



Difficulties in Emotional Regulation: A Comparative Study among Meditators and Non- Meditators

Madhava Chandran K^{1*}, Varughese Mathew² and Rinsha K A³

¹ Independent Social Researcher, Kozhikode, Kerala State, India

² Research Scholar, Centre for Yoga & Holistic Wellness, NIT, Kozhikode

³ PG Scholar, Health and Yoga Therapy Course, The Zamorin's Guruvayurappan College, Kozhikode

*Corresponding Author: K. Madhava Chandran, Anugrah, Kozhikode, Kerala, India.

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Abstract:

The study reported in this article, which was carried out among a sample of 100 meditators and 100 non-meditators using a questionnaire containing the measure of Difficulties in Emotion Regulation has revealed the influence of the practice of meditation in reducing the difficulties in regulating emotions, when compared to non-meditators. Experience of psychological problems has contributed to more difficulties in emotion regulation for the meditators. The results of regression analysis showed that the two characteristics, namely, whether or not experienced psychological problems in the past 3 months, and whether or not experienced physical health problems in the past 3 months together explain 76.8 % of the variation in the difficulties in emotion regulation experienced by the meditators, with the F value being significant. The usefulness of undertaking studies on various psychological benefits of mindfulness promoting practices like yoga, meditation, art of living etc. among various sections of people in different countries is also highlighted in the article.

Keywords: Emotion regulation; difficulties; meditators; non-meditators

Introduction:

People who are able to regulate their emotions can usually adapt their behaviour to a situation even when experiencing difficult emotions. Emotion regulation is a multidimensional construct that has been proposed to encompass different emotion regulation strategies and difficulties with emotion regulation [1].

Difficulties in emotion regulation, also called as emotional dysregulation indicates trouble in managing feelings and emotions. Emotional dysregulation can manifest in several ways such as feeling overwhelmed by seemingly minor things, difficulty controlling impulsive behaviour, or having unpredictable outbursts. Emotional dysregulation may be linked to differences in brain development or function or conditions that affect the brain, and can impact daily life. If a person has persistent difficulty in emotion regulation, it can lead to psychosocial impairment [2]. Studies have shown a significant positive correlation between difficulty in emotion regulation scores and symptoms of various psychological disorders such as Generalized Anxiety Disorder [3], social anxiety [4] and

health-related anxiety [1].

2. Methodology

This study was carried out among a sample 100 meditators and 100 non-meditators from Kerala State of India using a questionnaire containing the measure of Difficulties in Emotion Regulation [5] containing 36 items scored from 1 to 5 on the Likert scale based on five responses, and the characteristics of the meditators, namely, age, sex, whether experienced any physical health problems and psychological problems during the past 3 months. The total score for difficulties in emotion regulation was worked out as the sum of scores of the items. The data was analysed as proportion, scores and through statistical test.

3. Results

Table 1 shows the range of total score for difficulties in emotion regulation of meditators and non-meditators, expressed as percentage of the maximum possible score.

Meditators		Non- meditators	
Total score for difficulties in emotion regulation	Respondents (%)	Total score for difficulties in emotion regulation	Respondents (%)
42.2 - 47.7	100	52.2 - 60.0	100

Table 1. Total score for difficulties in emotion regulation of meditators and non-meditators



meditators.

Table 2 shows the statistical significance of the difference in mean total score for difficulties in emotion regulation of meditators and non-

Mean total score for difficulties in emotion regulation*	
Meditators	Non- meditators
43.6	55.6
t stat = - 12.3; $p < 0.001$	

Table 2. Statistical significance of the difference in total score for difficulties in emotion regulation of meditators and non-meditators regulation of the meditators based on their sex and age.

* as % of the maximum possible score under the study

Table 3 gives details of the mean total score for difficulties in emotion

Mean total score for difficulties in emotion regulation of the meditators *	
Males	Females
42.5	46.1
t stat is non-significant	
Mean total score for difficulties in emotion regulation of the meditators *	
Age group	
40-50	61-72
42.7	45.3
t stat is non-significant	

Table 3. Mean total score for difficulties in emotion regulation of the meditators based on their sex and age

* as % of the maximum possible score under the study

Table 4 shows the mean total score for difficulties in emotion regulation of the meditators who experienced and who did not experience psychological problems and physical health problems during the past 3 months.

Mean total score for difficulties in emotion regulation of the meditators *	
Experienced psychological problems in the past 3 months	Did not experience psychological problems in the past 3 months
47.5	42.7
t stat = 15.7; $p < 0.001$	
Mean total score for difficulties in emotion regulation of the meditators *	
Experienced physical problems in the past 3 months	Did not experience physical problems in the past 3 months
44.3	43.3
t stat is non-significant	

Table 4. Mean total score for difficulties in emotion regulation of the meditators who experienced and who did not experience psychological problems and physical health problems during the past 3 months

* as % of the maximum possible score under the study

physical health problems in the past 3 months on their total score for difficulties in emotion regulation.

