

Meditation as a Therapeutic Measure Among Students Appearing for Board Exams

¹Archana Tangri & ²Dr. Janaki Yashwant Naik

¹Research Scholar, Faculty of Management, Amity University, Mumbai (India)

²Research Supervisor, Amity University, Mumbai (India)

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ABSTRACT

Purpose - In today's fast paced world with all kinds of pressure and load from all direction falling on tiny shoulders of students appearing for board exams of both 10th and 12th standard, we need to help them find a balance. These students have forgotten that there is life beyond ranks, marks and competitions. Their emotional needs, need to be met too.

Method - A survey needs to be conducted on the students appearing for board exams to narrow down on the areas where we can find the root cause of ill effects of pressure faced by students and help them deal with reduction in mental and physical exhaustion.

Result - The result will be helpful in reaching out to the stressed out/ burnt out students, creating awareness among parents and students and helping them lead a better and balanced life with meditation practice.

Conclusion - Though there will always be teething problems in starting anything new, but by conducting survey and creating awareness about benefits of meditation, it should bring about positive change and balance in lives of school students.

1. Introduction

School students are like soft clay that get moulded, take shape and form according to the circumstances and atmosphere surrounding them. It is a very well known fact that today's school children are a heavily stressed out lot especially those appearing for board exams of 10th and 12th standards (examinees). Students' characteristics have been linked to increased stress, which can block progress and interfere with academic success (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Claudat, White, & Warren, 2016). Pressure on students are of different types like, school pressure, parental pressure, peer pressure, pressure to excel in every field in addition to academics. These students go through tremendous stress balancing peer pressure, academic burden and family load. Parents want to micromanage the kids neglecting their deeper interests and natural talents. This kind of stress does take a heavy toll on the young, impressionable minds resulting in the pouring of terrible news like young children ending their lives, running away from homes, going into depression at a very young age, having health problems preferring to take drugs, trying out anything that momentarily transports them into a different world. It is widely known that stress may interfere with academic achievement, but unmanaged stress could lead to more serious physical and psychological consequences, such as anxiety and depression (Rosenthal, 2011). And the cases are alarmingly on the rise. Even if the children are able to cope with the mounting pressure, the stress interferes with their academic achievements and all they are left to face is the rebuke from home as well as school front. Therefore reducing stress and promoting overall growth (mental and physical) of students will benefit them in many ways.

Meditation has proven to be productive tool to help balance lives. It is the need of the hour since many are still ignorant about the uses of meditation. Meditation can be used as an effective tool in stress reduction and giving health benefits to students. A study on stress levels of school students can be

conducted. The purpose of the study would be to pin point the obstructions and opportunities involved in promotion of meditation in schools. It will definitely help students cope better with stress and be prepared for the world outside the comforting and safe haven of schools and homes. Need to determine the barriers and benefits of meditation is the call of the hour. Also research regarding students' beliefs about the use of meditation in higher education is needed to determine the potential for integrating the practice of meditation in the school or in junior college setting. Some evidence exists about the benefits of TM for reducing stress, improving academic performance, and increasing graduation rates in a variety of school settings, such as middle school, high school, and higher education (Barnes, Bauza, & Treiber, 2003; Colbert et al., 2011; Colbert, 2013; Nidich et al., 2011; So & Orme-Johnson, 2001). However, before implementing a meditation program for students, more needs to be understood about students' perceived levels of stress and their beliefs regarding the use of meditation.

Meditation practice is increasingly becoming utilized as a means for stress reduction among students. (Caldwell, K., Harrison, M., Adams, M., Quin, R., and Greeson, 2010) Meditation practices can be classified as formal or sitting meditation or informal meditation, developing awareness of the present moment in daily life. The words meditation, mindfulness, and mindfulness meditation tend to be used in the field interchangeably, (Germer, C.K., Siegel, R.D., & Fulton, 2005) and any use of the word meditation is intended to incorporate the mindfulness components of awareness in the present moment.

