

Meditators and Non-Meditators: Level of Mindfulness and Psychological Well-Being

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ABSTRACT

Numerous researches have documented positive outcomes of practicing meditation and mindfulness since advent of Positive Psychology. Hence the present study has been designed to investigate effect of practicing meditation on levels of mindfulness in daily life and also to understand if any relationship exists with level of mindfulness and psychological well-being of its practitioners. A total of 120 participants (60 meditators and 60 non-meditators), aged 30-50 years were assessed on level of mindfulness using Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire and their psychological well-being was studied by Ryff Scale of Psychological Well-being. The data was analyzed using Mean, Standard deviation, t-test and Correlation. Results revealed that Psychological well-being of meditators was significantly higher ($p < 0.05$) than non-meditators. Further it was observed that significant difference exists in levels of mindfulness between meditators and non-meditators where meditating participants reported substantially higher ($p < 0.05$) levels of mindfulness particularly on traits of Observation and Awareness. Also a strong positive relationship ($r = 0.764$) exists between level of mindfulness and well-being, implicating that higher level of mindfulness in an individual relates to increased level of self-reported psychological well-being. Findings are in line with other studies evidencing positive impact of meditation on well-being of an individual.

Keywords: Meditators, Mindfulness, Psychological Well-Being.

P psychological well-being (P.W.B.) is multidimensional construct where elements of happiness, balance of positive – negative effect, life satisfaction and optimal psychological functioning all integrate together.

Diener, (1997) states Psychological well-being as the way people appraise their lives in two major ways, i.e., cognitive and affective. The cognitive part is an information based evaluation of one's life that is when a person gives conscious judgments about satisfaction

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with life as a whole. The affective part is a hedonic appraisal which is more directed by emotions and feelings based on their frequency of pleasant or unpleasant mood.

Thus, contemporary researchers and psychologists propagate the idea of Well - being as it relates to the ideas of self- realization, autonomy, personal growth and purpose in life (Birren & Renner, 1980; Ryff, 1995) which also act as a protective agent against various health challenges like early aging due to stress, cardiovascular disease and many other mental disorders such as depression, schizophrenia, anxiety, attention deficit etc. (Baer,2003; Bishop, 2002; Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, & Walach, 2004).

But promotion of well- being in a society which nurtures disorders, stress and competition seems to be a daunting task. However, positive psychology reports that instilling of positive human constructs like strength, resilience, integrity, compassion, love, interpersonal skills etc. act as a shield against mental illness. This means that if constructive emotions are promoted in place of harboring negative toxic emotions, a state of well-being can be achieved.

Meditation or contemplation offers a practical solution to it as it acts as a buffer to mind which is otherwise susceptible to harboring negative emotions and promotes constructive thought patterns. It has been well documented that practice of mindfulness meditation results in inculcation of all the aforementioned positive constructs in human mind (Esch et al.,2003, 2013; Esch &Stefano 2010; Marchand 2012;Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek & Finkel, 2008; Kong, Wang & Zahao, 2014).

Meditation can be defined as a process where one modulates his attention intentionally either for relaxation, self-exploration or for transcendence (Schmidt et al, 2010). Broadly it can be divided into two basic types – Concentration meditation and Mindfulness meditation. In concentration meditation awareness is restricted with focus on a fixed repetitive aspect like mantra (Transcendental meditation) or breath(Zazen), single word or sound. Whereas in Mindfulness meditation non-analytical awareness is maintained on any dynamic aspect like physical sensations (in body scan) or on mental content (guided meditation).

However, practically both the categories overlap constantly and the foremost requisite for any meditation remains same which is deliberate awareness and focus on concentration and attention which is known as mindfulness or awareness. This mindfulness has the potential to provoke relaxation response (Benson and Klipper 2000) similar to body's biological antagonist reaction to stress and thus it acts as a protective agent in various stress related diseases (Esch et al., 2003; Stefano et al., 2005).

