



# Feeling Irritated: A Comparative Study between Meditators and Non-Meditators

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## Abstract

**Objective:** To analyse how far meditators and non-meditators experience mental irritation.

**Method:** The study was undertaken using a questionnaire among 50 randomly selected meditators from Satyananda Yoga Research Centre, Kozhikode, Kerala State, India and 50 non-meditators from Kozhikode. The questionnaire contained the irritability scale and the characteristics of the respondents, namely, age, sex, marital status and the level of health problems they have faced during the past 3 months. The responses to the irritability items in the scale were scored and the total score of responses to all the items was worked out as the total irritability score. The data was analyzed as proportion, score and through statistical tests.

**Results:** The results show that the meditators have experienced the irritability items comparatively less than the non-meditators. The statistical significance of the difference in the comparatively lower total irritability score of meditators and the higher score of non-meditators indicate the influence of meditation practice in reducing feelings of irritability. Youngsters have experienced more irritability than elders, even with meditation practice. More health problems faced by the meditators have contributed to higher feelings of irritation. The statistical significance of the difference in the mean scores for some irritability items have shown that meditators are able to control their temper and anger better than the non-meditators. For married meditators, who can be expected to have more problems than unmarried people due to their family responsibilities and problems, meditation has actually helped to reduce the feelings of irritation more than that of the unmarried meditators. Meditation has helped males and females equally to reduce their irritated feelings much.

**Conclusion:** The study has clearly shown the influence of meditation practice in reducing the irritability feelings more than that of the non-meditators. Under the presently existing stressful nature of life of many people, it would be worthwhile to analyze various benefits of relaxation techniques like yoga, meditation, art of living, exercises etc. so that scientifically backed informed decisions can be taken by individuals as well as institutions to propagate such methods for achieving better well being of the society at large.

**Keywords:** Feeling Irritated; Meditators; Non-Meditators

## Introduction

Irritability is a common emotion, in which a person may feel less tolerant than usual. When a person feels irritable, small things which do not usually bother them can make them feel annoyed or agitated. The resulting tension can make a person more sensitive to stressful situations. People may experience confusion or difficulty concentrating, excessive sweating, rapid heartbeat and fast or shallow breathing along with increased irritability. Many factors can cause or contribute to irritability including life stress, lack of sleep, hormonal changes, financial worries, family problems, loneliness, isolation, lack of adequate sleep, work dynamics etc. Feelings of agitation, frustration and impatience are all signs of irritability. Anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder and schizophrenia can also cause mental irritability. Based on review and meta-analysis of studies carried out, it has been reported that irritability forms a distinct dimension with substantial stability across time, and that it is specifically associated with depression and anxiety in longitudinal studies [1].

The effects of meditation on mental health including relaxation, systematic desensitization, retrieval of repressed memories, perception, memory, stress, depression, anxiety, sleep disturbances, and relaxation have been reported [2]. All these benefits can be expected to help in reducing mental irritation also.

This study was carried out to analyse how far meditators and non-meditators experience mental irritation.

## Method

The study was undertaken using a questionnaire among 50 randomly selected meditators from Satyananda Yoga Research Centre, Kozhikode, Kerala State, India and 50 non-meditators from Kozhikode. The questionnaire contained the irritability scale [3], in which the respondents were asked to mention how much they have faced various irritability items during the past 3 months, and the characteristics of the respondents, namely, age, sex, marital status and the level of health problems they have faced during the past 3 months. The respondents were asked about irritability experienced by them during the past 3 months using the items in the scale with three point responses, namely, not at all true, somewhat true, and completely true. The responses were scored from 0 to 2 and the total score of responses to all the items was worked out as the total irritability score. The data was analyzed as proportion, score and through statistical tests.

## Results

Table 1 shows the responses of the meditators and non-

meditators towards various items related to irritability/feeling irritated.

| Items related to irritability | Response        | Respondents (%) |                |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|
|                               |                 | Meditators      | Non-meditators |
| Easily annoyed by others      | Not true        | 50              | 20             |
|                               | Somewhat true   | 40              | 60             |
|                               | Completely true | 10              | 20             |
|                               | Total           | 100             | 100            |
| Often loses temper            | Not true        | 70              | 30             |
|                               | Somewhat true   | 30              | 60             |
|                               | Completely true | -               | 10             |
|                               | Total           | 100             | 100            |
| Stays angry for a long time   | Not true        | 70              | 70             |
|                               | Somewhat true   | 30              | 20             |
|                               | Completely true | -               | 10             |
|                               | Total           | 100             | 100            |
| Angry most of the time        | Not true        | 70              | 60             |
|                               | Somewhat true   | 30              | 40             |
|                               | Total           | 100             | 100            |
| Gets angry frequently         | Not true        | 70              | 30             |
|                               | Somewhat true   | 30              | 50             |
|                               | Completely true | -               | 20             |
|                               | Total           | 100             | 100            |
| Loses temper easily           | Not true        | 40              | 30             |
|                               | Somewhat true   | 60              | 20             |
|                               | Completely true | -               | 50             |
|                               | Total           | 100             | 100            |