The purpose of the study is to identify barriers and opportunities involved in promoting use of meditation in the students appearing for board exams in standard Xth and XIIth, for stress reduction. Meditation has been shown to be an effective coping tool for dealing with stress. Current uses of meditation and mindfulness to enhance college student success is also presented. Studies regarding various benefits of

meditation have addressed the need for understanding barriers to meditation.

To determine barriers and opportunities for meditation and related practices, a study on stress levels of examinees' attitudes and beliefs should be conducted to determine students' perceptions regarding the use of meditation in a school / junior college population. The constructs of the Health Belief Model (HBM) can be utilized to categorize student responses.

Using the **Health Belief Model** to categorise students responses & find out the Variables Involved in Promoting Meditation. The Health Belief Model (HBM) is a conceptual framework used as a guideline for developing health behavior interventions. Since the early 1950s, the Health Belief Model (HBM) has been one of the most widely used conceptual frameworks in health behavior research, both to explain change and maintenance of health-related behaviors and as a guiding framework for health behavior interventions. Over the past two decades, the HBM has been expanded, compared to other frameworks, and used to support interventions to change health behavior. The key constructs are: Perceived Susceptibility (perception of one's degree of susceptibility to a health concern) and Perceived Severity (perceptions regarding the seriousness of the health concern) which can be grouped together as "Perceived Threat," Perceived Benefits (Belief of potential benefits of a health practice), Perceived Barriers (Moderating elements that inhibit undertaking a desired behavior), as well as Self-Efficacy (Belief in one's ability to carry out a health intervention). Cues to Action is a sixth variable that relates to cues that can trigger action. This framework is used to identify and discuss elements relating to the use of meditation for behavioral health, as well as to categorize the responses from the study regarding meditation beliefs and attitudes of college students. (wikipedia.org)

2. Review of literature

Meditation has been in practice since eons as an effective tool in reduction of stress and depression and rise in academic performance. So, it is very important to find out stress levels in school students appearing for board exams from standard 10th and 12th standards (examinees), their beliefs, knowledge and attitude towards meditations and what stops them from doing so.

The review of literature is divided into three sections:

- 1) Studies relevant to college students' stress.
- 2) Study supporting meditation's physiologic benefits among students.
- 3) Study focusing on the Barriers in College Students

Stress instudents

Everyone is highly stressed in today's time, even students are not spared. Sad scene is that they have no clue how to cope with it and its ill effects. Sadly, many commit suicide due to fear of getting less marks or failing, go into deep depression or fall into drug trap. It is very common when it comes to students appearing for board exams, parents and school pressurize students for better grades. **8th All India School Education Survey, UGC Annual Report (2010-11)** says- Stress does not spare students either. According to a study, 72

per cent of students in India are unaware of how to deal with stress and its ill-effects. A NIMHANS study has found that 11 per cent of college students and 7-8 per cent of high school students have attempted suicide because of exam stress. And, 27.6 per cent of IT professionals in the country are addicted to narcotic drugs, says the study. According to the Legatum Prosperity Index (2015), India ranks 99 among 142 countries that have been assessed in these sectors. Education, being the most fundamental need of any developing country, should be the number one priority for India. In education sector, our country ranks 92, which is way behind the ranks of other developing countries such as Philippines (76), Malaysia (51), Sri Lanka (59) and many more. It may have a resemblance that our country is behind other neighboring countries in the field of education. Not only in India had students worldwide faced various forms of academic stress. Many of them commit suicide due to the failure of examination, depression anxiety and make their lives riskier. It is quite common when it comes to board exams of 10th and 12th standard where many incidents of students committing suicides occur. Parents and school pressurise the students to achieve better grades for finding better educational institutions makes them more stressful. In fact, India has one of the highest rate of suicides among people aged between 15 and 29. Two-third (66%) students reported that their parents pressurize them for better academic performance, and the pressure from non-graduate parents was more compared to parents those were graduates and post graduates. Everyday, 6.23 students commit suicide due to the peer pressure, their must be something wrong that we are not understanding. More than 50% 12th students admitted of having more than 3 private tutors. In one study, the first of its kind regarding perceived stress and coping strategies of students at two colleges in Illinois, findings showed that "students who were least confident in achieving their academic goals felt more stress and more than one-third of the students wanted information about ways to reduce stress" (Pierceall&Keim, 2007, p. 711).

