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## EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTS OF HEARTFULNESS SELF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM ON THE INTERNAL MENTAL HEALTH OF NURSING STUDENTS- A PROSPECTIVE OBSERVATIONAL STUDY

\*<sup>1</sup>Raja Amarnath, <sup>2</sup>Latha Venkatesan, <sup>2</sup>Sugirtha Jenitha, <sup>3</sup>Chitra Rajan, <sup>4</sup>Geetu Bohra and <sup>5</sup>Varalakshmi

<sup>1</sup> HOD Professor, Department of Pulmonology and Critical Care, Sree Balaji Medical College and Hospital, Senior Consultant, Apollo Hospitals, Chennai, India

<sup>2</sup> Principal and professor in Maternity nursing, Apollo College of Nursing, Chennai, India

<sup>2</sup> Clinical Researcher, Sree Balaji Medical College and Hospital, Chennai, India

<sup>3</sup> Consultant, Environmental Sustainability, Lalaji Memorial Omega International School, Chennai, India

<sup>4</sup> Human Resource Professional, HTC Global Services, Chennai, India

<sup>5</sup> Statistical Analyst, CIPACA Pvt. Ltd, Chennai, India

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To evaluate the effects of 24-week Heartfulness meditation Self-development program' in improving internal mental health of nursing students.

**Methodology:** The study was designed as a prospective interventional study to examine the effect of meditation on internal mental health parameters such as Psychological stability, Moral reasoning, Self Efficiency and Positive attitude. The data was collected from students of four year undergraduate nursing program in a private hospital in Chennai, Tamilnadu, India before and after a 24- week Heart fullness Meditation self-development program. Data were obtained using the Internal Mental Health Quality of Life Questionnaire 2004-2015 Phillip W. Long, M.D.

**Results:** Data from 174 students was collected and analyzed using SPSS version 21. There was a significant overall increase in the Internal mental health of nursing students post intervention [ $P < 0.000^*$ ]. This improvement persisted even in the subgroup analysis based on academic year and family background.

**Conclusion:** The outcome of this interventional study demonstrated positive effects of Heartfulness meditation in improving Internal Mental Health of nursing students. This improvement was greatest in first year students and in students coming from a joint family system, who actually had a poor internal mental health at baseline assessment compared with others. Elimination of disturbing thoughts and negative tendencies by 'Heartfulness cleaning' and creation of internal peace and calmness by 'Heartfulness meditation' combined with the coaching on personality development appear to be the essential factors behind this transformation.

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### INTRODUCTION

A sense of pleasure in or satisfaction from one's achievements or the achievement of a group with which a person is associated is very important aspect of a mental well-being.

\*Corresponding author: Raja Amarnath,

Professor, Department of Pulmonology and critical care; Sree Balaji Medical College and Hospital, senior consultant, Apollo hospitals, Chennai, India.

It is an overall feeling of confidence in one's abilities, of self-respect and self-confidence rather than specific achievements. 'Student's mental well-being' is an essential part of a student's overall health and has a direct impact on a student's day to day living including academic performance (Kucirka, 2013; Cleary et al., 2012; Hunt and Eisenberg, 2010). The start of under secondary education may mark the beginning of a period in which students experience significant changes including those related to developmental tasks, self-identify and the formation

of values. Nursing students may have increased risk for mental health issues as they are often required to face challenges not typically found in other programs (Mark and Smith, 2012). There may be some nursing students who do not have the required coping skills and/or a reliable support system needed to help them navigate the challenges that nursing education engenders. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), "mental health is an integral part of health as such there is no health without mental health. It is more than the absence of mental disorders [and] is determined by socio-economic, biological and environmental factors" (Becker and Kleinman, 2013) Mental health is influenced by both internal and external factors which include physical health, personality, traits, temperament, social background, family life, education, environment, work culture etc. Incidence of mental health issues was more common amongst nurses. It is due to work overload, employment factors and organizational factors (Zandi *et al.*, 2011; Thomas, 1997) Poor student mental health has been correlated with: lower student performance, higher attrition rates (Martin, 2010), lower graduation rates (Kitzrow, 2003), decreased overall program satisfaction and problematic student behavior (Gibbons *et al.*, 2011) World Health Organization defines mental health as "subjective well-being, perceived self-efficacy, autonomy, competence, inter-generational dependence, and self-actualization of one's intellectual and emotional potential, among others"(World Health Organization. 2001).

