

The Practice of Mindfulness Meditation with Dhamma gīta for Mental Well-Being: A Case Study of Working Women Practitioners at Buddhamahametta Foundation, Chiang Rak Noi, Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya

Voranij Vasuratna

International Buddhist Studies College

Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University

Received: May 27, 2023 Revised: February 21, 2024 Accepted: May 14, 2024

Abstract

This study investigated how mindfulness meditation with Dhamma gīta affected mental well-being. The study was conducted with thirty-two working women practitioners at Buddhamahametta Foundation, Chiang Rak Noi, Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya. A mixed methodology was used in this research study. A quantitative method utilizing a paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare the mental well-being scores before and after the practice of mindfulness meditation with Dhamma gīta. The results revealed that there was a significant difference between the mental well-being scores before ($M=39.97$, $SD=9.51$) and after the practice of mindfulness meditation with Dhamma gīta ($M=52.91$, $SD=4.41$), $t(31) = -9.16$, $p < .001$. Moreover, qualitative data explained that the practice helped increase the levels of mental well-being. From this research results, mindfulness meditation with Dhamma gīta could be an alternative method for working women practitioners.

Keywords: Mindfulness Meditation, Dhamma Gīta, Mental Well-Being

Introduction

Nowadays, as the world becomes more online, people are increasingly communicating with one another through social media platforms such as Facebook, Line, or Instagram. Employees work at the office and some start to work from home. It makes working more remote but may become more challenging, especially for families that have children and parents that live together. It may create an environment that is stressful for the working class where technological advances have its benefits and drawbacks. Thus, the stress can create suffering for themselves and others such as their family members, their colleagues, and their subordinates. Stress can create mood swings. If one is unmindful, it can create relationship problems in the family and the workplace.

Literature review

Mindfulness practices have benefits on one's psychological well-being. Mindfulness can reduce stress and negative emotions. In the study by Brown & Ryan (2003), revealed that mindfulness practice can help reduce stress and mood disturbance in cancer patients. According to Maxwell & Duff (2016), mindfulness practice can be an effective prescription for people who have anxiety and depression because it helps their mind to stay in the present: not in the past or in the future. Furthermore, in the study by Van der Riet et al. (2015), mindfulness could have an effect on one's concentration, clarity of thought and the ability of sleep and it could also reduce the negative thoughts.

The mindfulness meditation has been used in many studies in the field of education, and it has been found to have a benefit in reducing negative feelings such as anxiety and stress (Chen et al., 2013; Schwind et al., 2017; Song & Lindquist, 2015; Van der Riet et al., 2015). For instance, mindful breathing was used in the study by Schwind et al. (2017) that investigated how mindfulness practice affected graduate and undergraduate students' feelings of anxiety, stress, and their general well-being. The result of their study revealed that mindfulness practice could help to both decrease anxiety and increase the feeling of calmness. Another study by Van der Riet et al. (2015) explored the effect of mindfulness practice on the stress levels of undergraduate nursing students. The interview results showed that mindfulness could help to decrease negative thoughts.

Moreover, music has been used as a tool to help cope with physical and psychological pain. The research results revealed that music therapy had a positive effect on the treatment of diseases studied (Hosseini & Hosseini, 2019). In recent years, Dhamma gīta was used in meditation practice. The music of mindful breathing was used by Thich Nhat Hanh for meditation practitioners to practice breathing meditation. It was used to help the practitioners stay in the present moment while listening to the song. In *The Role of Children Buddhist Songs in Cultivating Moral Values in Buddhist Sunday School*, it revealed how a song is used as a tool to give Dhamma in order to cultivate moral values in children at school (Latifah, Budiyanto, & Puspita, 2015). Dhamma or the teachings of Buddha can be taught through this channel.

