



HEARTFULNESS MEDITATION PROMOTES LIFE SATISFACTION

Medical Science

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ABSTRACT

Studies indicated that temporal satisfaction positively affects health. Research on Heartfulness meditation has established that it reduces stress, promotes mental well-being, both of which positively impact life satisfaction. Hence we explored whether Heartfulness Meditation promotes life satisfaction. Cross-sectional study was conducted among Heartfulness Meditators (n=5,988) and Non-Meditators (n=5,909) using snowballing technique for sample selection. 'Temporal Satisfaction with Life Scale' was used for data collection. Descriptive statistical analysis and independent t-test was performed. Result indicated that Heartfulness Meditators had significantly higher temporal satisfaction than non-meditators ($p < 0.05$). Similar effect was observed in sub-group analysis. Life dissatisfaction leads to chronic diseases. Heartfulness meditation helps to get rid of negative thoughts and develops positive energy that enables practitioner to realize the true nature of different circumstances and be contented which naturally leads to satisfied life. To conclude, Heartfulness meditation practice, as a lifestyle, appears to be an effective tool to promote life satisfaction.

KEYWORDS

Heartfulness Meditation, Life Satisfaction, Temporal satisfaction, Mental well-being.

INTRODUCTION

"You are what you think all day long" - Ralph Waldo Emerson

Sowing the positive thoughts all through the day is linked to a healthy life [1]. According to WHO, "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". This definition clearly states that mental well-being is imperative for a healthy life. Important factors among the positive psychology foreshadowing good health are positive emotions, life satisfaction and optimism [2, 3, 4].

Life satisfaction is defined as a cognitive judgement of the life of a person and reflects a global evaluation related to his or her life [5]. Temporal satisfaction is nothing but life satisfaction in the past, present and future. It gives an assimilated conclusion of how a person's life as a whole has gone, is going, and will go [6]. Studies indicate that temporal satisfaction and health are interrelated and temporal satisfaction has direct influence over health-related factors like chronic illnesses, sleep problems, physical fitness, stress, depression and physical activity [7]. Arrindell and his team found that anxiety was inversely related to life satisfaction [8]. Similarly, depression is consistently reported to be negatively correlated with life satisfaction in both clinical [9] and non-clinical samples [8,10]. Shilpy Kashyap and her team proved that employee's life satisfaction is directly proportional to efficient work and productivity in an organization [11].

Research indicates that life satisfaction is a predictor of longevity and psychiatric morbidity. There is evidence between life dissatisfaction and all-cause disease, injury and mortality with a dose-response relationship [12]. Life dissatisfaction is related to obesity and adverse health behaviors such as smoking, heavy drinking and physical inactivity. Also the connections between asthma, arthritis, diabetes and

heart disease with life dissatisfaction reside significant [7].

Factors like quality of society, position in society, personal abilities, courses of life events, flow of experience and inner process of evaluation determine the life satisfaction [13].

Studies have proven that meditation improves the inner strength which is one of the determinant of life satisfaction. It is a powerful technique for learning to live in and enjoy the moment. When practiced regularly, meditation appears to decrease negative emotions like anxiety and depression and increases positive emotions like joy, contentment and peace by balancing the chemical components in the brain areas like Amygdala & Hippocampus [14]. It also strengthens areas of the brain in charge of managing emotions and controlling attention. It makes a person more fully engaged in the here-and-now and more aware and appreciative of good things. In the recent studies, Heartfulness Meditation has been shown to improve the mental health [15], at the same time, reduces the stress [16], both of which are known to positively affect life satisfaction. To the best of our knowledge, no study has been conducted so far to figure out the direct link between temporal satisfaction and meditation. This is focus of our present study which is a cross sectional survey aimed to observe whether the practitioners of Heartfulness Meditation have higher levels of satisfaction in life compared to general population.