It further states that the good health of a person is encompassed in self-realization of one's potentials, confronting stress, working productively and their contribution to society (World Health Organization. 2014). Positive mental well-being is a specific requirement for healthcare professionals during their encounters with patients/caregivers, healthcare team members, and hospital management. In case of nursing students, mental health affects the use of real self, ability to empathize, ability to cooperate, and healthy interpersonal relationships with patients and colleagues (Randle, 2003). Low self-esteem is also the base of submissive behaviors (Torun *et al.*, 2012). Submissive attitudes which are particularly encouraged in Asian cultures affect self-worthiness and self-importance. Particularly in nursing programs, students are often not given the opportunity to express their ideas freely and experience difficulty in "SAYING NO". This will make them difficult to develop leadership skills. This leads to low self-confidence and a tendency to avoid taking responsibilities (Ozkan and Ozen, 2008). After their graduation, nursing students will have to carry out healthcare and rehabilitation services for the patients and their families that involve not just physical but also emotional and psycho-social support. These important responsibilities require good mental health. Nurses with good mental health can recognize and manage their feelings, motivate themselves, overcome problems effectively and establish healthy interpersonal relationships in the work environment (Gülay Bingöl *et al.*, 2012).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study aims at observing the effect of Heartfulness Self-development program on the mental health by examining a range of behaviors, sentiments and outlook in group of undergraduate nursing students. The student sampling included students of first, second and final year of four year undergraduate nursing program associated with a private hospital in Chennai, Tamilnadu India.

Third year students were unable to participate as they were occupied with the peripheral postings. The participating students volunteered to undertake a 24 weeks self-development program based on Heartfulness Meditation.

*Heartfulness meditation involves tuning the heart and mind to unison and meditation on the heart. It is a growing practice among adults and students to enhance performance, creativity and personal wellbeing and to develop serenity and compassion [www.heartfulness.org].*

There were 24 sessions conducted weekly once. During each session the students went through a lecture on a topic related to self-development followed by trainer led practical session. Heartfulness Meditation practices which included meditation on the heart, cleansing of unwanted impressions and Introspection and tuning into inner self. The study was based on standard questionnaire extracted from Internal Mental Health Quality of Life Scale Copyright © 2004-2015 Phillip W. Long, M.D. The questions were related to a person's confidence levels, self-worthiness, emotional balance, overall social functioning and coping factors that were of relevance to the nursing academic program and job requirements. The forms were filled up by the students at the start and end of the 6 months program. They were not informed prior regarding the forms to be filled. Ethical consent was obtained from the institutional authorities and also from the students who have participated in this program.

## Data Analysis

Data was collected from 174 participating Nursing students included frequencies of demographic such as year of studies and family details as well as students' self-rating on their present mental condition using the Quality of life scaling tool. The subscales determine the attitudes of the person toward him/herself in various fields. The Quality of Life scaling tool includes 4 subscales that contain 18 statements evaluating the mental state of the person. These subscales are psychological stability, moral reasoning, self efficiency, positive attitude. Each subscale is assessed on a Likert scale ranging from little or no difficulty, much difficulty and severe difficulty with the scores 0, 1 and 2.

## RESULTS

Mean, frequencies and percentage were carried out for the demographic profiles as seen in table1. t-test was carried out on all the subscales like psychological stability, moral reasoning, self efficiency and positive attitude. Comparison was done by studying mean values of pre and post intervention Internal mental health scores of student's year wise and family wise. There is a significant improvement in internal mental health of students in all the considered subscales, post the meditation sessions. Complete demographic profile of participants is represented in Table-1. Out of 174 participants, 77 (44.3%) are 1st year students, 45 (25.9%) are 2nd year students, and 52 (29.9%) are 4th year students. 52 (29.9%) of the total population are from a joint family while 122 (70.1%) are from a nuclear family system. Mean values were derived individually for each subscale at the beginning of the program for students of all academic years. Overall, highest internal mental health was seen in final year students for moral reasoning, positive attitude and psychological stability ( $m=0.461, 1.576, 4.769$ ). 2nd year students had the highest internal mental health for self efficiency [Table-2].

Internal Mental Health Assessment	No Difficulty [0]	Much Difficulty [1]	Severe Difficulty [2]
<b>PSYCHOLOGICAL STABILITY</b>			
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
<b>MORAL REASONING</b>			
10.			
<b>SELF EFFICIENCY</b>			
11.			
12.			
13.			
14.			
15.			
<b>POSITIVE ATTITUDE</b>			
16.			
17.			
18.			