For working people, it is sometimes hard to find time to go to a meditation retreat to receive Dhamma. Practicing meditation via online channels can be an alternative way that helps lay practitioners practice from home or from work. They do not have to go to the meditation retreat. They can practice mindfulness meditation with Dhamma songs anywhere even when they travel abroad. In addition, this online practice can help meditation practitioners continue their practice in their everyday life outside of the meditation retreat. It would be interesting to find out whether the online channel can help solve the problem that working women have.

The knowledge obtained from this study might help other working women meditation practitioners. They can know how to practice meditation at home or at their workplace. They can utilize the practice with Dhamma gīta in their daily life routine. This will give an insight into the Dhamma gīta that has been used in their everyday life. If it has a positive effect on the meditation practitioners, it would give an opportunity to help people who do not have time to go to the meditation retreat.

In addition, if the practice helps increase the level of mental well-being, it can create a better individual, organization, and society. Mental well-being is one of the seventeen sustainable development goals (SDG). According to World Health Organization (2001), Mental health is “a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community”. If this online meditation practice can help mental well-being, it will not only benefit an individual but it can help create a better organization and society.

Moreover, this research study can also help meditation masters. They can use some of the knowledge from this study to adapt to their teaching in order to help their students. They may utilize some of the ways of mindfulness meditation with Dhamma gīta in their teaching meditation in the future. The master who has already used Dhamma gīta can also gain a better understanding of the practice of mindfulness meditation with Dhamma gīta.

Furthermore, there is a lack of research studies on Dhamma gīta. Dhamma gīta might be able to help their meditation practice in learning Dhamma or moral values through Buddhist songs. Because there is a little research study, the finding of this research will provide valuable insight into the field of Buddhism. The findings from this research study will give knowledge to the field of psychology as well if the practice of mindfulness meditation with Dhamma gīta can help the mind of working women practitioners. Studies (Goyal et al., 2014; Kacem et al., 2020; Hosseini & Hosseini, 2019) revealed that meditation and music therapy can be a way that can help reduce stress. However, there is a lack of study about mindfulness meditation with Dhamma gīta.

For the abovementioned reasons, it is vital to study this matter in depth. This study will shed a light on the effects of mindfulness meditation with Dhamma gīta on mental well-being. This can help give new insight into the mindfulness meditation practice with Dhamma gīta. Most meditation practices are held in a silent place. It would be very interesting to see how Dhamma gīta plays a role in meditation in this modern world. This study will be beneficial for people who are in the field of Buddhism and also other fields such as psychology and musical therapy. This research study will benefit not only meditation practitioners but also meditation masters.

Methodology

A mixed methodology was used in this study, which includes questionnaires before and after the online meditation course, as well as one-on-one interviews with thirty-two participants. This was collected in order to find out whether the practice of mindfulness meditation with Dhamma gīta intervention can significantly increase the level of mental well-being. The research was conducted over a 15-day period with each individual practicing at least 20 minutes per day at their convenience. In *Mindfulness Meditation Adherence in a College Sample: Comparison of a 10-Min Versus 20-Min 2-Week Daily Practice*, this research study (Berghoff et al., 2017) revealed that the daily practice helped reduce the levels of stress and increase the levels of mindfulness in the 2 weeks in both groups (10-min 2-week daily practice and in 20-min 2-week daily practice groups). Therefore, the participants participated in the online meditation practice at least 20 minutes for 15 days.

The purpose of this research study is to find out whether the practice of mindfulness meditation with Dhamma gīta helped the mind of working women practitioners. As mentioned, the participants were given a pre-questionnaire, a post-questionnaire, as well as one-on-one interviews upon completion of the online meditation course. The aim of the research is to answer the following research questions as follows:

1. Did the practice of mindfulness meditation with Dhamma gīta help increase the levels of mental well-being?
2. How did the practice of mindfulness meditation with Dhamma gīta help increase the levels of mental well-being?

