

Comparative Analysis of the Level of Contentment Before and After the Practice of Meditation

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Abstract

Objective: To carry out a comparative analysis of the level of contentment of people before and after the practice of meditation.

Methodology: The study was carried out among a randomly selected sample of 50 people who have done meditation for at least three months in Kozhikode District of Kerala. Data was collected using a questionnaire which contained the measure of contentment, the characteristics of the respondents such as age, marital status, period of meditation practice, whether they had any psychological problems or any other problems during the past six months. The data was analyzed as percentages and through statistical test.

Results: The findings show that after meditation practice, more number of people experienced the positive contentment items and less number experienced the negative items considered under the study, when compared to before doing meditation. This is also reflected in the higher contentment scores after the start of meditation than before starting it, with statistically significant difference in the scores. Meditators reporting psychological problems and other problems in life during the past six months obtained a lower contentment score than those who had no such problems, with statistically significant difference in the scores. Respondents with 16 months of meditation practice obtained a higher contentment score than those who have done meditation for 3 to 10 months, with statistically significant difference in their scores.

Conclusions: The study has revealed that meditation has helped in improving the level of contentment of people, when compared to before the start of meditation. It would be useful if the institutions carrying out research on meditation, yoga etc. transfer the results to people through appropriate means so that more people could be motivated to practice them and achieve mindfulness and better wellbeing in their lives.

Keywords: Meditation, Practitioners, Contentment in Life

Introduction

Contentment in life is the degree to which one perceives wants are being met and accordingly, getting satisfied with what you have and who you are. Instead of comparing oneself to others or wishing for a different life, you feel like living a life you can stand behind, accepting yourself as you are today, and valuing all the opportunities and experiences. This contributes to inner peace, happiness, gratitude and compassion to others and a feeling of purpose and meaning in life. Peace of mind and positivity developed through contentment in life will help in personal growth and self-improvement. Cultivating the necessary skills of self-awareness, mindfulness, etc. can help in enabling con-

tentment in life as meditation is the key to awareness. Self-contentment will help the person to live in harmony with oneself and the world.

There is a form of well-being and happiness, called eudemonia happiness, which was first explored by Aristotle. This type of happiness is not dependent on external circumstances but rather emerges from an inner sense of well-being and living in alignment with one's values, which allows us to feel content without needing validation from the outside world. Mindfulness can help us cultivate a sense of inner well-being, which allows us to feel content without needing validation from the outside world.

Mindfulness meditation helps us become more familiar with the nature of the mind and more skilful in noticing when we are getting caught in these patterns, which can help us to choose to disengage and move our attention in ways that support us rather than pull us down.

Methodology

This study has attempted to analyze the level of contentment in life of respondents before and after the start of breath awareness meditation done for 20 minutes a day. 50 people who have done meditation for at least three months in Kozhikode District of Kerala were selected randomly. Data was collected from them using a questionnaire which contained the measure of contentment [1], the characteristics of the respondents such as age, marital status, period of meditation practice, whether they had any psychological problems or any other problems during the past six months. The data was analyzed as percentages and through statistical test.

Results

Table 1 gives the contentment score of the respondents before and after the start of meditation.

While 60 % respondents get a contentment scores in the range of 60 to 68 before the start of meditation, the scores increase to

66 to 76 % for 60 % respondents after the start of meditation practice. Similarly, 40 % respond of meditation, which increases to 94 to 100 for 40 % respondents after the start of meditation practice. This indicates that the level of contentment in life experienced after starting meditation practice is comparatively more than what they had experienced before starting meditation.

Meditation can promote feelings of wellness, satisfaction and happiness in general. Meditation helps us to keep our mind in the present moment contributing to one of the happiest experiences one can have. It also encourages attending to both internal and external stimuli in the present moment in a non-judgmental and open manner. There are overall changes in the combinations of neurotransmitters that reflect a more positive, relaxed, and even contented direction through meditation. The mind holds innate qualities of well-being and clarity that lie waiting beneath the superficial level of dissatisfaction. The main purpose of meditation is to access, recognize and enhance the positive qualities of mind. The more we can do this, the less we need to rely on external situations for our happiness. (Source: Does Meditation Make You Happy. <https://mindworks.org/blog/meditation-make-you-happy/>). Some researchers suggest that paying attention to inner occurrences with acceptance leads to emotional benefits [2, 3].

