

LOVING KINDNESS MEDITATION AND ITS IMPACT ON FORGIVENESS AND SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING OF COLLEGE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Loving Kindness meditation is an age-old practise which has a lot of potential benefits for the practitioners. The present study was conducted to assess the impact of 30-days practice of Loving Kindness Meditation in improving forgiveness and subjective well-being of the college students in Kerala.

Method: The study constituted an initial purposive sample of 300 college students, who were administered with Rye's Forgiveness Scale and Subjective Well-being scale and 71 students (Men= 35, Women =36), who scored low on both the scales were randomly allotted to either an experimental group (Loving Kindness Meditation group) or a control group. The students in experimental group were given the treatment for 30 days while the control group did not receive any. The post-test measures were taken.

Statistical Analysis Used: The hypotheses were tested using paired sample t-test

Results: There was a significant difference in forgiveness and subjective well-being among the students in experimental group, while such a change was not found in the control group, when the pre-test and post-test scores were compared.

Conclusion: Loving Kindness Meditation was helpful in improving forgiveness and subjective well-being of college students.

Keywords: *Loving Kindness Meditation, Forgiveness, Subjective well-being, College Student*

INTRODUCTION

Loving Kindness Meditation is a unique form of meditation practise that has its origin in Buddhist tradition, which strives to develop perspectives of unconditional kindness towards both oneself and other people. While the specific operations vary across various Buddhist traditions, the central psychological operation is to continuously generate one's good intentions towards specific targets. Typically, those who practise quietly recite certain phrases towards targets, such as "may you be happy" or "may you be free from suffering." In some traditions, people visualise their goals or light emanating from their hearts directed towards others to aid in the formation of intentions (Zeng et al., 2015, Sujiva, 2007).

Research studies have very well established that Loving Kindness Meditation has a positive impact on positive emotions and has the ability cultivate or foster positive emotions (Diener et al., 2006; Zeng et al., 2013). Also, it has been identified that practising Loving Kindness Meditation, in addition to enhancing positive emotion, can also build the practitioner's personal resources; that can have an impact on enhanced life satisfaction and lesser depressive symptoms (Fredrickson et al., 2008). Another variable that is closely related to improved life satisfaction and experiencing positive emotions is forgiveness; which is the tendency towards letting go of animosity towards a perpetrator, who had done an unjust act (McCulloch, 2001).

Based on the literature regarding forgiveness, although several researchers have given different definitions to forgiveness, all the definitions follow a common core; that is, when an individual is forgiving to an offender, he/she is letting go of negative emotions and experiencing more positive emotions towards the offender (Gao, Li & Bai, 2022). Due to its association with positive emotions, researchers have extensively studied on the impact that forgiveness have on subjective well-being and found that apart from having a direct impact on subjective wellbeing, an indirect impact also exist, as forgiveness has an effect on gratitude, interpersonal satisfaction and social support (Zhu, 2015; Aricioglu, 2016). Further studies have stated that forgiveness is positively related to both short-term and long-term happiness as well as psychological well-being (Maltby et al., 2005; Davis et al., 2015).

Research evidence have immensely supported the importance of having subjective well-being. It has been identified by the investigators that having subjective well-being in life contributed to few negative psychological symptoms and more positive ones and it has been largely contributed to quality of life of the individuals (Abdel-Khalek & Lester, 2013; Skevington & Böhnke, 2018). It has been even suggested that subjective well-being along with GDP is a strong indicator of human progress (Easterlin, 2014).

Considering the desirability of having forgiveness and subjective well-being as a part of daily living, it is well-known that these variables can be cultivated using different techniques. The current study explored the impact of meditation technique- Loving Kindness Meditation in promoting forgiveness among the individuals and enhancing the overall subjective well-being.

Method

Objectives

1. To find out if Loving Kindness Meditation is effective in promoting forgiveness and subjective well-being of college students.

