

“MEDITATION CHANGED MY LIFE”

A study of experiences of Finnish meditation practitioners in Tampere

Hyon Soo Kim-Onnia

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ABSTRACT

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People have to go through various changes and social problems in the modern society. In these living circumstances, people have to compete for surviving and it causes a lot of health problems and stress. Thus, there must be a way where mind and body could relax and operate systematically and meditation can help us in it. Many studies have already demonstrated that meditation has a good effect on stress management, obtaining insight and self-understanding, and controlling physical and psychological problems.

The purpose of the study was to investigate how Finnish people in Tampere consider meditation and what the current situation of meditation in the Finnish society is. The survey was mostly conducted in three yoga classes at Sampola through questionnaires. 46 people participated in this study, and Tixel program was used for analyzing results.

The results indicate that more Finnish people have started to practice yoga in Tampere and already some people are aware of its value and effect. Many people recognized positive effects of meditation - not only physical changes but also psychological changes. All respondents wanted to recommend meditation to others. Moreover, people considered that meditation would be suitable for Finnish society. For more comprehensive results, a comparative study of different kinds of meditation would be needed.

Key words: meditation, mindfulness

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1. INTRODUCTION

Modern societies are constantly changing all over the world. People go through various changes and social problems everywhere. The rapid developments in science and technology brought us convenient living, but that lifestyle does not give us comfort. Every minute, there are many kinds of crimes, accidents, and natural disasters in the world. People never know what will happen in the near future. In these living circumstances, people have to compete for surviving and it causes stress, anxiety, worry and emotional problems. These negative feelings can create toxin which might be harmful for our body. For instance, over-stress can create different problems such as insomnia, asthma, depression, drug addiction, smoking, alcohol abuse, and other illnesses.

Thus, it is quite necessary to learn how to cope with stress and negative feelings. This study introduces meditation, one of the effective techniques for handling those problems. From doing meditation, our mind can be calm and peaceful, and we can find true happiness in the end. Meditation can also bring personal insight and self-understanding. It is a doorway into an enlightened way of knowing ourselves better so that we can overcome many stressful situations by our inner sources. Many studies have already demonstrated that meditation has a healing effect on various kinds of disease.

Meditation was already introduced as a powerful technique for well-being five thousand years ago in Asia. However, it was spread to Western society thousands of years after it was adopted in the East and it finally started to gain popularity in the mid-20th century. (Meditation: History, 2008). Western people have started to practice meditation and have adapted it to medical, health care, scientific, and psychotherapeutic purposes. Nowadays meditation is already popular in many Western countries.

In Korea, meditation became very popular a decade ago. It has been used for many purposes such as managing stress, obtaining better health, healing various kinds of diseases. Personally, I started to become interested in

meditation because of Buddhist religious background and health problems. However, I had not often heard about meditation in Finland except some yoga courses in gymnasium. Many people were unfamiliar with the term 'meditation' when I did an empirical study of meditation in my class last year. The empirical study consisted of an interview of a Finnish girl who had practiced meditation for six years, a theoretical background of meditation, and a short meditation practice. The positive result of the interview and interest in my presentation could provide me an idea for this thesis. Thus, I pondered how Finnish people consider meditation and decided to study the current situation of meditation in Tampere where I live in.

2. CONCEPTS OF MEDITATION AND MINDFULNESS

The key concepts in relation to meditation are explained in the following.

2.1. Concept of meditation

“Meditation means being meditative, silent, peaceful, with no thoughts in the mind and it is consciousness without content. When a mirror is not reflecting anything, it is meditation”, said Gautam Buddha. (Beckett 2008.)

The word mediation is derived from two Latin words: meditari (to think, to dwell upon, and to exercise the mind) and the mederi (to heal). It is originally from Sanskrit word “medha” which means wisdom. Buddha is one of the biggest proponents in the meditation history. Buddha has been also known as one of the biggest meditation representations around since 500 B.C.(Jones 2008.)

It has also been said that meditation has originated from shamatha, which is the Sanskrit term for the basic foundation of calm and relaxed bare attention. Such calm acknowledging is the essential and fundamental step, a “letting go” that allows the meditator to access the next stages. (Austin 2006, 11.)

In other words, meditation is a systematic way of making our minds quiet so that we can contact our true identity –self, which is the source of constant joy, bliss and peace. (Meditation Corner, 2004).

In addition, meditation can help us to understand our own mind. We are able to learn how to transform our mind from negative to positive, from disturbed to peaceful, from unhappy to happy. The aim of meditation is overcoming negative minds and cultivating productive thoughts. (Gyatsa 2007.) The attitudes needed for meditation are non-judging, patience, beginners’ mind, trust, acceptance, and letting go. (Kabat-Zinn 2007.)

2.2. Concept of mindfulness

Meditation has been recently used as a way to manage stress and gain the state of mindfulness. In other words, meditation is a practice of cultivating mindfulness. It is about being aware of where your mind is from and trying to be 'here and now, at the moment'. Various thoughts can disturb the procedure while meditating, but one can release the thoughts freely and let them go. By doing this, people can realize that the thoughts may not be an entity of absolute truth. When your mind is clear of distracting thoughts, you can obtain new perspectives and new ways of handling stress and other problems.

The concept of mindfulness has roots in Buddhism and other contemplative traditions where conscious attention and awareness are actively enriched. It is most commonly defined as the state of being attentive to and aware of what is happening in the present. (Brown & Ryan 2003.)

Basically, there is nothing particularly Buddhist about it. People are all mindful to one degree or another, moment by moment. Meditation is an essential human capacity. The contribution of Buddhist traditions has been in part to emphasize simple and effective ways to refine this capacity and bring it to all aspects of life. (Kabat-Zinn 2003, 146.)

There are several definitions of mindfulness. Kabat-Zinn defines mindfulness as our capacity for awareness and self-knowing. It is the practice of paying closer attention not only to the world around us, but to the cultivation of our own minds and bodies. (Kabat-Zinn 2005, 75.)

In his other journal, mindfulness is often spoken as insight meditation, which means a deep non-conceptual seeing into the nature of mind and world. This seeing requires a spirit of perpetual and persistent exploration – as in, “What is this?” – toward whatever arises in awareness, and toward “Who is attending”, “Who is seeing”, “ Who is meditating”. (Kabat-Zinn 2003,146.)

In addition, mindfulness is a skill that allows us to be less reactive to what is happening in the moment. It is a way of relating to all experience – positive, negative, and neutral – such that our overall level of suffering is reduced and our sense of well-being increases. We are easily caught up in various distracting thoughts which are mindlessness. In contrast, when we are mindful, our attention is not involved in the past or future, and we are not judging or rejecting what is occurring at the moment. We are present. This kind of attention generates energy, clear mind, and joy. It is a skill that can be cultivated by anyone. (Germer 2005, 241- 253.)

