

Role of Vipassana on Mental Health of Individuals: A Review Paper

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Abstract

Vipassana, a significant kind of meditation, is a therapeutic practice that focuses on the profound interconnectedness between the mind and body, ultimately leading to the attainment of inner and outward tranquillity and mental equilibrium. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), approximately one-eighth of the global population is currently affected by mental health problems, which have significant implications for their physical health, overall well-being, social interactions, and occupational prospects. The maintenance of optimal mental health is crucial for the promotion and preservation of our comprehensive physical and psychological wellbeing. Consequently, researchers have increasingly focused their attention on a particular technique in recent years, recognizing its potential to alleviate stress and enhance overall well-being.

This study aims to access the available research on the role of Vipassana on the mental health of individuals. A comprehensive scoping review was conducted from 2018 to 2023. The review suggested that Vipassana has the potential to be useful in addressing various mental health and well-being concerns among individuals. The use of Vipassana in the case of collapse and burnout was not supported by sufficient data. The practice of Vipassana has been indicated as a protective factor against mental health issues. Based on the findings, it was concluded that researchers have the potential to significantly contribute to the enhancement of mental health and well-being among people. Through the implementation of research endeavours focused on various facets of the Vipassana method and its impact on stress

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management, job productivity, general well-being, and quality of life, it is possible to ascertain the significant role, it may play in raising awareness about the therapeutic advantages of the Vipassana method for individuals.

Keywords: *Mental health, well-being, Vipassana, Buddhist meditation or Buddhist mindfulness.*

Introduction

Vipassana is a profoundly ancient meditation technique originating from India. This method is a pragmatic approach that purifies the mind, ultimately resulting in the complete elimination of all forms of pain. “Vipassana” is a North Indian Pali word that translates to “observing things as they truly are”. Although the terms “Mindfulness meditation” and “Vipassana meditation” are frequently used interchangeably, Vipassana is more precise. It entails impartially discerning one’s own emotions and beliefs, devoid of any judgment or attachment. The Buddha propagated the practice of Vipassana as a comprehensive solution for addressing many forms of affliction. It is a self-transformation practice that facilitates profound awareness of the interconnectedness between the mind and body through the practice of self-observation (Jarukasemthawee, 2015). The interaction between emotions and the body is now a very important subject of study in psychology due to its significant potential utility for many therapeutic applications. The fundamental processes underlying the relationship between Vipassana and its therapeutic applications and mental health add to its widespread appeal (Zeng et al., 2014).

According to P.D. Thakur (1994), Vipassana classes for kids in India were a smashing success, with over 5,000 kids signing up for three-day classes. Parent and educators alike saw dramatic improvements in their students’ ability to concentrate and retain information. Similar courses are also in the works in Western countries.

An eminent advantage of Vipassana meditation lies in its capacity to diminish stress and foster calm. Practitioners can redirect their attention from stress-inducing ideas and situations by concentrating on breathing and bodily sensations. This procedure facilitates the initiation of the body’s relaxation response, resulting in a reduction in the synthesis of stress hormones like cortisol and an elevation in the secretion of pleasurable neurotransmitters such as endorphins (Hart, 2009).

In specific research examining the Impact of Vipassana Meditation on Plasma Endogenous Beta-Endorphin Levels and Quality of Life, it was shown that a majority

of those practicing meditation saw a notable elevation in beta-endorphin levels (Yan Naing Soe et al., 2023).

In significant research on the practice of Vipassana, it was shown that engaging in Vipassana meditation contributes to the effective management of anger and the enhancement of mental well-being (Rajesh Shirsath, 2019). According to the World Health Organisation (2022), approximately one-eighth of the global population is currently affected by mental health problems, which have significant implications for their physical health, overall well-being, social interactions, and occupational prospects. Mental health encompasses more than the mere absence of mental diseases. The phenomenon under consideration is situated on a multifaceted spectrum, whereby individuals perceive it in diverse ways, exhibiting differing levels of challenge and suffering, and possibly yielding disparate social and therapeutic consequences. Multiple individual, social, and structural determinants may interact over the course of an individual's lifetime to either support or hinder their mental health, thereby influencing their position along the mental health continuum. Multiple studies have demonstrated the efficacy of Vipassana meditation in alleviating symptoms associated with anxiety, depression, and other mental health conditions, as well as reducing negative thoughts and emotional distress.

In a recent qualitative study on the Experiences of Attending a Vipassana Meditation Retreat, the researchers discovered that participants reported an enhanced awareness of their emotions and thoughts after the retreat. This heightened awareness enabled them to successfully cope with the many challenges encountered in their daily lives (Kirti Singhal and Sujata Sriram, 2023). In the study of ten days of Vipassana meditation it was found that by engaging in a ten-day Vipassana meditation training, individuals may develop a heightened ability to see and understand the various levels of mind and body awareness with enhanced clarity (Silva, E. M. M. and Nogueira, M. I., 2022). A research investigation carried out by the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in New Delhi (2021) revealed that those in jail exhibited a decrease in neurotic tendencies, aggression, and sentiments of powerlessness after practicing Vipassana meditation. In addition, jailed individuals conveyed an increased perception of optimism and overall state of being after their participation in the Vipassana meditation programs (Kishore et al., 1995). There is evidence that vipassana practice, in conjunction with its ethical principles and rules, can foster a sense of calm, objectivity, and empathy, which in turn can strengthen social cohesiveness (Santosh Lama and Bhagwan Aryal, 2022).

According to Mr. S.N. Goenka (1994), vipassana practices help individuals make changes that promote society. In the summer of 2000, Mr. Goenka, the primary

instructor of vipassana meditation, attended the “Millennium World Peace Summit” in New York. During the event, he delivered a speech among several global spiritual luminaries. In his address, Mr. Goenka emphasized that global peace can only be attained when individuals find inner peace, and Vipassana meditation is the path that leads to this objective.

