

Loving Kindness Meditation And Its Impact On Intergroup Anxiety

Suman Grigary Thomas^{1*} and Shanmukh V. Kamble²

^{1*}Research Scholar, Post Graduate Department of Studies and Research in Psychology, Karnatak University Dharwad, Karnataka.

²Professor, Post Graduate Department of Studies and Research in Psychology, Karnatak University Dharwad, Karnataka.

Received: 07-06-2023

Revised: 14-07-2023

Accepted: 01-08-2023

Abstract

Loving Kindness meditation is an age-old practise which has a lot of potential benefits for the practitioners. The present study was conducted to assess the impact of 30-days practice of Loving Kindness Meditation in reducing intergroup anxiety of college students. The study included an initial sample of 300 college students who were administered with Intergroup Anxiety Scale Short Form. 80 students (Men= 36, Women =44), who scored low on the scale were randomly allotted to either an experimental group (Loving Kindness Meditation group) or a control group; where the former received treatment for 30 days while the latter did not receive any. The hypotheses were tested using paired t-test and the results of the study suggested that there was a significant decrease in the intergroup anxiety among the participants of experimental group post the treatment while similar change was not identified among the participants of control group.

Keywords: Loving Kindness Meditation, Intergroup Anxiety, College Students

INTRODUCTION

Loving Kindness Meditation, with its roots in Buddhist tradition is a special type of meditation practice that aims to cultivate perspectives of unfailing kindness towards oneself and others. Despite the fact that the precise operations vary among the various Buddhist traditions, the main psychological operation in Loving Kindness Meditation is to constantly generate one's good intentions towards particular targets. Usually, those who practice this form of meditation, recite certain words or phrases to targets, such as "may you be happy" or "may you be free from suffering." Some cultures encourage people to visualize their intentions or the light of their hearts shining outward towards others. (Zeng et al., 2015, Sujiva, 2007).

According to numerous research studies (Diener et al., 2006; Zeng et al., 2013), loving kindness meditation has a positive effect on positive emotions and has the capacity to cultivate or foster positive emotions. Additionally, it has been discovered that practising loving kindness meditation can help build the practitioner's personal resources in addition to enhancing positive emotion. This can lead to greater life satisfaction and fewer depressive symptoms (Fredrickson et al., 2008). Also, there is research evidence suggesting that Loving Kindness Meditation is actually helpful in reducing prejudice towards others (Parks, Britel & Crisp, 2014; Berger, Bernick & Tarrasch, 2018).

Intergroup Anxiety is a highly related concept to prejudice, where one experience anxiety in anticipation or actual interaction with outgroup members (Stephen,2014). This anxiety is quite different from social anxiety, as the person experience anxiety only on the presence of outgroup members and not in any other social circumstances (Paolini et al., 2006) and this can lead to prejudice and negative behaviors towards the members of other groups. In the present study, we are trying to understand whether Loving Kindness Meditation is an effective method in bringing down the intergroup anxiety among the people.

Method

Objective

To find out if Loving Kindness Meditation is effective in reducing Intergroup anxiety of college students.

Hypotheses

H1: There is a significant improvement in the intergroup anxiety of college students in the Loving Kindness Meditation group

H2: There is no significant improvement in intergroup anxiety of college students in the control group

Participants

The participants of the present study included 300 students within the age range 19-25, studying in various colleges in Kerala. From the initial sample, 80 (Men=36, Women=44) students who scored low in forgiveness and subjective well-being were randomly allotted to either an experimental group or a control group.

Sampling Design

A purposive sampling method was utilised where data was collected from 300 students from various colleges of Kerala and a random allotment method was employed to allot students to experimental and control groups.

Instrument Used

Intergroup Anxiety Scale Short Form developed by Paolini et al. (2004), which consisted of 6 items was used to assess the intergroup anxiety of the participants and the scale constituted a 4-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 to 4.

Procedure

300 students from various colleges in Kerala State, India, constituted the primary source of data for the study. The researcher contacted the college principles to ask for permission to collect data from the students. After explaining the study's goals to the participants, the researcher later got their informed consent. The students were administered with Intergroup Anxiety Scale -Short Form and 80 students (Men=36, Women=44) who scored high in the scale were then randomly allotted to Loving Kindness Meditation group (N=40; Men=19, Women=21) and control group (N=40; Men=17, Women=23). The participants in the Loving Kindness Meditation group received training for 30 days while the control group did not receive any. Then the Intergroup Anxiety scale was readministered to the participants in the two groups and the pre-test and post-test scores were compared and contrasted.

Data Analysis

With the help of SPSS 25, the statistical operation of Paired t-test was utilized to compare and contrast the pretest scores of the participants.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the Mean, SD and t-value of Loving Kindness Meditation group on Intergroup Anxiety

		N	Mean	SD	t-value
Intergroup Anxiety	Pretest	40	19.97	1.60	21.66**
	Post-test	40	10.47	2.05	

***p<0.01, Highly Significant*

Table 1 displays the Intergroup Anxiety pre- and post-test results for the Loving Kindness Meditation intervention group. In contrast to their average pre-test score of 19.97, the participants' average post-test intergroup anxiety score was 10.47. The pre-test score's corresponding SD was 1.60, and the post-test score's was 2.05. After receiving the loving kindness meditation training, the t-value was found to be 21.66, which was highly significant ($p < 0.01$) and indicated a significant decrease in intergroup anxiety with a large effect size of 3.65.