According to Olendzki (2005), in western countries, most therapists consider meditation as a relaxation technique. Some meditation may be relaxing, but the style and the purpose of meditation decide its effect in part. (Germer 2005.) Mindfulness in contemporary psychology has been adopted as an approach for increasing awareness and responding effectively to mental processes that contribute to emotional distress and maladaptive behavior. (Bishop 2004, 230.)

People may misunderstand what mindfulness meditation does. Mindfulness meditation is not a relaxation exercise and it is not a way to avoid difficulties in life. We confront our difficulties before we eliminate them. Moreover, mindfulness meditation is about settling into our current experience in an alert and objective way, not about achieving a different state of mind. (Germer 2005,16.)

In this busy modern society, we just run forward. However, we should stop running and try to be in the present so that we could realize and see deeply that there are many conditions we can be happy about. Washing dishes is usually an annoying job, but it can be a pleasant job after mindfulness meditation. The following chapter discusses how this mindfulness process can occur in our mind.

2.3. Process of meditation

According to Meditation Society of America (2006), the process of meditation can be seen in the figure 1 to 4 as below:

Meditation is a three-step process that leads to a state of consciousness that brings serenity, clarity, and bliss. As depicted in figure1, our "normal" state of mind is actually quite abnormal. We receive sensory stimuli and react in a completely uncontrolled way. We bounce from one thought to another and follow with our emotional and physical reactions.

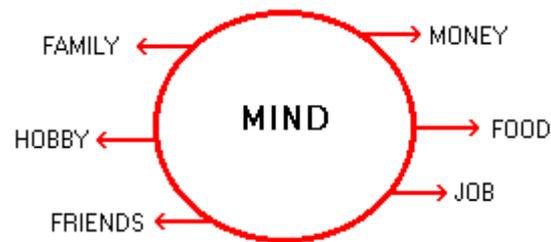


FIGURE 1. Normal mind (Meditation Society of America)

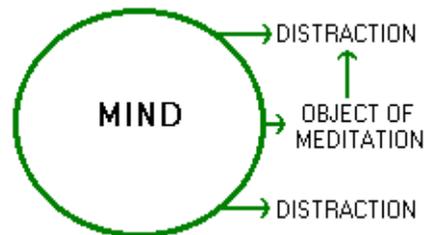


FIGURE 2. Concentrating mind (Meditation Society of America)

Figure 2 demonstrates concentration. This is the first step in meditation and is the starts of gaining control over the mind and thereby life. The idea is to pick an object/subject to place your attention on and then to focus exclusively on it without diversion.

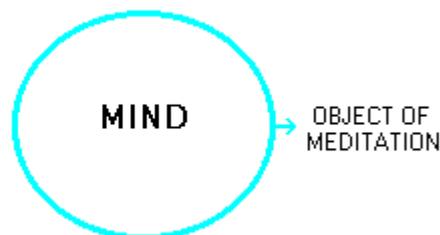


FIGURE 3. Meditation mind (Meditation Society of America)

The third figure depicts meditation. Here we have unbroken attention. When concentration flows into meditation, the attention paid to the object of meditation becomes deeper and deeper effortlessly and spontaneously, true knowledge about the object presents itself.



FIGURE 4. Contemplating mind (Meditation Society of America)

At the last stage, the unity of the object of your meditation and your mind, as illustrated in the fourth illustration, occurs. This is the state of contemplation and is the ultimate state of consciousness. Where we usually are only conscious of our body and ego and consider ourselves apart from the rest of the universe, with the experience of contemplation we become conscious of the cosmos and know ourselves to be a part of it and realize our unity with all of it. This is realization, cosmic consciousness. It is our birthright and destiny to know this exquisite state first hand and enjoy the truth, consciousness, and bliss that is our eternal true nature. (Meditation Society of America 2006.)

Following all these procedures and obtaining a deep sense of peace would be difficult in the beginning and we need to practice these procedures slowly and repeatedly on a regular basis.

3. HISTORY OF MEDITATION

In India, meditation has been practised more than five thousands years. It was introduced by holy men called yogis, who used to meditate to train their minds and bodies and to achieve a sense of well-being. Patanjali, an Indian yogi of legend, referred to meditation as self-realization when he experienced an absolute awareness of his “self”. Meditation is one of the techniques of Buddhism to free the mind from suffering. The seventh path of the yogis is also meditation. Samadhi (enlightenment) can be achieved from classical yoga exercises. (ABC of meditation 2008.)

After that, yoga spread slowly through out India, China, and Tibet. The first ones to meditate in the west were the monks who lived in seclusion. Gradually from the East, meditation went to the west. Yoga and Zen movements were used by monks, spiritual teachers and gurus. (ABC of meditation 2008.)

“In detail, mindfulness is the fundamental attitude underlying all streams of Buddhist meditative practice: the Therava tradition of the countries of Southeast Asia (Thailand, Burma, Cambodia and Vietnam); the Mahajana (Zen) schools of Vietnam, China, Korea, and Japan; and the Vajrayana tradition of Tibetan Buddhism found in Tibet itself, Mongolia, Nepal, Bhutan and large parts of India in the Tibetan community in exile. It should be noted that these traditions all have various schools, subtraditions, and particular texts that they regard more than others, so the actual practices and emphases regarding mindfulness can vary considerably” (Kabat-Zinn 2003, 146.) On the next page, there is a brief chronological Table of the History of Meditation:

TABLE 1. The Chronological Table of the History of Meditation (ABC of meditation 2008)

2000-3000 before Christ	Vedic Meditation texts are found in old Hindu texts.
1000 before Christ	In the I Ching we find the first references to Qi Gong, a meditative motion doctrine that later on resulted in Tai Chi.
588 before Christ	Buddha reaches enlightenment through Meditation and thereby starts Buddhism.
200 before Christ	Patanjali writes yoga techniques. The seventh step is Meditation.
200 after Christ	A group of Christian monks who call themselves "the fathers of the desert" live in seclusion from society, among other things to get closer to God through Meditation.
1000 after Christ	Jewish cabalistic groups use Meditation to get closer to God.
1500 after Christ	Under the influence of Martin Luther the Catholic Church diminishes the influence of Meditating monks.
1550 after Christ	St. Theresa was strongly in favour of Meditation. In spite of this after 1550 Meditation practically disappeared from Christian religious practice.
1893	Asian priests first present their ideas about Meditation at a meeting of religious leaders in the U.S.A.
1967	The Beatles start to practice Meditation with the Maharishi Yogi and thereby start a world-wide movement that results in a fast growth of Meditation in the West
Today	Firms have rooms where people may not talk and where employees get an opportunity to meditate. In the course of the last decade the number of people that practice Meditation in the U.S.A. has doubled and is now about 10 million. Meditation is more and more accepted in the world of healthcare and in the world of science. In some circles, for instance in Hollywood and New York Meditation is considered hip and trendy.

