

Benefits of meditation on working women

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Abstract - In recent times, women of a nation are the building blocks of a society, they are essential for its economic and social development. These women, however, has to maintain a dual responsibility of managing household chores and handling work responsibilities. Thus, it is likely that they would suffer from more stress as compared to men. Meditation was used to see if it proves to be an effective technique for lowering negative emotions and increasing positive motions among women. Thus, a total sample of 100 women, comprising 50 of those who performed meditation and 50 those who do not were taken. PANAS and Life Satisfaction were administered on them and later results were analyzed using t statistic. It was found that significant differences existed between the degree to which these women experience positive and negative emotions and their life satisfaction also varied considerably.

Index Terms - PANAS, Life Satisfaction, Meditation.

INTRODUCTION

Health is one of the most important factors that every human strives to maintain. World Health Organization has defined health as “a complete state of physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. Rather than describing health as an absence of illness, it is recognized to be an accomplishment involving maintenance of balance between physical, mental, and social well-being. The popular term wellness is used to denote to this optimal state of health (Frank, 2002). People adopt different techniques like Yoga, Meditation and exercise in order to stay fit in this fast-growing world, full of stress, where they actually try to maintain a balance between their working life as well as personal lives. In today’s fast-growing world, stress is growing nowadays considerably which affects physical and mental health of people. Most of the organizations, thus, in order to keep their employees

healthy and devoted towards their work, they conduct various workshops and stress buster programs. So these programs are meant to boost the individuals’ ability to strike a good equilibrium in their lives.

Women, in recent times are playing a vital role in being a crucial building block for the adequate economic and social development. They are making their place in diversified fields such as in the top management in a corporate, a lawyer, teacher, or doctor etc. It is even more difficult for them to strike a balance between their working and personal lives; thus they are likely to experience greater levels of stress as compared to the males. Another study also suggested that women have a greater chance of experiencing symptoms like fatigue, irritability, and depression than men (Kermane, 2016). It was reported that stress levels of women are at its peak during the middle age, wherein one out of every five middle-aged women experiences stress either constantly or frequently in the past years (Gregoire, 2013). Thus, the amount of stress experienced by working women and housewives varies considerably and it is the working women, who are more stressed.

There are a lot of techniques that have been used by health psychologists or different health care professionals to help people overcome stressful situations. Research has indicated that eradication of stress is linked with improvement in an individual’s health and methods like meditation, yoga and exercise are instrumental in achieving the goal of good health. Exercising to Improve health. Exercising for at least 30 minutes a day helps people in relieving their stress levels. It helps in improving the functioning of the heart and helps in healthy circulation of blood. It can have positive impacts on brain functioning and in improving focus and mood. There are a number of ways through which people can do exercise, such as going for a brisk walk, doing weightlifting, strength

training, swimming, playing outdoor sports such as basketball, volleyball etc.

Yoga. Yoga helps people in improving flexibility through mastering different postures. It increases one's blood flow, more specifically, the relaxation exercises one learns in yoga helps in circulation, especially in hands and feet. It also helps in providing oxygen to body cells, which improves their overall functioning.

Following a Healthy Diet. Eating a balanced diet, full of fruits with high fibers, green vegetables, cereals and pulses, also having low-sugar, and low-salt also helps in improving overall body functioning. A balanced and healthy diet provides a person with more energy and improves one's outlook and moods. This kind of diet helps in lowering the risk for stroke, heart disease, diabetes and other serious physical illnesses.

Preventing disease and injury. Probiotics are termed as a good bacterium that helps in overall body functioning. These substances are good bacteria and are responsible for maintaining intestinal health as opposed to bad bacteria that can lead to infection. They may also help in the prevention of yeast infections and urinary tract infections.

Meditation. Meditation is a great way of relaxing the entire body and mind. Daily meditation helps a person to become more resilient to the stressors of everyday life. For practicing meditation, daily, it is important that a person should relax and focused. It may or may not be performed with a positive mantra such as "Om", while taking deep breaths, trying to sync with the mantra. This Deep breathing can help in lowering a person's heart rate and blood pressure allowing him/her to take a moment away from a stressful task. It also relieves mood and induces positive thinking and reframe one's view of the situation.