1) Meditation practice to reduce stress among students

Since meditation has proved beneficial to seriously ill and chronic pain patients. Studies on students have also been conducted and the results prove that meditation does help in improved academics, better mindset and reduced stress with just 10 minutes twice a week of practice. There was increased empathy, spirituality as well as reduced anxiety amongst board examinees. They were able to cope much better with the multiple pressure and study load put on them. A study by Decrko and colleagues [3] found that 90% of college students who completed the program demonstrated significant reduction of psychological distress and anxiety compared to the control group, after a 6-week mind/body intervention comprised of six 90-minute group training sessions focusing on the relaxation response and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). Rosenzweig and others [4] used MBSR (mindfulness-based stress reduction) to aid in total mood disturbance (TMD), finding that second year medical students had significantly lower TMD scores than the control group, as well as improved scores on the subscales measuring bewilderment, confusion, fatigue, inertia, tension-anxiety, and vigor-activity. This study also

concluded that meditation, specifically MBSR can be an effecting tool in reducing stress among college students.

Studies Related to College Student's Outcomes with Meditation and Mindfulness Practice Various forms of mindfulness practices can result in benefits among college students. Caldwell and others [1] found that total mindfulness scores were significantly higher at the end of the semester compared to measurements taken at the beginning and in the middle of the semester. Not only did mindfulness scores increase but better sleep quality was also reported. In looking at how meditation not only affects stress but also forgiveness among college students, Oman and colleagues [2] found that after an eight week 90-minute per session intervention, college students in the treatment group demonstrated lower levels of stress and ruminations and higher levels of forgiveness.

Barriers in students

Studying for boards can be very stressful. Time management is a main issue as both students and parents are mainly focussed on getting better CGPA. Unavailability of proper teachers who can teach meditation, no awareness among staff, students and parents are other big barriers for meditation to reach out to students and help them.

Many parents and students didn't believe in the power of benefits or its benefits.

Since literature review clearly points out the various kinds of stresses which impact board examinees, there is an immediate need to point out the exact barrier to meditations practice inside school and then zero down the need to enhance the creativity and productivity of students. Gryffin, Peter & Chen, William & Enguc, Naz. (2014) found during a study that College students have a high burden of stress resulting from balancing college life, academic studies, work, and family. Meditation has been shown to be an effective coping tool for dealing with stress. To determine barriers and opportunities for meditation and related practices, a Knowledge, Attitudes and Beliefs (KAB) survey was conducted to determine student perceptions regarding the use of meditation in a college population. Ignorance of the benefits of meditative practices were identified as the primary barrier.

Students with disabilities are increasingly enrolling in colleges and universities. However, many institutions are still unprepared to support them beyond the basic federal mandate of equal access and reasonable accommodations. This qualitative study utilized a nontraditional media of reflective journaling to capture the anecdotal experiences of 16 college students with disabilities for a 10-week period. Four major themes emerged concerning barriers and frustrations these students encountered on a daily basis: (a) faculty perception, (b) fit of advisors, (c) college stressors, and (d) quality of support services. Recommendations for higher education administrators and disability personnel to become more vigilant in improving support for this population are discussed (Hong, Barbara. (2015))

A study on Barriers to Meditation by Gender and Age Among Cancer Family Caregivers found that Despite solid basic science research supporting meditation's physiologic benefits, meditation remains a marginalized practice for many Westerners; observational and descriptive studies indicate a spectrum of barriers to meditation practice. (Anna-leila Williams, Peter Van Ness, Jane Dixon, Ruth McCorkle)

3. Research Gap identified

Before implementing meditation as practice for examinees in schools, It is very important to understand the beliefs and the stress levels that the students undergo.