After Asia, these Buddhist traditions have spread in the West and have been absorbed by several generations of Westerners, who practice these methods in their own lives on a daily basis. Practicing methods are participation in constant teacher-led, intensive meditation retreats which can last from a weekend to three months or more. This phenomenon provides a range of abundant

resources for personal practice and dialogue that can contribute toward the training and development of highly competent teachers, from a wide variety of professional backgrounds, committed to the effective delivery of genuine mindfulness-based interventions in various fields. (Kabat-Zinn 2003, 147.)

In conclusion, nowadays meditation has been spreading quickly all over the world despite the different religious background and has been used for individual purposes. It would be nice to investigate the history of meditation in Finland or Nordic countries, but that information was hard to find, especially because of the language problem.

4. BENEFITS OF MEDITATION

Meditation is basically a method for working on the mind. First, we learn how to identify our different positive and negative mental states, and then we utilize methods for removing negative states and developing positive ones. As our mind becomes more positive, we learn how to react well to everyday situations and our relationships with others. In other words, our actions become positive and effective, and our overall experience of life becomes more satisfying and useful to ourselves and others.

Meditation is used to assist in reaching a higher level of spiritual entity and self-awareness. It has been practiced widely in many cultures around the world, especially the more spiritual cultures of Asia.

However, in Western countries, meditation is a method to combat stresses of increasing work pressures resulting in absences because of illness. In Netherlands, it is reported that employers are so attracted towards the benefits of meditation that provisions have been made to put meditation into workers' contracts. Also the Dutch Police and Department of Defense have introduced meditation to training programmes to assist employees' physical and mental effectiveness. (Beckett 2008.)

Recently mindfulness meditation has been applied to many psychological and health related problems and researches show successful positive outcomes in this.

A simple technique practiced for as few as 10 minutes per day can help to control stress, decrease anxiety, improve cardiovascular health, and achieve a greater capacity for relaxation. (Stoppler 2005).

Meditation relaxes the body and mind as well as helps to gain peace without any side effects. It is easy to practise any time and by anyone. It does not require any special equipment and can be practiced wherever we want. It is

possible to do while walking, eating, riding a bus or doing laundry. Sitting, walking, Tai Chi, and yoga are quite popular forms of meditation whereas drawing, painting, dancing, and listening to music could also be simple methods which could be practised on a daily basis.

Meditation makes people more than only feel good and calm. It makes us perform better and it has an effect on the whole body. It helps to slow down the heart rate and breathing and also normalizes blood pressure. It decreases the sweating level and helps us to use oxygen more efficiently. Adrenal glands produce less cholesterol, our mind ages at a slower rate, and our immune function improves. It makes our mind clear and increases creativity. People who meditate regularly find it easy to give up life-damaging habits such as smoking, drinking and drugs.

Besides this, meditation has various psychological and physiological benefits. Firstly, as psychological benefits, meditation reduces stress, anxiety and depression. It also increases creativity, intelligence, moral reasoning and memory. It reduces irritability and moodiness. Moreover, it increases emotional control, self-esteem and alertness. It also helps to improve relationships and concentration. Secondly, as physiological benefits, meditation prevents, slows, or controls pain of chronic diseases. It also boosts the immune system and helps lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels. In addition, it improves airflow, especially in those with asthma. (Meditation 2008.)

Moreover, doing a meditation in a right way can be useful in headaches, mental stress, symptoms of pre-menstrual syndrome and menopause as well as many other diseases, and blood circulation. It provides stamina, strength and flexibility to fight every kind of illness, diseases, physical and mental problem. The important feature of meditation is that it works without side-effects and any medicine.

Many studies have demonstrated the broad range of positive impact of meditation on many other kinds of diseases such depression, anxiety disorder,

obsessive-compulsive disorder, social phobia, post traumatic stress disorder. (Brantley 2005: Kabat-Zinn 2003.)

For instance, meditation can work for depression. Feelings of helplessness, hopelessness and isolation are symptoms of depression. Meditation increases self-confidence and feelings of connection to other people. Many studies have shown that depressed people feel much better after provoking the relaxation response. (Hargreaves & Mason 2001; Segal, Teasdale & Williams, 2002.)

In addition, in medical studies, meditation has been shown to lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels. Further study continues to measure the impact and benefit of meditation on the risk factors to cardiac problems, as well. These include hypertension, high cholesterol, obesity, and insulin resistance. In a study published in the winter 2007 *Ethnicity & Disease* medical journal, transcendental meditation positively impacted patients who suffer from congestive heart failures. (Benefits of meditation.)

Also according to Brantley (2005), Mindful Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) approach, which was designed by Kabat-Zinn et al. in Massachusetts Medical Center in MA, was reported in many researches as a magnificent method for treating chronic pain, depression, cancer, eating disorder, cardiac disease, and stress reduction. (Brantley 2005, 139).

The following sentences are a more detail example of the effect of MBSR approach. A study conducted by Kutz et al. (1992) investigated the effects of MBSR on a group of people with long term anxiety and obsessive neuroses as well as personality disorder. They showed expressive improvements in self-rated and therapist rated symptoms. Kabat-Zinn et al. (1996) utilized MBSR programs based on mindfulness meditation for patients with anxiety disorders and found a reduction in the levels of anxiety and panic during the course and over a 3 month follow- up period. Over the last 25 years, mindfulness training has been used in hospital clinics and community settings offering pain management and stress reduction programs including MBSR. (Melbourne Academic Mindfulness Interest Group 2006, 286.)

In summary, meditation may be an effective treatment option for conditions such as anxiety, stress, chronic pain and eating and affective disorders as well as being an adjunctive treatment for other physical health conditions and behavior change interventions. (Melbourne Academic Mindfulness Interest Group 2006, 287.)

As a clinical point of view, meditation should not be conducted for some people such as borderline psychotic or psychotic patients without supervision by psychotherapist familiar with meditation. This is because those sensitive patients bring dizziness, feelings of dissociation while they are doing meditation. Also therapists should provide careful instruction, training, and follow-up observation. (Carrington 1978, according to Shapiro 2008, 8.)

5. TYPES OF MEDITATION

There are various types of meditation which have existed in different parts of the world. There are no definite rules for those meditations. Meditations can be done even while we are walking, eating, or doing some housework.

Sitting, Vipassana, walking, yoga, Tai chi, Zen, Kuksundo, Japa, and Chi Kung are some examples of well-known types of meditations. Some of them are described below:

5.1. Sitting meditation

Sitting is the most commonly recommended posture. In order to begin this meditation, we should choose a quiet time and place. We can sit on a cushion or chair relaxed posture, but straight your body up. Close your eyes gently and begin by bringing a full and present attention to what you feel within you and around you. Let your mind be spacious and your heart kind and open. (Kornfield 1994.)