**Table 1:** Responses of the meditators and non-meditators towards various items related to irritability .

Table 2 gives details of the statistical significance of the difference in total irritability score of meditators and non-meditators

| Mean total irritability score |                | t value and statistical significance |
|-------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------------|
| Meditators                    | Non-meditators |                                      |
| 2.4                           | 3.7            | - 2.86; p<0.01                       |

**Table 2:** Statistical significance of the difference in total irritability score of meditators and non-meditators.

Table 3 shows the statistical significance of age wise difference in total irritability score of meditators

| Age group | Mean total irritability score | F    | Significance |
|-----------|-------------------------------|------|--------------|
| 26-31     | 3.7                           | 16.5 | P<0.01       |
| 51-68     | 1.8                           |      |              |
| 71-73     | 2                             |      |              |

**Table 3:** Statistical significance of age wise difference in total irritability score of meditators.

Table 4 shows the statistical significance of the difference in total irritability score of meditators based on the level of health problems faced

| Level of health problems faced in the past 6 months | Mean total irritability score | F   | Significance |
|---|-------------------------------|-----|--------------|
| Less  | 1.7                           | 5.1 | p<0.05       |
| Moderate  | 2                             |     |              |
| Much  | 3.3                           |     |              |

**Table 4:** Statistical significance of the difference in total irritability score of meditators based on the level of health problems faced.

Table 5 shows the statistical significance of the difference in score of items related to irritability between meditators and non-meditators.

| Items related to irritability | Mean score |                | t value and statistical significance |
|-------------------------------|------------|----------------|--------------------------------------|
|                               | Meditators | Non-meditators |                                      |
| Often loses temper            | 0.3        | 0.8            | - 1.98; p<0.05                       |
| Gets angry frequently         | 0.3        | 0.9            | - 2.15; p<0.05                       |
| Loses temper easily           | 0.6        | 1.2            | - 1.8; p<0.10                        |

**Table 5:** Statistical significance of the difference in score of items related to irritability between meditators and non-meditators.

## Discussion

Responses of the meditators and non-meditators towards the experience various items related to irritability/feeling irritated during the past 3 months are discussed below

### *Easily annoyed by others*

While 50 % of the meditators report that this is not true, only 20 % of the non-meditators have responded in this manner. Double the number of non-meditators has mentioned that this as completely true, as compared to the meditators (Table 1).

### *Often loses temper*

70 % of the meditators mention that this is not true. However, only 30 % of the non-meditators have responded that this is not true for them. Further, while 10 % of the non-meditators have mentioned that this is completely true, none of the meditators have responded in this manner (Table1).

### *Stays angry for a long time*

While 10 % of the meditators report this as completely true, none of the meditators have reported so (Table 1).

### *Angry most of the time*

70 % of the meditators mention that this is not true, as compared to only 60 % of the non-meditators. While only 30 % of the meditators mention that this is somewhat true, the figure for non-meditators is 40 % respondents (Table 1).

### *Gets angry frequently*

While 70 % of the meditators report that this is not true, only 30 % of the non-meditators have responded in this manner. Further, 20 % of the non-meditators have reported that this is completely true, while none of the meditators have responded in this manner (Table 1).

### *Loses temper easily*

While 40 % of the meditators report that this is not true, 30 % of the non-meditators have responded in this manner. A high proportion (50%) of the non-meditators have reported that this is completely true. However, none of the meditators have reported that this is completely true of them (Table 1).

From the above discussion, it is evident that considering the past 3 months, the non-meditators have felt comparatively more irritated than those who have practiced meditation. Based on a study, it has been reported that people who practice meditation are able to maintain more emotional stability through better experience of positive emotions and less of negative emotions, when compared to those who are not practicing meditation [4]. It has been observed that more than 50 % of the meditators have experienced stress reduction and are able to calm and relax their mind

through meditation [5]. The results of another study have also revealed the effect of daily meditation for three minutes by children for one month in improving positive feelings and reducing negative feelings experienced by them [6].

The findings of the studies mentioned above establish the fact that meditation helps people to experience a good mental state. This could be the probable reason why meditators under the present study have felt less irritated than non-meditators.

The mean total irritability score of meditators (2.4) is less than that of non-meditators (3.7), with statistically significant difference in the scores (Table 2). This result once again establishes the effect of meditation in reducing irritability feelings among the practitioners.