The participants are Thai working women who are meditation practitioners at Buddhamahametta Foundation. They have taken meditation courses at Buddhamahametta before. They have practiced the four foundations of mindfulness meditation and mindfulness meditation with Dhamma gīta such as mindful bowing with Dhamma gīta, mindful walking meditation with Dhamma gīta, and mindful sitting meditation with Dhamma gīta. The questionnaire which contained the Thai Mental Well-Being Scale by Pimthong, S. et al (2022) was given to the participants before and after they participated in the 15-day online meditation practice.

After the participants filled out their answers via a google form, the quantitative method utilizing a paired-sample t-test was used to compare the mental well-being scores in the pre-and the post-questionnaires in order to test whether there is a significant difference between the means of the pre-questionnaire and the means of the post-questionnaire. Then, an individual interview was used to find whether a mindfulness meditation practice with Dhamma gīta via an online practice channel helped the mind of working women meditation practitioners or not.

For content validation, three experts were invited to examine the content validity of all research tools using the Index of Item-Objective Congruence or IOC. The scales with closed-ended and open-ended questions were given to the three experts to validate the content who were researchers who have a background in well-being and Buddhism. The content validity score of the evaluation and recruitment form was 0.96, the pre-and post-test questionnaire was 1.00, and the interview questions were 0.88. The instrument was adjusted after receiving feedback from the experts.

The protocol for this study was approved by University Research Ethics Committee. A researcher informed participants about the study objectives and procedures before giving the written informed consent. Participation was voluntary, confidential, and anonymous. If the participants were not interested in continuing this mindfulness meditation with Dhamma gīta, they could withdraw at any time.

After all the data were collected, the data from the pre-and post- questionnaires were entered into the SPSS computer program. After that, the scale was analyzed using a paired-sample t-test. Then, the interview recordings were transcribed and translated. Thematic analysis will be used. Thematic analysis is “a method for systematically identifying, organising, and offering insight into, patterns of meaning (themes) across a dataset. Through focusing on meaning across a dataset, TA allows the researcher to see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences” (Braun & Clarke, 2012). After the researcher found a pattern in the interview transcription, themes were created.

The intervention of this practice of mindfulness meditation with Dhamma gīta which was approved by 14 experts in the field such as meditation masters, meditation practitioners, and broadcasters contained the following steps:

Step 1: Apologizing and Asking for Forgiveness and Requesting to Withdraw False View Wishes.

In this step, the participants apologized and asked for forgiveness and requested to withdraw false view wishes. It took about 10 minutes to complete this first step. They read the sentences aloud in order to apologize if they made any mistake and asked for forgiveness for what they had done badly in the past.

Step 2: Mindfulness Meditation Practice

The participant would chant Jinapañjara Gāthā in the first and the fourth session. In other sessions, they could do closing and opening their hands to practice mindful hand movement.

Step 3: Mindful Bowing or Mindful Walking Meditation with Dhamma Gīta

The participants did a mindful bowing or mindful walking meditation while listening to Dhamma gīta. In this step, they had to be aware of their body and their mind. For example, when bowing, they were aware that their back was bending. They were aware

that their body was moving and their head was touching the floor. They also had to be aware of when the feeling occurred. For example, when their legs felt painful. Moreover, they were aware that they were hearing the sound of Dhamma Gīta. They were also aware of the mind. They know how they felt.

Step 4: Mindful Sitting Meditation with Dhamma Gīta.

The participants had to be aware of their bodies while sitting meditation with Dhamma gīta. It is similar to step 3. The difference is that they meditated in a sitting posture.

Step 5: Sending Merits

The participants had to send merits at the end of each session. They would dedicate the merit by changing the merits prayer and pour water into a vessel.

