



## MINDFULNESS

Introduction of Meditation Techniques & Effects with the  
Elderly in Home Care Services

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## TIIVISTELMÄ

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<p>Opinnäytetyön kuvaus: Tutkimus ja analyysi meditaatiotekniikoiden käytöstä ja niiden vaikutuksesta vanhusten kotihoidossa.</p> <p>Teoreettinen yhteenveto: Esitellä meditaatiotekniikoita ja tutkia niiden vaikutuksia vapaaehtoisten kotihoidossa olevien ikääntyvien henkiseen ja fyysiseen hyvinvointiin. Hypoteesi on, että säännöllinen mietiskely voi minimoida tai jopa poistaa vanhusten stressiä ja masennuksen vaikutuksia niin että he voivat elää parempaa, rakentavampaa ja miellyttävämpää arkea. Tutkimuksessa tarkasteltiin sitä kuinka Mindfulness-meditaatio on yksi vanhusten valittavissa oleva menetelmä tekniikaksi vähentää yksinäisyyttä, stressiä ja masennusta ja selvittää niistä, sekä osoittaa kuinka iäkkäät ihmiset voivat helposti ottaa käyttöön tämän uuden metodin.</p> <p>Metodologinen yhteenveto: Tutkimusmenetelmä oli laadullinen ja tavoitteena oli koota aineisto useita menetelmiä käyttäen. Aineiston hankinnassa käytettiin kyselylomaketta, observointia sekä tehtiin haastatteluja. Pääosa aineistoa koottiin meditaatioryhmän prosessista, kirjoista, artikkeleista ja verkkolähteistä, mukaan lukien tutkimuksen tekijän analyysiiset havainnot ja kokemus meditaatioharjoitusten kohderyhmän opastamisesta. Sekä kyselylomakkeisiin vastaaminen että yksilöhaastattelut tehtiin henkilökohtaisesti. Tutkimuksen tekijä teki yhteistyötä tutkimukseen osallistuneiden henkilöiden kanssa oppiakseen ja harjoitellakseen osallitujilla vastikään esiteltyä toimintaa.</p> <p>Tärkeimmät tulokset: Ensisijaiset tulokset osoittivat, että lyhyen meditoinnin harjoittelujakson jälkeen osallistujien kokemukset olivat positiivisia. Vaikka toiminta oli kaikille osallistujille uutta, näyttää, että he onnistuivat omaksumaan sekä meditaatiotekniikan teorian että käytännön.</p> <p>Johtopäätös: Mindfulness-meditaatio sopii vanhuksille ja vaikuttaa heidän fyysiseen ja psyykkiseen toimintakykyyn. Meditaation hyvät tulokset auttavat vanhuksia selviytymään menetyksistä ja sopeutumaan sairauksiin, kohtaamaan stressiä, yksinäisyyttä ja masennusta.</p>	
Asanat: Mindfulness, Meditaatio, Vanhukset, Terapiat, Kärsimys, Yksinäisyys	

## ABSTRACT

KEMI-TORNIO UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

Degree Program:	Bachelor of Social Services
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<p>Thesis Description: Research and analysis of the introduction of meditation techniques &amp; their effects upon the elderly volunteer participants in home care services.</p> <p>Theoretical summary: To introduce meditation techniques and to examine the effects upon mental and physical health amongst elderly volunteers in home care. The hypothesis is that if elderly people are meditating regularly, stress and depressive effects will be reduced or greatly minimised, and may even disappear, with a view to enabling them to lead more constructive and comfortable everyday lives. The study examined how one method, Mindfulness Meditation, is capable of helping the elderly to reduce and better cope with many of the effects of ageing such as loneliness, emotional and physical stress and depression, and to show how older people could easily adapt this procedure into their lives.</p> <p>Methodology Summary: The research method was qualitative, focusing on data collection. The approach of qualitative researchers is the use of questionnaires, direct observation and interviews to collect data. The main data were collected from work done with the volunteer meditation group of senior citizens, from books, articles and internet sources, and include my analytic observations and experiences while guiding the meditation activities of the subject group. Both questionnaires and personal interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis with the respondents. The researcher collaborated with the respondents in an attempt to learn and practise this activity newly introduced to them.</p> <p>Main results: Primary results have indicated that the participant's experiences were positive following a short period of training in meditation techniques. Although this is a new activity for all participants involved, it is seen that they were successful in apprehending both the theory and practise of meditation.</p> <p>Conclusion: The system of Mindfulness Meditation is suitable for the older person as with those of a younger age, with potentially very positive effects upon both their physical and mental health and functions. Such meditation practises are able to help the elderly to adjust to the many changes in life they confront in their ageing, such as illness, loneliness, depression and other stresses which affect them at this time of their lives, which may help them avoid having to resort to medications which are more traditionally prescribed for these conditions.</p>	
KEYWORDS Mindfulness, Meditation, Elderly, Therapies, Suffering, Loneliness	

## Table of Contents

TIIVISTELMÄ.....	3
ABSTRACT.....	4
1 INTRODUCTION.....	6
2 LITERATURE REVIEW: BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS MEDITATION .....	12
2.1 Social Welfare Among Older People: The Risk to Well-Being.....	12
2.2 Social Welfare for Older People.....	14
2.3 Integrating Mindfulness Meditation into Daily Life of Seniors.....	18
2.4 Effect of Mindfulness Meditation upon the Elderly.....	19
3 MEDITATION AND MINDFULNESS .....	22
3.1 Meditation East and West.....	22
3.2 Meditation in Tradition of Theravada Buddhism.....	24
3.3 Basic of meditation disciplines and Meditation Religious.....	28
3.4 Pre-requisites of Meditation for the Practitioner.....	32
4 RESEARCH IMPLEMENTATION.....	35
4.1 The Purpose and Research method.....	35
4.2 Data Collection and Analysing.....	36
4.3 Process of meditation.....	37
4.4 Ethics of the Study.....	44
5 RESEARCH RESULTS AND SUMMARY.....	47
5.1 Initial Experiences in Mindfulness Meditation Techniques.....	47
5.2 Effects and Regconising change of meditation on practitioners.....	51
5.3 Summary of the Result.....	55
6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION.....	59
6.1 Discussion and Finding.....	59
6.2 Conclusion.....	64
REFERENCES.....	68
APPENDIX 1.....	74

## 1 INTRODUCTION

It is in the nature of humankind to seek happiness, a sense of inner peace, a harmony with the external world. Often it is thought that it is through the acquisition of wealth, of power or of social status that this is achieved. People will do everything and anything to arrive at and to obtain this elusive, ultimate goal of satisfied desire which is equated with inner peace. This happiness is sought also through family relationships, work, accumulation of friends and pursuit sensual pleasures.

From the perspective of the teachings of Buddhism, such pursuits for their own sakes do not result in developing the sought-for real happiness, but is an imaginary one, an illusion of the mind and imagination that brings only more disenchantment, or pain, in its wake. Real happiness is without defilement or suffering in our lives, though life itself has much discomfort, for the harder one tries to reach this quality in living, the more elusive it seems to become. The image of one trying to catch a butterfly, so enticingly near, yet so elusive, describes something of this pursuit (Venerable Narada Mahathera, 1998, p.223).

Peace and happiness are misunderstood. Man seeks it from outside himself rather than looking within wherein the answer lies, for the external is only a shadow of what might be in reality. Man may try to overcome this unhappiness and disconnect from their real selves by seeking to please their senses through transient pursuits and activities, under the illusion that they are enjoying happiness. Sensory stimulation however, does not really bring peace and relaxation, but rather increases the distance from it. The more we try to please the senses through sensual pleasures, the more we will become slaves to the senses, rather than masters of our own destinies. There is no end to our craving for satisfaction in this way.

The life span of man is traditionally divided into three stages: The first, the middle and the final stage. It is in this final stage, in that of more advanced years of later life, that there comes opportunity for a fulfilment, an opportunity to 'unravel the complexities' of a lifetime, and to engage in a renewal of spirit, a process of completion that fulfils the journey of life. It is here, in 'old age', when focus on 'being', rather than on 'becoming' as in the earlier stages of life, can become the direction and purpose for the senior

person (Bee, H.L. And S.K. Mitchell, 1980).

There are many issues that confront elders in this final stage of life. There is often loneliness following cessation of a productive working life, the passing of a partner, children now a long distance away, and isolation within one's social community. The result can be dejection, gloom, depression, and a change in self-image from one of positive self assurance to negative doubt and emotional insecurity. The habits of a lifetime give way to the uncertainty of unknowns as health changes bring limitations for physical movement, and mental alertness suffers, and routine may give way to an unstructured existence. The elderly person may feel at this point that he can no longer exert control of his own destiny and direction, thereby rendering his/her life to be less meaningful and without purpose.

This study is concerned with exploring the therapeutic value by introducing a group of elderly retirees into meditation techniques, in order to help them to adjust, adapt and at times to cope more positively with the ageing process which they are confronting.

When one considers the elderly in Western industrialised societies, it is significant that life expectancy has increased considerably in the past century due to much-improved and widely-available health care as well as an emphasis on healthful living generally, particularly in recent decades. People in a Western society can now reasonably expect to live well into their eighties, with many now reaching their nineties and even 100 years. While this can be viewed as progress in social welfare and conditions, on the other hand it raises other significant problems and concerns for both governments and society at large. Because demographic changes have altered the structure of the traditional family causing younger family members to migrate to other regions and even countries in order to find work and education, maturing older family members are frequently left on their own and without family support in their old age. Where there was previously the concept of the extended family as is found in many 'traditional' societies throughout the world today, this has given way to a fractured and uncertain familial relationship structure with its many complexities raising the question, "Who will care for the elderly in lieu of family?" ( George W. Leeson, 2003).

The growth of the welfare state has been an influence in the overall picture, which has

increasingly taken the burden from families of supporting the elderly and placed it under the responsibility of the State. Because of these changes in society, it has become increasingly necessary that more community support be provided for the elderly age group who continue to stay on in their own homes. This equally applies as well for those who are unable to remain independent, by the State providing residential home facilities and care. A side-effect of this imbalance in the care of senior citizens, too frequently is loneliness and depression which are on the increase as many elderly become housebound or incapacitated.

The role of day centres and home-delivered social and nursing support as well as community/church support groups is rising in importance. Another factor is that many elderly are living longer, and that they do not have independent means to provide for themselves and for meeting the rising costs of living such as food, heating, transportation and recreational activities. This combination of elements are key factors in the rising incidence rates of depression, fear, stress and the accompanying medical conditions that arise from them. It goes without saying that this is not conducive to healthy living. Trends such as these inevitably place greater stress and pressure on society to find new ways of alleviating such concerns. Apart from Government and social support provided by the established caring agencies, there is a clear need for new and meaningful therapies that can add quality to the elderly person's life in maintaining their independence and enjoyment of life as much as possible, for it has become even more important than ever.

There is a catalogue of disabilities and maladies faced by the ageing and aged members of society. With each passing day they face reduced hearing, vision, mobility and general physical well being, and increases in major maladies such as cardiovascular disorders as well as joint, muscle, skin and ambulatory disorders. The current situation in the Western world, especially loneliness in advanced age, may additionally cause a number of psychological problems or diseases brought on by unhappiness with negative conditions in life, and personal circumstances.

There can be little doubt that one of the major issues confronting the elderly in 21<sup>st</sup> century Western society, in their changed status from productive members of society



and heads of families, to one of loneliness and a sense of uselessness, is giving rise to emotional and mental disorders, which in turn bring about physical illnesses, disorders and disabilities. Health deterioration amongst the elderly is not an instant process, but one developing over time. Social isolation and social exclusion, along with loneliness will affect anyone, all the more so the elderly. Statistically men have shorter life expectancies than do women. There is a larger number of widowed women than men that reflect this, with the attending consequences of elderly women facing all the problems of ageing with little or no familial support. There are numerous ways in which these concerns can be addressed, on the larger societal level, as well as on the localised, personal one. Meditation is one such approach that has increasingly attracted interest and is gaining credibility and acceptance as a means to alleviate problems connected with ageing, and one that is increasingly being used with success in several countries (Wikipedia, ageing of Europe, 2013).

From the perspective of helping older people practise Mindfulness Meditation and possible benefits to the elderly, this study addressed the following research questions:

- Is meditation a technique which is suitable for older people to practise?
- Is such a technique helpful for the elderly to cope with different feelings and situations?
- How does meditation help the elderly maintain harmony physically and mentally when confronted with stress, loneliness and depression?

According to Buddhist philosophy, a person is made up of two elements – the physical and the mental. In this paper I have briefly introduced the topic of the physical in relation to man's entering into the final stage of his life, when he is confronted with the reality of his diminishing physical capacities. It is here that can be found attending patterns of distress that may affect the mental element. It is here too, wherein lies the sense of well being or lack of it, and which may lead to a sense of emotional and psychological distress or suffering, and a detraction from the desire and ability to recognise the positive aspect of one's advancing age, which is the culmination of the life process ( Veneral Narada Mahathera, 1998, p. 530).

