



# Does Buddhist meditation increase happiness?

König, R. & Malinowski, P.

School of Psychology, Liverpool John Moores University

Contact: R.Koenig@ljmu.ac.uk



## Background

During the last two decades numerous studies have analysed the effects of meditation within therapeutic or health care settings (for review see Murphy, Donovan, & Taylor, 1997), or assessed brain changes due to meditation in very advanced meditators (for review see Cahn & Polich, 2006).

↳ Little research has been done to investigate the effects of meditation on ordinary people who don't use meditation as a specific health-related intervention or dedicate large portions of their daily activities to meditation practice.

↳ The present study thus focused on the investigation of so-called lay Buddhist meditation practitioners of the Karma Kagyu Lineage, a branch of the Vajrayana tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, known in the West for emphasising the integration of meditation practice into everyday life (in addition to family, job, etc.).



## Participants



**190 practitioners of Buddhism** attending the 2004 New Years Course of the Karma Kagyu School of Diamond Way Buddhism in Munich, mainly from Germany (161) with a mean age of 36.6 years ( $SD = 8.3$ ); 50.0% female.

↳ Non-Buddhist control group: 113 German participants who attended a big national Christian event (44.2% were female; mean age 38.6 years,  $SD = 9.9$ ).



↳ The two groups did not differ significantly in terms of age ( $t(301) = -1.80, ns$ ), education ( $U = 9920.0, ns$ ), or sex ( $\chi^2(1) < 1$ ).

## Central questions

- A. Can trends in the level of well-being among meditators who practice specific meditation methods of the Karma Kagyu Lineage be identified?
- B. Can differences in personality dimensions be detected in relation to advancement in meditation practice?
- C. Do the participants' values, especially those pertaining to their materialistic attitude, correlate with their advancement in meditation?

## Method



Questionnaire with three main sections:

1. Demographics
2. 8 self-report measures
3. Buddhist group: questions about involvement with Buddhism and about their meditation practice



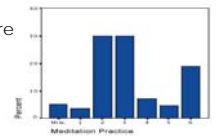
## Scales

- ↳ Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985)
- ↳ Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999)\*
- ↳ Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1989)
- ↳ Life Orientation Test revised (Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994)
- ↳ General Self-Efficacy Scale (Sherer, et al., 1982)\*
- ↳ Materialism Scale (Richins & Dawson, 1992)\*
- ↳ 25 personality markers of Goldberg's compilation (Goldberg, 1990)\*

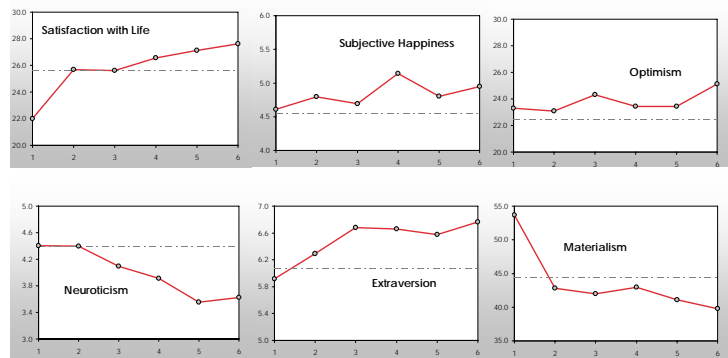
Scales marked with (\*) were translated into German by the authors. For the other scales we used the published German versions.

## Results

Based on their meditation experience Buddhists were subdivided into six meditation practice categories: 1 – beginners to 6 – most advanced practitioners. Percentages of participants in meditation practice categories:



To test whether the Buddhists' scores are related to the progressive levels of meditation practice, the data was analysed for possible trends, by studying the polynomial contrasts in meditation level within one-way ANOVAs. The different category sizes were taken into account by considering only the weighted terms.



### Significant overall ANOVAs:

life satisfaction, happiness, neuroticism, materialism, religiosity

### Significant linear trends:

life satisfaction, happiness, self-esteem, optimism, self-efficacy, extraversion, neuroticism.

↳ To check whether the linear trends depended strongly on the small group of beginners, contrasts were again calculated without the beginners' group → life satisfaction, self-esteem, optimism remained significant (happiness & self-efficacy marginally).

↳ Trends were analysed to assess whether they are confounded by age and religiosity: life satisfaction and neuroticism remained significant (marginally for optimism)

## Conclusions

↳ Buddhist meditation seems to influence the individual's experience positively.

↳ The more advanced Buddhist practitioners are the more satisfied they are with their lives and the less neurotic they are.



↳ Causal interpretation is not warranted, as a between-participant design was used. The observed effects may partially, or even exclusively, reflect self-selection biases.

↳ Longitudinal follow-up study is ongoing