

The Impact of Vipassana on Criminals' Personality: A Psychological Study

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Abstract

Vipassana is an ancient Indian meditation technique reintroduced by Gautam Buddha. This study explores the impact of Vipassana meditation on the personality traits of prisoners. The research involved 75 male convicts from Tihar Jail, assessing their personality traits before and after the meditation program using standardized questionnaires. The findings indicate that Vipassana effectively reduced aggression, hostility, and lie-scores but did not significantly affect psychoticism, neuroticism, and extraversion. These results could be valuable for prison administration in using indigenous methods to control criminal behavior and promote further research into ancient Indian techniques.

Background

Social scientists have examined criminals' personalities since the mid-eighteenth century to understand the dynamics of crime, finding that socioeconomic and personality factors significantly contribute to criminal behavior. Eysenck (1977) posited that criminal behavior results from the interaction between environmental conditions and inherited personality traits. Other researchers, such as Yochelson and Somenow (1976), identified thinking errors in criminals that need correction for change to occur. Various reform programs globally, including in India, have shifted towards using ancient techniques like Vipassana to rehabilitate offenders.

Literature Review

Numerous studies have investigated the impact of Vipassana on human psychology. Udupa (1975) found increased RBC, plasma, and cortisol levels in participants, while Singha (1976) and Dwivedi (1977) noted improvements in attention span, emotional stability, and alertness. Kabat-Zinn (1982) demonstrated Vipassana's effectiveness in pain relief, and Kutz (1985) found better personality adjustment among meditators. Various studies have also shown Vipassana's positive effects on addiction control, psychological parameters, and overall well-being.

Vipassana Meditation: An Introduction

Vipassana, meaning "insight" in Pali, is an ancient meditation technique aimed at seeing things as they truly are through observation. Rediscovered by Gautama Buddha over 2500 years ago, it involves a structured ten-day residential course with components like Anapana (awareness of respiration) and the development of wisdom (pañña). Participants observe moral rules, focus on their breath, and practice awareness of body sensations to foster non-judgment and non-reaction, leading to long-term behavioral changes.

Vipassana in Indian Prisons

Since the first prison course in Jaipur in 1975, Vipassana has been introduced in various Indian jails with noticeable improvements in inmates' attitudes and behaviors. The program has gained acceptance globally, with other countries adopting it in their prisons. Recognized for its rehabilitative value, Vipassana is now a recommended practice by the Indian Union Home Ministry and other international bodies.

Study Objectives and Hypotheses

The study aimed to assess Vipassana's effect on convicts' personality traits, specifically hostility and aggression. Hypotheses included:

1. Vipassana significantly affects convicts' psychoticism.
2. Vipassana significantly affects convicts' neuroticism.
3. Vipassana significantly affects convicts' extraversion.
4. Vipassana affects convicts' lie-scores.

Methodology

The study involved 75 male convicts from Tihar Jail with varied crime backgrounds, aged around 35 years. An exploratory pre-and post-test design was used. Personality traits were measured using the Eysenck Personality Scale (1983), adapted for Indian settings. Data were analyzed using t-tests.

Results

The results (Table 1) showed that Vipassana significantly impacted lie-scores and reduced aggression and hostility but did not significantly affect psychoticism, neuroticism, and extraversion.

Discussion

The study's findings align with previous research that highlights the effectiveness of Vipassana in reducing behavioral issues with psychological origins, such as aggression and hostility, while it may be less effective on traits with biological bases like psychoticism and neuroticism. The practice works as a form of systematic desensitization, conditioning inmates to reduce negative behaviors. Combining Vipassana with other therapies might enhance its effectiveness.

Conclusion

Vipassana meditation has shown significant potential in rehabilitating convicts by reducing aggression, hostility, and lie-scores. While it may not affect all personality traits, its behavioral benefits make it a valuable tool in prison reform programs.

References

- Netgel (1998), Mulla Committee (1980), NHRC (1988), Jaipur Jail (1990), Tihar Jail (1994), Udupa (1975), Singh Dwivedi (1977), Yochelson and Somenow (1976), Kabat-Zinn (1982), Kutz (1985), Bhannager (1990), Curry (1990), Ayyar (1990), Khosla (1989), Cregan (1986), Chokhani (1986), Chandaramani (1991), Khurana and Dhar (2000), Chaudhary (1995), Royal College of Psychiatrists (2001), Hussain (2001), Hetu (2006), Nespour, Sanyasi, Swaroomuthi (2008), Fleischman (1991), Eysenck, Allport (1937), Matthews (1997).

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Introduction

Vipassana is an ancient Indian meditation technique, reintroduced by Gautam Buddha. This study explores the impact of Vipassana meditation on the personalities of prisoners. The aim is to assess how Vipassana affects various personality traits of convicts.

Background

Personality is a significant factor in understanding criminal behavior. According to Eysenck (1977), criminal behavior results from the interaction between environmental conditions and inherited personality traits. He emphasized the genetic predispositions towards criminal conduct, suggesting that some individuals possess unique nervous systems that influence their behavior. Yochelson and Samenow (1976) noted that criminals often exhibit thinking errors that must be corrected for change to occur.