In relation to the spiritual element of life, it is this very quality which deserves to be

reinforced. This study seeks to address the nature of ageing and to suggest an approach to ease these areas of discord and to create bridges and roads within the person that will facilitate his/her progress through the passing of time. Loneliness, physical discomfort and not infrequently depression, are all aspects of 'suffering', which are both the physical and mental, but also in a more subtle area: The spiritual, as recognised in Buddhist teachings. There are many ways in which the elderly can approach and resolve such problems.

I have been a practitioner of meditation technique at Buddhist Meditation retreat in my home country Vietnam for many years. From the age of 13 as a school boy in Vietnam, I was introduced to meditation, regularly taking training and education training through the nearby Buddhist monastery and meditation retreat. Such activities are very much the norm Vietnam, for most of the population follow the spiritual path of Buddhism quite actively, which incorporates meditation very actively in its teachings and religious practices. It was during this time when my experiences deeply influenced my thinking and feelings, bringing awareness of the inner and out natures of our lives. I continued regularly in this education of learning prayer, respect for life, purification of body and mind and commitment to serving mankind. By the age of 17 I had achieved a level of competency in meditation practices, and since these early years I have regularly continued, making meditation an important part of my life. For the people of Vietnamese, meditation is a traditional activity central to Buddhist philosophy. It is a most important aspect in daily life. The practise of meditation becomes not only an aspect of Buddhism's focus on social harmony, but more importantly it is an important training for development of the inner spiritual life.

It was during the period of my second practical training in Elderly Care in Finland that the idea came to me that my experience and understanding of meditation practises could be useful and beneficial to the elderly with whom I work. Though an activity and practice not common in Finland, I knew that meditation was not only not in conflict with any cultural or religious views of the Finnish society, but that there is every reason that it could be complimentary in every respect, for it is an activity addressing the very nature of all human beings. It was from this outlook that I approached Home Care Services with the idea of offering a workshop or course in Meaningful Meditation specifically for the elderly with whom I have been fortunate to be able to work and

learn.

In summary of this approach, I suggest that there is broad consensus that Mindfulness Meditation can play a positive method role in the lives of the elderly, that enables the older practitioners new opportunities to develop skills and insights that enable a calm, quiet inner environment that supports the beauty of the ageing process, and ultimately brings a sense of happiness within.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW: BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS MEDITATION

### 2.1 Social Welfare among Older People: The Risk to Well-Being

In explaining the nature of maturing and growing older, the Buddhist contemporary intellectual, author and practitioner from Thailand, Ven Payutto states that “Old age is a natural phenomenon as the body matures and experiences natural processes of physical, emotional and psychological change brought on by passing years of living, something experienced by everyone in the later years of their lives. By the laws of nature all conditioned things are impermanent and as such are subject to change, being subject to cause and conditions. Everything that has a beginning must have an end. The life of all beings following birth, leads eventually to decay of faculties, termination of life, the break-up of aggregates and the casting off of the body” (Ven P. A Payutto, 1996).

Designating people as “being of old age” usually takes place in society when older citizens come to the age of retirement from work, which may be from 55 years and older (The pension system, 2013). There are variations in this ageing categorisation in different countries. In some Asian countries for example, retirement can take place between 55-60 years of ages, whereas in most Western countries it tend to be from 60 to 65 years (Retirement Age, 2013). There is much discussion in those countries which offer pension benefits about which age older people are eligible to receive these benefits. At the moment however, there is no United Nations (UN) standard numerical criterion, although the UN has agreed the preferred cut off is 60+ years (Maybeth Weiberger, 2001).

The concept of ageing is understood in two ways. Firstly, there is deterioration of the physical body which everyone must face eventually in their lives. In the human being ageing can be divided into three periods. The first can be termed Youth, the second as Middle Age, and the third as Old Age. This approach is referred to as 'age old biological physics', or observing ageing (Dividing the Lifespan, Wikipedia, 2013). When people are faced with this process of biological ageing, there are those who adjust successfully, but also there are those for whom it is a difficult process to confront. It is not uncommon for some people not to be able to easily accept that they are becoming older, for they fear facing the difficulties of old age, and leaving behind their youthful identity, and con-fronting the reality that one cannot remain forever young. On the other hand,

there are also those who are happy in old age, for it represents the time of retirement from demands of work, opportunities for relaxation and for development of deeper spiritual values. It is in this encroaching old age period when the older person has the opportunity to contemplate about life and all that they have experienced in their lives, whether it has been difficult or successful.

Reviewing memories of the past and reviewing a lifetime of many experiences and episodes can be greatly impressionistic, healing and dramatic. It is not uncommon for these people to display emotions they encounter by not holding back tears, by displaying emotions of pain, suffering, and sadness they have encountered, as well as the joys and happiness of a lifetime past. There are many examples of the elderly who recall their golden years with heartfelt joy, but intermingled with this may be emotions of great sadness at what has changed and what is being left behind. What has happened to this joy? Regret replaces happiness, and the golden time of joy may be overwhelmed by grief, regret, and fear if there is an unwillingness to accept existing circumstances of age. Memories of a past youth and facing up to biological ageing can create an overall feeling of sadness, whether the life has been, memorable or not.

Secondly, the ageing of the mind can be affected by emotions, perceptions, thoughts, and attitude. There is a tendency in many of us to grow old without finding a piece of blue sky, a quiet place, a peaceful life, a happy situation to opposite and very different from what we may have experienced throughout life in earlier years. In life many people are facing so much suffering and pain such as lost relatives, accidents that leave many people unable or unwilling to face and acknowledge their distress and the painful aspects of their lives. Ageing of the mind can induce people to give up, fail in their efforts, and to close their lives off from the world around them. When people experience closed, cognitive, emotional blockage and a closed mindset and attitude towards life, they lock themselves off from the world, which means they cut off their relationships with loved ones and also with the community and society. It is what is often referred to as an "old state of mind". Old age is, therefore, not only limited to the physical biology of humans but to the emotional and psychological as well.

## 2.2 Social Welfare for Older People

When people reach retirement age in Western societies, they qualify to receive pension benefits and health care services. Such benefits and provisions are not always available in some Asian countries if they do not have a history of working life. But in Western countries there are two kinds of pension benefits, namely the state pension and normally a working pension connected to the work place, though for those who were not working much outside the home during their working lives, they are still eligible to receive a state pension. This pension is intended to be enough to enable old people to meet the normal costs of living.

The Social Security system of Finland guarantees that the elderly have equal right to social welfare and health services and other benefits (National Institute for Health and welfare, 2010). In Asian cultures the elderly customarily live with the family of a son or daughter who will help them with their care. But there are also situations where they are not receiving help from these other family members, but are actually maltreated by them. The elderly in such situations suffer both physical and mental deterioration. Social protection in more progressive countries such as Finland aims to safeguard the living environment of the elderly, and ensures good standards of health services for them. Furthermore, the elderly usually make more use of these public services more than other age groups (National Institute for Health and Welfare, 2010). Older people in Western cultures, especially in Finland, have sufficient support services and good living conditions.

There are three kinds of services for those of retirement age in Finland.

- For those people who still live in their own homes but need daily assistance, they can ask help from home help services whereby a home-help assistant visits them on an arranged basis at their own home or apartments.
- When an elderly person does not wish to stay, or are unable to stay independently in their own home, but are still in good health, they can choose to move into a care home offering in-house services. They will have their own room and receive many services that they require. Moreover, they can join in common activities with other people provided by these services. They may even develop new friendships here as well. In those instances when they are caring for themselves they may have to move into Elderly

Care. Here, they will receive full support from these services, even if they are in reasonable physical condition, but may be experiencing, either physical or emotional complications. As the elderly become even further advanced in years, we know that there will be many physical changes little by little, until they begin to suffer mobility difficulties. The elderly may often feel lonely when they are living alone at home, lacking connection with community or communication with other.

Ageing also changes a person's self image, a common experience when they have to forgo the familiarities of life and habits of a lifetime making it increasingly difficult to maintain the sense of self-identity on which they depend. In these kinds of situations the old person may feel that he cannot control his life and that life is now meaningless or without focus and meaning as was once experienced in an active, younger lifetime. Mental disorders are not uncommon amongst this age group who may develop disorders and problems similar to those that can occur in middle-age. There are many older people in Finnish society who suffer various levels of mental disorder and who are not getting any help with their psychological problems. Depression is also one of the mental disorders that can occur. It creates changes in body image, the ability to function in a balanced manner consistently, and can result in symptoms such as becoming physically ill, or lonely, or in developing a retiring disposition, or even clinical depression. It is estimated that such problems affect as many as 15-22% of Finnish men and 19-30% of Finnish women above the age of 65, who are suffering from mild depression.

Every second day a Finnish senior citizen commits suicide (Suicide and Older Adults, 2010). The most common cause for this problem is depression. The risk factors for committing suicide are male gender, retirement, losing a lifelong spouse, social seclusion and mental or somatic illness. Helplessness and dependence may also increase the risk. Senior suicides are often more violent than those in younger age groups. The reason may be that elderly people are more committed to their suicide decision. The Finnish senior usually has contacted health care before ending his life, but they have not communicated about their inner tensions or thoughts. Only a small number of Finnish suicide seniors receive some kind of psychiatric help. Mental and cognitive disorders are growing in Finland because of changes in the age composition. There are problem in getting elderly people to make contact with health care and in making such contact long term. The reason for this is that mental health problems amongst elderly may not be

easily noticed or they may not be taken so seriously. This vulnerable group should not be without community activities and interrelationships. There is a need to have good social relations, social support and social activity responsive specifically to the physical and mental needs of this elderly group. By being included in and fully involved into community activities the elderly can be helped to cope with the many difficult changes and challenges they face in their advanced years, which in turn help to decrease risk to diseases and mental complications.

Most elderly in Finland want to stay in their own homes as long as possible. In such situations, they can get home help services and home nursing in their home when required. They feel more secure and positive when there are family and friends living nearby and who can meet them regularly. Most older Finns live with their spouses at home but if the spouse dies, they may often continue alone without family and friends nearby. It is possible however, for them to receive good health services support at home, with a nurse coming to visit them. However, such home visits are short in duration, giving only a brief connection with someone from the outside world.

In Finnish society, grandparents do not usually live with their children and grandchildren, who may often be a long distance from them. This then results in their being isolated with no family members near enough to help care and look after them and to visit. Moreover, distances are great in Finland, especially for those who live in the countryside, so it can be especially difficult for the senior citizen who finds himself isolated and unable to visit friends and relatives who may have moved to more distant areas. Children may frequently live in different cities from their ageing parent or parents, for whom family and grandchildren have particular meaning, perhaps without meeting any of them in a year. This is one of the main reasons why every third senior person in Finland experience loneliness.

The elderly frequently experience difficulties with their physical health. If an elderly person is not able to move anywhere from their home they more likely feel lonely and vulnerable. The mental health of the elderly is as important as that of physical health. A person who has psychological problems is more likely to stay at home becoming further isolated, increasing the sense and risk of loneliness. The risk of becoming an in-patient is doubled with lonely elderly people, compared to other groups in the general



population (Renee P. Meyer, MD and Dean Schuler, MD, 2013).

These situations beg the question: “How can a way be found to enable the ageing retired to overcome loneliness or depression?” In some cities and municipalities, voluntary work has been organised and in most of them daily activities are organised for the older person at day care centres. It is here that it is possible for seniors to develop and to maintain social relations and to meet new people. Such centres also offer different kinds of activities and recreation which give structure to the older person's daily life, which can help to alleviate the sense of isolation and loneliness. For these vulnerable elderly such day activities have an overall improving effect on their life quality.

Another avenue of help to enable the elderly to overcome stress, depression and loneliness, and one that has been suggested is meditation (Fiona Macrae, 2012). Meditation has different meanings to different people. In English dictionaries only a few decades ago, meditation was defined simple as ‘to think’ or ‘to ponder’. Today a deeper understanding has evolved, and we can find meditation defined as ”a specific way of thinking that leads to mental, emotional and physical balance” (Yogani, 2005, 7). In a word, meditation means a concentrated state of mind in serious reflection. The origin of the word meditation stems from the Latin word, ‘mederi’, meaning ‘healing’(Wiki, Meditation). It is an effort to heal afflictions of the mind, the hurt ego, understanding the cause of the problem and finding a way to solve it through knowing what counter measures to take. To meditate thus is to deepen a state of understanding (Yogani, 2005, 82). Meditation as a practical addition to everyday life of any age can contribute positive and constructive effects and benefits for anyone who undertakes to learn and practice with sincerity. As it does not conflict with other activities or interests its application with the elderly is particularly relevant.

It is possible that if the elderly person practises meditation regularly every day, it can help him/her by helping to connect with their inner, spiritual self, and to derive a balanced sense of well-being and happiness in its purest form. A further benefit is that relief of pain can also be experienced through the practise of meditation as well as altering their perceptions which helps them to cope more effectively with such physical discomforts. Since meditation also reduces stress, it relieves tension in the muscles and decreases blood pressure. Meditation is known to help in the cure of various kinds of

illnesses connected with advanced age, such as heart disease, high blood pressure, emphysema and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. It can also strengthen the immune system and reduce harmful hormones and biochemical compounds present in the blood stream (Buddhist Meditation and Health, 2012). This practise can reduce depression, anxiety, stress and pain as well. If the elderly person becomes a good meditation practitioner, the practise can help to bring their physical, mental and spiritual states into balance. It is for the reason that there is a strong case for saying that this alternative therapy should be offered to this vulnerable age group as part of the social care facilities available to elderly citizens. The achievable results are a strong, positive addition to the other catalogue of conventional remedies already available in order to bring an enhanced opportunity for happiness, relaxation and health, without the burden of negative side effects of conventional chemical medicines.

