

Negative Expectations: A Comparative Study Before and After the Practice of Meditation

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ABSTRACT

Negative expectations arise when unfavourable outcomes are anticipated in life. Over a period of time, this can cause unnecessary negativity, anxiety, discouragement, hopelessness etc., which may significantly impact the well-being of people and their ability to face challenges. Mindfulness meditation can help the practitioners to remain focused and peaceful without any negative effect on emotions. The study reported in this article was undertaken using a questionnaire among 100 meditators from yoga/meditation centres in Kozhikode District of Kerala State in India. The questionnaire contained the measure of negative expectations before and after the start of meditation practice, and the characteristics of the respondents, namely, sex, age, marital status, whether they had practiced meditation before joining the present meditation class, and whether they experienced health problems during the past six months. The results show that the mean score for negative expectations is less after starting meditation than before meditation with statistically significant difference in the scores, indicating that the respondents had less of negative expectations in life after they started practicing meditation. The range of scores before meditation was also comparatively high than after starting meditation, which again establishes less negative expectations after starting meditation practice. The lower score for the items related to negative expectation after meditation, when compared to before starting meditation, with statistically significant difference in the scores also helps to further substantiate the effect of meditation in reducing the negative expectations, namely, not able to see things ever going one's way, often finding things to be out of control, expecting that if something bad could happen it probably will, not able to imagine getting what is wanted, feeling that usually more bad things are going to happen than good, and the negative expectation that things always seem to be happening that stop from getting anywhere in life. Elderly meditators reported less negative expectations than youngsters, with statistically significant difference in their scores. The effect of higher period of meditation in reducing negative expectations more is also evident from the study. The characteristics of the meditators, namely, marital status, whether done meditation before joining the present class, and whether

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experienced health problems during the past six months contribute to 62 % of the variation observed in the score for negative expectations after starting meditation practice, with a significant F value. Unmarried meditators reported less negative expectations than married people, those who have done meditation before have less negative expectations, while health problems during the past six months has resulted in more negative expectations for the meditators. It will be worthwhile if yoga centres are also able to conduct studies related to yoga and meditation, in addition to the research undertaken by academic and research institutions in the country so that the transfer of useful results of these studies may motivate more people to start practicing these mind and body relaxing techniques.

Keywords: Negative expectations, Before meditation, After meditation

Negative expectations arise when unfavourable outcomes are anticipated in life. Over a period of time, this can cause unnecessary negativity, anxiety, discouragement, hopelessness etc., which may significantly impact the well-being of people and their ability to face challenges. Although negative expectations might help to face difficulties when negative events happen in life, they can also make people feel bad psychologically. A study has reported that depressive symptoms were more strongly associated with the presence of negative expectations than with the absence of positive expectations (Kube and Herzog, 2023). Lonely individuals were found to report more negative expectations about others, whom they believe to be less fair and trustworthy (Bellucci, 2020). This might lead to feelings of frustration for them.

Meditation stimulates the mind, expanding wellbeing and health (Rachna Rani and Sarita Rani, 2022). Brief mindfulness meditation will be an effective way to help practitioners to remain focused and peaceful without any negative effect on emotion (Wu et al, 2019). Even though people usually tend to ignore potentially negative information, this can be reduced through regular mindfulness meditation (Ash et al, 2023). Mindfulness practices are central to reducing negative expectations by enhancing emotional awareness and psychological balance (Rinsha et al., 2025).

The study reported in this article was carried out to analyze negative expectations of people before and after starting meditation.

METHODOLOGY

The study was undertaken using a questionnaire among 100 meditators from yoga/meditation centres in Kozhikode District of Kerala State in India. The questionnaire contained the measure of negative expectations (Drinkwater et al, 2023) before and after the start of meditation practice, and the characteristics of the respondents, namely, sex, age, marital status, whether they had practiced meditation before joining the present meditation class, and whether they experienced health problems during the past six months. The responses for the items related to negative expectations were strongly agree, agree much, slightly agree, neither agree or disagree, slightly disagree, disagree much and strongly disagree with score of 7,6,5,4,3,2 and 1 respectively. The sum of scores of the items was worked out as the score for negative expectations. A lower score indicates less of negative expectations and vice versa. The data was analyzed as proportion reporting, scores and through statistical tests.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the results of statistical significance of the difference in scores for negative expectations of the respondents before and after starting meditation practice.