Table 5 shows the results of regression analysis of the influence of two characteristics of the meditators, namely, whether experienced psychological problems in the past 3 months, and whether experienced

Particulars	Regression coefficient	R ²	F
Whether experienced psychological problems in the past 3 months	- 8.75; $p < 0.001$	76.8	107.2; $p < 0.001$
Whether experienced physical health problems in the past 3 months	Not statistically significant		

Table 5. Results of regression analysis of two characteristics of the meditators on total score for difficulties in emotion regulation



4. Discussion

Total score for difficulties in emotion regulation

Higher total score for difficulties in emotion regulation indicates more difficulty. It can be made out from Table 1 that the range of total score for difficulties in emotion regulation is more for those who have not done meditation, when compared to the meditators. This implies that the meditators have experienced comparatively less difficulties in emotion regulation.

Statistical significance of the difference in total score for difficulties in emotion regulation of meditators and non-meditators

The mean total score for difficulties in emotion regulation is less in the case of meditators, as compared to the non-meditators, with statistically significant difference in the scores (Table 2). This finding once again establishes the effect of meditation practice in reducing the difficulties in emotion regulation.

Statistical significance of the difference in total score for difficulties in emotion regulation based on the age of meditators

Even though the mean score of female meditators is more than that of males, and the mean score of meditators in the age group of 61 to 72 years is more than that of meditators in the age group of 40 to 50 years, no statistically significant difference in the mean total score for difficulties in emotion regulation of the meditators based on their sex and age was observed in the study (Table 3).

Statistical significance of the difference in total score for difficulties in emotion regulation of meditators who experienced and who did not experience psychological problems and physical health problems during the past 3 months

Data presented in Table 4 indicates statistically significant difference in the mean total score for difficulties in emotion regulation of meditators who experienced and who did not experience psychological problems during the past 3 months, with the latter group getting a comparatively lower score than the former group. This implies that existence of psychological problems has contributed to more difficulties in emotion regulation for the meditators. This finding is also an indication that for people who have achieved improvement in the psychological conditions through meditation, difficulties in emotion regulation has also reduced.

However, statistically significant difference was not observed between the mean total score for difficulties in emotion regulation of meditators who experienced and who did not experience physical health problems during the past 3 months (Table 4). This implies that physical health problems have not contributed much to the difficulties in emotion regulation for meditators.

In addition to psychological benefits, yoga, in which meditation in the form of “yoga nidra” is an important component has physical health benefits also [6]. Hence, the result mentioned in the previous paragraph may be probably because due to the practice of meditation, the respondents would not have experienced significant physical health problems, and hence, perceptible difference would not have been there in the difficulty to regulate emotions, which can be an outcome of such problems.

Regression analysis of the influence of two characteristics of the respondents on total score for difficulties in emotion regulation

The results of regression analysis of the scores for two characteristics of the meditators, namely, whether or not experienced psychological problems in the past 3 months, and whether or not experienced physical health problems in the past 3 months on the total score for difficulties in emotion regulation (Table 5) indicates that these two characteristics together explain 76.8 % of the variation in the difficulties in emotion regulation experienced by them. The F value is also highly significant.

However, among the two characteristics, whether or not experienced psychological problems in the past 3 months only has a significant regression coefficient (Table 5). This helps to once again establish the influence of only the psychological problems faced by the meditators in creating more difficulties in emotion regulation, as already explained based on the data presented in Table 4.

The effects of yoga practice, which involves meditation also on psychological benefits such as improvement in the emotional state [7], maintenance of positive mental state [8], improvement in quality of life [9], improvement in contentment in life [10], improvement in resilience ability in life [11], feeling less disgusted in life [12] and more of distress tolerance in life [13] have been reported. All these psychological benefits could probably help the practitioners to overcome difficulties in emotion regulation also.

5. Conclusions

The influence of the practice of meditation in reducing the difficulties in regulating emotions, when compared to non-meditators is evident from the study. The range of total score for difficulties in emotion regulation is more for those who have not done meditation than the meditators, indicating that the meditators have experienced comparatively less difficulties in emotion regulation. Statistically significant difference observed in the mean total score for difficulties in emotion regulation of meditators who experienced and who did not experience psychological problems during the past 3 months indicates that the existence of psychological problems has contributed to more difficulties in emotion regulation. However, statistically significant difference was not observed between the mean total score for difficulties in emotion regulation of meditators who experienced and who did not experience physical health problems during the past 3 months. The results of regression analysis reveals that the two characteristics, namely, whether or not experienced psychological problems in the past 3 months, and whether or not experienced physical health problems in the past 3 months together explain 76.8 % of the variation in the difficulties in emotion regulation experienced by the meditators, with the F value being significant. No statistically significant difference was observed in the mean total score for difficulties in emotion regulation of the meditators based on their sex and age.

It will be useful if more studies on various psychological benefits of mindfulness promoting practices like yoga, meditation, art of living etc. is carried out among various sections of people in different countries so that the results will probably help to make people motivated to practice these techniques and achieve better



wellbeing in their life. It will also probably help in making people continue such practices through better conviction of their positive psychological effects.

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