Some techniques are:

- Exercise our capacities to make a commitment without interruption.
- Try to be separated from the usual world of distractions.
- Try to be slow the flow and calm. By promoting more detached pauses, meditation creates a quieter setting in which triggers can have greater effect when they finally strike.
- Demonstrate convincingly that we do not always need to be “doing things”.
- Promote many kinds and levels of intuition and introspection. Some of these glimpses will expose our sources of resistance. Examining these episodes with greater objectivity, we can find that we are overreacting, and realize why.

- Promote mindful acts of bare attention. Focus on the present moment. When we are able to see more deeply, we appreciate this reality of the world and realize the way things really are.
- Try to be a way to celebrate that we are just alive now in this incredible universe.

(Austin 2006.)

5.2. Vipassana

Vipassana is one of India's most ancient techniques of meditation. The word Vipassana means insight and a clear awareness of exactly what is happening as it happens. The purpose of this meditation is to give the meditator insight into the nature of reality and accurate understanding of how everything works. (Gunaratana 2002, 6.)

The goal is to reach the perfection of all the noble qualities latent in our subconscious mind. This goal has five elements to it: Purification of mind, overcoming sorrow and lamentation, overcoming pain and grief, treading the right path leading to attainment of eternal peace, and attaining happiness by following that path. (Gunaratana 2002, 156.)

Practicing Vipassana is the process of self-purification by self-observation. One begins by observing the natural breath to concentrate the mind. With a sharpened awareness, one can proceed to observe the changing nature of body and mind and experience the universal truths of transience and suffering. (Goenka 2009.)

5.3. Walking meditation

Walking meditation is practicing meditation while we are walking. Since walking meditation is not a way to an end, only going is important. That is why you do not have to hurry. Be aware of your breathing without control it and make sure your breathing feels natural and comfortable. While we are walking, we usually think various things as anxieties, fears and sorrows and we forget about the

beautiful earth where we live in. However, try to feel the connection between your feet and ground and see how wonderful the world is. After this, you can let go of your sorrows and worries and feel the complete freedom and happiness. (Hanh 2005, 26.)

In order to do this exercise, focus your attention on each foot as it contacts the ground. When the mind wanders away from the feet or legs, focus on your attention again. In order to make your concentration deeper, do not look around, but keep your gaze in front of you. (Meditation Techniques, 2008.)

The aim of this walking meditation practice is to clear your mind of all thought and focus. Making your walking your one single and primary contemplation, then your body will respond by letting go of tensions and relaxing. If thoughts come to your mind, you simply give them brief consideration, and then return to focusing on your walking. (Bingham 2008.)

5.4. Yoga

The Sanskrit word “yoga” is derived from the root yug (to join) or yoke (to bind together or concentrate). The word “yoga” explains a way of uniting or a method of discipline: to join the body to the mind and together join to the self (soul) or the union between the individual self and spiritual self. (Garfinkel & Schumacher 2000, 125.)

In practice, yoga is an applied science of the mind and body. Yoga creates an internal environment which allows the individual to reach to his or her own state of dynamic balance. Yoga can harmonize the mind, make the emotions calm, and tone the body. Also it is a way to promote fitness, flexibility, relaxation and our well-being.

5.5. Tai Chi

It is originally developed in China as a form of self-defense. It improves stress reduction, balance, and capacity for our body. Tai Chi is an effective form of exercise that has existed for 2,000 years. It has more than 100 possible movements and positions. We can find several movements that we prefer or explore the full range. (Mayo Foundation of medical education and research 2008.)

5.6. Zen

Zen emphasizes the Buddha's original teaching which is human suffering comes from our desire, hate, and ignorance. The practice of this meditation starts with a foundation of calmness and clarity, and then it develops gradually into mixtures of receptive and concentrative styles. By doing this meditation regularly, you can promote feelings of calm awareness and emotional stability. Then finally it can lead to the status of successively deeper levels of insight which are moments of awakening and profound realization. (Austin 2006.)

6. AIM OF THE STUDY

The main aim of the study was to investigate how people in Tampere consider meditation and what the current situation of meditation in the Finnish society is.

The purposes of this study are as following:

- To introduce general information of meditation and enhance knowledge of it to Finnish people.
- To recognize the importance of meditation in Finland.
- To promote health and well-being of people.

For these purposes, research questions of the study are as following:

- How meditation is perceived in Finland?
- What is the meaning of meditation for Finnish people?
- Is meditation suitable for Finnish society?

7. METHOD OF THE STUDY

7.1. Background of the study

First, I had a presentation of meditation which included a simple meditation in my class. For the presentation, I interviewed one Finnish girl who has been doing yoga for 6 years. Briefly here is the summary of her interview. The reasons why she started yoga were a lot of stress from her work and tiredness. She started yoga in 2003 and the meditation techniques she has been using were group meditation, walking meditation, breathing technique and Astanga yoga. As effects of yoga and meditation, she could reduce her stress and migraine and feel energetic, peaceful and happy. She also could increase patience and share similar experiences with many people. In the end, the meditation changed her life completely. She mentioned that meditation can fit into Finnish society well because it helps to reduce not only loneliness and stress but also helps people to be open and talk. Lastly, the meaning of meditation for her is that meditation makes her peaceful, relaxed, more opened and helps to concentrate well about some situations. The interview result and many people's interest after the presentation gave me to draw positive outcome of this thesis.

7.2. Conduct of the study and data collection

In Finland, one of the most well-known types of meditation is yoga. In Tampere yoga courses are conducted in Sampola, Ahjola, gymnasiums and private organizations. Sampola and Ahjola are popular education centers in Tampere where offer courses for children and adults. Those courses they offer include arts, languages, physical exercise, dancing, cooking courses etc.

This survey was conducted from 17. 3. 2009 to 24. 3. 2009 at Sampola. I contacted the director of Sampola first and then one yoga teacher who has many courses there. I went to 3 yoga classes of hers and introduced the purpose of this study before they completed my questionnaires. The total

respondents were 52 people. 49 people were practicing yoga in 3 yoga classes in Sampola and 3 people who I know personally participated additionally. 6 people were deleted among 52 people because of lack of information.

This research is based on a quantitative method. Quantitative research deals in numbers, logic and the objective, while qualitative research deals in words, images and the subjective. (Davis 2000). I chose questionnaires over interviews for this study so that I could obtain many numbers of respondents.

Data collecting was performed through a questionnaire in Finnish which included 13 questions. Among them, there were 4 open and 8 closed questions. The questionnaire was designed in such a way that the first few questions were only closed questions to make it easy for the respondents to answer. In addition to this, 4 open questions helped respondents to express their feelings by writing. The questionnaires in Finnish and English are attached as appendixes in the end of this paper.

Theoretical background of the study was gathered from literature, internet articles and previous research.

7.3. Data analysis

In order to analyze the data, Tixel program was used for the closed questions. After data input, to describe the results in a simple way, one-dimensional tabulations were used. For open questions, a qualitative method was used. First, all the datum was sorted out for similar types or sequences. Then the datum was reconstructed in a meaningful or comprehensive way.

