46 | 2 | 100 |
| I worried a lot | 10 | 60 | 30 | Nil | 100 |
| I felt moody | Nil | 53 | 45 | 2 | 100 |
| I got nervous easily | 20 | 60 | 20 | Nil | 100 |
| I was able to relax and handle stress well | 8 | 24 | 66 | 2 | 100 |
| I was emotionally stable without getting easily upset | Nil | 44 | 46 | 10 | 100 |
| I remained calm in tense situations | 8 | 38 | 46 | 8 | 100 |

*Experienced during the past one month

Statistical significance of the difference in total emotional stability score of meditators and non-meditators is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Total emotional stability score of meditators and non-meditators

| Details | Meditators | Non-meditators |
|--------------------------------------|------------|----------------|
| Mean total emotional stability score | 27.5 | 18.6 |

t stat = 25.4; Significant $p < 0.01$

Table 4 shows the statistical significance of the difference in emotional parameter scores of meditators and non-meditators.

Table 4: Emotional parameter scores of meditators and non-meditators

| Emotional parameter | Mean score | | t stat and statistical significance |
|---|------------|----------------|-------------------------------------|
| | Meditators | Non-meditators | |
| I felt depressed | 3.6 | 2.1 | - 13.0 $p < 0.01$ |
| I was tense | 3.3 | 2.6 | 5.3 $p < 0.01$ |
| I worried a lot | 3.5 | 2.4 | 8.3 $p < 0.01$ |
| I felt moody | 3.7 | 2.1 | 16.2 $p < 0.01$ |
| I got nervous easily | 3.4 | 2.3 | 7.9 $p < 0.01$ |
| I was able to relax and handle stress well | 3.2 | 2.4 | 5.2 $p < 0.01$ |
| I was emotionally stable without getting easily upset | 3.1 | 2.4 | 4.1 $p < 0.01$ |
| I remained calm in tense situations | 3.7 | 2.0 | 16.6 $p < 0.01$ |

Discussion

The next two paragraphs discuss the five negative emotional parameters considered under the study, which were experienced by the meditators and non-meditators during the past one month, while the third paragraph discusses the experience of three positive emotional parameters by them during this period

It can be made out from Table 1 that 45 % of meditators have reported that they felt depressed rarely only, while 22 % have not felt depressed at all during the past one month period (total 67 % meditators giving these two favourable responses). However, Table 2 shows that in the case of non-meditators, 20 % report feeling depressed always, while 50 % felt depressed most of the time (total 70 % non-meditators giving these two unfavourable responses). It can be made out from Table 1 that 67 % meditators were tense rarely only and 18 % were not at all tense (total 85 % meditators giving these two favourable responses), when compared to 10 % non-meditators feeling tense always and 42 % feeling tense most of the time, totaling to more than 50 % of non-meditators giving these two unfavourable responses (Table 2).

Table 1 shows that 39 % meditators report getting worried a lot rarely only, while 26 % were not at all worried during the past one month (total 65 % meditators giving these two favourable responses), compared to 10 % and 60 % of non-meditators getting worried a lot always and most of the time respectively (Table 2). Table 1 reveals that in the case of the parameter, namely, feeling moody, while 67 % of meditators have felt this negative emotion only rarely, 14 % report not at all experiencing it (total 81 % meditators giving these two favourable responses). However, it can be made out from Table 2 that 53 % of non-meditators have felt moody most of the time. It can be inferred from Table 1 that a total of 90 % meditators report rarely and not at all feeling nervous easily (45 % each giving these two favourable responses). But, in the case of non-meditators (Table 2), 20 % have always felt nervous easily, while 60 % of them felt it most of the time, totaling to 80 % of non-meditators feeling easily nervous always and most of the time.

With respect to the positive emotional parameter, namely, able to relax and handle stress well, Table 1 shows that while 15 % of meditators experienced this emotion always, 85 % experienced it most of the time, totaling to 100 % of meditators. However, Table 2 shows that 66 % of non-meditators have been able to feel relaxed and handle stress only rarely during the past one month. It can be made out from Table 1 that a total of 77 % meditators have felt emotionally stable without getting easily upset always and most of the time. However, in the case of the non-meditators, a total of 56 % people have given the responses, namely, rarely and not at all feeling emotionally stable without getting easily upset (Table 2). 23 % of meditators have always remained calm in tense situations, while 52 % have remained calm most of the time under tense situations (Table 1). But, this is not the manner in which the non-meditators have experienced this positive emotion. 46 % of them have been able to feel calm under tense situations rarely only, while 8 % of them have not at all been able to have this feeling during the past one month period (Table 2).

The above findings indicate the effect of meditation practice in helping the respondents to experience the positive emotions more and reduce the experience of negative emotions, when compared

to people who do not practice meditation. This is further established from the data presented in Table 3, which shows a higher and statistically significant total emotional stability score for meditators (27.5), when compared to the score of non-meditators (18.6). It can be made out from Table 4 that the mean score for all the three positive emotional parameters and five negative parameters is also comparatively more for meditators than non-meditators, with statistically significant difference in the scores.

In short, the results of this study reveal that meditation practitioners are able to maintain more emotional stability in their life through better experience of positive emotions and less experience of negative emotions, when compared to those who are not practicing meditation.

Conclusion

The study has revealed that with respect to the five negative emotional parameters, higher proportion of meditation practitioners have reported experiencing them rarely and not at all during the past one month. However, more number of non-meditators have experienced them all the time and most of the time. Regarding the three positive emotional parameters, while a higher proportion of meditators report experiencing them always and most of the time, majority of the non-meditators have rarely experienced and not at all experienced them during the past one month. Statistically significant difference is observed between the comparatively higher emotional stability score of the meditators and the lower score of the non-meditators, indicating better emotional stability achieved through the practice of meditation. Similarly, statistically significant difference exists between the comparatively higher scores for all the emotional parameters in the case of meditators and the lower scores of non-meditators, establishing the effect of meditation in improving positive emotions and reducing negative emotions of the practitioners.

Conflict of Interest

The authors of this article declare that there is no conflict of interest in this article now or in the future.

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