

ABSTRACT

In defining health mental health has been included as a major component. It is estimated globally that in 15 years mental health problems will be the number one cause of morbidity with an increasing trend of people becoming mentally ill.

Meditation defined as a state of concentration in mind on wholesome thoughts, has been known to improve mental health. Although meditation is known to improve mental health and reduce stress, majority do not seem to practice it.

It has been revealed that stress levels among medical students are higher than that of the general population. Therefore this study was designed to assess the mental health status of medical students and to describe the association between mental health and meditation.

The study was carried out as a cross sectional comparative post test only design with one group of medical students who practiced meditation at least for 15 minutes per day and at least 3 days per week for a minimum of three months from the day prior to the commencement of the study and the other group without practicing meditation. One hundred and fifty medical students with 75 of them practicing meditation were included in this study. These medical students were from medical faculties in the Western Province of Sri Lanka.

As revealed by the study more than 37% of the students had severe mental burden during the last one week. Of those who participated in the study 6.7% were not feeling happy during the last week and more than 47% had got very angry when they got angry last. Above percentages were higher for those who did not practice meditation.

The association of meditation with some characteristics of mental health status such as satisfaction about money, happiness during the last one week, level of anger, amount of being upset in the event of death of a close relative, feeling on the importance of developing the mind and the attempt taken to improve the mind during the last three months had a statistical significance at $p < 0.05$

Taking the above findings into consideration it is recommended that mental health of medical students needs much more attention. Since meditation has been proven to have an association with improvement in mental health it is recommended to create awareness among students about the available opportunities to learn meditation.