Methodology

Study design and participants

In this cross-sectional study, we used snowballing technique for selection of the participants. This study was conducted online from 1st Sept 2018 to 31st Oct 2018 using Google form Questionnaire; all those responded within this period have been taken for study analysis.

Totally 12,695 participants filled the Temporal Satisfaction

questionnaire. Among these, 5,988 had been practicing Heartfulness Meditation for more than one year and 5,909 are not practicing any kind of meditation. Remaining 798 participants were excluded from the study as 435 were below 18 years of age, 112 had not answered the questionnaire completely and 251 were practicing other forms of meditation.

Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire elicited information of demographic details and The Temporal Satisfaction with Life Scale [6] which contains 15 questions with 7-point Likert scale rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Descriptive statistical analysis was performed and Independent t test was used to find out the significance between meditators and non-meditators.

Results

The data has been grouped according to the demographic, social and health information. Mean, frequencies and percentage were carried out for the demographic profiles are seen in Table 1.

Table-1: Demographic profile of the study participants

Variables	Groups	Frequency	Percentage
Overall	Meditators	5988	50.3%
	Non meditators	5909	49.7%
Gender	Male	6380	53.6%
	Female	5517	46.4%
Type of family	Nuclear	7116	59.8%
	Joint	4781	40.2%
Nature of work	Heavy	110	0.9%
	Moderate	3551	29.8%
	Sedentary	8236	69.2%
Marital status	Single	4186	35.2%
	Married	7417	62.3%
	Separated	294	2.5%
Place of residency	Metro	3099	26.0%
	Urban	5881	49.4%
	Sub urban	1528	12.8%
Physical illness	Chronic illness	2816	23.7%
	No illness	9081	76.3%
Mental illness	Chronic illness	1047	8.8%
	No illness	10850	91.2%

Table 2 shows results of independent sample t-test that was carried out on all the subgroups such as gender, type of family, nature of work, marital status, place of residence and physical and mental health.

Data Analysis

Among the participants, 50.3% were Meditators and 49.7% were Non-meditators. Overall result indicates that Meditators ($M \pm SD = 69.65 \pm 14.17$) have significantly higher temporal satisfaction than non-meditators ($M \pm SD = 68.50 \pm 14.85$) ($p = 0.000$).

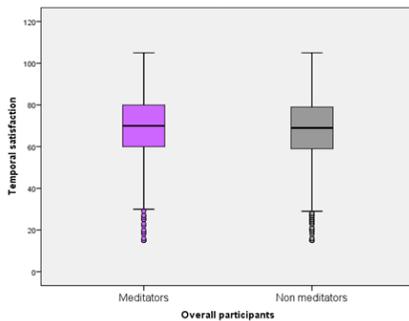


Figure 1: Distribution of TEMPORAL SATISFACTION SCORE of the overall study population

Gender

Our study population contains 53.6% males and 46.4% females. Among Female population, meditators displayed significantly higher temporal satisfaction in their lives than non-meditators ($p < 0.05$). Among male population also same trend was observed, even though it remained insignificant.

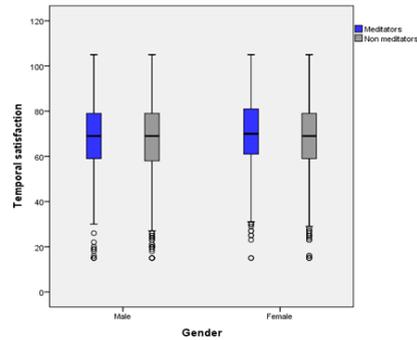


Figure 2: Distribution of TEMPORAL SATISFACTION SCORE – analysis based on Gender

Type of family

Under family systems, Nuclear (59.8%) and Joint family (40.2%) systems were considered for comparing Temporal satisfaction levels between meditators and non meditators.

A nuclear family is a family group that consists of only parents and their children.

A joint family is a large undivided family group where more than one generation lives together in a common house.

