

EFFECTS OF BUDDHIST MEDITATION ON MENTAL WELL-BEING OF ELDERLY IN COLOMBO DISTRICT - SRI LANKA

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The rising of elderly population in Sri Lanka presents significant mental health concerns, driven by factors such as financial insecurity, social isolation, and age-related decline. In this context, Buddhist meditation has emerged as a culturally congruent approach with potential mental health benefits. This study examined the impact of Buddhist meditation on the mental well-being of individuals aged 65 and above in Colombo District and explored the association between meditation practices and mental health outcomes. A cross-sectional qualitative study with 15 participants was conducted using the snowball sampling method which was methodologically sound and practical due to the difficulty in identifying elderly meditation practitioners, enabling access to information-rich cases and building trust. In-depth insights were prioritized over generalizability, and the sample size aligns with guidelines suggesting data saturation occurs within 12–15 interviews. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews incorporating both open-ended questions and the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS). Content analysis and grounded theory methods were used to analyze qualitative data. All participants who engaged in Buddhist meditation reported high levels of mental well-being. Positive outcomes were consistently identified in four core areas: positive feelings and emotional well-being, functioning and daily engagement, social and interpersonal well-being, and sense of purpose and personal growth. Grounded theory analysis further revealed that regular meditation contributed to enhanced emotional regulation, mental relaxation, empathy, cognitive clarity, and even perceived improvements in physical health. These findings suggest that Buddhist meditation is a highly effective, low-cost intervention for improving the mental and holistic well-being of the elderly. The study recommends the wider promotion of meditation practices and the establishment of supportive community meditation centers to facilitate this intervention as a viable mental health strategy for Sri Lanka's aging population.

Keywords: *Buddhist meditation, cognitive improvement, emotional regulation, mental relaxation, mental well-being*