

Mindfulness, Resilience and Optimism among practitioners and non-practitioners of Meditation

Niyati Magan^{1*}

ABSTRACT

Challenges in life can disrupt the basic state of balance of an individual. Resilience and optimism are essential traits that allow a person to get through difficult times and move towards success. Resilience is the capacity to adapt to life altering and stressful situations. Optimism refers to the capacity of maintaining positive attitude and hope for future. Mindfulness is known to decrease stress and improve resilience and optimism. Mindfulness is about paying attention in the present moment and observing oneself in a non-reactive and non-judgemental manner. Meditation aims for using certain strategies for mental relaxation and paying attention in the present moment and experience, thus creating a mindful state. The present research aims to study the relationship between mindfulness, resilience and optimism and the difference between the three among regular meditation practitioners and non-practitioners. The sample (N=81) includes practitioners (N=40) and non-practitioners (N=41) of meditation from age 23 to 45. Meditation practitioners practised some sort of meditation at least 3 to 4 times a week for 20 to 30 minutes at a time while the non-practitioners had no formal meditation practice as a routine. It was seen that there is a positive correlation between mindfulness, resilience and optimism and regular meditation practitioners are significantly higher on mindfulness, resilience and optimism than non-practitioners. Meditation allows an individual to be mindful of the nature of their thought and emotion that further aids in self-regulation and self-control. It promotes greater self-awareness that can prevent negative biases in our judgement.

Keywords: *Mindfulness, Meditation, Resilience, Optimism*

“When we can be centred in ourselves even for brief periods of time in the face of pull of the outer world, not having to look elsewhere for something to fill us up or make us happy, we can be at home wherever we find ourselves, at peace with things as they are, moment to moment.”

– Jon Kabat Zinn

The life of a human being is generally full of ups and downs. The modern lifestyle in particular is extremely stressful. The mind of the modern man is generally plagued with worries or anxiety for the future. Psychological resources like resilience and

¹MA Clinical Psychology, Amity Institute of Psychology and Allied Sciences, Noida, India

*Responding Author

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optimism are extremely important these days to maintain functioning and keep moving ahead in life in the face of adversity. Resilience, in general terms, means the ability to bounce back from adversity. Optimism refers to maintaining a hopeful approach towards the future. Mindfulness refers to maintaining one's awareness in the present and live moment to moment. This approach allows an individual to see life as it is. It is said that humans suffer either their memory or their imagination. Mindfulness prevents an individual from ruminating over their past or worrying about the future.

Mindfulness is known to reduce stress levels and prevent burnout. Various mindfulness-based techniques are used in the treatment of psychopathologies and to ensure the overall well-being of an individual (Chiesa & Malinowski, 2011). Mindfulness allows individuals to successfully go through periods of change, thus making them more resilient (Keye & Pidgeon, 2013). Mindfulness frees consciousness from tendencies towards paying attention to negative information (Baumeister et al., 2001) thus increasing optimism in an individual.

Meditation refers to techniques of conscious attention maintenance in a non-analytical manner (Shapiro, 2009). It allows for a mindful state in which an individual acknowledges external or internal stimulus without getting caught in it. Such monitoring enhances awareness and improves self-control (Simkin & Black, 2014).

Mindfulness

Bishop & Lau et al., (2004) defined mindfulness as an amalgamation of two components: "The first component involves self-regulation of attention so that it is maintained on immediate experience. The second component involves adopting a specific orientation towards one's experience within the here and now, an orientation that's characterized by curiosity, openness and acceptance."

Mindfulness induction has shown a reduction in suicidal ideation by improving the zest for life (Collins et al., 2017). Mindfulness aids in regulation of thought that prevents cognitive distortion (Su & Shum, 2019) which further helps in maintaining an optimistic outlook and prevents excessive stress. Meditation leads to higher trait mindfulness and lesser music performance anxiety among collegiate musicians (Diaz, 2018).

Resilience

Resilience is defined as "the ability of the system to maintain its identity in the face of internal change and external shocks and disturbances." (Cummings et al., 2015) It refers to maintaining functioning during adversity, returning to previous levels after trauma and positive adaptation in the post-trauma phase. (Cutuli & Masten, 2009)

Emotionally intelligent people tend to be more optimistic and resilient to stress, thus showing greater psychological well-being (Akbari & Khormaiee, 2015). Optimism, openness to experience, control coping and low neuroticism make an individual resilient in the face of crisis (Riulli et al., 2002). It has been seen that loving-kindness meditation leads to better resilience and compassion among health care workers due to increased positive affect and reduced stress (Seppala et al., 2014)

Optimism

Optimism is a stable personality trait characterised by hopefulness or positive expectancy of future events.

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Optimistic people are low on neurotic tendencies. This saves them from using maladaptive coping strategies in the face of stress (Bastianello et al., 2014). Mindfulness generates positive emotions and prevents emotional malfunctioning (McLaughlin et al., 2019). Regular meditation practise leads to better perceived thought control and greater optimism (Gootjes & Rassin, 2014).

Purpose

The purpose of the research is to study the relationship between resilience, optimism and mindfulness and how they vary among regular meditation practitioners and non-practitioners.

