

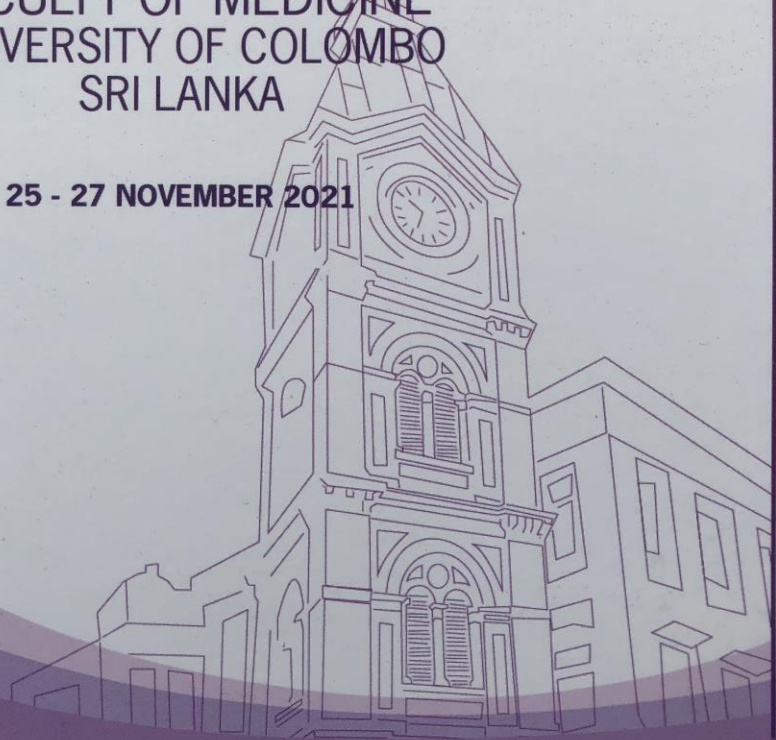


"NCD AND COVID 19: TACKLING TWO PANDEMICS THROUGH COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH"

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PP- 10: **Psychological distress and mindfulness: a preliminary cross-sectional analysis between Buddhist-based meditation practitioners and non-meditators from Sri Lanka**

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Introduction: Meditation is a well-known concept among Sri Lankans. This cross-sectional study explored self-reported differences in mindfulness and psychological distress (namely depression, anxiety and stress) between long-term meditators (LTM) following mainstream Buddhist-based meditation practiced in Sri Lanka and their age and gender matched non-meditating controls (NMC).

Methods: A purposive sample of LTM (n=25) who meditated for three or more years and followed practices taught at Sri Lankan Buddhist meditation centers/temples/monasteries and a purposive, community sample of NMC (n=15) who had never or rarely meditated were recruited. Individuals below the age of 18, experiencing brain damage and receiving psychiatric and/or psychological treatment or had been in the past three years were excluded. Participants completed a demographic information sheet, the judgmentally validated Sinhala Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ-39-SIN) and the Sinhala Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21). Data was analyzed using IBM SPSS at an alpha level of 0.05. A cross sectional analysis between the two aforementioned groups (LTM; n=15, NMC; n=15) and a subsequent correlational analysis with the LTM group (n=25) was conducted.

Results: In terms of psychological distress, NMC reported greater levels of anxiety, stress and total DASS-21 scores compared to LTM. The LTM group scored significantly higher in four of the five FFMQ-39-SIN subscales: *describing*, *acting-with-awareness*, *non-judging of inner experience* and *non-reactivity to inner experience*. Meditation experience of the LTM in terms of years of practice was significantly associated with *acting-with-awareness* and *non-reactivity to inner experiences*.

Conclusion: Buddhist-based meditation as practiced in a Sri Lankan context may alleviate psychological distress, especially in terms of anxiety and stress while enhancing mindfulness skills in regular practitioners. Further studies will be conducted to examine if these findings are replicated in a larger sample. We believe these findings to be promising in an era where masses report psychological distress due to a global pandemic.

Keywords: Buddhist-based meditation, mindfulness, anxiety, stress, Sri Lanka

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