Age wise statistically significant difference in the mean total irritability score of meditators has been observed under the study (Table 3). The lowest score (2.0) is for meditators in the higher age group of 71 to 73 years, followed by those in the age group of 51 to 68 years (1.8), while youngsters in the age group of 26 to 31 years have the highest score of 3.7 (Table 3), indicating that young people have experienced the maximum feeling of irritability even with meditation practice. The busy, competitive, stressful nature of work of many youngsters nowadays may probably be making them more mentally unstable, even when they practice meditation. This might have made them feel more mentally irritated.

Statistical significance difference in the total irritability score of meditators has been observed based on the level of health problems faced by them during the past 3 months. Those who reported much health problems have the higher mean score of 3.3, followed by those who had moderate health problems (score of 2.0), while meditators having less health problems get the lowest mean irritability score of 1.7 (Table 4). This implies that the level of health problems faced by the meditators have influenced their irritated feelings. More health problems might have led to more of mental unrest, which might have probably made them feel more irritated in life.

It can be made out from Table 5 that there exists statistically significant difference between meditators and non-meditators in the mean scores of the irritability items, namely, often loses temper, gets angry frequently and loses temper easily. The mean scores for these items are less for the meditators than the non-meditators, implying that meditators are able to control their temper and anger better than the non-meditators. The benefits of peace of mind and mental relaxation which are normally achieved through meditation due to improvement in the production of "feel good" hormones might have contributed to this.

Meditation directly disrupts the body's stress response, allowing the practitioner to remain calm and emotionally sound [6]. Meditation can help to control anger by helping to focus on the breath, body sensations and emotions and by shifting attention away from thoughts. Regularly practicing meditation can help you focus your mind, calm your body, reduce scattered thoughts and feelings and lower the likelihood of acting on impulses [7,8].

A meta-analysis of 22 studies on meditation demonstrated its ability to increase the compassion of people toward themselves and others [9]. This may be considered to imply that meditators could feel less angry towards themselves as well as others, as well as an indication of not losing one's temper easily.

Meditation can prevent the sympathetic nervous system from overwhelming the body and keeping the body in a constant state of fight or flight. It can also help the body find relaxation and reverse it through the para sympathetic nervous system. This deactivates many of the hormones and prepares the body for fight or flight and all the emotions that are tied to this response [10].

Even though the mean total irritability score of married meditators (2.13) under the study is found to be less than that of unmarried meditators (3.5), indicating comparatively less irritated feelings experienced by the former group, there is no statistically significant difference in their scores. This implies that for married meditators, who can be expected to have more problems than unmarried people due to their family responsibilities and problems, meditation has actually helped to reduce the feelings of irritation more than that of the unmarried meditators. As already mentioned earlier regarding the influence of age on feeling irritated, the comparatively young un-married meditators might not have been able to reduce their feelings of irritation as much as married people, who may be mostly of comparatively older age with not much of work related problems as youngsters probably due to the competitive, stressful and busy schedule of work of young people.

The mean score total irritability score of male meditators (2.4) is the same as that of female meditators, indicating that there is no significant difference in feeling irritated between the sexes. The low mean scores also indicates that male and female meditators are not very much irritated. Even though females may be expected to be more emotional than males, meditation practice might have helped them to reduce their feeling of irritability much, similar to that of males.

## Conclusion

With respect to the irritability items under the study, namely, annoyed easily by others, often losing temper, staying angry

for a long time, being angry most of the time, getting angry frequently, and losing temper easily, the results indicate that the meditators have experienced them comparatively less than the non-meditators. The statistical significance of the difference in the comparatively lower total irritability score of meditators and the higher score of non-meditators indicate the influence of meditation practice in reducing feelings of irritability. Even with meditation, comparatively young people have experienced more irritability than elders. More health problems faced by the meditators have contributed to higher feelings of irritation. The statistical significance of the difference in the mean scores for some irritability items have shown that meditators are able to control their temper and anger better than the non-meditators. For married meditators, who can be expected to have more problems than unmarried people due to their family responsibilities and problems, meditation has helped to reduce the feelings of irritation more than that of the unmarried meditators. The comparatively young un-married meditators might not have been able to reduce their feelings of irritation as much as married people, who may be mostly of older age with not much of work related problems as youngsters, probably due to the competitive, stressful and busy schedule of work of young people. Meditation has helped males and females equally to reduce their irritated feelings much.

In the present day stressful nature of life of many people due to various uncontrollable factors, it would be worthwhile to analyze various benefits of relaxation techniques like yoga, meditation, art of living, exercises etc. so that scientifically backed informed decisions can be taken by individuals as well as institutions to propagate such methods for achieving better well being of the society at large.

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