Research has shown that specific personality traits are prevalent among criminals and correcting these traits could help reduce criminal activities. Prison reform measures can alleviate negative emotions like hostility and helplessness among inmates. Various committees, such as the Mulla Committee (1980) and the National Human Rights Commission (1988), have recommended reformative measures to improve jail conditions and control criminal behavior.

In India, the approach towards reforming convicts has evolved from modern intervention programs to ancient techniques like yoga, meditation, and prayers. Reform programs incorporating these techniques, including Vipassana, have been implemented in various jails both in India and abroad since the 19th century.

Literature Review

Studies have indicated that Vipassana meditation positively impacts human psychology. Research by Udupa (1975) found that attending Vipassana courses increased RBC, plasma, and cortisol levels in subjects. Other studies by Singha (1976) and Dwivedi (1977) noted improvements in attention span, emotional stability, and alertness among meditators. Kabat-Zinn (1982) demonstrated Vipassana's effectiveness in pain relief, while Kutz (1985) found that meditators had better personality adjustment compared to non-meditators.

Vipassana has also shown positive results in clinical practice. Chokhani (1986) applied Anapana meditation on neurotic patients and reported positive clinical responses. Hammersley and Cregan (1986) noted Vipassana's effectiveness in controlling drug and alcohol dependence, and Khosla (1989) reported significant improvements in psychological parameters such as depression, anxiety, and stress coping.

Studies specific to convicts have shown similar positive outcomes. Sanghvi (1994) reported that Vipassana courses positively impacted patients with asthma, hypertension, and peptic ulcers. Khurana and Dhar (2000) found that Vipassana significantly affected convicts' extraversion and lie-score traits. The Royal College of Psychiatrists (2001) stated that Vipassana meditation can improve discipline and cooperation among prisoners and aid in treating mental illness.

Vipassana Meditation: An Overview

Vipassana, meaning "insight" in Pali, is a technique aiming to see things as they truly are through repeated observation. Rediscovered by Gautama Buddha over 2500 years ago, Vipassana is currently taught under the guidance of Shri S. N. Goenka. The technique encourages conscious lifestyle changes, improves concentration, and facilitates deeper psychological introspection, resulting in long-term behavioral changes.

Participants must take a ten-day residential course to learn Vipassana. The training has three components: observing moral rules (sila), awareness of respiration (Anapana), and developing wisdom (pañña). The practice involves observing the natural flow of breath and body sensations, promoting equanimity and tranquility of mind.

Vipassana in Indian Prisons

Vipassana has been practiced in Indian prisons since 1975, starting at the Central Jail in Jaipur. Participants have shown marked changes in attitude and behavior, with a reduction in crimes and petty offenses in participating jails. Recognized by the Indian Union Home Ministry in 1994, Vipassana courses are now organized in prisons across the country and globally.

Study Objective

The study aimed to investigate the effect of Vipassana meditation on convicts' personality traits, including hostility, aggression, psychoticism, neuroticism, extraversion, and lie-score.

Hypotheses

1. Vipassana will significantly affect controlling the psychoticism of convicts.
2. Vipassana will significantly affect controlling the neuroticism of convicts.
3. Vipassana will significantly affect controlling the extraversion of convicts.
4. Vipassana will be effective in controlling the lie-score of convicts.

Methodology

Sample:

The study randomly selected 75 male convicts from Tihar jail in Delhi, representing various crime categories such as theft, rape, murder, bride-burning, dacoity, and forgery. The convicts had a minimum qualification up to 12th standard and were primarily from Delhi, NCR region, Haryana, MP, Rajasthan, and UP, with an average age of 35 years.

Design:

The study employed an exploratory research design with pre- and post-intervention assessments. A t-test was computed to evaluate the impact of Vipassana. Standardized questionnaires measured personality traits before and after the Vipassana sessions.

Measuring Instruments:

The study used the Eysenck Personality Scale (1983) adapted for Indian settings by Sanyal Kathpalia (1999), which measures four dimensions of personality: psychoticism, neuroticism, extraversion, and lie-score. The reliability of the test is reported as $r = 0.76$ for test-retest and $r = 0.88$ for inter-total consistency.

Results

Table 1 shows the pre- and post-intervention means and t-test results for the various personality traits.

**Significant at .01 level, Significant at .05 level*

According to the results, Vipassana was significantly effective in changing the lie-score of convicts but was not effective in changing psychoticism, neuroticism, and extraversion.

Discussion

The findings indicate that Vipassana impacts behavioral traits with a psychological origin, such as hostility, aggression, and lie-score, rather than traits with a biological origin, such as psychoticism, neuroticism, and extraversion. This suggests that while Vipassana can condition certain behaviors, it may not alter genetically influenced personality traits.

The study supports previous research indicating that high levels of psychoticism, neuroticism, and extraversion are prevalent among criminals. However, Vipassana was not effective in altering these traits, possibly due to their genetic basis. Conversely, the significant change in lie-score suggests that Vipassana can influence behaviors related to social desirability and aggression.

Overall, the study concludes that Vipassana can be an effective tool for behavioral conditioning in prisoners, potentially reducing aggression and hostility. Combining Vipassana with other therapies could enhance its effectiveness in rehabilitating convicts.

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