8. RESULTS

In this chapter results which were analyzed by Tixel program are presented. It is divided into four small sections. Firstly, background information such as age, occupations etc. are showed for better understanding of this research. Secondly, what kind of meditation and how they are practicing them etc. are discussed. Thirdly, experienced effects such as satisfaction, changes etc. are presented. Lastly, how those respondents considered meditation are discussed.

8.1. Background information

As background information gender, age, education and occupation of respondents are discussed.

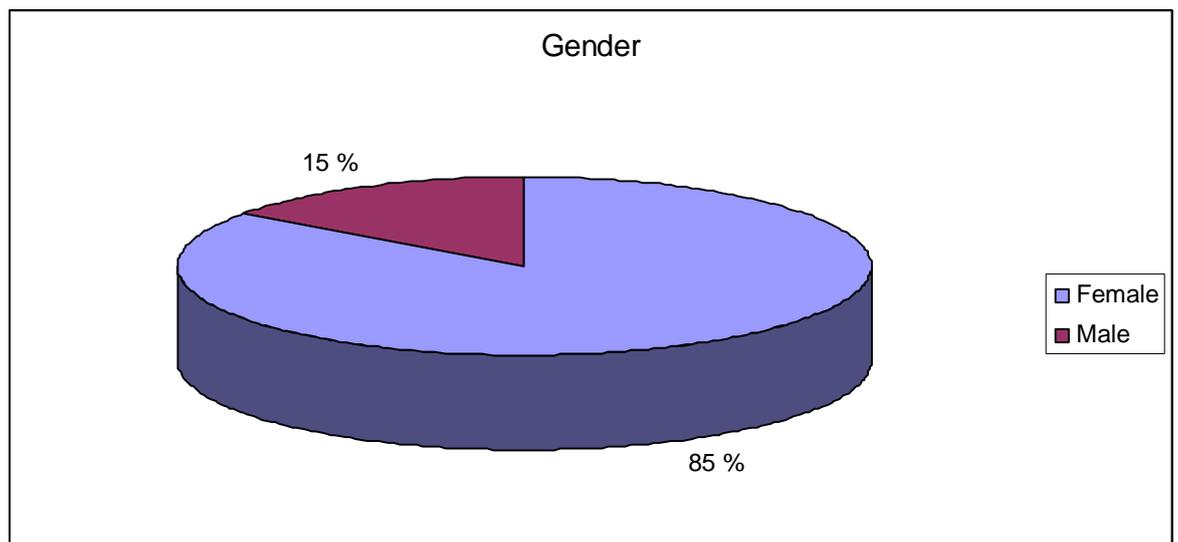


FIGURE 5. Gender

The survey was done randomly in yoga classes and as we can see in figure 5, there were 39 females and seven males among 46 people. In other words, there were only few males in the group.

TABLE 2. Age

Age	Number of people
21-30	28
31-40	7
41-50	5
Others(10-20, Over 51)	6

The table 2 shows that the biggest group was people in their 20's. The second and third groups were people in 30's and 40's. For other groups, there were one teenager and three people who were in their 50's and two people who in their 60's.

In figure 5 and table 2 we can see that the largest group of respondents was females in their 20's. This is maybe because many of them were students and they have more time than working people who have families. Also we can assume that young people can adopt a new trend easily than other ages.

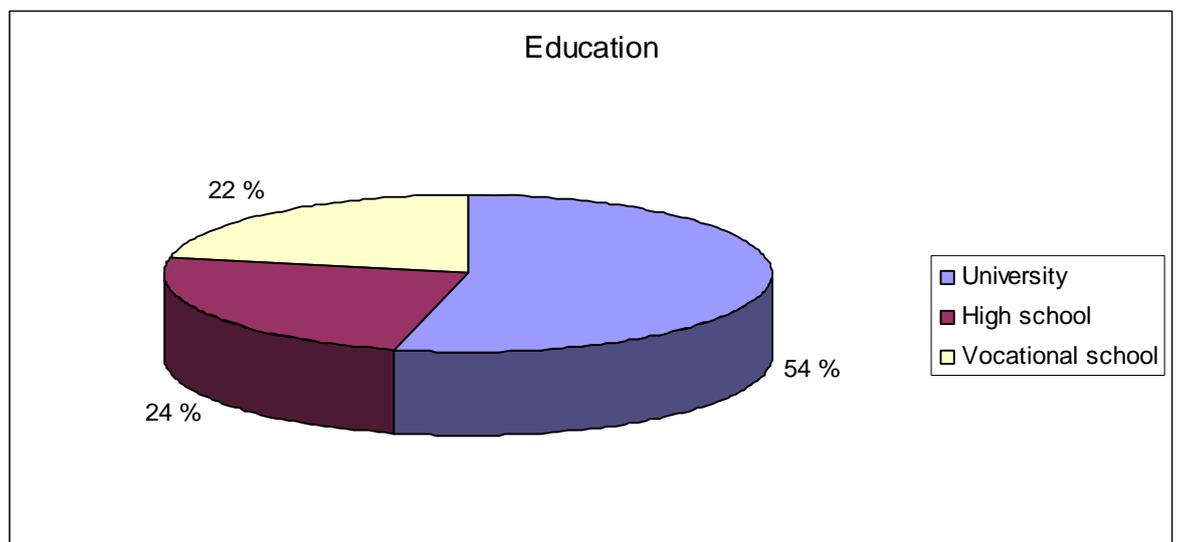


FIGURE 6. Education

Figure 6 shows that the number of people who graduated university was over half of the whole group. Then 24% of people graduated high school and 22% of people did vocational school. More than half of respondents had over university degrees, so they have higher education background.

TABLE 3. Occupation

Occupation	The number of people
Student	15
Engineer	4
Translator	3
Office worker	2
Physiotherapist	2
Nurse	2
Artist	2
Unemployed	2
Accountant	1
Baker	1
Carpenter	1
Consultant	1
Energy therapist	1
Journalist	1
Maintenance planner	1
Natural goods seller	1
Pensioner	1
Project manager	1
Researcher	1
Social worker	1
Teacher	1
Museum secretary	1

In the survey of 46 people, the biggest group was students. Engineers were the second biggest group and translators the third biggest. The rest of respondents had a wide variety of professional backgrounds.

8.2. Meditation in practice

In this section, we can see the reasons for starting meditation, what kinds of types of meditation have been tried, how long people have been tried those meditations and how often they do meditations.

TABLE 4. Reasons why people started meditation

Reasons why people started meditation	The number of people
Because of interest	36
Because of health problems	25
Because of stress	12
Because of some recommendations from somebody	6
Others(Because of interest of Asian philosophy and culture)	2

Table 4 shows that most of people started meditation out of interest, and over half of people did it because of their health problems. Interestingly, two people did it since they were interested in Asian philosophy and culture.