It can be considered as a pill which enhances the chemistry between the mind and body. Meditation is a type of mental exercise wherein an individual emphasis on 'contemplation or reflection to attain a state of relaxation or peace' (Newberg et al., 2010). Scientific studies have constantly highlighted that meditation helps to enhance physical, emotional as well as mental health. For instance, meditation helps in reducing negative emotions, improves stress management skills and increases self-awareness.

When one uses meditation to manage stress, the ultimate aim is to stimulate the process of relaxation. This relaxation response neutralizes the overflow of

stress induced hormones in a human body. In addition, it has a positive influence on an individual's psychological well-being. Some of the benefits of meditation are listed below.

Increased Immunity. Meditation helps in the process of relaxation and enhances immunity of patients suffering from cancer. This was supported by a study conducted at Ohio State University wherein it was found that the technique of progressive muscular relaxation can be instrumental in reducing the incidence of breast cancer and its recurrence (Dhabhar, 2007).

Emotional Balance. Meditation helps a person in becoming emotionally strong, by keeping away all the remunerating thoughts. It helps them to strike an emotional balance and get free of the problematic behaviors that result because of the traumatized ego. This task might appear difficult at first but is achievable through meditation and such cases of troubled ego can be cured.

Reduction in risk of serious diseases. A study at Harvard Medical School also revealed that meditation helps in reducing blood pressure by lessening the responsiveness of body to stress related hormones. In addition, it also helps us to eliminate stress related to daily lives by relaxing us, which helps in reducing the risk of heart diseases, arthritis, asthma and various skin diseases. Research says that the relaxation that meditation provides helps in reducing the risk of various diseases and symptoms by making the human body resistant to the stress responses.

The only difference between a person who meditates and who do not is that in a meditative mind, the power of how to evaluate a thought lies in the hand of the person itself, however in a non- meditative mind the stress provoking though becomes too powerful. A study conducted by Aline (1998) also revealed that there exist differences in women who practices meditation and those who do not for instance, women who were into meditation we're more calm, generated alternate solutions to problems, paid more attention to environmental cues and also displayed optimism.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Meditation helps people in taking charge of their own thoughts and bodies and lets them decides as to how they would like to respond to a stress provoking situation. "Studies have shown improved ability to

[permanently] regulate emotions in the brain. It is very empowering. We wanted to see the effect of meditation on their positive and negative emotions as well as their life satisfaction. Meditation was taken as a variable as it has a direct impact on their spiritual and mental wellbeing and not the physical aspects of health. The focus of this study is to assess the peace of mind rather than the benefits one receives from physical postures.

As we have chosen the sample as working women and if they practice meditation, they will be more focused and will be able to maintain a balance between personal and work life. They will be able to stay calmer and will be able to handle day to day chores properly.

Researchers have shown that meditation is responsible for making the brain better at processing information, making decisions, forming memories, and improving attention. It also prevents us from falling into the trap of distractions and multitasking. Meditation also helps in dealing with stressful situations.

METHOD

Purpose: To investigate the effects of meditation on working women using Life satisfaction scale and Positive and negative Affect Scale (PANAS).

Objectives

1. To assess the negative affect of working meditating and non-meditating women.
2. To assess the positive affect of working meditating and non-meditating women.
3. To assess life satisfaction of working meditating and non- meditating women.

Hypotheses

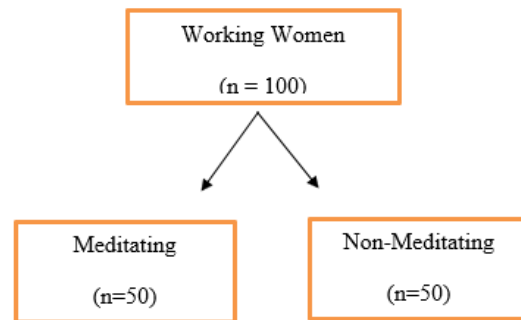
1. There is no significant difference in negative affect of working meditating and non-meditating women.
2. There is no significant difference in the positive affect of working meditating and non-meditating women.
3. There is no significant difference in the life satisfaction of working meditating and non-meditating females.