Hypothesis

1. There is significant positive correlation between mindfulness, optimism and resilience.
2. There will be significant difference in mindfulness, resilience and optimism between regular practitioners of meditation and non-practitioners of meditation.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample consisted of 81 participants (40 practitioners and 41 non-practitioners) from age 23 to 45 from Hyderabad.

Measures

1. **15-item Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire:** - 15-item Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ-15) by Baer et al. (2008) was used to measure mindfulness. It has five sub-scales i.e. observation, description, awareness of actions, non-judgemental inner experience and non-reactivity. It is a five point likert scale ranging from never or rarely true to very often or always true.
2. **Brief Resilience Scale:** - Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) by Smith and colleagues (2008) was used to measure resilience. It is a six item scale. The scale ranges from strongly disagree to strongly agree.
3. **Life Orientation Test- Revised:** - Life orientation Test –Revised (LOT-R) by Scheier & Carver (1994) was used for measuring optimism. It involves a five point likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. It has 10 items; 3 items measure optimism, 3 items measure pessimism and 4 items serve as fillers.

Procedure

The participants were informed about the purpose of research and the questionnaires were filled via google forms. The participants were assured of confidentiality to elicit their honest responses without any fear or inhibitions. Standardized psychological tests were administered to the participants.

RESULTS

Mean, standard deviation, pearson product moment correlation and Mann Whitney U were calculated for the sample (N=81).

Table 1: - Difference between regular meditation practitioners and non-practitioners

	Meditate	Mean Rank	Mann Whitney U
Mobs (Observation)	Meditators	52.01	379.50
	Non-Meditators	30.26	

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	Meditate	Mean Rank	Mann Whitney U
Mdes (Description)	Meditators	53.93	303.00
	Non-Meditators	28.39	
Mact (Acting with Awareness)	Meditators	46.90	584.00
	Non-Meditators	35.24	
Mjud (Non- Judgement)	Meditators	51.55	398.00
	Non-Meditators	30.71	
Mnonr (Non-Reactivity)	Meditators	51.44	402.50
	Non-Meditators	30.82	
Mindful (Mindfulness)	Meditators	57.44	162.50
	Non-Meditators	24.96	
Res Total (Resilience)	Meditators	53.70	312.00
	Non-Meditators	28.61	
Optimism	Meditators	55.34	246.50
	Non-Meditators	27.01	

Table 2: - Correlational Table

	Mindful	Resilience	Optimism
Mindful	1	0.711**	0.698**
Resilience	0.711**	1	0.672**

**p<0.01

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

In the present study we studied the correlational relationship between mindfulness, resilience and optimism as well as see how the three variables differ between regular meditation practitioners and non-practitioners. There is significant positive correlation between mindfulness and resilience ($r=0.711$, $p<.01$) and optimism and mindfulness ($r=0.698$, $p<.01$) indicating that greater mindfulness would lead to better resilience and optimism. There is also a significant positive relationship between resilience and optimism ($r=0.672$, $p<.01$), indicating that optimistic people are more resilient and vice versa. The first hypothesis thus stands true. People who are mindful have less negative biases in information processing which impacts attitude formation in a positive manner (Kiken & Shook, 2011). This would lead to positive perspective formation and maintaining optimism. Optimism is further known to improve work engagement and well-being (Malinowski et al., 2015).

It has been seen that regular meditation practitioners are significantly higher on mindfulness and all the sub-scales of mindfulness i.e., mindful observation, description, acting with awareness, non-judgement and non-reactivity. They are also higher on resilience and optimism in comparison to non-practitioners of meditation. The second hypothesis also stands true. Focused attention meditation allows an individual to observe his/her cognition from a detached perspective which fosters greater self-awareness and promotes non-reactivity (Simkin & Black, 2014). Mindfulness helps in building resilience to suicide by improving zest for life (Collins et al., 2017). Regular meditation practise therefore leads to greater overall mindfulness which further aids in building resilience and optimism. Consistent practise of maintaining state mindfulness during meditation leads to better self-regulation due to better cognitive appraisal (Garland et al., 2015).

CONCLUSION

Every individual has faced adverse circumstances in life. Challenging times are truly taxing to our psychological resources like hope, resilience, self-efficacy, etc. However, it is extremely essential for an individual to remain centralised and regulate oneself emotionally

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in order to deal with such circumstances. Resilience and optimism become extremely essential in such times to keep going. A regular meditation practice can help an individual to view his/her current reality in an objective and non-reactive manner. It would further instil awareness about the nature of one's thoughts and emotions which would lead to better self-regulation, thus leading to building resilience. Increased ability to objectively view thoughts and emotions would further prevent negative biases in viewing the situation at hand which leads to a general positive attitude and positive affect. Better self-regulation and self-awareness are also indicative of a better emotional intelligence. Long term meditation practice leads to neurobiological changes in the brain which helps in maintaining the benefits of meditation (Simkin & Black, 2014).

The study was conducted to see the relationship between resilience, optimism and mindfulness and the difference between the three among meditation practitioners and non-practitioners. The study has important implications in denoting how a regular meditation practice can lead to better resilience and optimism which are vital for effective stress management and burnout prevention. This effect is seen through various pathways thus indicating that a regular meditation practice leads to better mindfulness which is further beneficial to an individual in various areas. We can thus say that meditation is an effective tool for maintaining psychological resources of an individual.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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