Impacts of Intense Meditation-Related Experiences (IMREs) on Identity, Self-Narrative, and Meaning Making: A Cross-Sectional Survey

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Background

Meditation can impact meditators in ways they perceive as both helpful and harmful[1,2], but little is currently understood about how that impact relates to individual identity, self-narrative, and efforts to make sense of experience. Two previous studies found that 88% of meditators who experienced adverse effects reappraised them positively.[2,4] This study focuses on the immediate impact and subsequent efforts to integrate intense meditation-related experiences (IMREs: comprised of >=1 meditation experience(s) that are appraised as intense and impactful). We measured the impact of IMREs that became central to identity and estimated the degree to which meaning-making efforts are associated with positive reappraisal of impactful experiences.

Method

- Cross-Sectional Survey (n=1804) of meditators recruited via practice communities and social media.
- *Statistical tests*:

Spearman's Correlations & Ordinal Logistic Regressions (OLR; Tables 1,2);
Partial Proportional Odds where assumptions were violated for OLR;
Moderation Analyses - CES on other factors

- *Measures*: see Fig. 1
  + Inventory of Meditation Experiences[3]

Example Items

- Enabling — *'Filled with a deep sense of love for and connection to all beings'*
- Disabling — *'Inability to make decisions, concentrate, or recall important details'*
- Self/Reality — *'A loss of a sense of being, or having a self'*

	n (%)
Gender	
Female	1131 (73.8%)
Male	385 (25.1%)
Other	8 (0.5%)
Age Group	
18–34	332 (21.7%)
35–44	437 (28.5%)
45–54	318 (20.8%)
55–64	342 (22.3%)
65+	103 (6.5%)
Country of Residence	
Australia	1227 (68.0%)
USA	326 (18.1%)
UK	68 (3.8%)

Figure 1

Predisposing Factors:
Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)
Psychological distress (K10)
Past Multi-day Retreat Experience

Meaning-Making Factors:
Effort invested in making sense of IMRE
Centrality of Event Scale (CES)
Remedial Strategies

Outcomes (Appraisals):
Help Then / Help Now
Harm Then/ Harm Now
(0- not at all; 4 – extremely)

