Meditation, Religion and Emotional Intelligence: A Snapshot of Recent Research from Malaysia

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Overview of Research

• **2 studies** – a **field experiment** of mediation practices, and a **mixed-methods study** of religiosity and emotional intelligence.

• **Multi-method research** conducted Malaysia – use of both quantitative and qualitative methods to enhance understanding of concepts as it applies to the Malaysian cultural context.
Study 1 – A Field Experiment of the Effects of Isha Kriya Mediation on Worker EI and Perceived Stress

- Stress is a **perceptual process**, and chronic associated with physical illness, anxiety, depression and chronic fatigue (McCarty, Atkinson & Tomasino, 2003; Praissman, 2007)

- Recent research focuses on the individual’s **ability to cope** with stress in the workplace (Wu, 2011; Riggio, 2009; Slaski & Cartwright, 2003)

- **Emotional Intelligence (EI):** Ability to understand and manage both emotions of self and other (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Law, Wong & Song, 2004)
  
  - Positive effects of EI noted across a wide spectrum of work-related outcomes – **happiness at work, higher job satisfaction and workplace adaptability**. (Chu, 2010; Nikolau & Tisaousis, 2002)
Meditation as a way to Enhance EI and Lower Worker Stress

• Helpful in fostering positive mental health (Sawyer, Witt & Oh, 2010)

• Decreases levels of perceived stress (Chu, 2010)

• Improves emotion functioning by enhancing EI, promoting positive emotions, empathy, tolerance, and sociability (Sears & Kraurs, 2009; Baer, et al. 2006; Luders et al., 2009).
Present Study

Research Question
• Does Isha Kriya assist to enhance emotional intelligence (EI) and lower perceived levels of employee stress?

Central Hypothesis
• Organizational employees who practice Isha Kriya will report higher levels of EI and lower levels of perceived stress compared with the control group after engaging in a 21-day practice.

• Isha Kriya – A non-sectarian form of meditation that is both practical and cost-effective. The practice requires just 12-18 minutes of practice per session and does not require individuals to fast before practice. Further, it is free compared with other forms of meditation.
Method and Procedures

Design: Single factor between-subjects field experiment.

Independent variable: Meditation treatment (control and treatment)
Dependent variables: EI and perceived stress

Measures
Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS; 16 items, $\alpha = .83$)
Perceived Stress Scale (PSS; 14 items, $\alpha = .86$)

Sample
35 employees from a medium-sized organization in Malaysia (c.f. n = 20 in Chu, 2010, n = 30 in Oman et al., 2008 and n = 26 in Vonareesawat et al., 2012)

Procedures
Employees were briefed on the mediation practice and asked to commit to practicing Isha Kriya everyday for the next 21 days. We used record cards to make sure employees committed to, and participated in the mediation daily.
## Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Meditation group n=13</th>
<th>Control group n=22</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>Posttest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>77.00 (8.48)(^b)</td>
<td>83.38 (8.99)(^{ab})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Stress</td>
<td>27.54 (5.50)(^c)</td>
<td>23.92 (4.50)(^c)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{a,b,c}\) indicated the pairs were significantly different from each other at \(p < .05\)

\(^b\) indicated the pairs were significantly different from each other at \(p < .01\)

Compared with the control group, **employees in the treatment group rated their EI higher after the three week practice period.** The treatment group also **rated EI higher, and reported lower stress** after the three weeks of practice.
Discussion

• Provides preliminary findings suggested that Isha Kriya may **enhance EI and reduce perceived stress among organizational employees**.

• Naturalistic setting allows results to be more strongly **generalizable to workplace settings**.

• Practice of Isha Kriya may be a **cost-effective** way of enhancing worker EI and lowering stress levels in organizations.
Study 2 – A Mixed-Methods Study of Religiosity and EI

• **Religiosity** – “a system of personal constructs” that is defined by a person’s degree of centrality in positioning a religious construct in their daily lives (Huber, 2011).

• Relationship between religiosity and EI has been researched before and show a **positive relationship between them** (Paek, 2006; Chung-Chu, 2010; Elias et. al., 2008).

• **LaMothe (2010)** suggests further research examine the **underlying meanings** of religiosity to individuals and how this impacts their EI.
Present Study

• Research Question: What is the role of religiosity in emotional intelligence?
  • The link between emotional intelligence and religiosity has not been established clearly.
  • Current study examines the associations between emotional intelligence and religiosity, and if there are links between these two constructs, and the meanings of religiosity in informing how individuals make sense of, being emotionally intelligent.

• Design: Sequential exploratory mixed-methods design (Qual-quant)
Method and Procedures – Qualitative Study

• **Study 1: Basic Qualitative Study**
  • Method: *Semi-structured interviews with 10 individuals from different religious faiths* (Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Catholics and Protestants)
  • Approach: *Phenomenology*
  • Analysis: *Thematic analysis*

• **Study 2: Cross-Sectional Survey**
  • Survey correlating EI measure with centrality of religiosity measure.
  • N = Random sample of **120 individuals from 5 major faiths**.
  • Measures: Centrality of religiosity (*CRS, 15 items, Huber, 2004*); Wong & Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (*WLEIS, 16 items, Wong & Law, 2004*). Both measures **reliable at .76** and higher.
  • Analysis: *Bivariate correlations*
Integrated Results

Qualitative Study
• Results were that several core teachings of religion were similar with EI sub-skills.
• Participants emphasized the influence of religion in helping them understand and manage their own emotions.
• Results also suggest that religion aids in encouraging emotionally intelligent behaviours – not vice versa.

Quantitative Study
• Key Correlations:
  • Prayer – Self-emotion appraisal = .19 ($p < .05$)
  • Prayer – Control of own emotions = .23 ($p < .01$)
  • Religious experiences – self-emotion appraisal = .22 ($p < .05$)
## Bivariate Correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EQ Subskill</th>
<th>Cognitive Interest</th>
<th>Religious Ideology</th>
<th>Prayer</th>
<th>Religious Experiences</th>
<th>Worship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-emotion Appraisal</td>
<td>.176 (.055)</td>
<td>-.009 (.920)</td>
<td>.189* (.038)</td>
<td>.223* (.014)</td>
<td>.046 (.618)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others’ emotion Appraisal</td>
<td>.125 (.174)</td>
<td>.104 (.259)</td>
<td>.151 (.100)</td>
<td>.218* (.017)</td>
<td>.009 (.919)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of emotions</td>
<td>.226* (.013)</td>
<td>-.112 (.224)</td>
<td>.116 (.206)</td>
<td>.161 (.079)</td>
<td>.024 (.789)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control of emotions</td>
<td>.157 (.086)</td>
<td>-.079 (.394)</td>
<td>.197* (.031)</td>
<td>.232* (.011)</td>
<td>.000 (.997)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

• Consistency across research in religiosity and EI – being religious does relate to individual ability to better understand and manage their own emotions (especially through religious experiences).

• Adds to research examining the broader individual and social benefits of religiosity in enhancing overall well-being (Jackson & Bergeman, 2011; Wills, 2009; Dolan, Peasegood & White, 2008).
Thank You!

- Questions?

- For more information, please email teeyj@help.edu.my