#### 24 week self-development program

Week	Topics	Objectives
1	Meditation – The technique to discover the inner world	What is meditation? The technique and its benefits.
2	De cluttering the mind	The technique of cleaning the mind and removing unwanted thoughts.
3	Time Management	Deeper understanding of time. How to use time effectively and efficiently?
4	Health – Balance of energies	Different aspects of health. The secret of a healthy life.
5	Sleep Cycle and Right nutrition	Importance of the Sleep quality. Food Habits and sleep.
6	Success Through Excellence	How can one be successful? Relationship between success and Excellence.
7	Aptitude and Attitude	The difference.
8	Dealing with Choices in life	How to make a right choice.
9	A Stress-free Life	Root cause of the Stress. How to lead a stress free life.
10	From Outside to Inside	Centering your focus.
11	Facing Challenges in life	The right attitude and adaptability during difficult times
12	Introspection (Prayer)	The need for prayer, its efficacy.
13	Designing Destiny	What is Destiny? Can we change it?
14	Personality Development	What is personality? How to reform?
15	Setting the Goal	How to set the goal in life?
16	Taking Initiatives	Alert and Observe. Work shop.
17	Team Management	How to be an effective member in a team, Team dynamics?
18	Dealing with failures	What is failure? How to handle failure?
19	Ambition versus Aspiration	The difference and its applicability in life.
20	The power of thought	How your Positive thoughts can help one and others Relationship?
21	Relationship	Managing the relationships in life.
22	A Balanced life	How to find Balance in work and personal life.
23	Happiness – The way of life	How to be happy always? What makes us happy?
24	My contribution to the society	What can I do to my society? My role and responsibility.

After the completion of Heartfulness self-development program, mean values were derived individually for each subscale for students of all academic years. Overall, compared with others, highest internal mental health for moral reasoning, positive attitude and self efficiency was seen in 1<sup>st</sup> years students (m=1.324, 4.207, 6.207).

**Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the study population**

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
YEAR WISE	I year	77
	II year	45
	IV year	52
	Joint	52
TYPE OF FAMILY	Joint	52
	Nuclear	122

Final year students had the highest internal mental health for psychological stability (m=12.788) [Table-3].

**Table 2. Baseline Internal mental health of students- year wise**

SUBSCALES	EDUCATION	MEAN
Psychological stability	I Year	5.688
	II Year	5.666
	IV Year	4.769
	I Year	0.857
Moral reasoning	II Year	0.622
	IV Year	0.461
	I Year	2.935
	II Year	2.533
Self Efficiency	IV Year	2.769
	I Year	1.831
	II Year	1.711
	IV Year	1.576

**Table 3. Year wise internal mental health of students- Post intervention**

SUBSCALES	EDUCATION	MEAN
Psychological stability	I Year	13.013
	II Year	13.800
	IV Year	12.788
Moral reasoning	I Year	1.324
	II Year	1.488
	IV Year	1.423
Self Efficiency	I Year	6.207
	II Year	7.311
	IV Year	7.038
Positive attitude	I Year	4.207
	II Year	4.266
	IV Year	4.230

After the Heartfulness based self-development program internal mental health of the nursing students increased significantly across different subscales, with a varying degree of improvement when assessed based on their academic year. Overall, 1st year students showed the highest improvements in internal mental health in all the subscales ( $m=7.324, 0.467, 3.272, 2.376$ ) than the rest [ $P < 0.000^*$ ]

**Table 4. Overall comparison of pre and post Internal Mental Health of students -year wise**

Subscales	Education	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Psychological stability	I Year	7.324	4.772	0.543	6.241	8.407	13.468	76	.000*
	II Year	8.133	4.219	0.628	6.865	9.400	12.932	44	.000*
	IV Year	8.019	4.146	0.575	6.864	9.173	13.945	51	.000*
Moral reasoning	I Year	0.467	1.165	0.132	0.203	0.731	3.521	76	.001*
	II Year	0.866	0.967	0.144	0.575	1.157	6.008	44	.000*
	IV Year	0.961	0.948	0.131	0.697	1.225	7.307	51	.000*
Self Efficiency	I Year	3.272	2.872	0.327	2.620	3.924	9.996	76	.000*
	II Year	4.777	2.183	0.325	4.121	5.433	14.678	44	.000*
	IV Year	4.269	2.567	0.356	3.554	4.984	11.990	51	.000*
Positive attitude	I Year	2.376	1.777	0.202	1.973	2.780	11.734	76	.000*
	II Year	2.555	1.672	0.249	2.053	3.058	10.249	44	.000*
	IV Year	2.653	1.867	0.258	2.134	3.173	10.250	51	.000*