### 2.3 Integrating Mindfulness Meditation into Daily Life of Seniors

This section reviews reference literature related to the topic of this research, on the benefits and other conclusions drawn from the study of Mindfulness Meditation with elderly practitioners. The Mindfulness Meditation activity was popular with the selected practitioners and instructors alike, as a practical tool to improve the physical and mental health of the elderly volunteers. Research on the topic suggests that Mindfulness Meditation might improve areas of the mental, emotional and spiritual lives of the elderly. In Western societies, Mindfulness Meditation has been successfully incorporated since the 1980s into various programs and treatments with the elderly with positive therapeutic benefits. One such pioneer was Jon Kabat-Zinn, who was integrating Mindfulness Meditation practises for treating psycho-physiological symptoms and for reducing stress. His treatments were commonly known as "mindfulness-based stress reduction" (MBSR; Kabat-Zinn, 1982, 4, 33-47). In 2002, Mindfulness Meditation-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) was developed to help people suffering from depressive relapse by blending Mindfulness Meditation and cognitive therapy (Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002, 55-60). Today there are many healthcare systems throughout the world which have successfully incorporated Mindfulness Meditation into social programs to aid in treatment of a wide variety of disorders, especially for older people. It should be noted that Mindfulness Meditation as a therapeutic approach has been practised widely in Eastern cultures for more than a

thousand years, and that it is only in recent years that this approach has begun to gain attention and to spread in many Western societies in more recent times.

Depression is one of the illnesses suffered by older people. Meditation has been shown to decrease the risk of depressive relapse. Numerous randomised control trials have yielded results in support of MBCT as an effective treatment for recurrent depression, especially for those with three or more prior depressive episodes ( Ma, S. H, & Teasdale, J. D. 2004, 72, 31-40). Moreover, Vipassanā (insight) meditation has been used to enhance the treatment of several disorders, including depression ( Disayavanish & Disayavanish, 2007). More especially, Disayavanish and Disayavanish (2007) noticed that Vipassanā can “ free the mind from suicidal thoughts and impulses” (p. 1685). Moreover, they also suggest that meditation can be an aid in diminishing greed and anger and can increase will-power, self-confidence, and self-esteem (Disayavanish C, Disayavanish P. 2007, 1680-1688).

In 1958, Dr Ainslie Meares, a medical doctor, conducted research into the art of meditation at the University of Melbourne. He was applying meditation in techniques in the treatment of psychosomatic and psychoneurotic illnesses in the late 1960s. He was interested in developing meditation as a treatment for the psychological component of their chronic organic pain. During this time he undertook training in both India and Nepal for learning meditation techniques that he later applied in his approach to the treatment of pain, including that of cancer patients. Meare was using simple method in learning physical relaxation, which helps the progress of removing stress by emptying the mind, and encouraging internal mental stillness. In his research he describes that in the practise of meditation there is no striving or activity of brain function, just a quietness, a stillness of effortless tranquillity (Ainslie Meares, Wikipedia, 2013).

#### 2.4 Effect of Mindfulness Meditation upon the Elderly

Mindfulness Meditation helps the practitioner to overcome loneliness. A recent study by J. David Cresswell, Director of the Health and Human Performance Laboratory at Carnegie Mellon University, found that Mindfulness Meditation helps older adults overcome loneliness. This is because the practise regularly helps people train the mind in focusing and concentrating on positive qualities that provide support for a good,

positive way of life and living. One thing that Mindfulness Meditation does is to help people to see our interconnectedness with the rest of humanity, rather than seeing themselves as isolated, singular being in a complex and distant world and universe. In particular, the main benefit of Mindfulness Meditation is that it helps people live in the present moment rather than in an imaginary non-existent state of the future, and that the present moment is with their emotions and interactions with other people in the 'now', or present, rather than in a non-existent future (J. David Cresswell, 2012).

This has been expanded upon by Kabat-Zinn (1990), who has incorporated Mindfulness Meditation method into the treatment of medical patients suffering from chronic pain and stress-related medical disorder, has shown how using the wisdom the body and mind can help in combating stress, pain and illness (Kabat-Zinn, J.1990, 82-89). Zautra et al. (2008), conducted research to examine whether cognitive behavioural therapy and mindfulness interventions targeted as responses to chronic stress, pain, and depression. They found that mindfulness intervention reduces pain and improves the quality of every day life for older people with rheumatoid arthritis ( Zautra, A. J., Davis, M. C, Reich, J. W., Nicassario, P, Tennen, Howard, Finan, P., & Kratz, A.2008, 408-421).

Whereas Baer (2003) found that while the mechanism by which mindfulness training so dramatically improves health and well-being is not yet clear, it can be reasonably assumed that the heightened awareness of both internal and external cues increases coping strategies. Because mindfulness is a meditative practise which aims to help people identify their thoughts moment by moment, without passing judgment of the thoughts (Baer, R. A. 2003, 125-143). It can positively affect physical and emotion conditions. Praissman (2008), found that the practise of Mindfulness Meditation-based stress reduction is an effective treatment for older people for reducing stress and anxiety that accompanies daily life and chronic illness. Moreover, where the mindfulness method was incorporated within therapeutic practise for the general healthcare provision, no negative side effects from MBSR have ever been documented. From these studies it can reasonably deduced that MBSR practise are a safe, effective, integrative approach for reducing stress (Praissman, S. 2008, 212-216).

Manocha (2000) reported that meditation was seen by a number of researchers as potentially one of the most effective forms of stress reduction. While stress reduction

techniques have been cultivated and studied in the West for approximately 70 years, data indicates that they are not consistently effective (Manocha, R. 2000, 1135-1138). Practising Mindfulness Meditation brings the mind to a state of quietude, and removes negative thoughts. The resulting effect is that stress can be reduced with the benefit that health is improved. Research suggest that meditation learned during an eight week training period can reduce depression, loneliness, inflammation, and possibly to preserve function in the ageing brain. An Emeritus Professor of Psychology at Indiana State University also said that: “Mindfulness Meditation can help people undo habits that have been there for decades” (Jean Kristeller). The practise of Mindfulness Meditation can teach people to eliminate habits that are dragging them down and make choices that will allow them to become more physically, emotionally, and mentally flexible (Karen Weintraub). The references contained herein suggest that further exploration of the practise of Mindfulness Meditation as an effective tool for older people enhancing physical and mental health and well-being at an individual level is warranted. By enhancing harmony and well-being at an individual level, the practise of Mindfulness Meditation would be a positive undertaking for this age group, by developing their understanding and awareness of themselves and one another in a spirit of compassion and loving kindness.

### 3 MEDITATION AND MINDFULNESS

#### 3.1 Meditation East and West

Meditation has been practised for millennia in Far Eastern countries (Meditation From East to West). in connection with spiritual practises meant to deepen understandings of the sacred and mystical forces of life. In context of practises from these areas of East Asia, it is often associated with teachings of Buddhism. As spiritual discipline however, meditation is also associated with most other spiritual path such as Hinduism, esoteric Christianity, and within mystical Islam (Sufism). For purposes of this paper is primarily made in relation to those meditation practise stemming from the Buddhist tradition, specifically that school of the Theravada tradition, found in South-east Asia: Myanmar, Thailand, Lao, Cambodia and also in south Asia and other parts of Asia (Alexander Soltys Jones, 2010, 45).

Although meditation practises originated within traditions to deepen understanding of the inner spiritual journey, in more recent secular times particularly in Western countries, it has become a vehicle for stress reduction, relaxation, centering of focus and concentration as well as a sense of inner peacefulness. It is the art of silencing the mind. When the mind is silent, concentration is increased and a sense of inner peace is experienced in the midst of the turmoil of daily, mundane existence. This is because a silent mind is devoid of judging, clinging or rejecting. The silent mind is free from hatred, anger, jealousy, confusion and conflict (Sayadaw U Jotika, 7-10).

A key concept and term to understand when approaching meditation and that requires clarification, is that of 'the mind'. There is much misunderstanding about this term, relating "mind" to the brain, or a function of the thinking process or function of the body. The mind is not a physical object, nor can it be seen with the eyes, photographed or approached with surgical procedures. The brain is not the mind, but simple another part of the body's functioning (Venerable Geshe Kelsang). According to the Buddha, Our mind is like a monkey never staying in one place but always jumping from this place to other place. (Buddhism and Psychology.) For example, when the body is relaxed and immobile, the mind seeks to become busy, jumping from one object of thought to another. In this simple explanation is found the basic principle of the concept

that of the mind and body being different entities and that ‘stilling the mind’ is the practise of exerting a discipline upon that invisible organ. Buddhist philosophy compares the body to guest house, and the mind as a guest dwelling within it. At that time of death, the mind leaves the physical body, journeying to the next life, much as a guest departs the guest house (Venerable Geshe Kelsang). A more specific contemporary definition of the mind is “The element of a person that enables them to be aware of the world and their experience, to think, and to feel; the faculty of consciousness and thought” (Venerable Narada Mahathera, 1998, p.530).

Mindfulness on the other hand, is a term stemming from the ancient Pali language, in which many of the earliest extant Buddhist scriptures are recorded, whereby ‘sati’ is combined with ‘Sampajanna’, with this term being translated to mean awareness, circumspection, discernment, and retention (Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 2008). These linguistic renderings have been considered by scholars to suggest that mindfulness means to remember to pay attention to what is occurring in one’s immediate experience with care and discernment. Mindfulness can be easily experienced and it is known as a non-judgemental observation. It is that ability of the mind to observe without criticism, to acknowledge the existence but without developing a connection to it. With this ability, one see things without judgement and is surprised by nothing. The observer simply takes a balanced interest in things exactly as they are in their natural states. One does not decide and does not judge but rather observes.

As the concept of mindfulness was gradually introduced into the realm of Western thought, mindfulness and its associated meditation practises became more widely spread within circles drawn to the more contemplative aspects of spiritual pursuits, with an expansion of Buddhist practises becoming more accepted in this endeavour over the years. Mindfulness Meditation comes from the tradition of meditative practise, along with concentrative meditation (Goleman, 1988, 66). Mindfulness Meditation is also related to “insight meditation” or “Vipassana practise” and is playing a large role in defining how meditation can contribute to therapeutic growth and personal development (Vipassana Dhura Meditation Society, 2008). Although there are numerous approaches to meditation, each one has the same goal of cultivating an ability to focus and manage attention. Mindfulness Meditation primarily cultivates an ability to bring a non-judgmental, sustained awareness to the object of attention rather than cultivating

focused awareness of a single object, such as a word or "mantra", as occur in concentrative meditation.

Jon Kabat-Zinn defines Mindfulness Meditation as "paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmental to the unfolding experience moment to moment" (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p4). Mindfulness is a general term for using the "present moment as the core indicator of the appropriateness of particular choice" (Kabat-Zinn, 1996, 153-160). Mindfulness means cultivating a moment by moment awareness of our thought, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment. It also means paying attention to our thoughts and feeling without judging them and without believing, for instance, that there's a right or wrong way to think or feel in a given moment. When practising mindfulness, the thoughts will tune into what practitioner is sensing in the present moment rather than rehashing the past or imagining the future.

### 3.2 Meditation in Tradition of Theravada Buddhism

In this study, reference to meditation is a practise initiated through the teaching of the Buddha Gotama, gained through his own experiences and practises. Though he was taught by no one, through his investigation and practises, he established practise methods resulting in what he termed "liberation and enlightenment". The method and discipline that evolved is unique in that it makes full use of the mind, that element of the body (Defined in subchapter 2.2 of this study).

Meditation in the Theravada tradition originated in ancient India where it was rediscovered and expanded upon by Gotama Buddha more than 2500 years ago. Following his self-study and development, it was subsequently taught by him as a universal remedy for illnesses (William Hart, S.N Goenka, 2009, 45). In those countries in which are found Theravada Buddhist traditions, including Thailand, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Lao, Cambodia and Vietnam, the "Insight and tranquillity" method of meditation predominates. Through traditionally it has been connected specifically with the teaching of Buddhism, and its cultural connections, it has become widely available to and practised by persons of many spiritual and religious disciplines and by those of no spiritual faith at all. In order to help explain his teachings, it is related that the



Buddha refers to them as like a great ocean where there is but one taste, the taste of salt, and that in his teachings and disciplines, there is also but only one taste. This taste, he says, is the taste of spiritual freedom, which, from the Buddhist perspective, means ‘freedom from suffering’. It is meditation that provides the means of creating inner awakening that in turn brings liberation from this suffering and conflict (Henepola Gunaratana, 1995, 2).

