Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic prompted dramatic, lasting changes in many people’s lives. Not surprisingly, heightened levels of stress1 and loneliness2 have been observed during the pandemic. Given the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on mental health, strategies for protecting and improving peoples’ well-being are of great value. Previous studies have shown that meditation can help reduce stress and anxiety3 and increase feelings of social connectedness5.

Like most areas of life, contemplative instruction also underwent a massive shift as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Meditation teachings went from being offered mostly in person to being delivered almost exclusively online, with the notable emergence of many live Zoom-based meditation sessions. Here we explore the experiences of meditators and contemplative teachers in navigating online meditation spaces.

AIMS

In this study, we examined:

- The degree to which meditation practitioners felt the Covid-19 pandemic strengthened or hindered their meditation practice
- What meditators liked and disliked about online meditation formats
- Perspectives from teachers of standardized mindfulness and compassion-based interventions about the efficacy of online versus in-person training formats

Methods

STUDY DESIGN

STUDY 1: Practitioners likes and dislikes about online meditation formats

318 participants reported engaging in online meditation activities. Written responses were coded in Dedoose by 2 independent coders who came to agreement on all codes.

For more information about the qualitative codes, view our codetable here.

When asked what they liked or found helpful about online meditation classes and retreats, meditators shared they liked the:
- accessibility & convenience
- sense of community
- sense of personal connection

When asked what they disliked or found unhelpful about online meditation classes and retreats, meditators shared they disliked the:
- missing in-person presence
- disconnectedness
- distractions

Also notable was that many meditators [19%] shared that they were asked to describe what they engaged in.

Study 2: Teacher perspectives of online training efficacy compared to in-person

Teachers indicated that online training formats were slightly less effective than their in-person counterparts.

A one-sample t-test showed that the mean of 2.67 (scale of 1-5) was different from the expected mean of 3 (t = -7.03, df = 213, p < .001).

We observed a significant positive correlation between the number of classes teachers had taught online and their perception of online training efficacy (r = 0.24, p < .001).

We found no significant correlation between the number of classes teachers had taught in person and their perception of online training efficacy (r = -0.004, p = .95).

Summary & Conclusions

- Meditators generally felt their practice somewhat improved and was minimally hindered as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Teachers indicated that online training formats were slightly less effective than their in-person counterparts.
- Amount of online teaching experience, but not in-person teaching experience, was positively related to teacher’s perceptions of online training efficacy.
- These data suggest that teachers and practitioners find online meditation formats valuable, despite their limitations.

References


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