



MEDITATION AND PSYCHOSIS: WHERE DO WE STAND!

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ABSTRACT

“Meditation” is the practice where one focus his or her mind for a period of time, in silence or with the aid of chanting, for religious or spiritual purposes or a method of relaxation. There are a lot of established literature guiding towards beneficial effects of the same in wide spectrum of psychiatric illnesses. Many mechanisms have been proposed for the same. However, there are contradictory evidences too. So, in depth longitudinal study is the need of the hour.

FULL ARTICLE

“Meditation” is the practice where one focus his or her mind for a period of time, in silence or with the aid of chanting, for religious or spiritual purposes or a method of relaxation¹ With the advent of counter-cultural movements during the 1960s and early 1970s, a more Eastern meaning of this term was disseminated into Western culture: meditation became a phenomenon that not only engage the thinking process but, on the other hand, seeks to disengage it². Nowadays, meditation is a term commonly used for various mental exercises consisting of techniques of concentration or contemplation, such as sitting meditation, walking meditation, repeating a mantra, breathing exercises, tai chi, qigong, some aspects of yoga, etc.³

Meditation has been opted to as treatment modality for both psychotic and neurotic spectrum disorders. Though their use as therapeutic modality is becoming widespread, the exact biological mechanism is still elusive; in some studies they have shown significant relief of symptoms.⁴

One of the first studies investigating the role of mindfulness in the treatment of psychosis, Chadwick et al. (2005) conducted an uncontrolled study in which mindfulness was taught to individuals with current, subjectively distressing psychosis⁵. During the six-session (each of 90-min duration) group intervention, participants practised a range of mindfulness techniques including: (1) a brief body scan, (2) mindfulness of breathing, and (3) ‘choice awareness’.

Mindfulness meditation is a practice that aims to achieve a state of consciousness in which the person intentionally pays attention, in the present moment, without judgment, to the unfolding experience moment by moment.⁶ Historically, this practice stems from the Buddhist religion, and it was first adapted to a therapeutic context (mindfulness-based intervention) in the form of a group intervention to improve the management of stress and chronic pain: the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program⁷

Inspired by the MBSR program, and enriched with elements from cognitive and behavioural therapy (CBT), the Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) program was subsequently developed to treat depression, and above all, prevent depressive relapse.⁸

Prolonged periods of silence were avoided and participants received an audiotape of guided meditations to facilitate at-home practice⁹

However, evidences of these practices triggering psychotic breakdown have been documented in literature. In some instances there have been relapse of old psychotic illness and in some there are incidences of new onset psychosis.¹⁰

Many mechanisms for the same have been proposed that includes alterations of mono amine pathways involving mostly serotonin and dopamine. The Ventral Tegmental Area has been implicated for the same. Despite all these suggested propositions there is nothing concrete to suggest it’s beneficial or detrimental role in relation to Psychiatric illnesses.

There is a need of longitudinal in-depth research to delineate the association between meditation and psychosis in general and the role of different types of meditation and mediators.

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