Mindfulness

The word mindfulness originally comes from the Pali word sati, meaning awareness, attention, and remembering (Bodhi, 2000). It can simply be defined as “moment-by-moment awareness” (Germer et al., 2005) or as “a state of psychological freedom that prevails when

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attention remains limber and quiet, without attachment to any particular point of view” (Martin, 1997). It increases the chances that any activity one is engaged in will result in an expanded perspective and understanding of oneself. In a state of mindfulness, thoughts and feelings are observed on par with objects of sensory awareness, and without reacting to them in an automatic, habitual way. Thus, mindfulness can be considered as a disposition trait or a characteristic which if inculcated in daily life, allows a person to respond to situations reflectively rather than impulsively (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

Rationale

Keeping in mind the empirical evidences suggesting varied physiological and psychological benefits of cultivating mindfulness and inclusion of meditation in daily routine, the present study has been designed to validate if practicing meditation leads to increased level of mindfulness in daily lives and also to understand if any relationship exists with level of mindfulness and psychological well- being of its practitioners.

Objectives of study

- To study if level of mindfulness as a dispositional trait is higher in meditating participants as compared to non -meditating ones.
- To study if meditation increases subjective well-being among its practitioners.
- To study if level of mindfulness is correlated with psychological well- being.

Hypotheses

- Level of mindfulness will be significantly higher among meditators as compared to non-meditators.
- Level of psychological well-being will be significantly higher in meditators than non-meditators.
- There will be a significant correlation between level of mindfulness and psychological well- being of participants.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

A total of one twenty participants (N=120) were included in the study from Jaipur city using purposive sampling technique between age group 30-50years, they were matched in terms of age (group mean age of meditators = 43.5, S.D., 9.5) (group mean age of non- meditators = 41.6, S.D. 7.2), education, marital status and socioeconomic status. Out of which 60 were meditators (practicing meditation >/ 5 years) and 60 non-meditators (with no prior practice of any relaxation technique).

Measures

1. Baseline Performa

A Baseline proforma was formed to obtain the background information of the participants like age, sex, education level, marital status and frequency of meditation practice.

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2. Dispositional mindfulness

Short Five facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (SFFMQ) was used to evaluate trait mindfulness. It consists of 24 items developed by Bohlmeijer et al., (2011) rated on Likert scale ranging from 1(never or rarely true) to 5 (very often or always true). It measures level of mindfulness in daily life on following five factors- Non- reaction, Observation, Awareness, Non-judgement and Description. The five scale shows high internal consistency scores ranging from 0.85 to 0.93.

3. Psychological well- being

Ryff scale of Psychological Well- being was used to evaluate well- being. It is developed by Ryff (2005) and consists of 54 questions (medium form). It measures on six areas of Psychological well-being: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life and self-acceptance. Respondents rate statements on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 6 indicating strong agreement.

RESULTS

The results in accordance with hypothesis are given below-

Hypothesis 1- Level of mindfulness will be significantly higher among meditators as compared to non- meditators.

Results reveal that Mindfulness level of Meditators (107.56) is significantly higher than Non-Meditators (88.53) and it is statistically significant ($t=2.01$, $p<0.05$). Hence, Hypothesis 1 is accepted.

Table 1, Mindfulness scores of meditators and non- meditators

Mindfulness	Meditators		Non- Meditators		
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	t- test
Description	20.56	12.1	18.58	5.67	1.14
Awareness	24.2	4.57	16.4	10.1	5.45*
Observation	19.1	15.6	14.3	9.5	2.03*
Non reactivity	20.2	14.1	18.75	8.34	0.68
Non Judgement	23.5	12.2	20.5	10.23	1.45
Total	107.56	58.57	88.53	43.84	2.0148*