Hypotheses

H1: There is a significant improvement in the forgiveness and subjective well-being of college students in the Loving Kindness Meditation group

H2: There is no significant improvement in the forgiveness and subjective well-being of college students in the control group

Participants

The participants of the present study included 300 students within the age range 19-25, studying in various colleges in Kerala. From the initial sample, 71 (Men=35, Women=36) students who scored low in forgiveness and subjective well-being were randomly allotted to either an experimental group or a control group.

Sampling Design

A purposive sampling method was utilised where data was collected from 300 students from various colleges of Kerala and a random allotment method was employed to allot students to experimental and control groups.

Instruments

Rye Forgiveness Scale: developed by Rye et al. (2001); which has 15 items and two subscales: absence of negative subscale (10 items) and presence of positive subscale (5 items). Each item is scored using a five-point scale, ranging from one to five (strongly disagree to strongly agree).

Satisfaction With Life Scale: Diener et al. (1985) devised the Satisfaction With Life Scale, a 5-item scale in which each item is rated on a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating strongly disagree and 7 indicating strongly agree.

Procedure

300 students from different colleges in Kerala State, India, formed the primary source of data for the study. The researcher got in touch with the college principles to ask for permission to gather data from the students. After explaining the study's goals to the participants, the researcher later got their informed consent. The students were administered with the Rye forgiveness scale and Satisfaction With Life scale and 71 students (Men=35, Women=36) who scored low in both the scales were then randomly allotted to Loving Kindness Meditation group (N=35; Men=17, Women=18)) and control group (N=36; Men=18, Women=18). The participants in the Loving Kindness Meditation group received training for 30 days while the control group did not receive any. Then both the scales were readministered to the participants in the two groups and the pre-test and post-test scores were compared and contrasted.

Data Analysis

The data was carefully examined, coded, and scored, and SPSS 25 was used to perform the statistical analysis. The data was then examined for irregularities after that. According to the guidelines provided in the relevant manuals, the associated Scales were scored. The obtained scores were evaluated using statistical methods like paired t-test to test the hypotheses.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the Mean, SD and t-value of Loving Kindness Meditation group on forgiveness and subjective well-being

| | | N | Mean | SD | t-value |
|-------------------------------|-----------|----|-------|------|---------|
| Absence of Negative Emotions | Pre-test | 35 | 19.05 | 3.37 | 19.04** |
| | Post-test | 35 | 31.42 | 2.92 | |
| Presence of Positive Emotions | Pre-test | 35 | 10.34 | 1.98 | 19.47** |
| | Post-test | 35 | 17.37 | 2.22 | |
| Total Forgiveness | Pre-test | 35 | 29.40 | 4.31 | 22.89** |
| | Post-test | 35 | 48.80 | 4.49 | |
| Subjective wellbeing | Pre-test | 35 | 15.17 | 2.83 | 15.38** |
| | Post-test | 35 | 23.48 | 3.80 | |

****P<0.01; Significant**

From the table 1, it can be very clearly seen that there was a significant increase in the forgiveness and its dimensions as well as subjective wellbeing of the students after they have attended Loving Kindness meditation sessions. For instance, in the absence of negative emotions dimension of forgiveness the mean score of 19.05 has increased to 31.42, in the post test condition following the intervention, and t-value was 19.04; which was significant and high ($P<0.01$). Similarly, in the presence of positive emotions dimension, there was a significant increase when post-test scores ($M=17.37$) were contrasted with the pre-test scores ($M=10.34$), with a t-value of 19.47; which was highly significant at $P<0.01$. In terms of overall forgiveness, similar results were found where the pre-test scores were 29.40 and the post test scores were 48.80 with a corresponding t-value of 22.89; which was significant and high ($P<0.01$) and the overall effect size was found to be high, with Cohen's d value of 4.40. Identical results were also found in the case of subjective well-being where there was a significant increase in the mean scores of the participants when post-test scores ($M=23.48$) were compared with pre-test scores ($M=15.17$) following the intervention, with a corresponding t-value of 15.38 ($P<0.01$) and the effect size was found to be high with Cohen's $d=2.60$.

