



Vipassana Meditation as an Effective Technique of Stress-Management

KEYWORDS

Vipassana meditation, Stress management

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ABSTRACT *The present research article is an endeavour to explore empirical supports for Vipassana meditation as an effective technique of stress management. Stress management refers to the wide spectrum of techniques and psychotherapies aimed at controlling a person's levels of stress, especially chronic stress, or distress as advocated by Hans Selye (1936;56), rather than positive stress which he calls eustress. Among several available practical stress management techniques, Vipassana is one of India's most ancient meditation techniques, which may help an individual to reduce stress, provide positive feelings of being in control of one's life and promote general well-being.*

Though the review of literatures related to stress management and Vipassana meditation will provide empirical supports for the effectiveness of Vipassana meditation in Stress-management upto some extent, but for the generalization and empirical verification of "Vipassana meditation as an effective technique of stress management", further studies should also be conducted in Indian context.

Introduction :

Stress-management refers to the wide spectrum of techniques and psychotherapies aimed at controlling a person's levels of stress, especially chronic stress, for the purpose of improving day to day functioning of life. Today the term 'stress' refers only to a stress with significant negative consequences, or distress as advocated by Hans Selye (1936, 56), rather than positive stress, which he calls eustress. Hans Selye (1956) described Stress as a non – specific (physiological) response of the body to a demand made upon it.

Most of the psychologists define stress as the physiological and psychological response to a condition that threatens or challenges the individual and requires some form of adaptation or adjustment (Wood & Wood, 1999).

Stress produces numerous symptoms which vary according to persons, situations, and severity. The process of stress management is one of the keys which help the person to achieve a happy and successful life in modern society (Paul Susic; 2013).

Stress-management is normally a coping strategy which is defined as an adaptive response to stress; a response intended to eliminate, ameliorate or change the stress producing factors or intended to modify the individual's reaction to a stressful situation in a beneficial way (Newmen & Beehr, 1979).

Pestonjee (1989) has stated that effective management of stress involves directing stress for productive purposes, preparing role occupants to understand the nature of stress, helping role occupants to understand their strength and usual styles and equip them to develop approach strategies of coping with stress.

Among several available practical stress management techniques, some are useful for Health- practitioners and others are for Self-help, which may help an individual to reduce stress, provide positive feelings of being in control of one's life and promote general well-being.

Because people feel difficulty in managing stress, therefore, psychologists have increasingly turned their attention on meditation to prove it as an effective technique of Stress -management that can be taught through workshop.

Vipassana is one of India's most ancient meditation techniques, which may help an individual to reduce stress, pro-

vide positive feelings of being in control of one's life and promote general well-being. It is a Self-help stress-management technique, which needs significant attention of researchers working in the area of stress management, today.

Vipassana means to see clearly, to observe thoroughly, to investigate penetratingly in various ways, the true nature of things, precisely, as they really are; seeing beyond what is ordinarily observed, not superficial seeing, not seeing mere appearances, but going deeply into every aspect of the things under observation (UKO Lay 2005- Manual of Vipassana meditation p-52)], thus, Vipassana means insight to see or observe the things as they really are', not as just they seen to be. It is a logical process of mental purification through self-observation and introspection. It is a non-sectarian, scientific, result-oriented technique of truth realization. The technique of Vipassana is a simple, practical way to achieve real peace of mind and to lead a happy and stress free life.

To learn Vipassana, it is necessary to take a **Ten days residential course** under the guidance of a qualified teacher (Acharya) at any Vipassana Meditation Centre with a noble silence and no contact with the out-side world. The participants have to arrive at the Centre before 4 p.m. on "day zero". The course starts in the evening after the registration process completed. There are three steps of Vipassana training:

Step-I Observance of Sila (Moral Conduct)- It is the foundation for the practice of Vipassana. During the period of course, participants have to take a vow of abstinence from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and taking any intoxicant.

Step-II Anapana (Awareness of Respiration)—This involves continuous observation of the natural flow of the incoming and outgoing breaths. To practice Anapana, keep the attention in the area below nostrils and above upper lip. If the mind is agitated or dull, breathe hard or fast for sometimes otherwise the breathing should be natural. Anapana promotes awareness of the present moment, equanimity and tranquility of mind. As the mind becomes more concentrated, it starts to calm down, sharpen, penetrating and capable for practice of Vipassana meditation. For the first three and half (3&1/2) days, participants practice Anapana Meditation by focusing attention on the natural breathings.