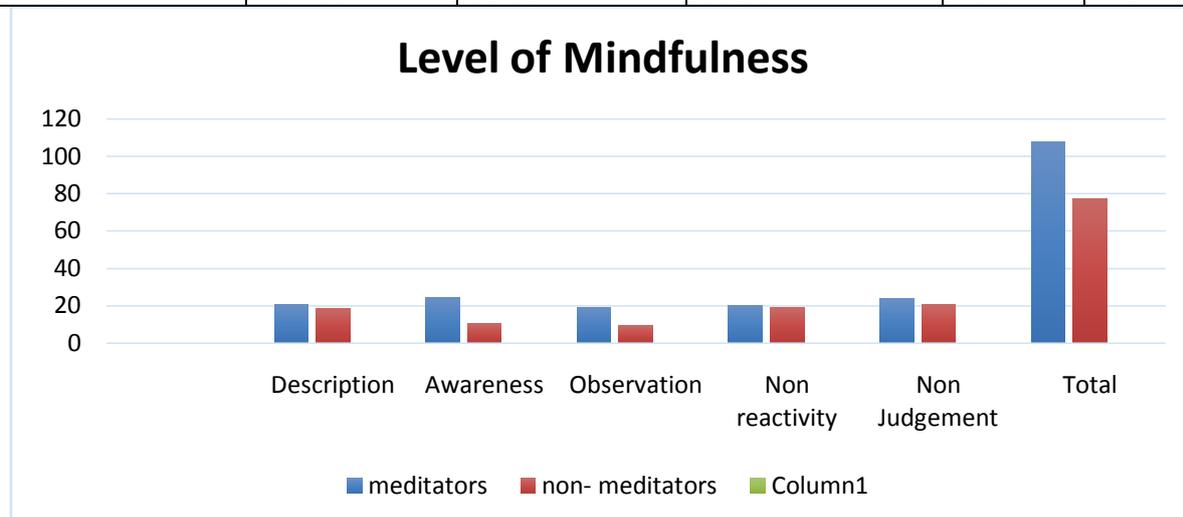


Figure 1- Mindfulness level of Meditators and Non- Meditators

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Hypothesis 2- Level of psychological well-being will be significantly higher in meditators than non- meditators.

To assess this hypothesis Psychological well- being scores of Meditators (123.71) and Non-meditators (107.5) were compared and t test was utilized to evaluate statistical significance. The result obtained clearly indicated higher scores of meditators which is also statistically significant ($t = 5.933$, $p < 0.05$). Hence, accepting the second hypothesis.

Table 2, Psychological well- being scores of meditators and non-meditators

Meditators		Non- meditators		t-value
Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
123.71	14.3	107.5	15.6	5.933*