Table 1: Contentment score of the respondents before and after the start of meditation

Before the start of meditation		After the start of meditation	
Contentment score range	Respondents (%)	Contentment score range	Respondents (%)
60 to 68	60	66 to 76	60
78 to 83	40	94 to 100	40
Total	100	Total	100

Table 2 shows the statistical significance of the difference in contentment scores before and after meditation practice.

The mean score is higher after meditation practice, when compared to before practice, and there exists statistically significant difference in the scores. This result also establishes the influence of meditation practice in improving contentment in life.

Table 2: Statistical significance of the difference in contentment scores before and after meditation practice

Mean contentment score	
Before meditation practice	After meditation practice
70.7	82.0
t stat = -2.80; significant p<0.01	

Table 3 shows the problems experienced by the meditators getting different contentment scores during the past six months.

It can be made out from Table 3 that respondents getting comparatively low contentment scores in the range of 66 to 76 report either psychological problems or other problems experienced during the past six months period. However, respondents under a higher score range of 94 to 100 have not reported any problems during the past six months period. This implies that those who faced problems in life were not able to achieve that much

of contentment in life through meditation, as compared to those who had no significant problems. Meditation is not helpful if it used to avoid facing ongoing problems or emerging crises in the meditator's life (Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Effects_of_meditation). It is also possible that there may be underlying factors such as stress, anxiety, or other mental health issues that could be impacting the ability to experience the benefits of meditation (Source: <https://www.quora.com/Why-does-meditation-have-no-effect-on-me>).

Table 3: Problems reported by the meditators getting different contentment scores

Contentment score	Problem reported by the meditators during the past six months	Level of the problem
66	Had other problems in life	More
69	Had psychological problem	More
73	Had psychological problem	Less
76	Had other problems in life	Less
94	No significant problems	NA
98	No significant problems	NA
99	No significant problems	NA
100	No significant problems	NA

Table 4 shows the statistical significance of the difference in contentment scores based on psychological problem experienced by meditators during the past six months.

Those who report experiencing psychological problems during the past six months get a comparatively lower mean content-

ment score, when compared to those who report no psychological problems (Table 4). The statistically significant difference in their scores (Table 4) indicate the influence of psychological problems in reducing the level of contentment achieved through meditation.

Table 4: Statistical significance of the difference in contentment scores based on psychological problem experienced by meditators during the past six months

Psychological problem experienced during the past six months	
Yes	No
Mean contentment score	Mean contentment score
71.0	84.4
t stat value = -2.40; significant $p < 0.05$	

Statistical significance of the difference in contentment scores based on any other problems experienced by meditators during the past six months is shown in Table 5.

Similar to the case of psychological problems experienced by the meditators, other problems in the past six months also resulted in a comparatively lower contentment score for them than those who do not report any problems in life, with statistically

significant difference in the scores (Table 5). As discussed in relation to the data in Table 3, problems experienced by the meditators led to a reduction in their contentment scores.

The reduction in contentment may probably be because the level of problems experienced by them, including psychological issues is more than the benefits achieved through meditation.

Table 5: Statistical significance of the difference in contentment scores based on other problems experienced by meditators during the past six months

Experienced other problems during the past six months	
Yes	No
Mean contentment score	Mean contentment score
71.0	88.8
t stat = -2.90; significant $p < 0.05$	

Table 6 shows the contentment scores of the respondents based on period of meditation practice and statistical significance of the difference in the scores.

