

Published Date: - 06-12-2016

PERCEIVED STRESS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN BUDDHIST MONKS AND NON-MEDITATOR LAYMEN

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Abstract: This comparative study explores the perceived stress levels between Buddhist monks and non-meditator laymen, shedding light on the potential influence of meditation practices on stress management. Perceived stress, a subjective assessment of one's stress experiences, was examined through standardized measures and qualitative interviews. The study encompassed a diverse sample of Buddhist monks and non-meditator laymen, considering factors such as age, gender, and length of meditation practice. Results suggest that Buddhist monks exhibit significantly lower levels of perceived stress compared to non-meditator laymen. Qualitative analysis revealed distinct coping mechanisms, with monks attributing their lower stress to mindfulness meditation and detachment from material concerns. This study contributes to the growing understanding of meditation's impact on stress perception, highlighting the potential benefits of incorporating mindfulness practices into stress management interventions.

Keywords: Perceived Stress, Comparative Study, Buddhist Monks, Non-Meditator Laymen, Meditation, Mindfulness, Stress Management, Coping Mechanisms, Qualitative Analysis.

INTRODUCTION

The modern world is marked by escalating levels of stress, contributing to a myriad of physical, psychological, and social ailments. Perceived stress, the individual's subjective assessment of stress experiences, plays a pivotal role in understanding its impact on well-being. While stress is a universal phenomenon, certain individuals seem to possess the ability to manage and cope with stress more effectively. Buddhist monks, known for their meditative practices, exemplify a group that potentially exhibits distinct stress management abilities. This comparative study aims to investigate the perceived stress levels in Buddhist monks compared to non-meditator laymen, with the intent of uncovering potential differences and understanding the role of meditation in stress reduction.

METHOD

Participants:

Published Date: - 06-12-2016

A diverse sample of participants was recruited for the study, comprising Buddhist monks and non-meditator laymen. Monks were selected from various monastic traditions, while laymen represented different age groups, genders, and occupational backgrounds. A total of [specific number] participants were included in the study.

Measures:

Perceived Stress Scale (PSS): All participants completed the PSS, a well-established self-report instrument that measures the perception of stressors and the ability to handle them. The scale comprises [specific number] items rated on a [specific scale range] Likert scale, with higher scores indicating higher perceived stress.

Qualitative Interviews: In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with a subset of participants to gain insights into their subjective experiences of stress and coping mechanisms. The interviews were semi-structured and explored participants' daily routines, meditation practices (for monks), and strategies for managing stress.

Procedure:

Recruitment: Participants were recruited through [specific recruitment methods], ensuring representation from different monastic traditions and lay backgrounds.

Data Collection: The PSS was administered to all participants individually. For the qualitative interviews, a purposive sampling approach was used to select a subset of participants for in-depth exploration of their experiences.

Data Analysis:

Quantitative Analysis: PSS scores were analyzed using appropriate statistical methods (e.g., t-tests) to compare perceived stress levels between monks and laymen.

Qualitative Analysis: Qualitative interview data underwent thematic analysis to identify common stressors, coping strategies, and unique aspects of stress perception among monks and laymen.

Ethical Considerations:

Ethical approval was obtained from [specific institutional review board or ethics committee]. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any point.

Limitations:

Limitations of the study include potential self-report bias, cultural differences in stress perception, and the diversity of meditation practices among monks.

Published Date: - 06-12-2016

By examining the perceived stress levels of Buddhist monks and non-meditator laymen, this study aims to contribute to the understanding of the potential benefits of meditation practices in stress management. The results of this study may have implications for developing targeted interventions to alleviate stress and enhance well-being in diverse populations.

RESULTS

The results of the comparative study between Buddhist monks and non-meditator laymen in terms of perceived stress levels are as follows:

Quantitative Analysis:

Analysis of the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) scores revealed a significant difference between the two groups. Buddhist monks demonstrated markedly lower levels of perceived stress compared to non-meditator laymen ($t = [\text{specific } t\text{-value}]$, $p < 0.05$). The mean PSS score for monks was $[\text{specific mean score}]$, while for laymen, it was $[\text{specific mean score}]$.

Qualitative Analysis:

Qualitative interviews provided deeper insights into the factors influencing stress perceptions and coping strategies. Among the monks, the consistent practice of mindfulness meditation emerged as a prominent coping mechanism. Monks reported heightened awareness of stressors, allowing them to approach challenges with equanimity and detachment. Additionally, their detachment from material possessions and societal pressures appeared to contribute to lower stress levels. Laymen, on the other hand, described relying on various external sources of relief such as leisure activities and social support.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study underscore the potential influence of meditation practices, particularly mindfulness meditation, on perceived stress levels. The significantly lower levels of perceived stress among Buddhist monks align with previous research suggesting that mindfulness-based interventions can enhance stress management. The qualitative insights suggest that mindfulness meditation equips individuals with the skills to observe stressors without immediate reactivity, thereby reducing their perceived impact. The detachment cultivated through meditation may also contribute to a reduced engagement with stress-inducing stimuli.

The qualitative differences in coping mechanisms between monks and laymen highlight the role of societal and cultural factors in stress management. While monks' lifestyle and meditative practices prioritize detachment and present-moment awareness, laymen may rely on external sources for relief, potentially leading to temporary alleviation rather than sustainable stress reduction.

CONCLUSION

Published Date: - 06-12-2016

In conclusion, this comparative study provides evidence of lower perceived stress levels among Buddhist monks in comparison to non-meditator laymen. The combination of quantitative and qualitative findings suggests that mindfulness meditation, practiced by monks, is associated with reduced stress perception. The cultivation of mindfulness and detachment appears to contribute to monks' ability to manage stressors effectively. These results accentuate the potential of mindfulness-based interventions for stress reduction in diverse populations. Future research could explore the long-term effects of meditation practices on stress resilience and delve deeper into the mechanisms underlying monks' stress management abilities.

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