

MINDFULNESS - BASED MENTAL TRAINING TO DEVELOP MENTAL HEALTH AND WORK PRODUCTIVITY OF SRI LANKANS

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Introduction

Sri Lanka is a prime Buddhist country in which Theravada Buddhism has been practiced for around 300 years. The core teachings of the Buddhism mainly deal with practical aspect rather than praying or performing rites and rituals. However, with passing the time, people of the country have got used to believe Buddhism rather than practice. Mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*) is the heart of Buddhism and has been instructed by the Buddha to practice it with each and every posture of daily lifestyles but the devotees as well as the monks of the country recite *Satipaṭṭhānasutta* on Poyadays and at funerals of monks. Yet, researchers of non-Buddhist countries have developed a series of mindfulness training methods that can be used for the various illnesses and to enhance efficacy indifferent fields. This research focused to pave the way to examine the importance of mindfulness training rather than reciting.

Method

This is a qualitative research with the sample of ten males who had been experiencing chronic stress, poor attention, sleeping problems and disappointment of life. They were employees of government and private sectors. They were instructed to practice mindfulness on breathing (*ānāpānasati*) and mindfulness on walking at least 20 minutes per day for 3

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months. Progressiveness of their mental health was carried out through interviews.

Result

After one month, 4 of them showed positive progress in their mental health. They informed their ability to sleep well than before and effectiveness of their works. After completing the 3 months 7 of them informed the positive improvements in both mental health and works.

Discussion

The concept of MBSR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction) was introduced and developed by Jon Kabat- Zinn in the University of Massachusetts Medical School. Later, many scholars in a various field of studies have paid their attention on this regard and applied mindfulness methods in their fields. As results, today mindfulness techniques have been applied in a various field such as Psychology, Medicine, Military, Industries, Business, Marketing and others. They have discussed widely positive result of mindfulness training in each field. Sri Lanka is a country that still has been developing. The main problem that has been faced by the country is poor economy. People are suffering from diverse economic problems. The productivities of Government and Private Sectors have been decreased rapidly. It is impossible to increase economy of the country unless rapid change in administration and mental condition of each sector and employees. As a matter of fact, the employers mostly do not pay much attention on mental fitness of the employees. Most of employees suffering from slight psychological disorders such as stress, adjustment, phobias, addictions etc. It is useless to punish such an employee who is suffering from mental imbalance. Mental fitness training is necessary to reduce their problems. MBSR or MMFT (Mindfulness-Based Mental Fitness) would easily be applicable to resolve these problems. In general, the meaning of mindfulness is paying attention in a particular way, keeping the mind in the present without being non-judgmental. This also can be called an

investigation of the nature of one's own mind through careful and systematic self-observation. Mindfulness helps to regulate the brain functions. When someone takes a decision amygdala and the prefrontal cortex of the brain starts to work. The amygdala is the part of the brain that decides if one should get angry or anxious and the pre-frontal cortex is the part that makes one stop and think about things. The prefrontal cortex helps analysing and planning, but it takes a long time to make decisions. The amygdala makes rapid judgments about a situation and has a powerful effect on one's emotions and behaviour, linked to survival needs. For instance, if a man sees a lion leaping out at him, the amygdala will trigger a fight or flight response long before the prefrontal cortex responds. But making hasty conclusion, amygdala may be wrong because there may not be as much danger in a situation as we think. But, emotionally charged situation can trigger uncontrollable fear or anger leading to conflict, anxiety, and stress. Long-term mindfulness meditation would control amygdala and may be able to intervene before a fight or flight response takes over and perhaps even redirects it into more constructive or positive feelings. A person's behaviour automatically occurs when he physically and mentally endowed with strength. But when they get stress due to various circumstances, they lose their mindfulness and fall into trouble. This is clearly observed when someone is mentally confused. When someone gets angry, his angry mind reacts towards the object with an angry behaviour. But, if someone has cultivated mindfulness, he can notice his angry feelings and then he has a better chance of calming it down.

Mindfulness of breathing is the most effective technique in stress reduction. According to scientific evidence, the body's primary natural method of stress response reduction is to engage the parasympathetic nervous system to counteract the tension producing action of the sympathetic nervous system. The breath is the direct route to activate parasympathetic nervous system. Conscious deep rhythmic breathing has a calming effect on the body and tends to help the heart to slow down, the

mind to quieten and attention to turn inward towards the sensation of inhalation and exhalation.

Mindful Walking brings a number of benefits in addition to the cultivation of mindfulness. It can be a helpful way to build concentration. When we are tired or sluggish, walking can be invigorating. The sensations of walking can be more compelling than the more subtle sensations of breathing while sitting. Walking can be quite helpful after a meal, upon waking from sleep. At times of strong emotions or stress, mindful walking may be more relaxing. An added benefit is that, when done for extended times, walking can build strength and stamina.

The participants were taught to practice mindfulness breathing and walking. Beginning they were reluctant to do so as, even though they are Buddhist, some of them never practiced meditation. Gradually, they were familiar with the practices and tried to concentrate on breathing even, while working. Participants who had sleeping problems were significantly showed more positive result and a few months later they had come back to fully normal. Participants who experience constant stress had said that they have feel better than past. Most important thing is that of participants enjoyed their working in the workplace and inter relationship had been very strong rather than past.

Conclusion:

The most significant thing that has been understood from the study is mindfulness can be applied for the above mental disorders effectively. If we can introduce mindfulness techniques for the common people who have engaged in any vocations, the productivities will be increased.

Keywords: mindfulness, Theravada Buddhism, mental illness, mental fitness, brain function

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