[Table 4]. Before the Heartfulness self-development program, for each subscale, the mean values were derived individually for the students based on their family background. Overall, students from nuclear family systems had the higher internal mental health for all the subscales ( $m=5.204, 0.639, 2.623, 1.721$ ) [Table-5]. After the Heartfulness self-development program, mean values were derived for students based on their family background.

**Table 5 Baseline Internal Mental Health of students based on the family background**

Subscales	Type of family	Mean
Psychological stability	Joint	5.884
	Nuclear	5.204
Moral reasoning	Joint	0.769
	Nuclear	0.639
Self Efficiency	Joint	3.153
	Nuclear	2.623
Positive attitude	Joint	1.730
	Nuclear	1.721

Overall, students from joint family systems had higher internal mental health for psychological stability, self efficiency and positive attitude ( $m=12.769, 6.557, 4.000$ ).

Students from Nuclear family system showed higher internal mental health for moral reasoning ( $m=1.327$ ) [Table-6]. After the Heartfulness based self-development program, internal mental health of nursing students increased significantly across different subscales, with a varying degree of improvement when assessed based on their family background. Overall, students from joint family systems showed higher improvement in internal mental health for psychological stability, self efficiency and positive attitude ( $m=6.884, 3.403, 2.269$ ). Students from nuclear family system showed higher improvement in internal mental health for moral reasoning ( $m=0.688$ ) [ $P < 0.000^*$ ] [Table-7]. After the Heartfulness self-development program, there was a statistically significant improvement in internal mental health of all the students across all the subscales [ $P < 0.000^*$ ] (Table 8).

## DISCUSSION

At Baseline, final year students had higher overall internal mental health compared with second and first years. Final year students are more experienced and skilled than the rest- this could be the reason why they were more positive towards their future.

Since they are more mature enough to handle the situations and have a better ability to decide the right and wrong things, they were psychologically more stable in the self assessment. During the second year of nursing, students get exposed to clinical work under the guidance of their seniors.

**Table 6. Internal Mental Health of students Post intervention based on their family background**

Subscales	Type of family	Mean
Psychological stability	Joint	12.769
	Nuclear	13.311
Moral reasoning	Joint	1.557
	Nuclear	1.327
Self Efficiency	Joint	6.557
	Nuclear	6.819
Positive attitude	Joint	4.000
	Nuclear	4.327

Naturally by this time they would have developed intimate relationship with their peers, got used to the academic, clinical and social environment along with a more hands-on experience without real burden or expectations on their performance that gives them a feeling of self confidence, assertiveness and a sense of belongingness at the work environment.

**Table 7. Overall comparison of pre and post Internal Mental Health of students based on their family background**

Subscales	Type of Family	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Psychological stability	Joint	6.884	4.718	0.654	5.571	8.198	10.522	51	.000*
	Nuclear	8.106	4.288	0.388	7.337	8.875	20.878	121	.000*
Moral reasoning	Joint	0.788	1.193	0.165	0.456	1.120	4.763	51	.000*
	Nuclear	0.688	1.021	0.092	0.505	0.871	7.448	121	.000*
Self Efficiency	Joint	3.403	2.857	0.396	2.608	4.199	8.589	51	.000*
	Nuclear	4.196	2.579	0.233	3.734	4.659	17.968	121	.000*
Positive attitude	Joint	2.269	1.921	0.266	1.734	2.804	8.518	51	.000*
	Nuclear	2.606	1.703	0.154	2.301	2.911	16.901	121	.000*

**Table 8. Overall comparison of pre and post Internal Mental Health of students**

Subscales	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Psychological stability	7.741	4.443	0.336	7.076	8.406	22.983	173	0.000*
Moral reasoning	0.718	1.073	0.081	0.557	0.878	8.831	173	0.000*
Self Efficiency	3.959	2.682	0.203	3.558	4.361	19.473	173	0.000*
Positive attitude	2.505	1.772	0.134	2.240	2.770	18.648	173	0.000*

As a result, they felt they were more self efficient than the first and final years at the baseline assessment. In the case of first years, as students join the course, there is some doubt or confusion about the career choice made as they are yet to understand the implications of the job. They are new to the environment, have fear of coping and adapting to the nursing setting. They are usually less self confident and naturally less mature than their seniors. Hence, as expected, their internal mental health status was weaker than the rest at the baseline. In our study, after the 24 week Heartfulness self-development program, internal mental health has significantly increased in all the nursing students irrespective of their year of study and family background. Post intervention, first year students improved in all aspects. As they are more open and they have many questions regarding their life, they were more interested to receive the helping hands.