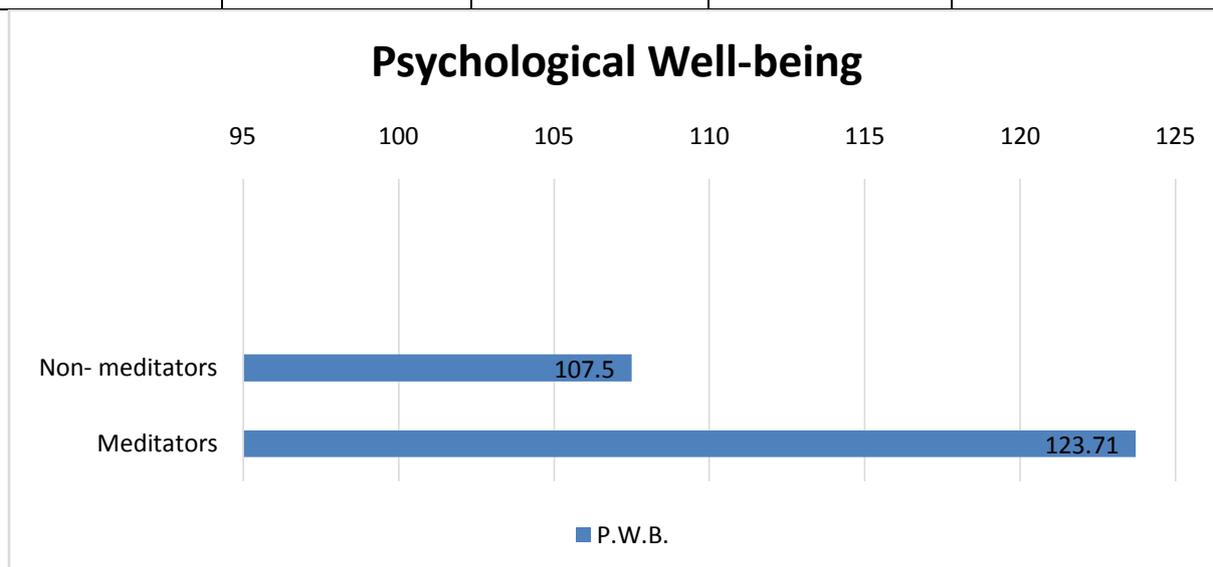


Figure 2- Psychological Well- Being scores of Meditators and Non- Meditators

Hypothesis 3-There will be a significant correlation between level of mindfulness and psychological well- being of participants.

Correlation value obtained between two variables was 0.764. The result indicate a strong positive correlation between traits of mindfulness with level of psychological well- being. This suggests that with increase in traits of description (0.84), Awareness (0.83), Observation (0.76), non- reaction (0.69) and non- judgment (0.72), overall psychological well- being also elevates significantly ($p < 0.05$).

Table 3, Correlation score of level of mindfulness with psychological well- being

Level of mindfulness		Description	Awareness	Observation	Non-reactivity	Non-judgment	Total
Psychological Well- being	r	0.846*	0.8374*	0.763*	0.691*	0.722*	0.764 *

DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study implicate that practice of meditation leads to enhanced level of psychological well-being and increased level of mindfulness. It also validates the fact that level of mindfulness positively correlates with psychological well-being of an individual.

The results of the study are consistent with study by Lykins & Baer (2009) where meditators when compared with non-meditators scored significantly higher on levels of mindfulness and sense of well-being. Further data depicted positive linear relationship between trait mindfulness and well-being of meditating participants implicating that with increased levels of mindfulness, self-reported well-being of participants also increased.

Such correlation can be explained due to the very nature of mindfulness of capturing current experience with clarity and vividness as opposed to mindlessness where automatic thoughts, behavior and habits run on an auto pilot mode indulging one in labelling, judging and comparing of experiences first-handedly (Shapiro et al., 2006). Hence one can make informed decision utilizing self-prescribed behavior regulation which directly relates to well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and also enhances other components (decreased rumination, emotion regulation) linked with happiness and contentment (Baer et al., 2008; Josefsson, Larsman, Broberg, & Lundh, 2011).

Various other studies have also reported similar findings suggesting a strong positive correlation with meditation regardless of the technique used and target population (clinical or non-clinical) (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Carmody, Reed, Merriam, 2008 ; Greeson et al., 2011 ; Schoormans, Nyklíček, 2011; Shapiro et al., 2008).

However research on mechanism underlying the same is still in infancy and requires further investigation. Hoerold et al., (2008) studied neurological underpinnings of Meditation which leads to mindfulness and also inculcation of self-awareness. This state results in activation of Pre Frontal Cortex (PFC) and Anterior Cingulate Cortex (ACC) areas of brain and increased alpha and theta activity which has been associated with meditation and relaxation and also changes in attention, concentration and emotional regulation (Cahn, 2006). Another study utilized Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) and Electro Encephalogram (EEG) techniques to compare experienced meditators and novice meditators and reported similar conclusions that enhanced mindfulness leads to decrease in emotional reactivity due to increased ability to engage PFC and heightened neuronal activity in areas related to self-awareness (Creswell, May, Eisenberg & Liberman, 2007). Thus, it shows possibility of training the mind, brain structure and functioning to reap the required benefits.

Hence it can be concluded that inclusion of contemplation in daily routine offers an alternative of contentment, happiness and a fulfilling life amongst the present distressed and disordered society.

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