TABLE 5. Types of meditation

Types of meditation	The number of people who have tried
Yoga	46
Tai Chi	10
Sitting meditation	4
Walking meditation	1
Chi Kung	1

As we can see in table 5, the most common type of meditation they have all tried was yoga since all of them except three people were from yoga classes. Then 10 people have tried Tai Chi and four people have done sitting meditation. Thus, we can tell that considerable amount of people have tried different types of meditations.

TABLE 6. Periods of practicing meditation

Type of meditation	Average time of practicing
Yoga	24.12 months
Tai chi	3.70 months
Sitting meditation	2.26 months
Walking meditation	1.13 months
Chi Kung	1.01 months

The average time of doing yoga was over 24 months and it was the longest. For Tai Chi, the average time of practicing was a bit less than four months and sitting meditation and other types of mediation were shorter than Tai Chi's. From this result, we can assume that many people like yoga and they have practiced it for long periods, but other types of meditation were just as trials in short periods.

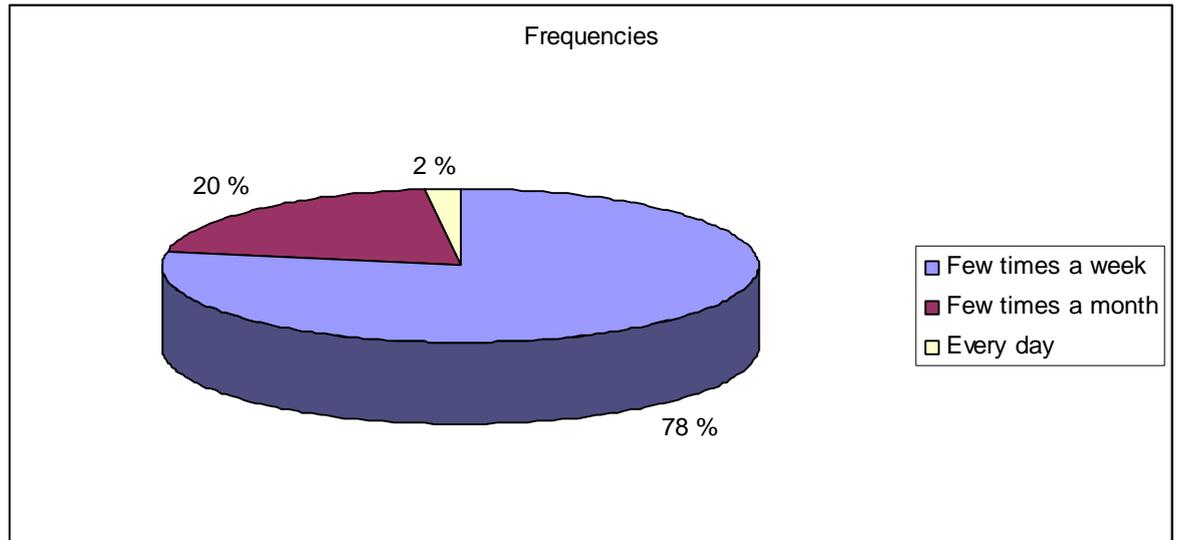


FIGURE 7. Frequencies of practicing meditation

Figure 7 shows that 78% of people were doing meditation few times a week since most of them were in yoga classes which were done twice a week in Sampola. 20% of people were practicing meditation few times a month and 2% of people have been doing it even everyday. Thus, most of people were practicing meditation quite actively.

All of these answers for four questions were multiple answers and some persons had answers more than one.

8.3. Experienced effects

Here what kinds of changes and how much effects respondents have got after practicing meditation are showed. Also how much people are satisfied and how many people want to recommend meditation to other people are presented.

TABLE 7. Changes after practicing meditation

Changes after trying meditation	The number of people
Better posture and flexibility	13
Calmness	12
Better general health and more energy	11
Less muscle pain	11
Less stress	10
Better relaxation	9
Better body awareness	7
Better concentration	5
Being positive, more patience	4
Better self-esteem	2
Better body control	2
Better breathing	2

The question for table 7 was 'what kind of changes the respondents noticed after starting meditation'. There were not only physical improvements such as better position and flexibility, better general health condition, but also mental improvements such as better concentration, self-esteem and being more patience. Hence people distinctly recognize the overall health changes from meditation. These answers were multiply answered.

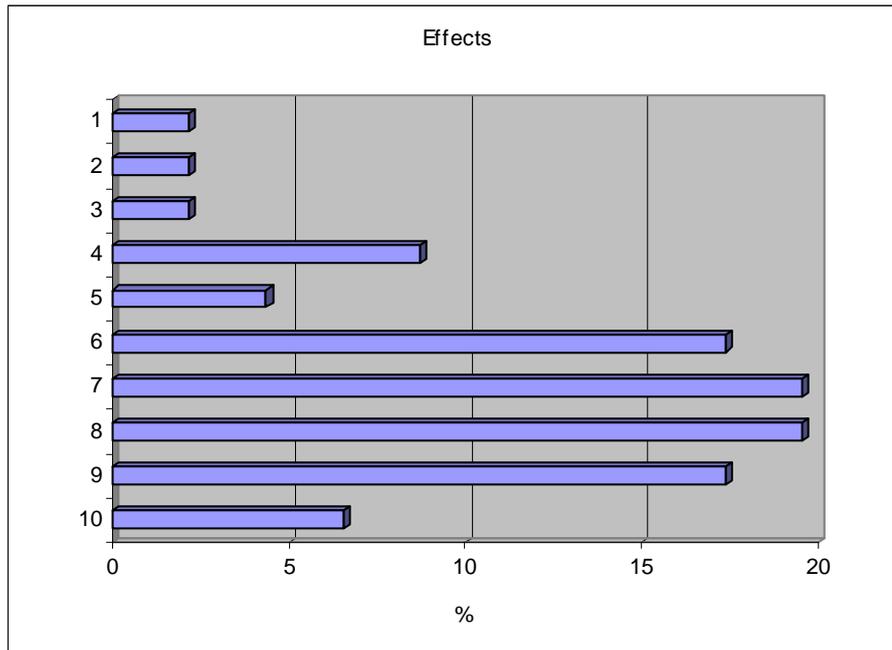


FIGURE 8. Effects

The question for Figure 8 was how much of effects respondents have got after practicing meditation. As we can see, 81% of people gave high scores such as over six. This means that most of people have fully recognized the effect of meditation.