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Table 1. Statistical significance of the difference in scores for negative expectations of the respondents before and after starting meditation practice

Mean score for negative expectations*	
Before meditation	After meditation
48.2	32.2
t = 3.85; p < 0.01	

* as % of the maximum possible score which indicates maximum negative expectations

Table 2 shows the range of scores for negative expectations before and after starting meditation practice.

Table 2. Range of scores for negative expectations before and after starting meditation practice

Before meditation		After meditation	
Range of score for negative expectations*	Respondents (%)	Range of score for negative expectations*	Respondents (%)
34.7- 46.9	40	26.5 - 28.6	40
51.0 - 55.1	60	34.7 - 36.7	60
Total	100	total	100

* as % of the maximum possible score

Statistical significance for the difference in scores for 6 (out of total 7) items of negative expectations before and after starting meditation is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Statistical significance of the difference in scores for the items of negative expectations before and after starting meditation practice

Item of negative expectation	Mean score*		t value and statistical significance
	Before meditation	After meditation	
Does not see things ever going one's way	4.2	2.4	5.6; p < 0.01
Often find things to be out of control	4.4	3.2	2.7; p < 0.05
If something bad could happen, it probably will	3.4	2.2	-2.7; p < 0.05
Cannot imagine getting what is wanted	2.6	1.8	2.5; p < 0.05
Usually have more bad things happening than good	3.4	2.2	-2.7; p < 0.05
Things always seem to happen that stop from getting anywhere	3.0	2.0	2.2; p < 0.05

* The maximum possible score for an item is 7.0, which indicates maximum level of negative expectation for it

Statistical significance for the difference in scores for negative expectations after starting meditation was not observed based on sex, marital status and whether the respondents experienced health problems during the past six months.

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The results of statistical significance of the difference in scores for negative expectations of the respondents after starting meditation based on age, and whether they had practiced meditation before joining the present meditation class is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Statistical significance of the difference in scores for negative expectations after starting meditation practice based on two characteristics

Mean score for negative expectations after starting meditation *		t value and statistical significance
Age group (Years)		
31 - 42	59 - 63	6.3; $p < 0.05$
35.4	27.6	
Whether done meditation before		-2.21; $p < 0.10$
Yes	No	
29.9	35.7	

* as % of the maximum possible score

Table 5 shows the results of regression analysis of three characteristics of the respondents, namely, marital status, whether done meditation before joining the present class and whether experienced health problems during the past six months on the score for negative expectations after starting meditation.

Table 5. Results of regression of three characteristics on the score for negative expectations after starting meditation practice

Characteristics	Regression coefficient (r)	R ² and statistical significance
Marital status	-6.1	0.62; $p < 0.01$
Whether done meditation before joining the present class	7.1	
Whether experienced health problems during the past six months	-8.2	

DISCUSSION

The mean score for negative expectations is less after starting meditation, as compared to before meditation, with statistically significant difference in the scores (Table 1). This indicates that the meditators had less of negative expectations in life after they started meditation practice. The range of scores of the respondents before meditation was comparatively high (34.7 to 55.1) than after starting meditation (26.5 to 36.7), again indicating less negative expectations after starting meditation practice (Table 2). The comparatively lower score for 6 out of total 7 negative expectation items after meditation, when compared to before starting meditation, with statistically significant difference in scores (Table 3) also helps to further establish the effect of meditation in reducing the negative expectations. These expectations include not able to see things ever going one's way, often finding things to be out of control, expecting that if something bad could happen it probably will, not able to imagine getting what is wanted, feeling that usually more bad things are going to happen than good, and the negative expectation that things always seem to be happening that stop from getting anywhere in life.

Meditation has been reported to help in improving the level of contentment of people, when compared to before starting it (Madhava Chandran and Sasidharan, 2024). People who

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practice meditation were found to maintain more emotional stability through better experience of positive emotions and less experience of negative emotions, when compared to those who are not practicing meditation (Madhava Chandran et al, 2023). Meditators reported enhanced awareness and mindfulness of actions, behaviour and relationships as benefits of practicing it (Madhava Chandran et al, 2022). All these psychological benefits may be attributed due to less experience of negative feelings by meditators, which would have contributed to more positivity in life.

There was no statistically significant difference in the scores before and after meditation for the negative expectation item, namely, doubting about getting the things that other people have. This may be considered logical, since, even before practicing meditation, people need not have much of that expectation, which reflects craving for getting things. This is also evident from the low mean scores of 2.6 before and 2.0 after meditation for this negative expectation, indicating less experience of this item.