The mean contentment score of respondents having 3 to 10 months of meditation practice is only 78, as compared to the score of 96.5 of those who have done meditation for a longer period of 16 months, with statistically significant difference in

the scores (Table 6). A 2016 study found that longer-term meditation practice was associated with structural changes of the “white matter” in the brain, which is responsible for “relaying sensory information” and can explain why meditation helps people stay in the present moment and may help combat age-related cognitive decline (Source: <https://fortune.com/well/2023/02/11/how-long-you-need-to-meditate-to-see-results-for-your-body-and-brain/>).

Table 6: Statistical significance of the difference in contentment scores based on period of meditation practice

Period of meditation practice (months)	
3 to 10	16
Mean contentment score	Mean contentment score
78.0	96.5
t stat = -3.46; significant $p < 0.01$	

The characteristics of respondents, namely, age, sex and marital status were not found to statistically influence the contentment scores of the respondents. However, meditators in the age group of 42 to 56 years had a mean contentment score of 87, while those who were in the younger age group of 22 to 39 years had a mean score of 79.4 only. Males had a higher mean contentment score of 85.2 than females (score of 76.5). Similarly, married meditators had a mean contentment score of 83.2, as compared to the score of 79.5 of unmarried meditators.

The above mentioned results indicate that respondents in the comparatively higher age groups were able to attain more of life contentment through meditators, males attained a comparatively higher level of contentment in life through meditation, and married meditators were able to achieve better contentment through meditation than unmarried meditators.

Meditation practitioners taken from an older population showed a reduction in blink (attentional decline) as compared to a control group taken from a younger population [4]. The older you are, the happier you will be, with less stress, anxiety and depression (Source: <https://time.com/collection/guide-to-happiness/4464811/aging-happiness-stress-anxiety-depression/>). Unmarried yoga practitioners reported significantly higher levels of anxiety and depression [5].

Discussion

Table 1 shows that while 60 % respondents got a contentment scores in the range of 60 to 68 before the start of meditation, the scores increase to 66 to 76 % for 60 % respondents after the start of meditation practice. Similarly, 40 % respondents get score in the range of 78 to 83 before the start of meditation, which increases to 94 to 100 for 40 % respondents after the start of meditation practice. This indicates that the level of contentment in life experienced after starting meditation practice is comparatively more than what they had experienced before starting meditation.

Meditation can promote feelings of wellness, satisfaction and happiness in general. Meditation helps us to keep our mind in the present moment contributing to one of the happiest experiences one can have. It also encourages attending to both internal and external stimuli in the present moment in a non-judgmental and open manner. There are overall changes in the combinations of neurotransmitters that reflect a more positive, relaxed, and even contented direction through meditation. The mind holds innate qualities of well-being and clarity that lie waiting beneath the superficial level of dissatisfaction. The main purpose of meditation is to access, recognize and enhance the positive qualities of mind. The more we can do

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The mean score is higher after meditation practice, when compared to before practice, and there exists statistically significant difference in the scores (Table 2). This result also establishes the influence of meditation practice in improving contentment in life.

It can be made out from Table 3 that respondents getting comparatively low contentment scores in the range of 66 to 76 report either psychological problems or other problems experienced during the past six months period. However, respondents under a higher score range of 94 to 100 have not reported any problems during the past six months period. This implies that those who faced problems in life were not able to achieve that much of contentment in life through meditation, as compared to those who had no significant problems. Meditation is not helpful if it used to avoid facing ongoing problems or emerging crises in the meditator's life (Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Effects_of_meditation). It is also possible that there may be underlying factors such as stress, anxiety, or other mental health issues that could be impacting the ability to experience the benefits of meditation (Source: <https://www.quora.com/Why-does-meditation-have-no-effect-on-me>).

Those who report experiencing psychological problems during the past six months get a comparatively lower mean contentment score, when compared to those who report no psychological problems (Table 4). The statistically significant difference in their scores (Table 4) indicate the influence of psychological problems in reducing the level of contentment achieved through meditation.

Similar to the case of psychological problems experienced by the meditators, other problems in the past six months also resulted in a comparatively lower contentment score for them than those who do not report any problems in life, with statistically significant difference in the scores (Table 5). As discussed in relation to the data in Table 3, problems experienced by the meditators led to a reduction in their contentment scores.