In nuclear families, meditators scored significantly higher Temporal satisfaction level ($M \pm SD = 68.84 \pm 14.20$) than non-meditators ($M \pm SD = 67.21 \pm 14.77$) ($p < 0.05$).

Even though Meditators in Joint family system showed higher score than non meditators it remained statistically insignificant.

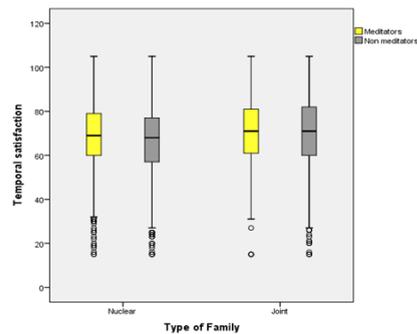


Figure 3: Distribution of TEMPORAL SATISFACTION SCORE – analysis based on Type of Family

Nature of work

69.2% of our study population were in the category of sedentary workers and among them meditators ($M \pm SD = 69.48 \pm 14.12$) scored significantly higher level of temporal satisfaction than non meditators ($M \pm SD = 68.70 \pm 15.19$).

Similar results were observed among the participants whose occupation has moderate & heavy physical activity ($p < 0.05$).

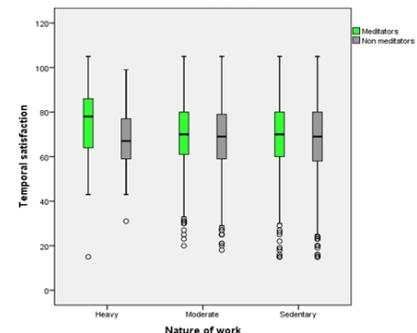


Figure 4: Distribution Of Temporal Satisfaction Score – Analysis Based On Nature Of Work

Marital status

Under the category of Marital Status, the analysis was done under three groupings, single (who had never been married), married (who were married at the time of study) and separated (who had once been married and had been separated or divorced or widowed at the time of study).

62.3% of the study population are married and among them meditators reported higher temporal satisfaction in their life than non meditators. Even among participants who fell into separated category, meditators scored higher levels of temporal satisfaction than non meditators.

In the category of Single, although the results in meditators showed higher than the non meditators, it did not reach statistical significance.

Place of residence

Based on the place of residence, our participants belonged to either Metro, Urban, Sub Urban or Rural area.

26 % of our participants were residing in Metros and among them Meditators showed significantly higher temporal satisfaction levels (M±SD = 69.40±14.33) than non meditators. (M±SD = 66.61±15.09) (p=0.000).

Even though the satisfaction level among meditators living in urban, sub urban and rural areas showed higher than the non-meditators, it is not statistically significant.

Chronic illness

In our study population 23.7% participants were reported to have chronic physical illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension, asthma, coronary heart disease, etc. Our study showed that among people suffering from chronic physical illnesses meditators displayed more temporal satisfaction than non – meditators (M±SD = 69.50 ± 14.62 < 65.37 ± 15.45) (p<0.05).

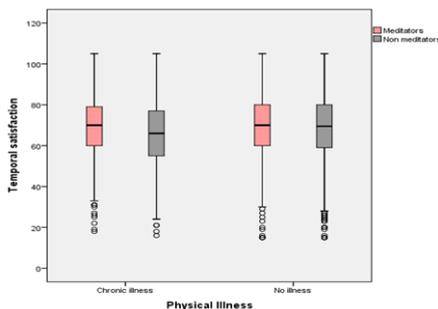


Figure 5: Distribution of TEMPORAL SATISFACTION SCORE – analysis based on Physical Illness

Likewise among participants who have chronic mental illness such as anxiety, depression and stress, meditators had higher temporal satisfaction than non-meditators (M±SD = 65.65 ± 14.57 > 60.31 ± 14.73) (p<0.05). The same results were observed in participants without any mental illnesses.