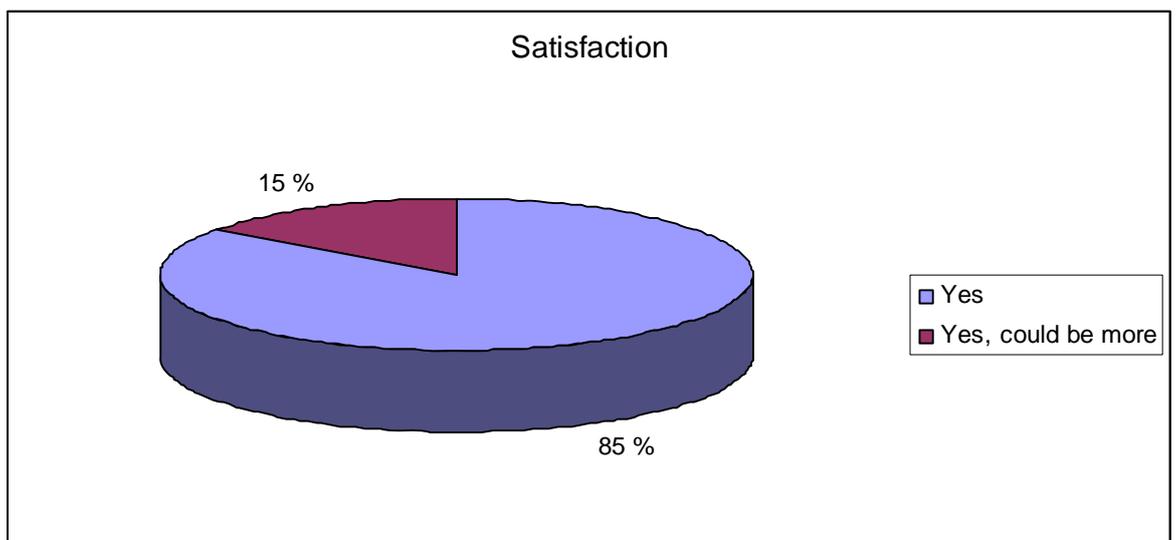


FIGURE 9. Satisfaction of meditation courses

The figure 9 shows that most of people who has done meditation in Tampere satisfied at their yoga classes. 15% of the rest of people were also satisfied, but

they want more places to practice yoga. Thus, all of them were satisfied and they had positive experiences.

Then for the result of recommendation, 100% of respondents wanted to recommend meditation to others. Thus, this result demonstrates how meditation is good and people recognized the value of meditation.

8.4. Understanding of meditation

This section describes how people define meditation by themselves and how they consider the meaning of meditation in Finnish society.

TABLE 8. Own definitions of meditation

Own definitions of meditation	The number of people
Listening to your inner world(self-awareness)	17
Calmness of your mind	17
Concentration to your body	11
Letting go of stress and thoughts, focusing at the moment	9
Peace	7
Relaxation	6
Balance of your body and mind	3
Focusing on breathing	3
Ability to cope with everyday challenges	1

The question of table 8 was `how to define meditation in own words`. 17 people answered that meditation was listening to your inner world and calmness of your mind. Then 11 people defined meditation as concentration to your body. Some people answered more than one. Amazingly, these answers are quite similar with the definitions by scholars. For instance, some scholars such as

Kabat-Zinn, Germer mentioned that meditation is ‘contact our identity’, ‘being aware of your mind’, ‘being at the moment’ and so on. However, the way of expression those definitions by respondents were quite similar and it can be because those answers were just what they heard or read from books or magazines.

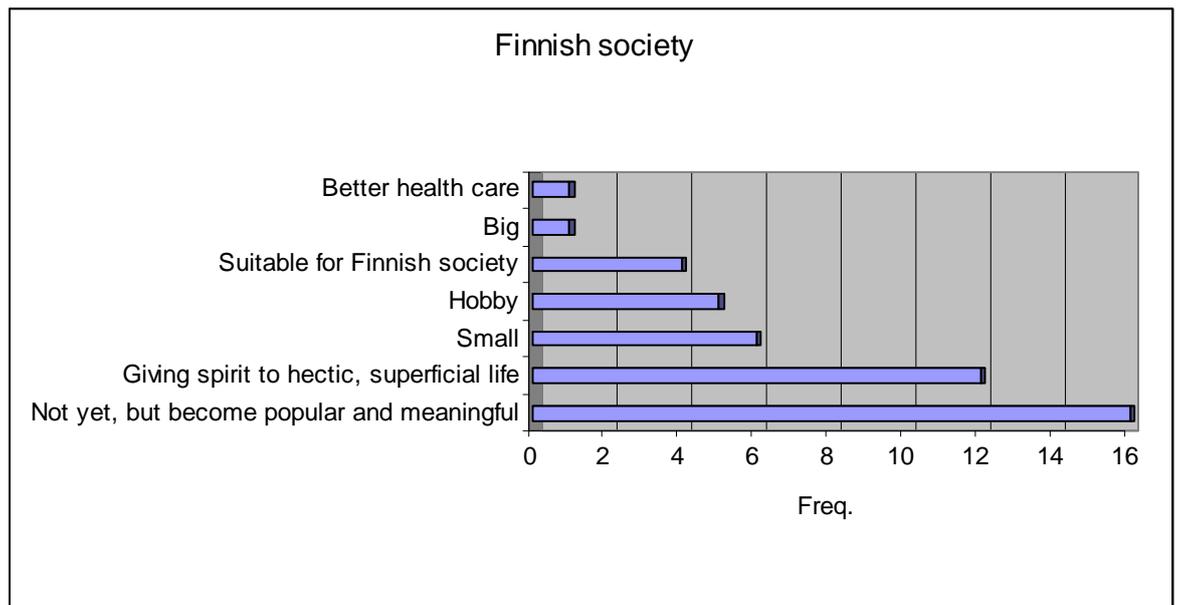


FIGURE 10. The meaning of meditation in Finnish society

Figure 10 shows that 16 people thought that the meaning of meditation in Finnish society is still not much, but it is becoming popular and more meaningful. 12 people answered that meditation gave spirit to this hectic and superficial modern life. Six people thought that the meaning of meditation is still small in Finnish society. Four people considered that meditation is suitable for Finnish society since Finnish people like sauna and fishing in the nature. Hence, meditation can be matched very well with their social and recreational lives and absorbed into their everyday lives naturally. In addition, meditation could be an excellent tool for overcoming depression which bothers people in Finland a lot during the winter time. Also many people feel isolation, burn-out, stress, mental health problems and tiredness. Meditation would certainly help in this. Furthermore, among respondents, the biggest group was young students. This tells us there is a big possibility that the number of meditation practitioners can grow in the future while they are getting older.

9 CONCLUSION

Social problems such as high suicide rates, wars, crimes, and hard work are slowly increasing health related problems. Therefore, there must be a way where mind and body could relax and operate systematically. Meditation can help us in this. Many studies have already demonstrated that meditation is an effective tool, not only for stress management, but also for controlling physical and psychological problems. Meditation has originated from many religious, cultural and philosophical traditions, but currently the training and practice of meditation can be effectively adopted by individuals in the absence of any particular spiritual traditions. Meditation is spreading slowly all over the world, and it is praised by thousands of people. The purpose of this study was to investigate how meditation practitioners in Tampere consider meditation.