The reduction in contentment may probably be because the level of problems experienced by them, including psychological issues is more than the benefits achieved through meditation.

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The response of the meditators towards various contentment related items in the tool used to quantify contentment are discussed below:

- I don't feel particularly pleased with the way I am in life: While only 50 % of the respondents do not agree that they were having this feeling before the start of meditation, majority of them disagree to this after starting meditation practice. In practicing meditation for joy and happiness, we are creating the conditions necessary to experience a happy state of mind (Source: <https://www.headspace.com/meditation/happiness>).
- I feel intensely interested in other people: While 80% of the respondents agree that they were having this feeling before the start of meditation, all of them agree to this after starting meditation practice. This may be attributed to the improvement in the mindset attained through meditation practice. When one experiences better mental peace, he or she could naturally feel free to interact with others and involve more in the activities of the society.
- I feel that my life is very rewarding: All the meditators have agreed to this after the start of meditation, whereas, only 70 % respondents agree that they were having this condition before the start of meditation. The positive effects of meditation themselves may become a motivation to live well and achieve rewards in life. Even if such rewards are not much, the improved mindset of the meditators could probably make them feel satisfied with whatever they might have achieved in life.
- I have warm feelings towards almost everyone: After the start of meditation, all the respondents have agreed to this contentment item, while only 70 % agree that they were having this feeling before the start of meditation. Considering this attitude as well as the feeling of interest in other people of all the respondents after the start of meditation (item 2 above), it can be interpreted that meditation has helped the respondents to develop a positive social outlook. This assumes relevance, especially in the present-day context, in which, the society is divided based on factors such as religion, caste, politics etc. to a great extent. Under these conditions, developing a positive social outlook as an outcome of practices like meditation etc. can be definitely considered as a blessing.
- I rarely wake up feeling rested: When compared to 30 % respondents who do not agree that they were having this condition before the start of meditation, after starting meditation 60 % respondents are found to disagree with this. This is an indication of the capability of practices like meditation to provide sufficient rest/relaxation to the body and mind, which has also been supported by studies undertaken in this line.
- I don't feel particularly optimistic about the future: While 60 % of the respondents do not agree that they were having this condition before the start of meditation, the figure becomes 90 % respondents disagreeing after they started meditation practice. Under a study by Patanjali Yoga Research Centre, Kozhikode, it has been reported that people have become more optimistic after the start of yoga practice [6]. In this rat race called life, happiness and optimism seem like a far-fetched dream. But meditation has that covered too. Regular meditation can help you regulate your thoughts (Source: <https://www.healthshots.com/mind/happiness-hacks/from-boosting-creativity-to-making-you-an-optimist-here-are-the-many-benefits-of-meditation/>).
- I find most things amusing in life: 50 % respondents agree that they were feeling in this manner before the start of meditation, while all of them are agreeing to this positive contentment item after starting meditation. This also indicates the effect of meditation in creating a better positive mindset.

Results of a study showed that meditation practice produced increases over time in daily experiences of positive emotions, which, in turn, produced increases in a wide range of personal resources (e.g., increased mindfulness, purpose in life, social support, and decreased illness symptoms) [7]. In turn, these increments in personal resources predicted increased life satisfaction and reduced depressive symptoms.

- I don't think that the world is a good place to live in: 60 % respondents do not agree that they were having this feeling before the start of meditation, which has increased to 80 % after the start of meditation practice. This can be attributed to the positive effect of meditation on the mind and body, which are much related in life.
- I laugh a lot: All the meditators agree to this after the start of meditation, compared to only 60 % agreeing before the start of meditation condition. This may be considered as an outcome of the mind related benefits attained through meditation, which motivate the practitioners to laugh much. It is a well established fact that mindfulness practices like meditation, yoga etc. help to promote peace of mind and happiness.
- I am well satisfied about everything in life: All the respondents agree to this after starting meditation, while only 60 % agree that they were having this condition before the start of meditation. This shows how much meditation has helped the practitioners in leading a productive and fruitful life, catering to most of the requirements imposed in life. As already mentioned under item no. 6, 90 % of the respondents have felt optimistic in life after starting meditation. Satisfaction in life is an important component for becoming optimistic about things in one's life.