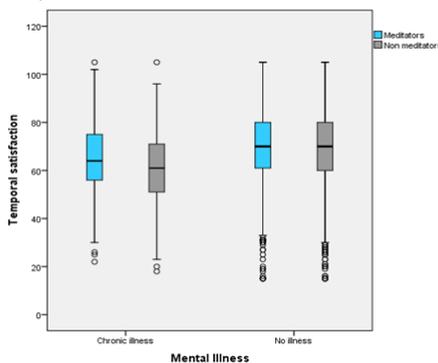


Figure 6: Distribution of TEMPORAL SATISFACTION SCORE – analysis based on Mental Illness

Box Plots: The centerline represents the Median. Rectangles stand for the middle half of the data which goes from 25th percentile to 75th

percentile. The whiskers go from minimum to maximum range. The open circles outside the whiskers indicate the outliers.

Table 2 - Analysis of Temporal Satisfaction level - Heartfulness Meditators Vs Non-Meditators

Variable	Group	Meditators (Mean ± SD)	Non meditators (Mean ± SD)	P value
Overall	Overall	69.65 ± 14.17	68.50 ± 14.85	0.000
Gender	Male	68.92 ± 14.28	68.23 ± 15.00	0.062
	Female	70.40 ± 14.01	68.84 ± 14.64	0.000
Type of family	Nuclear	68.84 ± 14.20	67.21 ± 14.77	0.000
	Joint	70.91 ± 14.03	70.32 ± 14.76	0.155
Nature of work	Heavy	73.70 ± 17.24	67.58 ± 12.91	0.039
	Moderate	69.98 ± 14.19	68.12 ± 14.19	0.000
	Sedentary	69.48 ± 14.12	68.70 ± 15.19	0.016
Marital status	Single	67.60 ± 14.04	67.65 ± 14.96	0.930
	Married	70.48 ± 14.16	69.46 ± 14.61	0.002
	Separated	66.52 ± 13.29	62.76 ± 16.06	0.036
Place of residency	Metro	69.40 ± 14.33	66.61 ± 15.09	0.000
	Urban	69.81 ± 14.15	69.16 ± 14.89	0.085
	Sub urban	69.85 ± 13.78	69.19 ± 13.41	0.355
	Rural	69.36 ± 14.18	68.19 ± 15.60	0.145
Physical illness	Chronic Physical illness	69.50 ± 14.62	65.37 ± 15.45	0.000
	No illness	69.70 ± 13.97	69.18 ± 14.63	0.082
Mental illness	Chronic Mental illness	65.65 ± 14.57	60.31 ± 14.73	0.000
	No illness	70.01 ± 14.08	69.34 ± 14.60	0.016

DISCUSSION

Several studies demonstrated that meditation leads to mental well-being [17,18]. But there is no study that specifically explores the connection between temporal satisfaction and meditation. We intent to bridge this gap, and found in our study that Meditators have higher temporal satisfaction than non-meditators; same results were observed in sub-group analysis which is detailed below.

Asthma and Ramzi reported females have higher life satisfaction than males [19]. Dost found that factors which influence males' and females' life satisfaction are different [20]. While sport, welfare or parental activities positively affect only females' life satisfaction, males are more affected by classical hobbies to increase their life satisfaction [21]. In our study female Heartfulness meditators displayed significantly higher temporal satisfaction in their life than non-meditators. Similarly, there was an increase of life satisfaction among male meditators, but it remained insignificant.

Life Satisfaction is attained in Joint and Nuclear families through different ways. In Joint families, a person learns patience, tolerance, cooperation, adjustment and interpersonal skills with the guidance of senior members of the family to achieve life satisfaction. In Nuclear family system it is attained by being independent, developing sense of confidence, warmth support and love [22]. Although, Heartfulness Meditators had increased life satisfaction in participants of both types of families, it was insignificant in joint family members. It has been observed in the previous studies that in nuclear family system, a person gets more free time and private space for himself [23]. It is likely that Meditators belonging to nuclear families are able to meditate better than the meditators belonging to joint families which could have aided for the significant improvement of life satisfaction.

