

Meditation may not be beneficial for shame: Meditation practice and two types of shame

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Background and objectives. Shame is a self-conscious emotion, in which the entire self is the central focus of negative evaluation. Shame can be meaningfully divided into internally focussed shame, focussed on judgement of the self by oneself, and external shame, experienced based on the belief that others perceive oneself negatively. Shame is predictive of depressive symptoms with indications that external shame is a stronger predictor than internal shame. Recent findings showed that participation in mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT), which includes significant meditation practice, was associated with lower, internally focussed shame-proneness. However, MBCT participation was associated with no reduction in external shame and external shame was associated with increased dropout from MBCT. The objective was to further examine the relationship of meditation practice with two different types of shame, in two non-clinical samples.

Methods. Using a community sample recruited from mindfulness websites and a university student sample, cross-sectional data on meditation practice, depressive and anxiety symptoms, mindfulness, and shame-proneness and external shame were obtained. **Results.** Hierarchical regression showed mixed evidence that external shame was a stronger predictor than shame-proneness. Frequency of meditation, most commonly mindfulness meditation, as well as length of meditation sessions, was associated with lower shame-proneness in both samples, although duration of meditation practice showed little evidence of association. However, frequency of meditation, duration of practice, and session length were unrelated to external shame.

Discussion and conclusion. Findings from two non-clinical samples add additional evidence that meditation practice and mindfulness-based interventions may be of benefit to internally focussed shame, but do not support its benefit for external shame. Therefore, distinctions between types of shame are relevant to participation in mindfulness-based interventions and to choosing suitable interventions to address shame. Compassion-based or cognitive-behavioural interventions may be more suitable to address external shame.