The present comprehensive scoping review of literature aimed to investigate the effect of Vipassana in improving mental health among the general population.

Method

This study aimed to access the available research on the role of Vipassana on the mental health of individuals. For this review of literature studies had to meet the following criteria:

- i. Delivered the intervention entirely using offline methods
- ii. Used validated instruments to assess mental health outcomes
- iii. It selected only those studies which were published in the English language only
- iv. Studies were excluded if the full text was irretrievable;
- v. The intervention also involved other forms of psychotherapy unrelated to Vipassana practice.

For the scoping review, the papers were reviewed and screened for the applicability of Vipassana for mental health. The hunting strategy recaptured papers published in English from October 2018 to 2023 and were recaptured across Web of Science, Scopus, Science Direct, and Google Scholar. Keywords that were used included Vipassana, mental health, well-being, Buddhist meditation or Buddhist mindfulness, and review. The selection criteria initially included all original articles in English that were related to Vipassana meditation for mental health and then the abstracts of the potentially relevant articles were screened. Ultimately, the whole texts of the chosen articles were acquired and evaluated to determine their eligibility.

Results and Discussion

This review of literature aimed to investigate the effect of Vipassana in improving mental health among the general population. After doing a comprehensive study of the research articles, it has been determined that Vipassana is a highly successful meditation practice in the short term, with the ability to positively impact several aspects of mental health. Various research conducted during the COVID-19

pandemic have revealed that practicing Vipassana mindfulness meditation enhances emotional intelligence, character strengths, and overall well-being of individuals throughout periods of confinement (Manjari et al., 2022; Nikhil Mahindra, 2023).

Adults who engaged in Vipassana meditation demonstrated higher levels of self-esteem compared to those who did not practice Vipassana, who exhibited typical levels of self-esteem. The study found a strong and statistically significant positive association between self-efficacy and self-esteem, indicating that an increase in self-efficacy leads to an increase in self-esteem. (Inchara Chamaiah Swamy et al., 2023)

A comprehensive analysis of research papers across several domains of mental health demonstrates that Vipassana meditation offers a wide range of physiological and psychological advantages, significantly enhancing overall human welfare. The benefits encompass reduced stress levels, enhanced immune system functionality, lowered blood pressure and heart rate, improved sleep quality, and alleviated chronic pain. Hence, the use of Vipassana meditation possesses the capacity to induce significant and profound alterations in the human experience. (Shweta, 2019; Anjalee Thanuja Amarasekera and Dennis Chang 2019; Alok Kumar Verma, 2023).

The present study has determined that Vipassana meditation significantly reduces psychosocial issues in adults with Alcohol Dependence Syndrome. This is achieved by fostering insight, which in turn enhances positive behaviour and improves mental well-being. (Shweta 2019, Thenmozhi et al., 2022). In the case of collapse and burnout, it was set up that there is not sufficient data to support to use of Vipassana for this additionally, no significant assessment has been found about the simultaneous investigation of social well-being and spiritual health.

Through the practice of Vipassana, people experience a gradual transformation in their cognitive processes, whereby they are motivated to cultivate not just verbal quiet but also mental and emotional stillness. Over time, individuals may undergo a process of developing a non-judgmental and stable disposition that positively affects almost every sphere of life (Ayushi Bhargava et al., 2019).

This state of being fosters a sense of clarity and purpose, ultimately contributing to positive mental health and overall well-being. The significance of maintaining a consistent practice is crucial, particularly in the context of engaging in Vipassana meditation. The level of determination with which an individual commits to their Vipassana practice directly correlates with the quality of outcomes they are likely to

achieve. The practice of Vipassana, along with its ethical guidelines and principles, has been observed to promote a sense of tranquillity, impartiality, and empathy, hence supporting societal cohesion (Santosh Lama and Bhagwan Aryal, 2022). An unhealthy mental condition has been shown to have several negative effects on life over time. Vipassana has been shown to decrease mental problems but access to interventions is limited. Therefore, the effectiveness of Vipassana practices for mental health and well-being was investigated.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that the Vipassana system is a method that facilitates the elimination of one's sufferings by addressing the underlying causes of fear, want, and ignorance that contribute to our miseries. It enables individuals to experience a state of peacefulness and serenity. Vipassana meditation is believed to contribute to improved overall well-being and a positive, joyful state of mind. Individuals who possess a calm and rational attitude have less mental strain and confusion, enabling them to effectively address their challenges and ultimately lead to a contented and blissful existence. The study underscored the significance of Vipassana meditation in contemporary society as a means to enhance mental well-being.

The findings of the review of research contribute to a better understanding of the effectiveness of Vipassana in our lives, while the current state of study on the efficiency of Vipassana practices is still in its early stages, it is imperative to conduct more studies to demonstrate the efficacy of Vipassana in our daily lives.

However, the extensive accessibility and affordability of Vipassana practice have the potential to enhance mental health and overall well-being in a significant number of individuals. Vipassana practices have the potential to be used for a multitude of objectives. For instance, when addressing concerns faced by housewives pertaining to feelings of inadequacy and inefficiency, as well as adult difficulties around uncertainty and accomplishment, and finally, challenges associated with old age such as loneliness and emptiness.

Future Directions

Future explorations and researches could look into evaluating the effects of Vipassana on different patients' characteristics and other health outcomes for which Vipassana practices have been shown to help. There is a suggestion to integrate Vipassana with other psychotherapies to boost their effectiveness in addressing

different mental health problems. Furthermore, there is a dearth of substantial research on the concurrent examination of Vipassana meditation concerning both social well-being and spiritual health. This has the potential to be used as a future endorsement.

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