There are two subjects and methods of meditation expounded in the Theravada Buddhist tradition, which, while separate, are also related and support each other:

- Tranquillity Meditation (Samatha Bhavana), also known as Development of Concentration

- Insight Meditation ( Vipassana Bhanava)

Because the aim of Samatha Bhavana is the development of calmness, it concentrates on the mind achieving an inner peace as a basis for developing wisdom. The practise of Vipassana Bhavana aims for gaining a direct understanding of the real nature of phenomena and changes of the body and mind. Both of these are methods of meditation, but only Vipassana Bhavana is regarded by Buddhism as the essential key to liberation. Both approaches seek to make the mind more calmer and more peaceful, with Samatha Bhavana made sharper and brighter through development of the complimentary approach of Vipassana Bhavana. It is through the practise of both of these methods together that the practitioner seeks to achieve peacefulness of mind, happiness and an end to the sense of suffering and conflict from within (Henepola Gunaratana 1995, 10).

In addition to Samatha Bhavana and Vipassana Bhavana, there are other meditation techniques taught and practised in different traditions throughout Asia. The different types of meditation that are acknowledged worldwide from the Eastern tradition include: Zen, Tibetan, Sahaya Yoga, Transcendental and Taoist.

- Zen Meditation: This method comes from the Mahayana Buddhist tradition predominately taught in Japan and Korea. It was also made popular mid-20<sup>th</sup> century in the United States by the philosophers Alan Watts and D.T Suzuki, and poets of the ‘Beat Generation’ of the period. In one type of Zen, the practitioner sits with thought suspended (sitting quietly doing nothing). The practitioner just watches and observes

sensations and thoughts as they arise and disappear, much in the same manner as is taught in Samatha Bhavana meditation. In a variant of this, the Zen Master will give the student a koan, or word puzzle, to ponder and reflect upon. Best results are achieved when the practitioner attends a retreat at a residential Zen meditation centre, and also meditates to a set schedule each day (Shunryu Suzuki, Trudy Dixon, 1970, 99).

- **Tibetan Meditation:** Also known as Vajrayana, Tibetan Meditation is a mixture of early Tibetan shamanistic traditions, Buddhism, and Tantric practise originating from India. In the Tibetan practise the teacher –known as ‘lama’ or ‘guru’ – is the most important element in the Tibetan practise, since each teacher has his or her particular slant in the practise. The Tibetan practise is the one that is the most filled with cultural influences from its native area, so will vary from area to area. There are many colourful deities. Due to the influence of the exiled Tibetan Dalai Lama and through continued efforts by psychologists investigating the impact of traditional Tibetan meditation practises on emotional and physical self-regulation, Vajrayana Tibetan meditation has developed a growing following in the West (Tarthang Tulku, 2005, 30).
- **Sahaya Yoga:** Regarded as a suitable meditation form of the ”general population” and easy to learn and practise, Sahaya Yoga seeks to develop ”thoughtless awareness” based upon original meditation techniques. It is practised in 15-minutes periods twice daily, and seen as a good exercise for hospital patients and staff as well as the broader public. Sahaya Yoga meditation is also known as a relaxation control and has been found to be more effective in a number of objective and subjective endpoints in practising meditation (Mark Stephen, Mariel Hemingway, 2010, 20).
- **Transcendental Meditation:** Often described as a form of mantra meditation, Transcendental Meditation (TM) seeks to prevent distracting thoughts by use of a mantra. The practitioner makes it the key focus in meditation to replace random thoughts that intrude upon the mind. In TM no particular attention is paid to the breath. As with other meditation formats, a mantra, often a meaningless mono-syllable, is repeated continuously to develop a meditative state. Typical TM practise includes two-20 minutes periods per day (Norman E. Rosenthal 2011, 94).

- Taoist Meditation: Taoism, a specific branch of meditation, helps practitioner to develop inside themselves through close observation of the things and phenomena in the world and to accept things that happen and not to fight against them. It is related to the ‘non-doing’ concept of meditative practises. The Taoist approach has been used for thousands of years to help people content with stress and the challenging issues of their times. There are no specific postures or inner concentration and in comparison to other approaches, it seems almost relaxed. Reflecting on its flexible approach, the American philosopher and Buddhist Alan Watt said, “Contemplative Taoists will happily sit with Yogis and Zenists for as long as is reasonable and comfortable, but when nature tells them that they are ‘pushing the river’ they will get up and do something else, or even go to sleep” (Alan Watts, Al Chung-Liang Huang, 2009, 55). In other words, the Taoist disciple tries to adopt a lifestyle corresponding to the movement of the universe or the Tao (Taoism, 2005, 63).

### **Meditation and the Elderly**

I have been a practitioner of meditation for many years. It is a useful technique that is suitable for anyone, of any age and disposition, and can be undertaken within ordinary daily life, whenever they comfortable, does not rely upon strict posture positions. For these reasons I have felt that it is particularly suitable for older people with whom I have practise with some meditations. There are four postures from which one may choose, and can be interchanged during the meditation period. It gives good result to those who practise regularly on a daily basis. It was while working at Elderly Home Care Services that I become interested in developing a meditation program to introduce these vulnerable people to learn and practise this meditation technique during a three month period. I had observed while working with them that many of these elderly people suffered various forms of stress and even alienation, loneliness, and depression. I felt that it would be possible to help alleviate some or all of these negative symptoms through the meditation I myself had been using, and set about developing such a program.

Vipassana meditation is practised to develop not only deep concentration of the mind but also liberation from all kinds of mental and physical sufferings, through realisation of our body-mind processes and their true nature. This is the ultimate goal of Vipassana Meditation. Mental and emotional distortions can be found in every human being and in

both the young and older generations. Everyone wants his mind to be free from mental distortions so that they can live in peace and harmony, all the more so the elderly, who, in their later stages of life, have far little opportunity to develop the skills and abilities to address them (Venerable Sujiva, 2000, 195).

Most meditation methods emphasize concentration and focus upon one point or object, thereby achieving strength of concentration, which results in peaceful states, and in extreme cases are said to give rise to super-normal powers. To differentiate between mindfulness and concentration we can quote their characteristics:

- Concentration holds on to and fixes the mind to the object as though one is holding tightly to something and not letting go. It is said that is similar to staring at the television screen, unable to move the eyes away from it.
- Mindfulness, however, is like making a careful observation of what is happening on the television screen (Venerable Sujiva, 2012).

In other words, concentration pins the mind to its object, while it is mindfulness that carefully and thoroughly gets a good look at it. When we find out what that thing really is, it is said that insight wisdom has been developed. From here it can be concluded that concentration can come without mindfulness, but when mindfulness is present to some degree, there is concentration.

### 3.3 Basic of meditation disciplines and Meditation Religious

As previously described, meditation is a practise that helps one to achieve develop balance mentally and physically as well as emotionally. With meditation, depression, stress and anxiety, loneliness and other negative emotional states can be addressed and treated. Meditation is used to help those who practise it to reduce, and even to eliminate stress and in turn enables that person to make more positive choices by enabling them to think more clearly and to achieve a quality of inner liberation from emotional turmoil. It is also a way to develop greater capacity for relaxation and at the same time to train and strengthen awareness. It is a way of entering and focusing the self, a way to half constant verbal thinking and to relax the body mind, this is also a technique for keeping calm the central nervous system, a way to relieve stress, bolster self-esteem, reduce anxiety, and alleviate depression. In Buddhist thought meditation can be called the Great Teacher. It teaches us to recognize the good and bad things appear in our mind through

understanding. The greater is one's understanding, the more flexible and tolerant one can be, and the more understanding one develops, the more compassion one can display towards others. We can look deeply inside and see self delusion and our own human problems. We have seen our own humanity problem and learned to accept it as it is. When we have learned and accept it for ourselves we will not suffer from it.

The introduction of Mindfulness Meditation to the elderly is to help them to identify and to reduce their own sense of negative emotions, eg: suffering, from both physical and emotional pain, and to develop a detached observation and awareness of the contents of their own consciousness. It also has the potential for transforming the way in which we respond to life events and prevent relapses in affective disorders. Mindfulness Meditations is not only relying on a theoretical definition, but also placing into practise that which is important in order to effect a shift in awareness and consciousness.

Once a practitioner develops a facility with the method, he/she will experience the benefit by himself without the need for assistance from others. If however, they do not regularly continue the practise, any positive results will be elusive and minimal benefit will be gained. To whatever extent one practises they will derive results from it based upon their own efforts, for no one can another to do it other than to further educate and teach the methods to be used. The main goal of Mindfulness Meditation is to help our mind being calm and peaceful. If our mind is peaceful, we will be free from worries and mental discomfort and so we will experience true happiness. If meditation is practised on a daily basis the mind gradually become more peaceful with the practitioner experiencing a deeper, purer form of happiness.

This part as well could be called "meditation and religion" for, the history and the spread of meditation is closely related to the history and the spread of religions, namely the Asian religions Daoism, Hinduism and Buddhism, as demonstrated in the following sections:

It is believed that already as early as 10,000 years ago Tantric meditation was practised among tribes of Southern India (Meditation Originate). Three thousand year-old records from China refer to meditation in terms of merging oneself with nature (Meditation Origins). Taoism (Daoism), practised in China at that time, was both a philosophy and a religion, focusing much upon the practise of meditation ( Meditation Origins.) The

oldest records concerning meditation date from 3000 B.C. in records describing Vedic meditation that have been found in Hindu texts originating from that time ( ABC of Meditation). Since Hindu religions are based upon Vedic traditions, it is easy to understand that meditation has always been an important part of Hinduism.

The third religion in which meditation has played a significant role is Buddhism. Siddhartha Gautama, who lived in the Indian subcontinent about 500 B.C., was the founder of the spiritual pursuit that came to be known as Buddhism. According to these teachings, meditation is the eighth and highest level of the “Noble Eightfold Path”, as defined and taught by Buddha. Today there are three main schools of Buddhism: Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana. For all of them, meditation is a central way and method to find enlightenment. With Buddhism, meditation has spread to all continents (Venerable Narada Mahathera, 1998, p.241).

The three Asian/Orient-based religions, Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism (Daoism), are referred to as meditation-centred religions. On the other hand, the three monotheistic religions of Christianity, Islam and Judaism can be referred to as prayer-centred. They know meditation too, but it is playing a different and much smaller role than it does in the Asian-based religions (Meditation in the World’s Religions). As described by ERIC REYNOLDS The very word ‘meditation’ had meanings that differed in the East and West. In the East, it is conceived as an inner quiet that opens one to the larger reality in which one is immersed. In the West, it was generally associated with contemplation of a particular subject. One meditated on something. It could be said in the West, meditation has meant a way of working with thoughts, while in the East it had to do with letting thoughts settle down (Meditation comes to West).

In Christianity prayers (address to or dialogue with God) are the main form of contemplative behaviour. "[Christian Meditation](#) is a term for a form of prayer in which a structured attempt is made to get in touch with and deliberately reflect upon the revelations of [God](#)"( By John Piper, 2003, 95-100). It was especially the monks and Christian fathers who used and recommended special forms of Christian meditation. Unlike in the Asian based religious traditions, Christianity in later periods did not teach the art of meditation to the more common believers, although there are references to meditative activities in the earlier days of Christianity and medieval periods (Prayer

Meditation, Wikipedia, 2013). The Catholic Church expressively has warned not to mix Christian meditation with some forms of Eastern meditation, especially what is called "New Age" (Way of praying). Islam also acknowledges meditation, with the aim to "empty your heart and your mind from everyday thoughts and to fill them with only the love of God (Allah)". This practise is similar in concept to that of the Christian idea of meditation. Judaism, the third monotheistic religion, knows meditation as a way to come closer to God. As mentioned above, the western meaning of meditation is not congruent with the eastern meaning of this term. In Europe and in the Americas, as well as in Oceania, Christianity had become established as the prevalent religion. In North Africa and in Near- and Middle East, as well as in some parts of Oceania (Indonesia), the same referred to Islam. Thus in these parts of the world, meditation was seen differently and played a much smaller role in religious teaching and life, than it did in South East Asia, East and Central Asia, where Buddhism and Hinduism were and are the prevalent religions (John Paul Caponigro, 2012).

From the view of meditation, the world is divided into at least two parts. In greater Asia, meditation was and is a central part of practising religion and widely practised as a main constituent of spiritual activity. For the rest of the world dominated by the Judeo-Christian-Islamic historical traditions, where meditation in the mode of 'emptying the self' as found in Asian practises, prayer has been the predominant everyday activity of believers. This has remained for the better part of the past 2000 years, coinciding with the advent of Christianity followed by Islam in the sixth century AD. In an early step of 'globalization', starting in the late 19th century, Asian traditions of meditation found their way into the Western world (Gil Fronsdal).

In the Western world, meditation as practised in the Eastern mode was given a boost when, "In 1893, an Indian swami named Vivekananda was invited to the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago. He electrified the audience with his message of the unity of religions. He said the meeting ground of them all was the perfect silence of meditation" (Meditation comes from West). Other meditation teachers from India followed him to Europe and North America. Initially in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century they were regarded as strange men from the east and only found very small acceptance in the Western societies. This changed after the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1962, an Indian yogi, or “spiritual master”, Maharshi Mahesh, published books about a meditation method he called “Transcendental Meditation”. His ideas drew wide interest and followings in a Western society where people were seeking expansion of consciousness and new mental and spiritual experiences. The world-famous pop group The Beatles and other public figures were among his followers (Meditation comes from West).