Step-III Vipassana (Development of Wisdom or Insight)—Vipassana is the purification of mind by experiencing one's

own reality through the practice of choice-less observation of body sensations and development of an attitude of non-reaction. There are several sensations arise in our body at every moment during contact with the out-side world whom we think as pleasant and unpleasant and start to like or dislike them. During practice, we train our mind to observe all the sensations with detachment and equanimity i.e. without developing craving for pleasant sensations and aversion towards unpleasant or painful sensations. As we proceed on this path, we experience that all sensations are constantly changing, impermanent and essence-less. This step is undertaken for the last six and half (6&1/2) days. Participants receive systematic meditation instructions several times Noble silence is observed for the first nine days in a day. Each day's progress is explained during a video-taped evening discourse by Acharya S.N. Goenka(2003).

On the tenth day, participants resume speaking, making the transition back to a more extroverted way of life. The course is concluded in the morning of eleventh day. The retreat closes with the practice of "Metta-bhavana" (loving, kindness and goodwill towards all). Participants have to follow the rules and regulations of the Centre.

Empirical Evidences for Vipassana Meditation as Stress coping strategy:

Several researchers, like Bhaskaran (1991), Nathawat (1996), Vigne (1997) and Jain & Sharma (2005) have reported the clinical and psychotherapeutic utility of Vipassana meditation as an effective intervention strategy of Stress-management.

Chokhani (1986; 1995) has reported its clinical utility and found it as a perfect anti-stress remedy as well as an excellent human potential development method.

Both clinical and traditional literature suggests that Vipassana "increases self-awareness, promotes integration of subjective experience and facilitates acceptance and tolerance to sufficiently reduce physical and psychological distress."

Khosla (1989) reported that after six months of regular Vipassana practice, subject's ability to coping with stress was significantly improved.

Miller et al. (1995), Nathawat et al. (1997) have reported the efficacy of Vipassana in managing anxiety, stress and related symptoms and other emotional problems.

Al-Hussaini et al. (2001) have examined the effects of Vipassana meditation on physical and psychological health on a multi-ethnic population in Muscat, Oman. They found that Vipassana might help mitigate psychological and psychosomatic distress.

Parihar (2004) reported that Vipassana improved mental health by reducing stress, tension, anxiety and irritation in govt. servants.

M.J.Ott (2004), in her systematic review, stated that mindfulness meditation (Vipassana) is a skill that can be learnt and when practiced in a disciplined manner, is consistently effective in reducing stress.

Kushwaha (2013) have found that stress score of highly stressed participants will be reduced significantly by practicing Vipassana meditation and showed moderate state of stress after completing the course. Thus, through the practice of Vipassana meditation people would have been able to moderate their level of stress.

Researches, regarding the effectiveness of Vipassana meditation as a Stress-management technique are still in progress. Very few studies regarding the significance of Vipassana meditation as a Stress-management technique have been made. Therefore, for the generalization and empirical verification of "Vipassana meditation as an effective stress management technique", further studies should also be conducted in Indian context.

In the present study through Vipassana meditation workshop, people can gain an understanding of mind and emotions, which make them able to cope with their stress and free from all mental defilements. It will also be helpful to promote the reduction of anger, calmness of mind, greater tolerance ability in individual and prevention of stress-based diseases, like cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure and other psychological distress.

Objectives of the Study:

In the light of above mentioned review of literatures, the objectives of this article is to provide empirical support for the effectiveness of Vipassana meditation as an effective technique of Stress-management and motivated to the researchers for collecting empirical support for Vipassana meditation as a better and improved coping skills with stress to the people for their less stressed and healthy lives.

CONCLUSIONS:

On the basis of the review of literatures, it can be concluded that the present article will be helpful for the researchers working in the area of stress-management. Awareness among people can be made through the learning of the technique of Vipassana meditation, so that they could be able to make their lives less-stressed and healthy. Empirical supports for the effectiveness of Vipassana meditation in stress management could also be drawn by arranging further researches in this area.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY:

To prove the effectiveness of Vipassana meditation in Stress-management follow-up studies should be made for a longer duration by researchers.

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