Studies show that sedentary lifestyle induces life dissatisfaction [24]. Being moderate or heavy worker enhances their life satisfaction [25]. A white-collar worker who works at a desk and who is in positions of governance making important decisions for the organisation, has 'sedentary lifestyle'. In most cases, their lifestyle involves very less or no physical activity. This Sedentary lifestyle along with life dissatisfaction increases the risk of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and obesity. Also it enhances the risk of colon cancer, high blood pressure, osteoporosis, lipid disorders, depression and anxiety [26]. In our analysis, we found that people with sedentary occupation who practice Heartfulness meditation showed higher life satisfaction than the general population. This could reduce their risk of lifestyle diseases. Same trend was observed among moderate and heavy workers also.

Many studies proved that married people are more satisfied in their life [27,28]. People, who are all separated or never married, are not much satisfied with their life [28]. Moreover studies demonstrated that people who are all separated or widowed have higher suicidal tendency [29]. In our study Heartfulness meditators had showed significantly higher satisfaction in this sub-group of people. This might help to reduce their suicidal tendency. Similarly, among married participants, Heartfulness meditators reported significantly higher life satisfaction. In today's world, married couples undergo so many ups and downs in many situations of their life; this negatively affects their health as well as their married life [30]. This is the most important phase of one's life with regards to upbringing the next generation as well as a positive contribution to the society. Any intervention that increases satisfaction during this phase of life impacts the prosperity of the society as a whole. Even though the meditators who are never married displayed higher temporal satisfaction than non-meditators, it remained insignificant. Never married participants are likely to be of younger age group, who do not have much family responsibilities and they are yet to see the deeper aspects and challenges of their life. They are usually happy and joyful by default. Also, people of this age group are likely to have begun meditation very recently and would not have done enough practice to impact their life satisfaction significantly.

In our study, metro dwelling meditators reported significantly higher temporal satisfaction than non-meditators. Meditators who are living in urban, sub-urban and rural areas' disposed better satisfaction than non-meditators but it was not statistically significant. Naturally rural dwellers were found to have significantly higher life satisfaction than city dwellers [31]. Heartfulness meditation can be a tool for the metro or city dwellers to enhance their life satisfaction.

Studies demonstrated that reduced life satisfaction is related to the development of chronic diseases. Women who are all dissatisfied with their life are more prone to type 2 diabetes mellitus, cancer and stroke. Among men, life satisfaction showed a negative association with stroke incidence. There is a stronger inverse relationship between life satisfaction and mortality rate in men [32]. Studies significantly revealed that life satisfaction is inversely correlated with depression, anxiety and hopelessness. In our study, among the participants suffering from physical and mental illnesses, Heartfulness meditators displayed higher life satisfaction. This might have a double positive effect, because increase in life satisfaction reduces the severity and progression of the disease, also the positive thinking that naturally arises from the satisfied minds promotes adherence to the treatment by these people. This leads to better management and outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Temporal satisfaction declares a person's past, present and future's life satisfaction. It is important for a person to evaluate himself on how satisfied is he with his life. Life satisfaction is strongly connected with happiness which promotes physical health, mental health and longevity.

Factors like social participation, voluntary works, sports and cultural events have positive correlation with life satisfaction [21]. However, Meditation improves life satisfaction significantly. Our findings revealed that Heartfulness meditators have higher life satisfaction than non-meditators. Heartfulness meditation's cleaning practice helps a person to get rid of the unwanted negative thoughts from his mind [33]. This practice promotes peace, calmness, happiness and self confidence by eliminating stress, anxiety, depression, anger, disappointments and fear. Meditation develops a positive creative energy and inner dependency on higher self which enables a practitioner to realize the true nature of different life circumstances and be contented under all situations which naturally leads to a satisfied life [34]. To conclude, Heartfulness meditation practice, as a lifestyle, appears to be an effective tool to promote life satisfaction.

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