Following this introduction in the 1960s interest in Eastern philosophy and its focus on meditation rose significantly. Such was the influence from Oriental and Asian culture, that a numbers of books was published, centres for Eastern studies were established and even Asian fighting arts became popular to a wide segment of the Western population. Later, the Dalai Lama, spiritual leader-in-exile of Tibetan Buddhism, benefited from this interest, making Asian thought and spiritual traditions even more popular in the Western world. In recent decades the connection between many Westerners and their traditional religious teachings and beliefs has undergone much questioning, more specifically from the Christian perspective ( Joanne Beckman, 2000).

At the same time, there has evolved an interest in and demand for learning more of the nature of “the inner self” , and in a world seemingly focused upon the superficial, stress and uncertainty in the midst of flux and change and the ebb and flow of increasingly changing life patterns, a desire for inner peace, rather than contemplation upon Divine attributes alone. This appears to be increasingly important and more important in a world that seems to have little time for known traditional values. It is no surprise then that other spiritual influences from distant and culturally unconnected areas of the world, particularly Far Eastern Asia, have gained a foothold, been tested and now increasingly accepted. In this evolving concept, meditation plays an important role. However, unlike in Asia, meditation in the Western context, is not seen as a part of religion, but as a way to find peace of mind and happiness, and a vehicle to better understand the deeper qualities and spiritual values of Western cultural tradition.

#### 3.4 Pre-requisites of Meditation for the Practitioner

As with many disciplines there are certain underlying concepts and background information that is important to know and understand by practitioners in order to form a good foundation for success in the field. With meditation it is both helpful and essential



that those beginning to learn have a reasonable understanding of its elements and steps necessary to develop the correct approach. Participant should know that all forms of meditation discipline have four elements in common. In order to make the practise of interest and simple, I steps I introduced were designed with the age group in mind and to minimise any physical or mental stresses.

- **Meditation environment:** Meditation should be practised in a quiet time and place where the practitioner will not be disturbed, and when they are alert and awake. Any time of morning, afternoon or evening is suitable.
- **Posture:** Depending upon the meditation type being practised, there are four common postures that are generally used. These are sitting, lying, standing and walking. The practitioner is free to choose whichever of the four postures is comfortable for them. However in the Zen meditation tradition, the Zen master will often advise to choose the sitting position because this posture can prevent the beginner falling asleep.
- **Concentration:** Focusing one's attention is usually a part of all meditation practises. The practitioner chooses to focus on an object or the sensation of the breath. Some forms of meditation involve paying attention to whatever is the dominant content of consciousness.
- **Breathing:** Breath and breathing form in all meditation disciplines an important cornerstone of the meditation process. The breath is observed, with a focus upon the sensation of breathing or 'seeing' the breath in a mindful, attentive way. When the mind wanders away from this focus, without force the meditator returns attention to the breath allowing the distractions to simply 'be', coming and going all the while 'watching' the breath.

Mindfulness Meditation is one of the major practise widely methods used in Buddhism. The main purpose of this method is to guide the practitioner into bringing attention to the sensation of the flow of the breath in and out of the body. The practitioner focuses attention on what is being experienced, without reacting to or judging it. This practise helps the practitioner to experience with greater balance and acceptance those thoughts and emotions found in everyday normal life, which for everyone, including the elderly, can form obstacles to an inner tranquillity. Mindfulness is a type of meditation that essentially involves focusing one's mind on the present moment. The practitioner seeks to be mindful, or aware, of thoughts and actions always in the present moment, where time is irrelevant, and without judging himself, and without attachment to the thoughts.

In the beginning there may be many obstacles that seem to appear for the novice practitioner, such as the mind wandering, some physical discomfort, an inability to maintain focus on the selected object or image, and even falling asleep. To achieve good results the practitioner should develop a strong determination, and persevere with effort and patience. Although immediate result can be experienced, just as it takes many years for a person to be qualified in a profession, similarly to be a good practitioner in meditation, it will take some time to control an elusive mind and calm the senses.

Just as when one learns a new skill in performing some task, there are always other specific tools for practise as well. The beginning student of a discipline needs to develop an understanding of the concepts before beginning, in order to help develop the diverse skills that will be needed in the undertakings as time goes on.

Meditation Steps:

- a) The meditation practitioner begins by developing concentration. The eyes are closed, the focus is placed upon the breath and breathing, and the action is observed. A counting technique can be used as well to help in building concentration and to lessen distracting thoughts, and the mind from wandering.
- b) Breathing: The breath is counted silently in the mind, one through five. At the conclusion one starts over again. Attention is focused on the air inhaled and exhaled through the nose entrance. When distractions arise it is ignored and focus is returned to this breathing process.

To succeed in meditation, one must train in the right way and practise regularly. The practitioner should be able to gain positive benefit from meditation to help provide them with the sense of inner peace from calming of the mind . When the mind is peaceful, they will be free from worries and mental discomfort. Buddhism teaches that the persevering practitioner will experience what it calls "true happiness", but when the mind is not peaceful, they will find it very difficult to know ease and the sense of what Buddhism calls "happiness". If one trains in meditation, the mind will gradually become more and more peaceful, and the practitioner will experience a purer form of ease and inner tranquillity, which eventually becomes a permanent state of being. The mind is seen as being like a balloon blowing freely in the wind controlled by external circumstances. For the meditator who has persevered in the way of mindfulness, success is measured by the sense of true tranquillity that is unaffected by external forces.

## 4 RESEARCH IMPLEMENTATION

### 4.1 The Purpose and Research method

This research examined the effects of the practise of Mindfulness Meditation upon elderly volunteer participants during a three-month period. The study explored how Mindfulness Meditation might be a method for older people to choose as a technique to reduce and cope with loneliness, stress and depression, and to show how it is possible for them to easily adapt this new model into everyday life.

#### **Research Method**

The researcher chose a qualitative approach because of the small number of participants in the meditation group, and the time period was relatively short. Qualitative research is the type of research that attempts to discover new phenomena within a specific research subject by researching individual agents that are relevant to the subject. The qualitative method is especially effective for studying subtle nuances in attitudes and behaviour, and for examining the process of meditation over time. This method is rarely criticised for being superficial. Another advantage of this style is its flexibility. The research design can be modified or changed at any time. On the other hand qualitative research also provides a unique way to inspect a single phenomenon and its processes in a way that helps researchers to understand as much as possible from an in-depth approach.

Qualitative research can be conducted by the researcher using only a questionnaire, a note book, and a tape recorder. In this instance the researcher incorporated the interview guide approach, using a set of open-ended questions to elicit information from the respondents. The questions could be used in any order to allow the interviews to flow spontaneously and to allow the interviewer to follow up on any important unanticipated responses. The interviews involved face-to-face interaction enabling probing, repetition and elucidation. A key consideration is that the respondent is free to respond free-form at length in his/her own words. Informants can be interviewed on an individual basis or in focus groups.

To assist in the matter of language, as English was used to address the participants, and they were all only Finnish-speaking, , a work colleague interpreted from English to

Finnish on behalf of the researcher during presentations as well as during the actual meditation instructions. The questionnaires also were translated into correct Finnish for each participant to ensure accuracy. The questionnaires concerned the meditation techniques used with participants during the program's duration of three months. The researcher collaborated fully with all the respondents to ensure that each of them fully understood and attempted to learn and practise this new activity.

#### 4.2 Data Collection and Analysing

There are many different ways for researchers to collect data for studying. In this study the researcher mainly collected data stemming from the participants' involvement in the process of meditation, individual interviews with them, reference books, articles, and similar resources. The main reason to collect such data is to facilitate right decisions in support of a theme or knowledge of the research in question. Such data collected helps the researcher to be open-minded and flexible in the course research and subsequent analysis. Interviews have several advantages. If a respondent does not understand a question, the interviewer can clarify it. Some questionnaires were unsuccessful because the participant gave a vague response. The observations and conceptualisations which may result from interviews are valuable in their own right, and may also provide the basis for further research, both qualitative and quantitative, at a later date. The most effective interviews were those where the respondents felt comfortable about expressing their opinions, as this conveyed a sense that they were reflecting valid observations about their experience of practising meditation.

Holding individual interviews with each participant helped me to understand their attitudes and emotions from the answers they provided. The form of questions was the same for all the interviewees. The interview helped the participants to answer questions easily with knowledge and experience gained in the short period of practise we had together during the course, about their Mindfulness Meditation. Mostly the questions related to the process of meditation and participant's personal opinions about this technique they had been learning. They were able to answer the questions in an open-minded way and able to freely to give their own opinions in the individual interviews than in general discussion that were held in each meditation session.

## **Analysing Data**

To collect reliable data for a research topic is not easy but the analysis of the data collected is even more difficult. The researcher needs to analyse in minute detail as much as possible what data is collected to get precise and reasonable results from the process. I was analysing the individual interview results of all respondents in support of the main research. When the data was collected I had to write down all the answers for similar questions on paper, then look carefully at every answered question to distinguish whether it was the same or different. Then I analysed the responses in detail, and given explanations as to why they provide the same and different answers from the same question, when they were practising together at the same time. From the data collected in the answers, I sought to choose the right theme in order to present an accurate picture from the analysis procedure. In other words, I analysed what I have seen and observed with each of the participants and their attitudes and responses in being introduced to these entirely new, and in some ways, alien activities of meditation to the elderly volunteers.

### **4.3 Process of meditation**

It was while I was doing specialised work training practise at a care home for the elderly as part of my undergraduate studies course in the Autumn of 2012, that I developed the idea of introducing meditation to the elderly. My view was that, as an experienced student of the meditation discipline, it could be an ideal and authentic means to address and to help alleviate elements of distress I frequently encountered amongst these older people with whom I was working. The first step was to discuss the idea with the manager of Home Care Services, and to propose a plan for introducing meditation to the elderly as part of their health and recreational programs. I explained to her that while the proposed class was intended to introduce meditation to participants, it was also my intention to collect data through observation during the sessions, from which I would analyse the results from our working together in support my thesis work. I explained to her that I had been practising for many years in my home country the meditation methodology I intended to introduce, and also detailed as well what I perceived as the substantial benefits that the participants could reasonably expect to realise.

Following in-depth discussions, the manager agreed that I could initiate a trial program with volunteers. In addition to the basics of the classes themselves, she asked me to establish and explain about a plan schedule and activities for the sessions. My original intention was to establish these group activities three times per week to last for approximately one hour each. Initially the Director did not accept my plan schedule, as Home Care Services already has many activities every day for older people, so a schedule of three sessions per week she considered to be impractical. The second reason was that would be no one could help me to interpret from English to Finnish for participants, since my ability with the Finnish language is insufficient for the demands of such an activity. She eventually decided that the meditation activity could be combined together with the Zumba exercise group every Tuesday morning, and that the Zumba leader would be able to assist me by interpreting my English to Finnish during the meditation sessions.

Following this decision, the meditation activity class was formed to follow the Zumba session. Once it was agreed, the director publicised information to the older users about the new meditation activity at Home Care Services every Tuesday morning welcoming their participation. The initial program was to be conducted during a three-month period, for a total of 12 meditation classes or sessions. Once it was established, I planned to conduct these classes for 10 sessions, with the two remaining periods dedicated to individual interviews with the attendees. In this initial undertaking there were 12 volunteer participants who responded to my proposal, and who participated in the meditation activities during the three-month period.

During the first session at the introduction, I explained to the new participants who had come that while the class was intended to introduce meditation to them, I was also intending to analyse the results from our working together to support my thesis work. I made it clear that all personal details were to be confidential in my writings, with no one being identified other than by a number, and that I hoped all the participants would be willing to work with me. I explained that I believed that the technique I was about to introduce, Mindfulness Meditation, could be of great benefit to them as older people, in addressing the many changes taking place in their lives as they grew older. Its principle, I explained, is nothing magical or mysterious, but simple techniques to help focus the mind to enable it to help them in many aspects of daily and long-term living.

Each session of 60 minutes was divided into four smaller periods. In the first part, I spoke about the theory of Mindfulness Meditation for 25 minutes, followed by group singing of a meditation song for five minutes in the second part. It was in the third part when the actual meditation instruction and practise was taking place, lasting about 15 minutes in total that we began to put into practise what had been explored in the first period through theory. The fourth period was given to a question-answer session of 15 minutes in order to provide an opportunity for the participants to voice questions, concerns, or otherwise discuss what was being experienced in the meditation process.

At the first meeting I queried everyone about meditation techniques, and whether they were familiar with them at all. Although most of the participants had heard about meditation, none had any prior experience, making it an entirely new undertaking for them. Owing to the wide variations of personal backgrounds, emotional and physical capabilities and some uncertainty amongst some of them, it was necessary to develop a step-by-step approach for short periods of time, enabling them to gradually grow into the idea and process of instruction and practise. At the core of the Mindfulness Meditation practise is the development of practitioner skills of observation concentration and mindfulness. At this initial session I provided the participants with a general introduction to meditation background and concepts, in which there was great interest. I felt that it was important for them to have a good grasp of the theory of meditation before undertaking the actual practise itself. Throughout the undertaking I encouraged questions and answers during the theory work, and the participants were free to ask questions at any time during this part. Most of the group liked listening to relaxing music and in singing, so I encouraged them in singing meditation songs, to help make their minds alert after listening to the theory explanations. I covered a different theory aspect in each session that was related to the practise method being introduced at that time. I then introduced Mindfulness Meditation and its benefits in general terms. One of my key points of interest was that participants know more about meditation concepts and the value of them in terms of their spiritual selves.