Sample

The total research sample consisted of 100 participants that were chosen from two different groups, working

women who practice meditation and working women who did not meditate. All the participants of the sample were in the age group of 35-45 years old and the women who belonged to the meditation group were practicing meditation since at least a year. Women were chosen as a sample for this study because they are required to maintain a balance between both household chores and work life, which is a highly stressful task and practice of meditation is believed to play some role in alleviating their stress levels. Meditation was selected as technique because the purpose was to assess only the peace of mind and not the physical aspects of health which is done in yoga.

A non-probability purposive sampling technique was used for selecting the sample. This technique attempts to incorporate only those people in the study who are typical of the population in which the researcher is interested.



TOOLS USED

1. PANAS- Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) This scale measures the affect of an individual in various contexts like the present moment, the past day, week, or year, or in general. It consists of 20 items, 10 measuring positive affect (e.g., excited, inspired) and 10 measuring negative affect (e.g., upset, afraid). A five-point Likert scale is used to rate each item which then helps to measure the extent to which the affect has been experienced in a specified time frame.

Psychometric properties of the scale are also good. It has an average Cronbach's alpha of 0.88 for the positive affect items and 0.87 for the negative affect items. Factor analysis was also performed on the items to ensure that each included item is closely related to either positive or negative affect but not both. The sub

scale ‘Negative Affect’ correlates strongly with scores of scales related to depression and distress.

2.SWLS- Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) is a short 5 item scale that measures cognitive judgments about satisfaction with one’s life. It is a 7-point response scale, having 5 as the lowest score and 35 as the highest score. Scores of 5-9 indicate that the respondent is extremely dissatisfied with his or her life while scores ranging 31-35 indicates extreme satisfaction. The psychometric properties of this scale are good. The coefficient alpha ranges 0.79 to 0.89, indicating that the scale has high internal consistency. Even in terms of validity, the scale displays good convergent and discriminant validity.

PROCEDURE

Keeping the purpose of study in mind, data was collected from 100 research participants belonging to two groups, working women practicing meditation and working women that did not meditate. Informed consent was obtained from the participants and voluntary participation was ensured. A single administration to two questionnaires, Satisfaction with life scale and PANAS was done. As all the participants were well versed with English therefore, the English version of the tests were administered, and instructions were delivered lucidly to avoid any confusions. There was no time limit for completing the test, but the participants were asked to complete it quickly. The participants were not informed about the precise nature of the questions being asked to prevent any socially desirable responses or deliberate lying on questions. Results were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

RESULTS

Table 1.1 depicts scores of the meditating (n=50) and non-meditating (n=50) women on PANAS and its two dimensions.

Dimension	Mean (Meditating Women)	Mean (Non-Meditating Women)	T Obtained
Negative Affect	17.32	24.1	5.10**
Positive Affect	37.94	32.1	3.63**

The table depicts that non meditating women had higher negative affect than meditating women as their

means on the dimension of negative affect were 24.1 and 17.32 respectively. Obtained t for this dimension was 5.10 which was significant at 0.01 level of significance. Similarly, on the dimension of positive affect, meditating women obtained a mean of 37.94 while non-meditating women obtained a mean score of 32.1, suggesting that positive affect was higher among meditating women than non-meditating women. Obtained t for this dimension was 3.63, significant at 0.01 level of significance.

Table 1.2 depicts scores of the meditating (n=50) and non-meditating (n=50) women on Satisfaction with Life Scale

Mean (Meditating Women)	Mean (Non-Meditating Women)	T Obtained
26.36	22.22	3.91

The table depicts that mediating women were higher on life satisfaction as compared to the non-meditating women as they obtained a mean score of 26.36 and 22.22 respectively. Obtained t score for this dimension 3.91, significant at 0.01 level of significance.