Being fresh to the new course, facing difficulties to cope up with the unfamiliar environment and with a poor self esteem, first year nursing students are naturally the needy people for motivating, inspiring, confidence building self-development programs such as the current one. Hence, they responded instinctively to the Heartfulness self-development program and participated whole-heartedly which was elicited in their responses shown by them. In this study, students from nuclear family systems had higher internal mental health across all subscales at the baseline. This could be because the children of nuclear families are brought up in an environment where they have more freedom and greater material wellbeing like education and healthcare. Whereas, Joint families generally have matriarchal systems with restrictions and their children usually have little space and freedom in making one's choices and decisions ( Madan, 1962). Post intervention, students from joint family systems showed overall improvement in their internal mental health more than the students from nuclear family systems. Indian tradition of joint family systems are more conservative, modest, and apparently not very social.

They usually live in rural areas or suburbs and generally get poor quality of education compared with the children from nuclear family systems who are usually from cities, more social, outgoing, derive closer attention from their parents and get a better education (Desai, 1956). Even though, the students from joint family systems appear to be less confident and less advanced than the nuclear family children, they are actually stronger internally and more flexible to change. Our study reflects the same as even though at baseline the students from joint family systems apparently had a lower self esteem and a poor internal mental health, they were more responsive to the Heartfulness self-development program and showed greater improvement. As the students learned to relax their body and mind very deeply during Heartfulness meditation, activity is directed to the parasympathetic nervous system triggering rest and relaxation and promoting feelings of happiness, well-being and calmness. This in turn helped the students to be more open in their expression of thoughts. When one sees the life from this peaceful, blissful state of being (which is the true nature of self), the dimension through which one understands it will be entirely different. One no longer perceives oneself as an insignificant being (Trieschmann, 2001; Seaward, 2017). In the current era, young adults are generally bothered by many thoughts that are fearful, judgmental, confusing and conflicting. These are usually a result of deep impressions from their past thoughts and actions. Heartfulness cleaning method used in the present intervention works precisely to purge out these impressions. As the load lightens there is a sense of peace and well-being, and problems begin to dissipate from one's consciousness. Another basic outcome of Heartfulness meditation was to bring about moderation inside by removing the negative tendencies. The same is reflected in the results as the improvement in social stability, emotional expressiveness, self efficiency and positive attitude and thereby improving the work life balance. Self-esteem is the most important factor in a nurse's life and this is something that needs to be developed at the very onset of the nursing career.

It is much overlooked factor in nursing curriculum where personality development is not given enough importance. In our study, Heartfulness Meditation has produced improved self-image, social stability and genuineness which are key factors for self-esteem.

### Conclusion

The objectives of mental health promotion of World Health organization is not just the absence of a disease but to foster activities in the field of mental health, especially those affecting the harmony of human relations. Work life balance seems to be a challenge for all students in healthcare sector. The key is to find harmony between the work they have to do and the various aspects of their life. Nursing students are especially vulnerable because they are socialized into a caretaker role, and the result is that they may put other's needs before their own. In our study, first year nursing students had poor internal mental health compared to others and the students from joint family systems also had a lower internal mental health compared to nuclear family systems. A 24 week Heartfulness meditation course has produced a significant improvement in mental health for all the participants with a greatest improvement in the first year students and students from joint family systems. It is evident that this Heartfulness meditation based intervention worked in different dimensions as Heartfulness cleaning removed disturbing thoughts, negative tendencies, Heartfulness meditation produced peace, calmness, self confidence and the teachings of the self-development program fostered personality development skills. Bringing awareness to these low cost, flexible interventions can have a profound effect in the overall improvement of mental health of nursing students. Meditation is the ultimate support to nursing students struggling with study-work-life balance because of the nature of their work and academic commitments.

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