It was at the first exercise that I introduced the participants to the many new techniques and the steps that we would be learning to help in the meditation process. These included the essentials of physical positioning such as a good sitting position, keeping

the back straight, feet flat on the floor and comfortable clothing, positions of hands resting just below the navel, or resting on the thighs. I explained that the main purpose of a good sitting position is to be comfortable and alert, and that lying down is impractical as more likely one would fall asleep! The actual meditation process required quite specific directions. These are the steps to enable the mind to observe and become free from the constraints of habit. The participants learnt the art of relaxing the mind and head, the how to then focus on the in-breath and out-breath effortlessly, all the while remaining relaxed inwardly always being aware of each phase of the breathing process.

I emphasised to them that it is this learning of the correct breathing process that is quite crucial to develop a successful meditation technique, whereby the mind can be freely observed without interference from externals. The breathing, with its rhythmical flow all the while observing the mind, could be observed by feeling the stomach rising and falling. For those who found this approach difficult, I helped them to develop focus and concentration using a counting technique, which can be equally successful. In this latter method, the practitioner just counts breaths one through five silently in the mind, starting again when they arrived at five. By keeping their attention focused on the air passing through the tip of their nose, the meditator is able to minimise wandering of the mind, but when they found the mind wandering off, without force, they gently guide the mind back to the breathing and observation. However, this time, instead of counting each breath, they could simply observe the entire breathing process mindfully. To do this indicates that practitioner has become relaxed, and is not forcing him/herself in the process. Gradually, with practise, the participants found that they too, were able to gently bring the mind back to the breathing when distracting thoughts would arise.

Each of the sessions followed an identical format: theory, singing, meditation practise, subsequently followed by discussion and observation of participants' reactions. This had the purpose of my learning each participant's personal reaction and experience in each of the sessions. This in turn, provided the opportunity to correct or improve any aspect of a person's experience during the meditation training. I thought it important to maintain continuity of practise and schedule in order to provide limited variation to ensure consistent observable results.

Observation: Each of the participants attempted to practise and to learn this new activity



of mediation, though of the 12 registered, four were not regularly in attendance so their results are incomplete in the survey. They listened carefully to the theoretical parts, and did their best to participate in the practical parts. If at any point or time they did not understand or required clarification they were always free to ask me, particularly because older people may not be able to remember specifics, or they could wait until the end of each session. Even though some people had difficulty in mobility and moving, everyone who signed up for the course was present for each of the sessions. Once they understood the objective and the concept of Mindfulness Meditation, and began practising and following the theory step by step, they were able to have the first stages of experience from the practise. A difficulty for all of them was that of having difficulty in consciously following their inhaling and exhaling. I encouraged them to continue, noting that it is always difficult to learn new techniques, so time and patience were necessary, just as in learning a musical instrument or other skill. Once the participants became familiar with methodology following a few sessions, they were able to practise on their own at home. They became satisfied that even after a few sessions that they were able to identify and experience more calmness of mind, and actions.

At the beginning there was one attendee who experienced resistance in the inhale-exhale practise because he found it 'too difficult' and didn't wish to exert the effort to learn. Another person had reservations and doubts about any benefit of learning meditation through the group sessions, and that he could practise on his own without learning from anyone else or the group, removing his own self-doubt. Overall there were no particularly negative reactions to the course. Each of the participants achieved different result levels, some with very positive views, and others with more modified views. Some people managed positive results in a short time but others felt that it was taking them a long time, perhaps reflecting differences in emotional, psychological and spiritual make up. From my point of view each participant achieved a different level from others, which is not unusual in such an exercise. Results depend upon one's makeup as well as the amount of effort and dedication to the exercises.

There were some participants not following the guidance and instructions being provided, which is seen as resulting from a less disciplined mind. Sometimes they came to the group more for relaxation and to enjoy the social interaction of the group. On the other hand most of the participants did try to concentrate and follow, and incorporate the

methods as taught, and listened carefully to explanations of the methodology and benefits of meditation. The group was always very interested in listening to my explanations about the benefits of meditation. One participant asked how one can gain positive results and benefit quickly, to which I replied that it is dependent upon what the practitioner puts into the process, how intently they practise, and how often. I recognised that a practise time of only 15 minutes was only marginally long enough at the minimum to allow enough time to really become engaged in the learning and practising methods. Despite this limitation everyone was very pleasant in the learning process. They always tried to remember the basic methods and to apply in practise.

Usually there were questions at the end of each practise session relating to techniques. In speaking with each of the participants individually and collectively, it became clear that while were not at all familiar with meditation activities, everyone was positive in that they were learning new things at this time of life, and enjoyed the sessions. Though meditation is not particularly popular in Finland, and certainly not available within elderly care programs, some people had heard about it but never thought to try. For them this was the first opportunity that they were able to practise and learn, then to continue by themselves. In general they all were curious how meditation works, what it does. Even at those times when some did not want to continue and to give up, they were encouraged by my talks and explanations. In the early stages the practical application parts were found to be the more difficult, but willingness to continue grew as time went on. Once people overcame their resistance and initial difficulties in the required disciplines they became quite positive and encouraged, and were more willing to continue.

It was explanation about theory that seemed to attract the greatest attention, and the process that the mind goes through, and the effects. Participants were very interested in listening to explanations about theory, though it required more than one or two sessions for the practise and meaning to become meaningful and points discussed remembered. Usually participants experienced good and positive feelings after each session, identified as: peace of mind, calmness, relaxation, enjoyment, comfort, and a cessation of thinking and emptiness of thought. Some quite quickly developed an interest in continuing at home, with different postures such as lying down, or sitting in a relaxing chair in a quiet room.

## **Participants' Background**

### Reaction of Different Client Groups

#### A: 65 - 75 year age group

- Lady No 1: Moved into care 3 years ago and is still in good health. Though she had heard about meditation, she had not participated previously. She also joined in many other activities at home care with other senior people.
- Lady No 2: Came into elderly care about four years ago. She had trouble with her knees and sometimes she had difficulty in moving. She had heard of meditation but she had not practised it before. She liked to join any kind of activities with others.
- Gentlemen No 3: Moved to elderly care about two years ago, physically in good condition. He had heard about meditation but had not yet practised it before joining the group practises. He also practised various of healthful activities.
- Gentlemen No 4: Came into elderly care four years ago, suffers from high blood pressure. He had heard about meditation but had not yet practised it. He liked to do light exercise such as chair Zumba.

#### B: Reaction from 75 - 85 year age group

- Lady No 5: Came into elderly care 6 years ago, has trouble with high blood pressure and with knees joints. She usually required assistance when moving and required special equipment. She had heard of meditation but she had never practised it. She liked to do activities with other residents.
- Lady No 6: Began elderly care seven years ago. She is alert and of good mind, though she had difficulties with her knees, and required assistance equipment when moving. She had never heard about meditation technique methods. She was curious to learn about it and wanted to join healthful activities.
- Gentlemen No 7: Moved into care six years ago, of good mind and who did a lots of exercise. He looked to be in good health and physically capable for his age. He had never heard about meditation. This was the first time he had joined in the practises. He always joined all the activities at elderly care.
- Gentlemen No 8: Came into care eight years ago. He has trouble with his knees and with high blood pressure. He had heard about meditation but he had not practised it before joining this session meditation. He often participated in other activities.

#### 4.4 Ethics of the Study

In undertaking this study, I have found that Mindfulness Meditation has valid, viable and positive aspects to help improve the mental health and well being of the elderly. It has been demonstrated in research related to this topic as well as my own empirical experience during this study, that only positive effects on the health of seniors have been derived from meditation practises.

One of the aims of this research has been to develop awareness through the technique of Mindfulness Meditation to help elderly people learn a realistic way to address and resolve difficulties people of the age group may face at this time in their lives. In addition to introducing them to meditation and teaching them the intricacies of meditation activities, a major motivation was that of enabling there to be the subtle form of healing power that can be realised through the meditation activity. It should be noted however, that this research is not premised on the presumption that those in the focus group were themselves experiencing particular problems, but that in a broad generalisation it is known that the age group is prone to stresses specific to ageing as mentioned in this research. My interest has been to introduce a simple, tranquil way of healing that can be easily learned to meet the challenges that many may be experiencing or may experience in future . Guiding others how to meditate has also taught me more than being a student listening to meditation talks by masters of the art which I have done in the past. It has encouraged and demanded of me to fully examine what I instruct, and to communicate that guiding in a coherent manner.

In this research topic the qualitative method of data collection was chosen. The researcher was observing those attributes of qualitative research that concern ethical issues and all supportive data for this undertaking.

The material for theory guidance in the process and collection of data was taken from reliable and trusted sources. The theoretical part was thoroughly and clearly explained to all the participants in the practise of Mindfulness Meditation, and they were instructed in step-by-step stages to ensure ease of understanding and clarity in their learning of the new methods being introduced. In the case where questions were posed I

sought to answer for ease of comprehension, as this material was entirely new for nearly everyone. Part of my project was to be aware of the health and comfort of the participants, and to observe any possible complications that might arise during the three-month course.

All data collected from interviews with the participants was analysed based exactly upon the responses they provided. There was no individual personal information or identification. All participants were informed of the purpose of this research at the beginning during the first session. At no time was there any deception or misrepresentation, and all steps were put in place to ensure privacy on every level, and that all research and interviews were freely answered.

The majority of the qualitative research methods were derived from the activities, from face-to-face engagement, observation and the questionnaires. Before I conducted the interviews, I made sure that the participants were already aware what was involved in the research process and the purpose of the study. The participants were also made aware in advance on how long the interviews would take, the procedures that would be undertaken, and the questions to be asked. They were assured that they were free to discontinue interviews at any time should they not wish to continue, and were reassured that no personal data would be recorded and that their individual contributions could not be recognised. They were also informed about the university where I was studying and why I need to do a research as part of my bachelor's thesis. There were no incentives given to the participants in any form to encourage them to participate in this study.

In the qualitative research method it is also incumbent upon the researcher to respect the confidentiality agreement that he/she signed before carrying out the research. In this case, the researcher should safeguard the identity of the participants, for example by not writing their names or in any way exposing any information identifiable to them. In addition I have in every respect done all I can to ensure confidentiality by not releasing material to third parties. No names have been recorded or referred to at any time. It is not possible to identify any statement or contribution by an individual in any way.

Participants who took part in this project were not selected by the researcher. All participants were volunteers who joined the group of their own free will as part of the

research process in full agreement to cooperate with me throughout. I explained to everyone that this method is not magical or mysterious, but simply consists of techniques to help focus the mind, to enable them achieve a peaceful mind which in turn could help them to solve any difficulties in many aspects of daily and long-term living that they might encounter.

It was essential to do everything possible to develop trust between myself and the participants as researcher in furtherance of ethical research practises. It was understood that some information that might be disclosed either publicly in the group or individually during interviews could bring about emotional shock and feelings, thus all the more importance was given to confidentiality and trust. The researcher has no permission to share out any information about the participants. Some information could be agreed between researcher and participants mentioned on the paper. They were assured that they have a right to complain and obtain feedback if it were found that there is incorrect information recorded.

The researcher has felt confident that he has had the complete trust of all the participants. They knew where the researcher was studying and the purpose of the research. The topic research itself was not that sensitive and involved no harmful practise. In social research, the field of study has an ethical value to a researcher. The researcher at no time was demanding of any requests from participants, and the researcher always asked their permission if there is something to change or if it were a private and confidential discussion. In the course of this research, the interviewer visited each participant in their own apartments for undertaking individual interviews. The participants did not need to come to the meditation session hall for this purpose, thus enabling them to feel most comfortable in answering questions.

## 5 RESEARCH RESULTS AND SUMMARY

### 5.1 Initial Experiences in Mindfulness Meditation Techniques

The initial goal of Mindfulness Meditation is to achieve a calm and quiet mind so that it is able to fully focus and observe what happens inside and outside of the physical and mental spheres. This practise can be approached gradually and therefore the participant should start his practise by focusing his attention the main subject.

Most of the practitioners had heard about meditation before but they had not practised it. Their general impressions were that they found it a positive experience and that they derived some good general benefits from it.

- As can be seen Participant No 7, a lady, summarised her thoughts by saying:

“ Se Voisi olla ratkaisu mielen ongelmiin” (TR: it could be a solution for mind problems).

- There was one older gentleman who did not think much of the meditation technique. He had doubts about its practise and he was uncertain whether it would have any good effects or benefits for him. His view was that he did not experience anything positive results from it because he did not believe in meditation theory or its practise. However, he was present each time in the meditation sessions.
- There were two practitioners who had never heard about meditation before joining the first meditation session. They were not familiar with meditation at all and for them it was a totally new experience. On the other hand, though there were some uncertain and even negative impressions, most participants enjoyed the new experiences and learning meditation through the lessons and sessions, which were all new for them. As well as genuine desire for learning the methodology, there were instances of those who joined such as the client who came because she was just curious to know more about it.