The online practice is available every day from 8:30 to 17:00 hours. The participants can listen to the practice of mindfulness meditation with Dhamma gīta online. They can choose anytime that they are available. In the online meditation practice program, there are 7 sessions per day. The participants must listen to at least 20 minutes per day. The participants who participated in online meditation practice for less than 10 days were excluded from the data collection. The daily meditation schedule is as follows:

8:30-9:30	Mindfulness Meditation with Dhamma Gīta
9:30-10:30	Mindfulness Meditation with Dhamma Gīta
10:30- 11:30	Mindfulness Meditation with Dhamma Gīta
11:30-13:00	Lunch Break (Dhamma Gīta)
13:00-14:00	Mindfulness Meditation with Dhamma Gīta
14:00-15:00	Mindfulness Meditation with Dhamma Gīta
15:00-16:00	Mindfulness Meditation with Dhamma Gīta
16:00-17:00	Mindfulness Meditation with Dhamma Gīta

The above-mentioned is a program and the schedule of the meditation in each session. There was preaching after the practice each day. During the day, they did a meditation practice via an online practice channel of the Buddhamahametta Foundation. In the morning, after the participants wake up and before going to bed in the evening, they could practice meditation by bowing to the Buddha or doing a walking meditation with Dhamma gīta. They can choose one of the four songs which are “The Buddha”, “Homage to The Buddha”, “To Nibbana” and “The Karmic Debt Cycle”.

Results

The data from thirty-two working women practitioners were analyzed using a mixed methodology.

Research Question 1: Did the practice of mindfulness meditation with Dhamma gīta help increase the levels of their mental well-being?

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare the mental well-being scores before and after the practice of mindfulness meditation with Dhamma gīta. The results showed that there was a significant difference in the mental well-being scores before ($M=39.97$, $SD=9.51$) and after the practice ($M=52.91$, $SD=4.41$), $t(31)=-9.158$, $p < .001$. The data from the interview also supported the statistical results. All working women practitioners (100%) stated that the practice could help them to increase their levels of mental well-being.

Research Question 2: How did the practice of mindfulness meditation with Dhamma gīta help increase the levels of mental well-being?

From the interview, there were three explanations on how the practice of mindfulness meditation with Dhamma gīta helped increase the levels of mental well-being of working women meditation practitioners. It can be divided into three themes. First, the practice helped to create positive feelings such as feeling calmer, more relaxed, and gentler in the mind. Second, it helped with their negative feelings such as feeling stressed, angry, and sad. Third, it helped working women meditation practitioners to be mindful.

Discussion

The results from the quantitative data (a paired-samples t-test) revealed that the practice of mindfulness meditation with Dhamma gīta could help the mind of working women meditation practitioners. A paired-samples t-test showed that, after the practice, the means of post-questionnaire were significantly higher than the means of pre-questionnaire. The data from the interview also supported the statistical results. All working women practitioners (100%) reported that the practice of mindfulness meditation with Dhamma gīta could help increase their levels of mental well-being. These results were comparable to the previous studies indicating that mindfulness practice helped to decrease negative feelings such as anxiety, stress, and depression (Chen et al., 2013; Kroska et al., 2018; Maxwell & Duff, 2016; Morais, P., Quaresma, C., Vigário, R. & Quintão, C. 2021; Schwind et al., 2017; Song, & Lindquist, 2015; Speca et al., 2000; Van der Riet et al., 2015) and increased positive emotions such as happiness, calm and vigor (Lindsay et al., 2018).

Conclusion

This research explored whether the practice of mindfulness meditation with Dhamma gīta helped the mind of working women practitioners. The findings have shown that there was a significant difference between the means of the pre- and post-mental well-being scores. Moreover, the data from the interview revealed that all participants thought that the practice helped them to increase their levels of mental well-being because of an increase in concentration and the development of positive feelings or a decrease in negative feelings. Therefore, the practice of mindfulness meditation with Dhamma gīta could be an alternative method for working women practitioners.

For further studies, research could be conducted in a different context in order to see how the practice of mindfulness meditation with Dhamma gīta plays a role in different populations. Moreover, it would be interesting to see the effects of the practice of mindfulness meditation with Dhamma gīta in a longitudinal study.