DISCUSSION

The aim of the study was to investigate the effects of meditation on working women using Life satisfaction scale and Positive and negative Affect Scale (PANAS). Due to an increase in competition and adoption of modern lifestyle, stress has become an inevitable part of the individual’s life. This is especially true for working women who are constantly required to balance their professional and personal lives. Past research has suggested that while nothing can be instrumental in eliminating stress, meditation can aid women in dealing with it in a more effective manner. Meditation is a technique or mental exercise wherein the individual focuses on contemplation or reflection to attain a state of relaxation and peace. It helps in rejuvenating the body and alleviates the stress level of an individual.

Keeping the above aspects in mind, a sample consisting of 50 working women was selected for the present study. They were chosen from two different groups i.e. working women who practice meditation and working women who did not meditate. Mediation was taken as variable in order to assess a person’s mental health and well-being. It was ensured that all the participants in the sample were in the age group of

35-45 years old and the meditating women were practicing meditation for at least two years.

The first hypothesis of the present study was that there is no significant difference in the negative affect of working meditating and non-meditating women. Based on table 1.1, it can be highlighted that the hypothesis is rejected ($t_{obt} = 5.10$), and there is a significant difference in negative affect of working meditating and working non-meditating women. Additionally, comparison of means for this dimension suggested that negative affect was more for working non-meditating women than working meditating women. These findings affirm the notion that meditation is beneficial for good mental state and wellbeing of the individual. Similar results were obtained in another study as well, wherein women who reported meditating for one year were found to be more calm, optimistic, and had lower negative emotions even during the times of crisis.

The second hypothesis was that there is no significant difference between positive affect of working meditating women and non-meditating women. Reference to table 1.1 suggests that the hypothesis is rejected ($t_{obt} = 3.63$), and there is a significant difference in positive affect of working meditating and non-meditating women and meditating women. Comparison of means highlights that working meditating women are more likely to experience positive affect and emotions than the working women who were not meditating. Such a difference could be attributed to the fact that meditation aids women in enhancing their levels of self-esteem, self-acceptance, and optimism about the future. It also helps in developing more positive social connections with others which provides them with the social support required to deal with various stressful events of life. All these aspects are then likely to be instrumental in enhancing their experience of positive affect and emotions.

The third and final hypothesis of the study was that there is no significant difference between the life satisfaction of working meditating and non-meditating females. Table 1.2 suggests that the hypothesis is rejected ($t_{obt} = 3.91$), and there is a significant difference in the life satisfaction between working meditating and working non-meditating women. Additionally, mean comparison of the two groups suggested that life satisfaction of meditating women was higher as compared to the non-meditating women.

This can be explained by the way people who meditate think and experience. Literature has proposed that women who meditate can motivate and inspire other people, which further enhances their view of themselves and their life. Moreover, they can pursue and attain their desired goals due to which they considered their life worthwhile and are more satisfied with it. Studies have also shown that people who meditate are generally happy with their life and are less likely to focus on negative emotional states (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000). These findings can be supported by the homeostatic model which states that a person's mood and outlook towards life has an influence on their perception and life satisfaction.

Thus, based on the findings mentioned above, it can be concluded that meditation is advantageous, having a positive impact on the mental and physical health of the individual. It should, therefore, be inculcated in the lifestyle of an individual, especially working women who are burdened with the dual responsibility of managing their personal as well as professional lives. Balancing between these roles can be a tough and stressful job for women. It can be the starting point for various stress-related disorders like heart disease, skin problems, arthritis and asthma however, practice of meditation can help to alleviate the ill effects of stress. It helps in reducing the negative emotions, improves stress management skills as people who practice meditation can generate effective alternate solutions to their problems by paying greater attention to environmental cues and displaying optimism and positive emotions during the negative situations. Moreover, it enhances a person's immunity and helps in dealing with various physical and psychological diseases including depression, anxiety and substance abuse.

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