These results demonstrate that Finnish people have started to be aware of meditation and already some people realize its value and effect. People who have practiced meditation in Tampere have various kinds of occupations and education backgrounds and were in different ages. However, most respondents recognized positive effects of meditation, such as physical and psychological changes. All people participating in this study wanted to recommend meditation to other people. The most popular types of meditation were yoga and Tai Chi. Meditation would be suitable for Finnish society for many reasons. Most of all, meditation can be used as a great tool for overcoming stress, burn-out, and mental health problems including depression. Also, Finnish people have already a big opportunity to practice meditation while they are having sauna or spending time in nature. Thus, meditation can be an effective tool for social, working, and cultural life and for promoting the well-being of people in Finland. For this, drawing more people's interest of meditation and advertising are needed. Also it would be nice to develop a Finnish style of meditation, which would combine an oriental and Western style of meditation so that people could adopt it more easily.

This research was conducted among people who were mostly doing yoga at Sampola, so the outcomes could have bias, and more studies are needed. However, the results indicate that Finnish people are starting to realize the importance of meditation, and that meditation helps well-being of people.

As a suggestion for further studies, it would be meaningful to do the same survey to people who do different kinds of meditation and after that a comparative study, so that we could expect more comprehensive results.

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APPENDIX 1

Student Hyon-Soo Kim

Postikatu 3 A 21

050 403 1366

Dear. Respondent

Hello! I am a student at Piramk and studying social services. This questionnaire will be used for my bachelor's thesis about meditation. The purpose of my thesis is to introduce meditation and to provide the knowledge and importance of meditation to Finnish society.

People go through various changes and social problems in the modern society. In these chaotic living circumstances, people have to compete for surviving and it causes a lot of stress and health problems. Thus, it is quite necessary to learn stress management techniques to be able to cope with stress and meditation is one of the effective techniques for it.

There are many kinds of meditation such as yoga, taichi, sitting, walking, sleeping meditation, Vipassana, Zen, Kuksundo, Japa etc. Here I just mentioned Yoga and taichi since these are popular ones in Finland.

The information you give will not be used for any other purpose and confidentiality will be kept. Please feel free to answer for questions (if you can write them in English, it would be helpful a lot).

I appreciate for your time and effort.

Soo

(Continues)

APPENDIX 1:2(4)

1. What is your gender?

1) Female

2) Male

2. What is your age?

1) 10 – 20 years old

2) 21 – 30 years old

3) 31 – 40 years old

4) 41 – 50 years old

5) 51 – 60 years old

6) Over 61 years old

3. What is your education?

1) Comprehensive school

2) Secondary school graduate

3) Vocational education

4) University

5) Something else, what?

4. What is your professional situation in general?

APPENDIX 1:4(4)

8. What kind of changes did you notice after starting meditation (yoga or taichi)?

9. If you think of the above changes by number, what it would be? Please circle one. (1 – hardly recognize , 10 – very much)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

10. Will you recommend yoga or taichi for other people?

1) Yes

2) No

11. Please describe meditation by your own words.

12. What could the importance of meditation (yoga and taichi) be in Finnish society?

13. How are you satisfied about the yoga or taichi courses available in Tampere?

* Thank you!

APPENDIX 2

Opiskelija Hyon-Soo Kim
Postikatu 3 A 21
050 403 1366

Hyvä vastaanottaja!

Hei! Opiskelen Pirkanmaan Ammattikorkeakoulussa sosionomiksi. Tämä kyselylomake liittyy opinnäytetyöhöni meditaatiosta. Opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena on esitellä suomalaiselle yhteiskunnalle meditaatio sekä sen merkitys ja tärkeys hyvinvoinnille.

Me kohtaamme nyky-yhteiskunnassa monia elämänmuutoksia sekä sosiaalisia haasteita. Ihmisten täytyy "taistella" selviytyäkseen ja se aiheuttaa paljon stressiä sekä terveyshaasteita. Tästä johtuen on tarpeellista oppia erilaisia stressinhallintamenetelmiä. Meditaatio on yksi tehokkaimmista menetelmistä stressinhallintaan.

Erilaisia meditaatiomenetelmiä ovat esimerkiksi jooga, taichi, meditaatio istuen, kävellen tai nukkuen, Vipassana, Zen, Kuksundo sekä Japa. Kyselylomakkeessa mainitsen vain joogan ja taichin koska nämä ovat erityisen suosittuja Suomessa.

Käytän antamaasi tietoa vain opinnäytetyöhöni ja kaikki tieto on luottamuksellista. Ole ystävällinen ja vastaa kysymyksiin (jos haluat vastata englanniksi).

Kiitos ajastasi!

Soo

(Continues)

APPENDIX 2: 2(4)

1. Mitä sukupuolta olet?

1) Nainen

2) Mies

2. Kuinka vanha olet?

1) 10 – 20 vuotta

2) 21 – 30 vuotta

3) 31 – 40 vuotta

4) 41 – 50 vuotta

5) 51 – 60 vuotta

6) Yli 61 vuotta

3. Mikä on koulutuksesi?

1) Peruskoulu

2) Ylioppilas

3) Ammattikoulu

4) Yliopisto

5) Joku muu, mikä?

4. Mikä on ammattisi?

APPENDIX 2: 3(4)

5. Minkälaista meditaatiota olet tehnyt ja kuinka kauan? (Merkitse kaikki mitä olet kokeillut).

Meditaatio tavat	Kuinka kauan?
Jooga	() Kuukausi
Taichi	() kuukausi
Vipassana	() kuukausi
Zen	() kuukausi
Meditaatio istuen	() kuukausi
Kävely meditaatio	() kuukausi
Muita ()	() kuukausi

6. Miksi aloitit joogan tai taichin?

- 1) Terveysshaasteiden takia
- 2) Stressin takia
- 3) Joku suositteli
- 4) Kiinnostuksen takia
- 5) Mainoksen innoittamana
- 6) Muu syytä
()

7. Kuinka usein joogaat tai teet taichia?

- 1) Joka päivä
- 2) Muutaman kerran viikossa
- 3) Muutaman kerran kuukaudessa
- 4) Joka toinen kuukausi
- 5) Muutaman kerran vuodessa

APPENDIX 2: 4(4)

8. Millaisia muutoksia olet huomannut meditaation (joogan, taichin) aloittamisen jälkeen?

9. Jos ajattelet muutosten vaikutusta kokonaisuutena, minkä numeron antaisit? Ympyröi yksi numero.

(1 – tuskin huomaan muutosta, 10 – huomattava muutos)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

10. Suositteletko joogaa tai taichia muille?

1) Kyllä

2) En

11. Määrittele meditaatio omin sanoin?

12. Mikä on mielestäsi meditaation (joogan tai taichin) merkitys suomalaisessa yhteiskunnassa?

13. Oletko tyytyväinen jooga tai taichi kurssien tarjontaan Tampereella?

* Kiitos Paljon!