Academic load being the main source of stress among students appearing for board exams. So, creating awareness about benefits of meditation is likely to help students, teachers and parents in addition to helping students succeed academically.

The literature review already shows how students get burnt out due to multiple stress loads which subsequently shows on their academic performances. So, it is very much needed on an urgent basis to pin point the exact obstructions that come in the way of including meditation practice in schools and then develop the students' creativity and productivity positively.

Prior to implementing a meditation program for students appearing for board exams of both 10th and 12th standards, it is important for school/ junior college stakeholders (i.e., administrators, faculty, staff, students..etc) to understand students' perceived levels of stress and beliefs about meditation. Academic stress is considered one of the main sources of stress for students. Educating students of the benefits and the practicality of meditation would likely help students to reduce stress and help them be more successful academically.

Surprisingly In spite of the Evidences that shows that meditation reduces stress and improves academic performance (Barnes et al., 2003; Colbert, 2013; Nidich et al., 2011; Shapiro et al., 2012; So & Orme-Johnson, 2001; Travis et al., 2009) there are a lot of barriers to practicing meditation.

4. Research methodology

A survey-based cross-sectional study of School/ Junior College Students to assess knowledge of meditation, attitudes toward meditation using Determinants of Meditation Practice and meditation experiences.

Perceived stress and trait mindfulness can be measured using the Perceived Stressed Scale and Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale, respectively.

The purpose of this study is to assess levels of stress in male and female students appearing for board exams of both 10th and 12th standard and their beliefs about meditation. This could lead to the identification and implementation of a new program for them, that may reduce stress and improve academic performance and graduation rates. The study will determine a baseline of stress among these students.

The literature review indicates a significant benefit for a variety of concerns for students. But if these students are resistant towards meditation practice, they are unlikely to participate in meditation programs or use meditation techniques. To gather data to evaluate Knowledge, attitude and Belief regarding meditation, and to identify potential barriers to meditation. An open-ended questionnaire will be given to a group of examinees.

A well structured questionnaire shall be used to collect the necessary data which will serve as primary data to answer the research questions and objectives regarding significance of problems, responses and the coping techniques of the examinees.

5. Studies and findings

While going through the developing literature review one can see feel the obvious stress and beliefs of board examinees. Hence it becomes meaningful to add meditation practice in school. For that we need to :-

- 1) Open up a dialogue between school administration and create awareness about the position effects of meditation.
- 2) To find out factors affecting examinees and how they are getting motivated by those factors.
- 3) To study the stress levels of the examinees deeply to be able to categorise it under low, medium and high levels.
- 4) Do a comparative study on examinees based on their beliefs about practicing meditation.
- 5) To make examinees aware about the benefits of meditation.
- 6) To make the school staff, students and parents aware about the health benefit if meditation so that finally meditation can be inculcated in school curriculum and all can reap from its benefits.

Research Problem-

Since board students are already under high stress, it is difficult for them to balance academics, family and friends. So, the first step would be SKAB (Students, Knowledge, Attitude and Belief) to understand where their interests and attitudes lie and how to motivate them to leave the sedentary life and overcome their physical and mental barriers.

A questionnaire can be prepared and we can get queries regarding literature review answered and a conclusion can be

reached which will be beneficial to the students, parents and the schools as well.

6. Conclusion

Literature review primarily based on Standard 10th and 12th board students revealed that making meditation practice a part of daily life would not only help in reduction of stress and anxiety but also help them lead a better and healthy life. A more deeper research needs to be conducted to find and overcome the barriers and make sure that not only the students but the entire society as a whole becomes aware of the benefits of meditation.

Hence, this research proposal!

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8. Statement Of Competing interests:

No Competing Interests Exist.

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