Elderly meditators in the age group of 59 to 63 years get a comparatively lower mean score than youngsters in the age group of 31 to 42 years with statistically significant difference in their scores (Table 4). Age related results mentioned above may probably be because under the present-day context of heavy and stressful work-related environment, youngsters may be feeling more stressed in life than elderly people, who may be mostly leading a relaxed life after retirement from their jobs/profession. A study has also reported that although aging is associated with some deterioration and hardship, ironically, people tend to feel better as they age. According to this study, even though sadness does not decrease, feelings of anger and anxiety reduce, and acceptance of negative emotional experiences increase with age (Shallcross et al, 2013).

The effect of higher period of meditation in reducing negative expectations more is evident from the lower mean negative expectation score of those who have done meditation before joining the present meditation class, when compared to those who have not done it earlier (Table 4). A study found that respondents with 16 months of meditation practice had more contentment in life than those who have done meditation for 3 to 10 months, with statistically significant difference in their contentment scores (Madhava Chandran and Sasidharan, 2024). Higher period of meditation practice has been reported to contribute to a better attitude towards benefits of meditation including psychological factors such as enhanced awareness and mindfulness of actions, behaviour and relationships (Madhava Chandran et al, 2022).

The characteristics of the meditators, namely, marital status, whether done meditation before joining the present class, and whether experienced health problems during the past six months are found to contribute to 62 % of the variation observed in the score for negative expectations after starting meditation practice, with the F value significant at $p < 0.01$. The regression coefficients of these three characteristics are also statistically significant (Table 5).

Unmarried meditators have a comparatively lower range of score for negative expectations after starting meditation practice (26.5 to 34.7 % of the maximum possible score) than married people (score range of 28.6 to 36.7 % of the maximum possible score). This indicates that married meditators have experienced negative expectations more than those who are not married. Family problems / commitments faced by married people can be expected to be more, probably leading to more of negative feelings by them. Those who have done meditation before have a comparatively lower score for negative expectations in the range of 26.5 to 34.7 % of the maximum possible score, while those who have not done it before have a score in

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the range of 34.7 to 36.7 % of the maximum possible score. The influence of more period of meditation in helping to reduce negative expectations is once again evident from this. Those who experienced health problems during the past six months have a higher range of score for negative expectations (34.7 to 36.7 % of the maximum possible score) than those who did not report health problems (26.5 to 34.7 % of the maximum possible score). Health problems may significantly impact expectations about the future, resulting in a negative, pessimistic outlook. Its outcome may be a sense of hopelessness, anxiety about the future, and even feelings of worthlessness. Further, the effect of negative expectations worsening the disease symptoms may also increase these problems.

CONCLUSION

The mean score for negative expectations is found to be less after starting meditation than before meditation with statistically significant difference in the scores, indicating that the respondents had less of negative expectations in life after they started practicing meditation. The range of scores of the respondents before meditation was also comparatively high than after starting meditation, which again establishes less negative expectations after starting meditation practice. The lower score for the items related to negative expectation after meditation, when compared to before starting meditation, with statistically significant difference in the scores also helps to further substantiate the effect of meditation in reducing the negative expectations, namely, not able to see things ever going one's way, often finding things to be out of control, expecting that if something bad could happen it probably will, not able to imagine getting what is wanted, feeling that usually more bad things are going to happen than good, and the negative expectation that things always seem to be happening that stop from getting anywhere in life. However, there was no statistically significant difference in scores before and after meditation for the negative expectation item, namely, doubting about getting the things that other people have, which may be considered logical, since, even before practicing meditation, people need not have much of that expectation, which reflects craving for getting things.

Elderly meditators reported less negative expectations than youngsters, with statistically significant difference in their scores. The effect of higher period of meditation in reducing negative expectations more is also evident from the study. The characteristics of the meditators, namely, marital status, whether done meditation before joining the present class, and whether experienced health problems during the past six months contribute to 62 % of the variation observed in the score for negative expectations after starting meditation practice, with a significant F value. The regression coefficients of these three characteristics are also statistically significant. Unmarried meditators report less negative expectations than married people, those who have done meditation before have less negative expectations, while health problems during the past six months has resulted in more negative expectations for the meditators.

Considering the fact that the number of people practicing yoga and meditation in India is not high, it would be worthwhile to carry out studies on the beneficial effects of these mind and body relaxation techniques among a large sample of people from different regions of the country. This could be possible if yoga centres are also able to conduct such studies with the assistance of experts in the field, in addition to the research undertaken by academic and research institutions in the country. Transfer of useful results emanating from these studies to people may motivate more number of them to start practicing yoga and meditation.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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