Loving Kindness Meditation is a primitive practise based on Buddhism that is useful in cultivating kindness, love and compassion towards others. Numerous advantages of this practise have been demonstrated in the previous researches. Because it promotes the growth of empathy and compassion for oneself and others, loving-kindness meditation may be helpful in increasing forgiveness. When one engages in loving-kindness meditation, he/she is essentially teaching their minds how to nurture joyful emotions and to be more accepting of both themselves and others.

This can make a person more sympathetic and understanding of other people, which in turn can make it simpler for him/her to forgive their transgressions. The findings of the current study are in line with the findings of Klevnick (2008); where the researcher found that a mindfulness training program which incorporated Loving Kindness Meditation was effective in promoting in forgiveness, self-control and patience of the employees.

Additionally, by lowering stress and fostering happy emotions, loving-kindness meditation may improve one's subjective well-being. By concentrating on good feelings during loving-kindness meditation, we can lessen our feelings of anxiety, depression, and other negative emotions. As a result, there may be a general rise in subjective well-being and a rise in happiness and contentment. The present results align with the findings of Rana (2015) that Loving Kindness Meditation is an effective tool in fostering the subjective well-being of practitioners. Similarly, in a study by Liu et al. (2020), it was found that LKM can be utilised in raising subjective well-being, mindfulness and spirituality of flight attendants. Hence, the hypothesis that there is a significant improvement in the forgiveness and subjective well-being of college students in the Loving Kindness Meditation group was accepted.

Table 2 shows the Mean, SD and t-value of control group on forgiveness and subjective well-being

| | | N | Mean | SD | t-value |
|-------------------------------|-----------|----|-------|------|---------|
| Absence of Negative Emotions | Pre-test | 36 | 19.83 | 3.89 | 0.70 |
| | Post-test | 36 | 19.77 | 3.75 | |
| Presence of Positive Emotions | Pre-test | 36 | 10.02 | 1.68 | 1.07 |
| | Post-test | 36 | 9.91 | 1.64 | |
| Total Forgiveness | Pre-test | 36 | 29.91 | 4.21 | 1.13 |
| | Post-test | 36 | 29.75 | 3.93 | |
| Subjective wellbeing | Pre-test | 36 | 13.94 | 2.38 | 1.43 |
| | Post-test | 36 | 13.77 | 2.17 | |

By having a close look on the table 2, it can be figured out that there was no significant difference in either forgiveness or subjective well-being among the students allotted to the control group. For instance, there were no significant differences in the pre-test and post-test scores of the subdimensions of forgiveness and overall forgiveness as well as that of subjective well-being among the participants of control group. The result was expected as the participants in the control group did not receive any treatment to improve their condition. Hence, the hypothesis that there is

no significant improvement in the forgiveness and subjective well-being of college students in the control group was accepted.

CONCLUSION

The present study was executed to identify whether Loving Kindness Meditation was efficient in promoting forgiveness and subjective well-being of college students. From the results, it was clear that Loving Kindness Meditation was very much effective in improving the forgiveness and subjective well-being which was consistent with the previous literature.

IMPLICATIONS

Modern psychotherapy should incorporate traditional meditation practises like Loving Kindness Meditation that has beneficial effects on the lives of practitioners. As it helps to promote forgiveness and subjective well-being of the students, it can have both academic and personal outcomes, as it helps to strengthen the relationships of the practitioners and help them to live a more fulfilling life.

LIMITATIONS

The study could have examined the influence of the participants' religious and spiritual orientation since forgiveness is a value that major religions encourage their adherents to instil. Another limitation of the current study is its dependence on self-report measures. Third-party reports and behavioural metrics that assess variables like forgiveness and subjective well-being would have provided more accurate and meaningful results.

SUGGESTIONS

Future studies can explore the how Loving Kindness Meditation can be useful in promoting related variables such as patience, self-control, social connectedness and be useful in the treatment of psychiatric symptoms. Also, the effectiveness can be checked in relation to other therapies based on the positive psychology philosophy.

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