Results

Figure 2

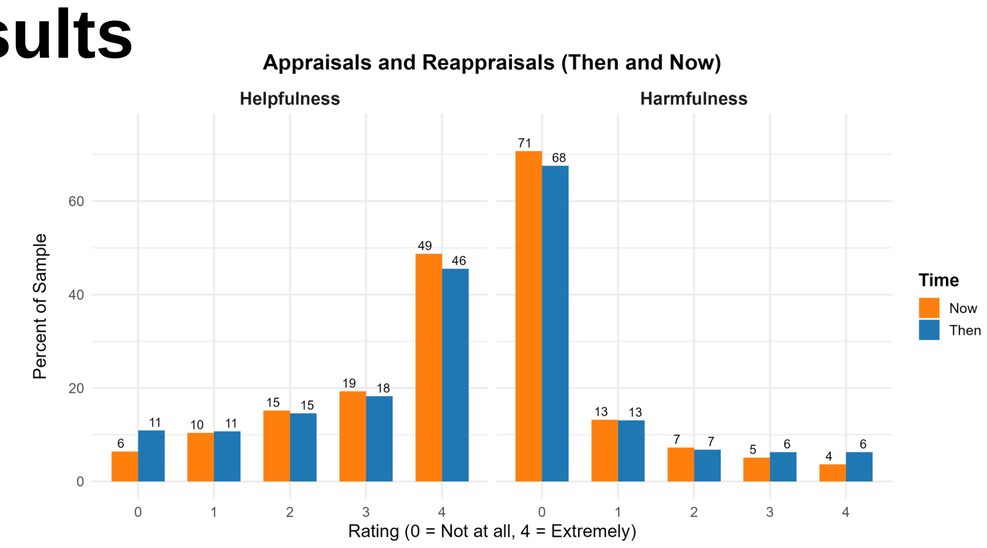


Figure 3

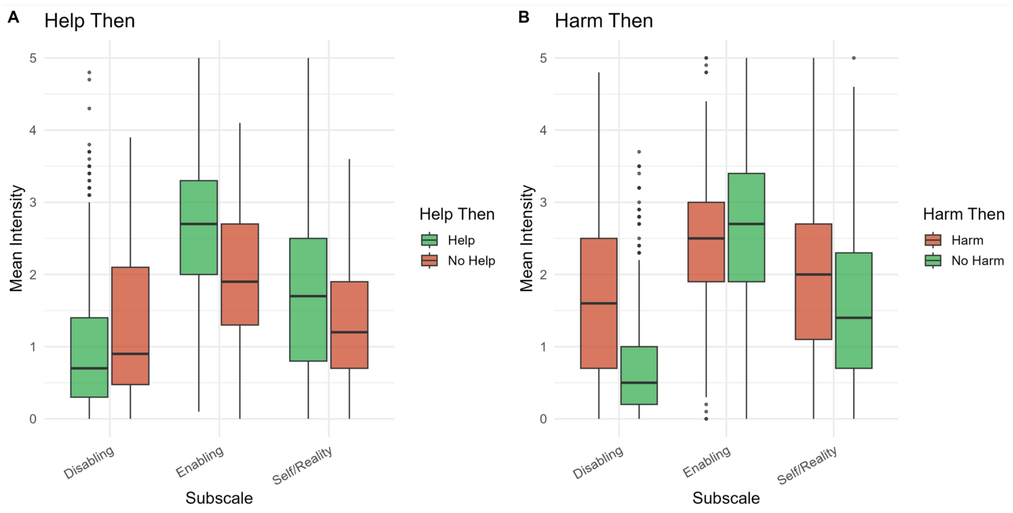


Table 1

	Help Appraisal		Harm Appraisal	
Predictor	ρ	OR [95% CI]	ρ	OR [95% CI]
ACEs	-.06*	1.00 [0.95, 1.05]	.24***	**1.11*** [1.05, 1.18]**
K10	-.31***	**0.93*** [0.92, 0.95]**	.39***	**1.11*** [1.09, 1.13]**
Retreat	.24***	**1.69*** [1.30, 2.19]**	-.18***	**0.67* [0.49, 0.92]**
Effort	.17***	1.00 [0.92, 1.08]	.02	**1.19*** [1.08, 1.32]**
CES	.36***	**1.09*** [1.07, 1.11]**	-.06*	0.99 [0.98, 1.01]

Table 2

	Help Reappraisal		Harm Reappraisal	
Predictor	ρ	OR [95% CI]	ρ	OR [95% CI]
Appraisal	.72***	3.13*** [2.78, 3.55]	.74***	2.47*** [2.10, 2.90]
ACEs	-.05	1.01 [0.95, 1.07]	.25***	1.06 [0.99, 1.13]
K10	-.32***	**0.97** [0.95, 0.99]**	.41***	**1.06*** [1.04, 1.09]**
Retreat	.26***	1.33 [1.00, 1.79]	-.21***	0.74 [0.50, 1.08]
Effort	.27***	**1.14** [1.05, 1.24]**	-.03	1.05 [0.94, 1.18]
CES	.45***	**1.07*** [1.05, 1.09]**	-.08*	0.99 [0.96, 1.01]
Strategies	-.32***	0.95 [0.88, 1.04]	.69***	1.33*** [1.19, 1.49]

Note. n = 1,012. CES = Centrality of Event Scale; ACEs = Adverse Childhood Experiences; K10 = Kessler Psychological Distress Scale; Retreat = past participation (0 = no, 1 = yes). *OR* = odds ratio.
***p < .001, **p < .01, *p < .05

References:

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Summary

ADVERSE & HELPFUL
Despite adverse (n=743) & functionally impairing (n=351) experiences, IMREs were endorsed as helpful (~94%) & not at all harmful (~71%).
(see Fig. 2)

EXPERIENCE TYPE
'Enabling' subscale items associated with help, 'Disabling' subscale items associated with harm
(see Fig. 3)

APPRAISALS
Help: *retreat(↑), centrality(↑), distress(↓)*
Harm: *ACEs*(↑), distress(↑), effort**(↑), retreat(↓)*
(see Table 1)

REAPPRAISALS
Help: *effort**(↑), centrality(↑), distress(↓)*
Harm: *distress(↑), remedial strategies(↑)*
(see Table 2)

MODERATION & INTERACTION
More personal meaning (CES) = more help *(CES:ACEs* & CES:Effort**)*



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