The findings showed that there was a decline in the participants' prejudice towards those who belonged to the out-group, i.e., there was a decrease in their negative attitudes towards them. The findings of Parks, Birtel, and Crisp (2014), who found that brief loving kindness meditation increased positive affect and the intention to make contact with members of the other group and reduced intergroup anxiety, were consistent with the findings of the current study. They have also found that practising mindfulness techniques such as loving kindness meditation helped to lessen intergroup anxiety towards a primary outgroup that was immediately present as well as negative attitudes towards an outgroup that was secondary.

Table 2 shows the Mean, SD and t-value of Control group on Intergroup Anxiety

		N	Mean	SD	t-value
Intergroup Anxiety	Pretest	40	18.35	1.40	-1.43
	Post-test	40	18.40	1.39	

The results of the control group's pre- and post-tests on intergroup anxiety are shown in the table. In contrast to their average pre-test score of 18.35, the participants' average post-test intergroup anxiety score was 18.40. Pre-test scores had an SD of 1.40, and post-test scores had an SD of 1.39. The obtained t-value of -1.43, was not statistically significant and indicated that there had been no significant change in intergroup anxiety among the participants in the control group.

The current finding can be explained by the fact that the control group of students did not receive any kind of intervention that encouraged intergroup harmony. Similar findings were obtained in the study by Page-Gould, Mendoza-Denton, and Tropp (2008), in which the treatment group received a cross-group friendship-promoting intervention, which led to an improvement in cross-group friendships and a decrease in intergroup anxiety, but not in the control group.

CONCLUSION

The goal of the current study was to determine whether loving kindness meditation was effective in reducing college students' intergroup anxiety. The findings showed that practicing loving kindness meditation significantly reduced the anxiety when they were interacting with outgroup members, which was consistent with earlier research.

IMPLICATIONS

Traditional meditation techniques like Loving Kindness Meditation, which have positive effects on practitioners' lives, should be incorporated into contemporary psychotherapy. It can benefit both academic and personal outcomes as it helps to foster positive qualities in the practitioners. It also benefits the practitioners' relationships and enables them to lead more fulfilling lives.

LIMITATIONS

The current study's reliance on self-report measures is a major drawback. The results would have been more accurate and significant if they had been based on behavioral metrics and reports from outside sources that evaluated factor like Intergroup Anxiety.

SUGGESTIONS

Future research can examine the benefits of loving kindness meditation in treating psychiatric symptoms and promoting related traits like tolerance, self-control, and social connectedness. Additionally, the efficacy can be compared to other treatments based on the positive psychology philosophy.

REFERENCES

1. Sujiva, V. (2007). Loving Kindness Meditation. Retrieved from <http://www.justbegood.net/Downloads/e-books/Meditation%20Loving%20Kindness.pdf>.
2. Zeng, X., Chiu, C. P., Wang, R., Oei, T. P., & Leung, F. Y. (2015). The effect of loving-kindness meditation on positive emotions: a meta-analytic review. *Frontiers in psychology*, 6, 1693. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01693>.
3. Zeng, X., Liu, S., & Liu, X. (2013). The application of loving-kindness meditation from psychological perspective. *Advances in Psychological Science*, 21(8), 1466-147. <https://doi.org/10.3724/SP.J.1042.2013.01466>
4. Fredrickson, B. L., Cohn, M. A., Coffey, K. A., Pek, J., & Finkel, S. M. (2008). Open hearts build lives: positive emotions, induced through loving-kindness meditation, build consequential personal resources. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 95(5), 1045-1062. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0013262>.
5. Diener, E., Lucas, R. E., and Scollon, C. N. (2006). Beyond the hedonic treadmill: revising the adaptation theory of well-being. *American Psychologist*, 61, 305-314. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.61.4.305>.
6. Parks, S., Birtel, M. D., & Crisp, R. J. (2014). Evidence that a brief meditation exercise can reduce prejudice toward homeless people. *Social Psychology*, 45, 458-465. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-9335/a000212>.
7. Berger, R., Brenick, A., & Tarrasch, R. (2018). Reducing Israeli-Jewish pupils' outgroup prejudice with a mindfulness and compassion-based social-emotional program. *Mindfulness*, 9, 1768-1779. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-018-0919-y>.
8. Stephan, W. G. (2014). Intergroup anxiety: Theory, research, and practice. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 18(3), 239-255. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868314530518>.
9. Page-Gould, E., Mendoza-Denton, R., & Tropp, L. R. (2008). With a little help from my cross-group friend: Reducing anxiety in intergroup contexts through cross-group friendship. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 95(5), 1080-1094. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.95.5.1080>.
10. Paolini, S., Hewstone, M., Voci, A., Harwood, J., & Cairns, E. (2006). Intergroup contact and the promotion of intergroup harmony: The influence of intergroup emotions. In R. Brown & D. Capozza (Eds.), *Social identities: Motivational, emotional and cultural influences* (pp. 209-238). Hove, UK: Psychology Press.