Participants were generally in agreement that it is difficult to control the mind and thinking process, to follow the method of inhalation-exhalation and to concentrate on an object to allow the mind to “wander away” without being connected to it. One participant felt pain in his body in the early stages of his practises. It is not uncommon however, for such discomforts to appear with new participants in the early stages of the

meditation practise, using muscles in new ways, and experiencing new postures and seating positions. They can, however, manage and adjust to these effects after a few sessions by continuing to practise and learning more of the skills and techniques as time goes on. They are usually able to resolve those difficulties by themselves. Two participants reported that they found that the meditation process to be easy. When questioned they confirmed that they understood the theoretical part, and found it easy to enter into the practical part of applying meditation theory, and that they had no problems doing so. Most respondents agreed that the technique of meditation was a positive exercise for older people with one person adding that it could be practised by anyone and that it did not depend on a person's age but rather that it depends only upon being willing to follow the method as instructed and to follow practise it.

When the mind is associated with patience, for example, it is possible to solve many difficulties encountered each day. Anger is such an emotion that can be resolved through the meditation process. For the participant who has realised the benefits of meditation it becomes an important and meaningful way of daily life, developing into a routine in the same manner as do eating and brushing teeth. practise of meditation can help reduce stress and anxiety, increase positive states of mind and enable the practitioner to experience greater contentment and well-being (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1992, 55).

Most participants said that they wanted to see meditation introduced to everyone. It has not yet become a popular practise in Finland, for there are not yet many people who know about it or its benefit. It appears that they prefer to work with methods familiar to them, for there is more confidence in the known, rather than the new, and unknown. Although meditation is widely known in the general Western societies, it remains generally unfamiliar in conventional Finnish society. The practise of meditation in Finland has no known history of being introduced to the elderly in Home Care. There are meditation groups practising in the south of Finland such as Nirodha Insight, Meditation Group, Turku Meditation Center, Sumatikirti Buddhist Center, and the Helsinki Zen Center ( World Buddhist Directory). These centres offer organised meditation courses and welcome those people who are interested in meditation. These centres welcome visitors interested meditation students to learn and practise the art. They wanted first, however, to practise it and to get good results before introducing it to others. There was one other person who did not want to recommend the activity to other



and to try to teach them, because she felt that she had not enough competence or experience. In addition, there was one other person who did not want to introduce it to other because he had not yet found benefits and did not feel that he could support the activity.

Most participants with whom I worked had no prior experience of the meditation techniques I was introducing to this group of volunteers. They only had their first experience when they came to the first session. The most important and interesting things to learn in this activity is breathing in and out with all of them having a good feeling experiences. Their own experience of the process can be described as follows: To be mindful, he breathes in, and mindfully again breathes out, exhaling slowly and consciously. Breathing in he knows he is breathing in, breathing out he knows he is breathing out, breathing in he knows his personal time is important, breathing out he feels his worries are fading away, dissolving into emptiness. He continues to develop a peaceful mind more and more with this repeated inhaling and exhaling.

The elderly meditation class participants were in agreement that what they encountered in the sessions together was useful to them, but that they had never known how to use it as a mindfulness exercise. It is very useful exercise to help us to live in the present moment, rather than in a distant world created by wandering mental imagination. It is not too complicated and does not require any pre-condition or state of mind. Although those participants have the same opinion that breathing in and out is the main object of this mindfulness exercise, it was nonetheless difficult for them to follow it correctly at the outset. It was necessary to move slowly so that they were able to gradually train themselves to experience the process in their own way.

In the words of one participant on the first day of the meditation class, she referred to it “as glorified nap times”, when her thoughts were quieted, and she fell asleep. Following a few sessions of practise however, she was able to stay awake and to concentrate on the main objective. She likes to think her centre of consciousness migrated back to her heart. Most participants had the same new experience in practise, observing their minds while focusing on the present. They mentioned that it was difficult to relax. When they closed their eyes their minds started to recall memories, or began ”thinking” many things. In their own accounts, their minds usually all day long spun stories about their

health, their finances, their families and other concerns. Often they were not even conscious of the internal soundtrack unspooling in their minds and yet it was the greatest source of stress in their lives. Although the mind is capable of creating life-affirming stories, it more often placed them into darker moods, and if they were still holding bad emotional feelings, those feelings just bubbled up and then their minds veered into criticism, self-pity, or worries about the future. The participants said that they only experienced these features as they started to apply the mindfulness tool of "mind-observation."

Most of the participants also had the same opinion about the techniques of meditation. It was mentioned that by practising meditation, they found it was more about training the mind and learning new ways of keeping the mind at peace and in a state of calmness. They also said that previously they mostly did physical exercises and that only helped in relation to physical needs. Thus if they were experiencing negative elements happening from their living environment or family and other conditions, they realised that the mind easily fell into a darker frame. When this happened individuals in the group usually put up with it until it came to an end. Unfortunately, however, some elderly people become depressed or lonely after living with this negative imagery for a long time. To correct this negative state requires more training to develop the skill of knowing how to work with the mind process, but experience clearly shows that this is quite an achievable goal. This is particularly relevant for the elderly because of the propensity of older, vulnerable people to fall into lower, darker states if they are confronted by loneliness, worries or other negative circumstances in their lives. In the interviews participants also said that they believed that if they practised this meditation activity properly and regularly, there would be a great benefit in it for them.

There was only one person, Participant Number 5, who had prior knowledge about meditation. He had read a Dalai Lama book and some other similar literature for beginners, but despite this it was not much help for him. He commented that they were usually vague and complex. He also had turned to books about Buddhism, however he became overwhelmed with so many lists of principles that he had no idea where to start. They gave him so much information and instruction that he ended up more confused than before. I told him that what he said was true. If one wanted to start to practise meditation one needed to find a Zen Master or person who has experienced meditation

in practise so that they could instruct the participant in the beginning, for one cannot learn meditation properly on his own any more than designing and constructing a building with no knowledge of architecture.

## 5.2 Effects and Recognising change of meditation on practitioners

Most participants in the program referred to their experiencing a sense of harmony through their learning the meditation process and that they found that their “thinking distractions” from their wandering minds had become relaxed after each meditation session. Other participants experienced different effects such as having positive feelings in the mind becoming quiet, calm and feeling lighter. From practising the meditation techniques the mind becomes more aware, and clearer from distracting thoughts, and with a sense of not thinking anything at all. Experiencing good and positive feelings is possible because the mind becomes free from distractions and addicting thought patterns following the meditation process.

Following several meditation sessions participants will become aware that they are having new experiences and perceptions in the way that they perceive thoughts, in that they begin to recognise their thoughts regardless whether they were positive or negative. One of those in the training program, Person No 7 found harmony through meditation that is, He stated

“ Se oli aika hyvä kokemus”. (TR: It was quite a good experience).

Additionally, Person No 7 mentioned about his/her additional good experiences by following quote:

“ Se myös autta minua voittamaan sisäisiä ongelmia kuten sellaisia jotka syntyvät vihasta, mustasukkaisuudesta, riippuvuudesta ja osaamattomuudesta” (TR: It also helps me overcomes inner problems such as those created by anger, jealousy, attachment, and ignorance), or

“ Se autta minua osaamaan mielenhallintaa ja tuo sisäistä rauhaa, se antaa kyvyn kasvattaa hyveellisiä aikeita jotka saavat minut tekemään hyviä tekoja” (TR: It helps me

know how to control our mind and brings inner peace, it enables me to cultivate virtuous intentions that lead me to perform good actions).

Participant No 5, an older gentleman acknowledged experiencing a benefit from meditation by saying:

“Meditoiminen autta minua löytämään sisäisen rauhan mielessäni”.(TR: practising meditation helps me to find inner peace in my mind).

He also mentioned in his own experience by saying:

“ Harjoitettuani meditoimia oivalsin, että onnellisuus ja kärsimys ovat mielentiloja, joten niiden pääasiallisia aiheuttajia ei voi löytää mielen ulkopuolelta.(TR: After practising meditation I realized that happiness and suffering are states of mind, and so their main causes cannot be found outside the mind)

One person spoke about how after beginning meditation exercises, he realised that his mind seemed more calm and relaxed than previously. He also said that he was developing an ability to be more conscious of the ways in which his mind or thought processes were distracting, and that he was developing a means of exerting some control over this, which he found very positive.

Participant No 1, a lady, mentioned in her own words about her experience and feelings after practising meditation saying:

“On mukava tulla meditoimaan, sain siitä hyvän olon joka kerta kun harrastin sitä” (TR: It’s nice to come to meditate, it gave me a good feeling each time I practised it).

A recognised result following on from meditation is that one develops a sense of “being the owner” of his own mind (Understand Mindfulness). It helps one to learn how to be the owner of his/her own mind and thinking processes, rather than being subject to its arbitrary whims and distracting thoughts. When negative thoughts appear, one may experience becoming distracted for a moment, but once recognised through focussing upon the process of mind and thoughts, one sees it as being useless and these distracting thoughts quickly leave and dissipate. Participant Number 5 mentioned that when he

joined this process and learnt how to meditate, he realised that meditation for beginners didn't have to be complicated, and that it would probably be better to read from books to get to know more after experiencing it in practise.

One participant did not experience positive results from the meditation activity. He reported that each time he tried it, he felt good but at other times he did not experience the sense of well-being and positive feelings he had come to expect. This suggests that his way of engaging in the meditation practise was not correct and that he needed additional time for training and practise more than the others.

None of the participants reported any particularly negative or bad effects from the meditation activities nor were there any complaints.

The participants found several beneficial effects of Mindfulness Meditation, particularly in relation to attention, pain, sleep, and achieving well-being. Furthermore, combined with other methods of pain reduction, they experienced increased body awareness leading to behavioural change, better pain coping, and direct pain reduction through meditation. Participants also described improved attention skills.

Most participants mentioned improved sleep patterns as well as quality of sleep once they began the regular sessions. They also described achieving well-being during and after a meditation sessions that had immediate effects on mood elevation, but which additionally through long term practise they thought would have beneficial effect on improved quality of elderly life. The participants only identified the immediate related effect on pain reduction, improved attention, improved sleep, but felt confident about achieving well being resulting from extended periods of practise Mindfulness Meditation.

A number of participant described pain reduction in using meditation in that they were able to constructively distract themselves from pain by placing their attention on routine activities. Others tried to be more fully aware of their daily activities as they became more skilled at implementing the meditation skills they were learning. They spoke of relieving pain by concentrating on their breathing, and by using breath concentration to successfully relieve pain in a number of situations. Generally most participants had the shared opinion that practising meditation helped to calm the mind and make them

capable of improving their mental capabilities. In other words, the main benefit of this activity was in developing concentration, and in other areas such as living and experiencing in the present moment, not in a world of imagination constructed by the 'busy mind'.

In brief, they said that their experiences could not be recognised by theory only, but only through gradually being led and developing their own skills in the meditation process. For many participants, anger is a common and good starting point which a short experience in practising Mindfulness Meditation can alter, because it is easily noticed and dissolves faster than most other emotions. Once one begins to watch the anger within, he will make an interesting discovery. He also will find that as soon as he knows he is angry, it will melt away of its own accord. It is very important that he watch without likes or dislike, for the more he is able to look at his own anger without making judgments, without being critical, the more easily the anger will dissipate.

Other participant added more of their own experience about this point. This they see with some certainty, for as mindfulness becomes stronger and more alert the mind becomes more aware of its own workings. And in the case of anger, as soon as it arises, the meditation practitioner realises it and allows this negative emotion to dissolve into nothingness.

The effect of Mindfulness Meditation can also help the elderly to find improvement with their memory. Many elderly feel that they lose or develop a bad memory when they turn into old age. Mindfulness Meditation could be one of the treatment techniques for improving memory, because meditation is a method of mental training which focuses one's attention and it helps to increase the control over brain resource distribution. It improves both attention and self-regulation. Meditation significantly decreases stress and may elevate brain-derived neurotrophic factors which protect neurons against stress and stimulates the production of new neurons. In other words, meditation practise has also been associated with physical changes in brain structure. This research provides structural evidence that meditation practise promoted neural plasticity and experience dependent cortical plasticity.

At the end of the meditation training I asked my work colleague, who acted as

interpreter for my English to Finnish, of her impression of the meditation process for the elderly participants. Her view was that that meditation was positive for everyone, and that it had positive influences upon them for both physical and mental condition. Her own conclusion however, is that this practise requires a longer period of application because it takes time for both understanding and skill in developing this approach. Especially for the elderly, it is difficult to learn and assimilate new habits and activities and as she also noted previously, religious faith in Finland has been so much a part in the lives of elderly people that they didn't have need for anything else to address their inner selves, as well as the this meditation exercise being an unfamiliar activity, alien to the Finnish cultural framework.

If elderly people suffer from severe memory problems or diseases, I don't recommend meditation for them (if meditation is new for them). However, in general her conclusion from the feedback is that meditation can have positive, constructive effect, and be a positive influence that can enhance the quality of life for the elderly, whether they have a religious background or not.