References

- Berghoff, C. R., Wheelless, L. E., Ritzert, T. R., Wooley, C. M., & Forsyth, J. P. (2017). Mindfulness meditation adherence in a college sample: Comparison of a 10-min versus 20-min 2-week daily practice. *Mindfulness*, 8(6) : 1513–1521.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2012). Thematic analysis. In H. Cooper, P. M. Camic, D. L. Long, A. T. Panter, D. Rindskopf, & K. J. Sher (Eds.), *APA handbook of research methods in psychology, Vol. 2. Research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological, and biological*.
- Chen, Y., Yang, X., Wang, L., & Zhang, X. (2013). A randomized controlled trial of the effects of brief mindfulness meditation on anxiety symptoms and systolic blood pressure in Chinese nursing students. *Nurse Education Today*, 33 : 1166-1172.
- Hosseini, E. & Hosseini, S. (2019). Therapeutic Effects of Music: A Review, *Report of Health Care Review Article*, 4 : 1–13.
- Goyal et al. (2014). Meditation programs for psychological stress and well-being: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *JAMA internal medicine*. 174(3) : 357-368.
- Kacem I., Kahloul M., El Arem S., Ayachi S., Hafsia M., Maoua M., et al. (2020). Effects of music therapy on occupational stress and burn-out risk of operating room staff. *The Libyan journal of medicine*. 15(1) : 1-8.
- Kroska, E., Miller, M., Roche, A., Kroska, S., & O'hara, M. (2018). Effects of traumatic experiences on obsessive-compulsive and internalizing symptoms: The role of avoidance and mindfulness. *Journal of Affective Disorders*. 225 : 326–336. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2017.08.039>

- Latifah, L., Budiyanto, A. & Puspita, M. (2015). **The Role of Children Buddhist Songs in Cultivating Moral Values in Buddhist Sunday School**. Proceeding Paper.
- Lindsay, E. K., Chin, B., Greco, C. M., Young, S., Brown, K. W., Wright, A. G. C., Smyth, J. M., Burkett, D., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). How mindfulness training promotes positive emotions: Dismantling acceptance skills training in two randomized controlled trials. **Journal of Personality and Social Psychology**. 115(6) : 944–973. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1037/pspa0000134>
- Maxwell, L., & Duff, E. (2016). Mindfulness: An Effective Prescription for Depression and Anxiety. **The Journal for Nurse Practitioners**. 12(6) : 403-409. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nurpra.2016.02.009>
- Morais, P., Quaresma, C., Vigário, R. & Quintão, C. (2021). Electrophysiological effects of mindfulness meditation in a concentration test. **Med Biol Eng Comput**. 59 : 759–773. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11517-021-02332-y>
- Pimthong, S. et al. (2022). Development and Validation of the Thai Mental Well-Being Scale, **Heliyon**, 8(4) : 1-6.
- Schwind, J. K., McCay, E., Beanlands, H., Schindel Martin, L., Martin, J., & Binder, M. (2017). Mindfulness practice as a teaching-learning strategy in higher education: A qualitative exploratory pilot study. **Nurse Education Today**. 50 : 92-96.
- Song, Y., & Lindquist, R. (2015). Effects of mindfulness-based stress reduction on depression, anxiety, stress and mindfulness in Korean nursing students. **Nurse Education Today**. 35(1) : 86-90.
- Speca, M., Carlson, L. E., Goodey, E., & Angen, M. (2000). A randomized, wait-list controlled clinical trial: The effect of a mindfulness meditation based stress reduction program on mood and symptoms of stress in cancer outpatients. **Psychosomatic Medicine**. 62 : 613-622.
- WHO. (2001) **Mental health: New understanding, new hope**. The World Health Report. Geneva: World Health Organization.
- Van der Riet, P., Rossiter, R., Kirby, D., Dluzewska, T., & Harmon, C. (2015). Piloting a stress management and mindfulness program for undergraduate nursing students: Student feedback and lessons learned. **Nurse Education Today**. 35(1) : 44-49. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2014.05.003>