

Abstract

Background: Buddhist-derived meditation is a well-known phenomenological practice that enhances overall well-being of individuals. However, broad and less-rigorous criteria in recruiting suitable meditation practitioners affect the reliability of results obtained through meditation research. Therefore, we aimed at developing an instrument to identify and recruit skilled meditators to be used in work conducted to understand the physiological, psychological, social, and environmental effects of meditation.

Methods: Extensive literature reviews, interviews and focus groups with experts in the field of meditation were utilized in developing the instrument. Judgmental validation of the generated items was ensured through establishing their face, content and consensual validity. Internal consistency reliability and factor structure of the scale was explored to analyze its psychometric properties. Cut-off marks were determined in order to develop a scoring system for the instrument.

Results: Twenty five items were categorized under five sections (A, B, C1, C2, D) that addressed six factors: duration of the meditation practice, details of the meditation practice, peripheral awareness, stable attention, alertness, and emotional stability. Three further qualitative items were added under section E. An exploratory factor analysis process resulted in a two-factor structure between the Likert scale items as theoretically expected. Scores to identify 'skilled meditators' were determined as: Section C1>7 (fall-back score; 7-9, ideal score; 10-12), Section C2>14 (fall-back score; 14-16, ideal score; 17-20) and Section D>25 (fall-back score; 25-29, ideal score; 30-35).

Conclusion: An instrument named, "The Colombo Intake Interview to identify skilled meditators for scientific research (CIISMR)", consisting of 28 items exploring six factors that identify a "skilled meditator" was developed and validated to the Sri Lankan context. The importance of using a combination of these six factors is discussed.

1. Background

Research on Buddhist meditation techniques has been popularized among multidisciplinary scientific communities due to its wide array of benefits. Meditation is being increasingly recognized as a form of health promotion which facilitates the interaction between human mind and body (1, 2). Meditation as well as mindfulness, which is cultivated through the practice of meditation, are considered as the safest modalities of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM). It is estimated that between 65% – 80% of the world population (i.e., around 3 billion people) use CAM methods including meditation for the treatment of various diseases, to maintain health and vitality and to improve quality of life (3).

The concepts of meditation and mindfulness are integral to Buddhist teachings and were most precisely laid out in Buddhist meditation texts predating the practice back to thousands of years. Meditation refers to a set of mental practices which ultimately leads to the insights into understanding the nature and workings of one's mind (4, 5). Meditation practices include a varied set of techniques including breathing meditation, body-scan, walking meditation, Zen meditation, loving-kindness meditation, mindfulness