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Reducing childhood anxiety and stress through buddhist meditation techniques

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Background: Childhood anxiety and stress are increasingly prevalent issues worldwide, having effects on cognitive growth and emotional health. Although standard interventions are available, greater interest is being sparked in culturally sensitive, non-invasive approaches. This research investigated the application of Buddhist meditation practices to alleviate stress and anxiety in children between the ages of 8 - 12 years.

Method: A mixed-method study was carried out with 30 purposely selected children from Central Province, Sri Lanka (16 girls and 14 boys), with ages ranging from 8-12 years old. Participants completed an 8-week meditation program consisting of Ānāpānasati, Metta Bhāvanā and Vipassanā. Pre-test and post-test psychological assessment using RCMAS and PSS-C were administered, along with interviews conducted by child psychologists and individuals with meditation, mindfulness and well-being experience. Validity was established through reviewing tools by expert review and standardized measures.

Results: Following the intervention, substantial mean reductions were observed for anxiety according to RCMAS (Boys:21.4 [Pre-test]; 14.2 [Post-test]; Girls: ????) and for stress as of PSS-C (M pre = 18.7, M post = 11.9). Ānāpānasati proved beneficial for regulating acute stress response, Metta Bhāvanā improved emotional regulation and compassion, and Vipassanā promoted insight into emotional conditioning. General improvements were also seen in attention, emotional regulation, and stress-resilience. Lastly, no statistically significant differences were found for anxiety or stress scores by gender difference, within pre- and post-intervention, respectively.

Conclusions: Buddhist meditation is an inexpensive, effective approach to childhood mental health promotion. The practices can be integrated into school and mental health clinics with appropriate modification. Although the study yielded promising results, follow-up and control conditions on the long-term effect are to be included in subsequent studies to determine durable effect and generalizability.

Keywords: Buddhist meditation, childhood anxiety, stress reduction, mindfulness, emotional well-being.