It has been reported that mindfulness is associated with satisfaction with life through savouring positive experiences and gratitude as mediators [8].

- I am always committed and involved in life: All the meditators have agreed to this after start of meditation, as compared to only 60 % respondents agreeing that they were having this condition before the start of meditation. This shows that meditation has inculcated a sense of responsibility to more people, which can be considered as an outcome of better self-awareness achieved through improvement in their mental conditions.
- I don't think I have a good personality: While 70 % of the respondents do not agree that they were having this feeling before the start of meditation, all the meditators disagree with this after the start of meditation.

Previously, people thought of meditation as something vague and that it did not contribute directly to personal development and that it is not very useful. It is now widely accepted that meditation should be part of a personal development program (Source: <https://sureself.eu/education/7-proven-ways-how-meditation-can-help-your-personal-development>).

- There is a gap between what I would like to do and what I have done: Only 60 % of respondents do not agree that they were having this feeling before the start of meditation. However, after the start of meditation, 90 % have disagreed with this. The health benefits achieved through meditation could have helped in undertaking the required tasks in life well. With respect to the contentment item no. 11, it was observed that after starting meditation practice, all the respondents reported that they are committed and

involved in life. This type of responsibility could be the one of the main reasons attributed for the mediators reporting that they actually do what is to be done in life.

- I am very happy in my life: While only 50 % of the respondents agree that they were having this feeling before the start of meditation, the figure increases to 90 % meditators agreeing to it after the start of meditation.

The main purpose of meditation is to access, recognize and enhance the positive qualities of mind. The more we can do this, the less we need to rely on external situations for our happiness and the more we can rely on the natural, positive qualities of mind - love, contentment, well-being and peace. (Source: <https://mindworks.org/blog/meditation-make-you-happy/>)

- I find beauty in some things of my life: 70 % of the respondents agreeing that they were having this orientation before the start of meditation has increased to all the meditators agreeing after the start of meditation. Improvement in mind set achieved through meditation can be expected to make people have such a feeling.
- I feel that I am not especially in control of my life: The proportion of respondents who do not agree to this changed from 20 % before start of meditation to 60 % after starting meditation practice. This again is an indication of the effect of meditation in helping people to carry forward their life in a better manner than what it was before they started meditation. Under the fast and strenuous nature of today's life, being able to have a control on life can be considered a real achievement, which will ultimately pay off to the meditators through better standard of living.
- I feel able to take anything on in life: While only 30 % of the respondents agree that they were having this feeling before the start of meditation, after doing meditation, 80 % of the respondents have agreed to this positive contentment item. Benefits reported by the respondents after starting meditation such as better control of life, happiness, feeling about a good personality, more commitment and involvement in life, more satisfaction, optimism in life etc. achieved through meditation practice can all be considered to be contributing to having a feeling that they can take anything on in their lives.
- I feel fully mentally alert: While all the respondents agree that they were having this feeling before the start of meditation, only 60 % agree to this before start of meditation condition. It should be noted that the response is not just about mental alertness, but about full mental alertness achieved due to meditation practice. Good level of mindfulness obtained through the practice of meditation can be expected to be the main reason for such a response.

Meditation practice and calm breathing impacts the nerves that are directly tied to the arousal centres in the brain, which relaxes the mind, providing a sharp focus and boosting mental alertness. Moreover, meditation also helps in improving attention span and prevents age-related mental decline (Source: <https://awesomecoffee.com/blogs/healthwellness/mentalalertness#:~:text=What%20is%20Mental%20Alertness%3Fprompt%20to%20react%20to%20danger.>).

- I often experience joy and elation: 40 % of the respondents agreeing to this feeling before the start of meditation increased to 60 % after the start of meditation. This is another indication of improvement in the mindset of the meditators. According to Himalayan Siddha, Akshar, Founder, Akshar Yoga Research and Development Centre, practising meditation releases happy hormones in the body (Source: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/lifestyle/health/3-amazing-meditation-techniques-to-boost-happy-hormones-101661674507496.html>).
 - I don't have a particular sense of meaning and purpose in life: Compared to 50 % respondents disagreeing with this before start of meditation, after doing meditation, all of them have disagreed with this item. This shows their orientation towards achieving goals in life. It may also be noted that 80 % of the respondents had agreed that they feel as being able to take on anything in life (contentment item no. 17). In a way, this also shows their commitment / responsibility to undertake necessary activities in life to achieve their goals. That It has been observed in this study that meditation has contributed contentment aspects such as happiness, commitment, alertness, optimism, feeling of having a good personality/ that life is rewarding for them, feeling elated, and feeling more energetic (as shown in the discussion related to this item shown below) for more number of people, when compared to the level of contentment for such items before the start of meditation. These factors may be expected to instil a better sense of meaning and purpose in the lives of the meditators.
- a warm feeling towards other people (contentment item 4). All these positive orientations may be helpful for the meditators to interact well and enjoy the company of other people, which is what 60 % meditators have reported under this item (item 22).
- I don't feel particularly healthy: Only 30 % of the respondents disagreed with this feeling before the start of meditation, which, significantly increased to 90 % meditators disagreeing after the start of meditation. This implies that the meditators are well aware of the physical and mental health benefits of meditation practice. This could be attributed as an important reason motivating them to continue meditation. It would be worthwhile if these meditators transfer this opinion to other so that some of them also may be interested to start doing meditating which is not very difficult to do or that much time consuming, unlike yoga, which may take about 50 to 60 minutes to perform most of the asanas, pranayama and yoga nidra meditation components. Some of the people doing yoga mentioned this as a constraint in yoga practice to the first author of this paper.
 - I don't have particular happy memories of the past: The data shows that while 90 % of the respondents agreed to this, after the start of meditation, all of them have disagreed to it. This could be probably attributed to the fact that meditation has provided them with various positive benefits and also contributed to less experience of negative aspects in life, which have been already mentioned in this paper.

Meditation is a mindfulness process helping to improving focus and attention, which can lead to better problem-solving and decision-making abilities. It also encourages individuals to perceive problems as opportunities for learning and growth by promoting a growth mind set (Source: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/role-mindfulness-meditation-career-development-kno2f>). This indicates the goal orientation of meditators. Having a good mind set is important in achieving goals in life (Source: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/3-factors-make-your-goals-successful-hellen-mwangi-ndirangu>).

- I feel I have a great deal of energy: While all the meditators have agreed to this after start of meditation, only 60 % respondents agree that they were having this feeling before the start of meditation. It was mentioned under contentment item no. 19 that 60 % of the meditators reported feeling elated after the start of meditation. Feeling energetic after meditation practice can be considered to contribute to an elated feeling in life also. A study conducted in Canada found that meditation can significantly improve brain function and energy levels (Source: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/dinakaplan/2017/05/26>).
- I don't have fun with other people: While 60 % respondents have agreed to this after start of meditation, only 30 % agree that they were having this feeling before the start of meditation. After meditation practice, all the respondents had reported feeling intensely interested in other people (item 2). After meditation practice, 70 % respondents had

Conclusion

This study carried out through pre and post-test mode using a questionnaire among meditation practitioners has revealed that meditation has helped in improving the level of contentment of people, when compared to before the start of meditation. As compared to before the start of meditation, after starting meditation practice, more respondents were able experience the positive contentment items and less of the negative contentment items included in the study. It would be useful if the institutions carrying out research on meditation, yoga etc. transfer the results to more people through appropriate means so that more people could be motivated to practice them and achieve mindfulness and better wellbeing in their lives. Meditation also encourages embracing suffering and negative emotions by observing and not over identifying with them.

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