### 5.3 Summary of the Result

Research analysis was conducted more successfully than the researcher had anticipated. By and large most results obtained from the participants were of good and positive benefit. There were no negative effects encountered, reported or observed. It should be noted that instruction in this meditation exercise was undertaken for a short time only and not over a prolonged period. Participants' efforts to overcome obstacles encountered during the initial sessions were by and large successful, resulting in positive effects, and in gaining more experience. After analysing the responses of the participants, my own opinion is that some people are more open to exploring new experiences while others are uninterested unless their interest and imagination can be captured perhaps through some additional persuasion. I could see that through the meditation period some women in the group were more open-minded and more amenable to the new undertaking than were the men who tended to be more sceptical beforehand. However, once the males experienced positive results they too, tended to become more trusting and open to possibilities of positive benefits within themselves and from meditation itself.

Based upon survey results and interviews, it can be seen that those participants who experienced tangible positive benefits from the meditation process had begun to learn how to keep harmony within themselves and how to avoid loneliness, stress and depression, and negative elements which often plague the elderly. This is a particularly problematical if they are experiencing a sense of isolation. Even though these meditation sessions lasted only three months, it can be seen through a review of questionnaires and direct interaction that the participants were able to understand the basic theory and practise of meditation, and that they were able to recognise and realise benefits from it. In the case of those who are suffering physical or mental distress, statements and study observations of the program participants confirm that they found their states more peaceful with diminished anxiety than before joining in the program, even though they were involved for a short period.

It is recommended that the interested person learn the basics of meditation from a qualified instructor rather than doing so alone without instruction, then continue the practise for about 20 to 30 minutes daily. For the elderly this offers the possibility of bringing a way of peace and harmony into their lives. My own suggestion that If one does not understand theory well, it is difficult to know where to start, because there are so many different forms of meditation, and each one has different techniques and purposes. This makes meditation for beginners even more confusing because many people don't realise that each form of meditation has a slightly different purpose. Here I would recommend to participants that it is by means of actual learning through instruction by someone experienced in the art and science of meditation, which will enable them to understand one form of meditation, and commit them to learning it well and practise it diligently. This makes meditation for beginners much easier. If one starts jumping from one form to another, they are not going to make easy progress. And if he/she does not see any benefit from his efforts, then he will give up very quickly.

Although there was not enough time available to extend sessions to more than one hourly session once weekly, in the short periods available to introduce them, overall these volunteers responded well and were pleased to be able to learn and practise, particularly with regards to how it could benefit them. In particular, they voiced hope that by developing a degree of facility over the mediation process, that they could address those emotions of loneliness, fear, uncertainty, and physical disability, and



sometimes depression. Of particular interest was that of developing deeper spiritual insights for spiritual harmony in these, their later years and final chapters of their lives.

These participants were about to adjust to the new meditation exercises in the first few sessions. Being of senior age, they required more time to assimilate and adapt than would younger people, so I orientated the sessions taking this into account. The main results came not from theory, but from that of practising and assimilating the process of meditation, for while theory is necessary to form a background picture and understanding of what is taking place, it is through experience that growth and learning takes place. Once the initial phases were passed and a rhythm became established, and the elderly participants had adopted this new methodology, they recognised results and their attraction to the sessions increased, followed by an appreciation for what they had developed.

The class participants were always punctual for the class even those who some movement difficulties. I was always very pleased to see that all the participants made a good effort to be on time for every session. From the outset I sought to explain and to clarify the theory aspects, and to carefully instruct the step-by-step in practise. I felt it important that everyone should clearly understand the theory, and to assimilate and remember the tools of practise.

There were some participants who had not found any significance in the earlier sessions, so I encouraged them to be patient because experiencing results requires time and practise and continued training to overcome the habits of life, and to learn the steps through repetition and correct technique. Following a few practise sessions in the group, and with self-practise at home, they began to find positive results from the new experiences. When this began to happen more regularly, everyone became more excited and interested and delighted, which encouraged them to further commit themselves to the process. Because they often tired easily from sitting too long, I divided the practical time into 15 minute sessions so that the participants would not be negatively affected by their physical conditions. I encouraged them to continue practising on their own time at home, to take advantage of their own familiar surroundings and with suitable postures. We held question-answer sessions to address uncertainties and possible problems. At the conclusion of each session I held conversations with each of the participants in order to

gain fresh insight material and to keep clear notes. My one regret was that the meditation periods were so short, but also my pleasure was in seeing that the participants began looking forward to their next sessions and practising together.

## 6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

### 6.1 Discussion and Finding

The aim of this study has been to explore possible beneficial effects of a group of elderly men and women learning and practising a form of meditation known as Mindfulness Meditation. This study has explored the research question through the observation of this group's participation in the research process, and by analysing interviews with them, incorporating theoretical background with previous research in the review of literature.

This project has also been for me a demanding challenge, to plan, develop and undertake such a study with the elderly through Home Care Services, and to develop the requisite research for this paper. Although I am very familiar with meditation techniques and have instructed a number of different people in the past in meditation techniques, this was my first time to be guiding inexperienced older people into the meditation process. More pointedly however, is that this is as far as I am aware the first time that such meditation activities for the elderly through Home Care services, have been developed and offered here in Finland. For most of the participants this was also the first time that they had encountered meditation techniques. It is gratifying to know that for the most part they were joining and continuing this project with very few difficulties.

From my experience gained through my studies and the research process adopted, I suggest that what was found and learned in this three-month experience was generally of benefit for everyone involved. My observation is that for the participants, there were good and positive influences on their physical and mental condition, and for me as the organiser and leader, a rewarding experience of working with a group of people for whom the benefits have the potential of contributing much to their lives. However, I feel that the meditation sessions should have happened more frequently as it takes time for participants to understand and gain familiarity with what was being offered. Especially for older people of this age group, it is less easy to learn and assimilate new ideas and techniques than for the younger generation. I also came to understand that religious beliefs in Finland which are of major importance for older people, following a lifetime of religious observation they are inclined to feel that they are not in need of anything else.

Regarding their suitability for possible inclusion in meditation instruction, I feel that if older people suffer from clinical memory problems or mental incapacities, I do not recommend meditation for them. Older people who undertake meditation training should still have an ability for good memory in order to remember and follow the instructions provided, and to be able to apply the methods and techniques that are taught. In Finland the elderly have sufficient support services and good living conditions to cope with most complications and challenges they might face in the ageing process as they grow older. However, I would still argue that in general meditation is a good practise and way of life for the elderly to supplement any other activities they may be undertaking, and to help to resolve areas of stress and distress that may be connected with ageing. Everybody meditates for different reasons. Meditation is a practise often undertaken by those seeking to develop their spirituality or even trying to work through emotional problems. Whatever a person's individual reasons for exploring it, I believe that my study does show that with openness of mind, the right instruction of theory and training, and regularity of practise, it can have beneficial results for this age group as well as for those of younger years. If the practitioner learns this method with an open and positive attitude and with good Mindfulness Meditation instructor, and he/she continues to practise it with regularity, then soon or later he will realise clear, beneficial results from it.

What were my expectations when introducing Mindfulness Meditation to these older men and women at Home Care Services? This particular subject involved certain pre-conceived ideas on my part, when I was working with the elderly and when I began the course. From my previous years of experience and knowledge of the subject, I was sure that Mindfulness Meditation could be a valid, important addition to the lives of such elderly persons, to help them adjust to the kinds of stresses particularly associated with the age group. In this study I have tried to help them to become familiar with meditation techniques that could be useful and have beneficial effects for them. From the outset the people who joined this initial program were very excited to be introduced to these new experiences and techniques.

Results of this study have indicated that the participants were pleased to have become involved, and in learning and experiencing a way to approach life in a more sublime

way, which has helped them to achieve and experience results that they realise will contribute to their overall well being in future. Although the meditation program was established to run for three months, the actual time working together during that time was relatively short, of one session each week lasting one hour. Once we began and the participants achieved some confidence, they began self-practising at home. I recognise that in some respects Mindfulness Meditation can be difficult for the beginner with no prior experience or knowledge of what is involved. Thus I felt it very important to develop a guiding structure based upon simple theory, to make it easy in order for the participants to easily remember and understand this new way of thinking and doing, with its focus on the interior person.

During this study I observed that with Mindfulness Meditation training it is possible improve the mental well being of seniors. Most importantly, in working with those elderly who are learning to meditate, I found that they experienced enhanced inner and outer states and awareness. One of the most important benefits of meditation is that it helps the practitioner to achieve a balanced emotional equilibrium by reducing negative ego states such as the sense of possessiveness, anxiety, anger and other such negative emotions. Continuous practise of meditation encourages the qualities of compassion and increased ability for self control. Furthermore, regular practise of meditation can help people maintain healthy relationships about them. A common misconception often connected with meditation and outside this study's purpose, is that the practise is meant particularly for older people as a way of gaining spiritual wisdom and mental peace, when in fact, it also concentration and makes minds sharper. Such an attribute is a desirable one with any age group.

In my own observations, I think that for many people the main purpose of practising meditation is to help people to resolve the many kinds of distortion the human being faces, such as sorrow, worry, stress, strain, depression and despair, so that one can live peacefully and happily and free from these negative emotional states.

If people make an effort to learn and to practise good meditation techniques to achieve calmness of mind and a peaceful countenance, worries and concerns are dissolved resulting in an increased sense of well being and what can be described as 'true happiness'. If this peacefulness is not present, even for one living in the very best

conditions, happiness and contentment will remain elusive and distant. Training of the mind, which is the focus of meditation when practised properly, will result in our inner states becoming more at peace, and eventually one can achieve the experience of a pure form of happiness, not connected to our physical surroundings or conditions. Through this medium daily life can become one of ongoing contentment, even bliss, even in the most difficult of circumstances. The mind is easily affected by whatever happens around us – that is within human nature. When the mind is re-aligned, or trained, to know that feelings and emotions are transient and unimportant, this sense of peace and well being can become permanent part of one's life regardless of circumstances. People often reflect on why they are unhappy, sad or distressed, which is 'suffering'. To this I suggest that they should find more information about the practise of meditation, which is one of the best medicines to prevent or cure many kinds of spiritual illness.

From the outset I was very aware that language could be a major barrier between the participants and me, and though I am developing skills with the Finnish language, it is not nearly adequate or broad enough to speak confidently about something as detailed and sublime as is meditation and its technical and spiritual dimensions. A colleague conversant in both Finnish and English, acted as interpreter for the entire meditation program period. I tried to locate meditation materials and books in Finnish to introduce the meditation class to them, but such publications were available in Finnish. Although there are many different activities available for elderly people at Home Care Services, there were quite a few people who were willing to participate in this introductory meditation exercise despite having no knowledge or background in it. Most of them were anticipating that it could help them to overcome various physical and mental problems confronting them in their advanced age. Early in the course sessions this was discussed together and possibilities explained to them.

I have also learned many things while working with these pensioners on the meditation project. It has been a very positive and broadening experience for me in sharing and working with them. Were the opportunity to present itself in future, I would very much like to continue to work with the elderly in Finland, although there are of course adequate and varied treatment methods available to address various conditions facing the senior person in Finland through the health system. When people of any age confront emotional or psychological problems or disorders, the norm here is to either

visit a psychiatrist through a hospital, or a psychologist or counsellor trained in these matters. Frequently medications are prescribed for what are seen as serious imbalances or particularly difficult emotional situations: depression, stress, tensions, anger, fear and so many more maladies. Patients are treated much in the same manner as the treatment for diseases, when, in the case particularly of the elderly, they may be suffering from normal human conditions stemming from old age, such as depression from loneliness, and resulting stress, emotional insecurities and related states that may eventually be the root causes of real physical disabilities.

Meditation is a valid means of training the mind. With practise, correct understanding of theory and continued practise of its methodology, a practitioner is assured of good and positive results. There are known cases when, after practising over a prolonged period, the meditator has not enjoyed positive results, and sometimes even has experienced negative ones. When this occurs it is important to learn the reasons for it and what lies behind them. It may be that the meditator has been using the incorrect method or working with an inappropriate theory or incomplete teaching, and in fact may not really understand precisely the theory practise method that has been taught. It is a reminder that in the same way as any science or skill must be taught and learned correctly in order to develop good results, the same applies to the techniques of meditation. If there are such difficulties arising from my practise and research with this group, I should wish to fully identify them and their causes in order that my teaching methods can be improved in future and that what can be learned is applied appropriately.

As a meditation practitioner, I would wish to see pilot programs initiated within the caring professions in Finland to engage the elderly in meditation methods as a constructive tool to help them to reaffirm their own natural selves, by redirecting negative emotions and feelings through meditation into positive, wholesome ways of living. I remain confident that many maladies associated with old age can be avoided or substantially reduced. Positive emotional and spiritual states through self-awareness can be derived from practising meditation, which in turn can be an effective alternative to more mechanical and medical approaches to the normal ageing process.

The question for me now is how can it be made possible to continue to help these older people to maintain this unique practise, and then to spread it to other care facilities

working with the elderly. To my knowledge no such program exists for this age group in Finland at the moment, as well as there being few qualified practitioners/teachers available. Though meditation classes and training is available in some centres in the south of Finland, the researcher has been unable to find any evidence of it being utilised through public care facilities such as the one where this research has taken place. I wish to emphasise that this method is only suitable for those who wish to practise it, and under no circumstances should anyone feel compelled or forced to undertake this training and practise. If one is not willing to concentrate on the practise, there can be little or no real benefit from it.

At the conclusion of this research work I have given much thought on what I could have done differently to better the approach were I to do it again. Were there to be such an opportunity to engage with the elderly in future, I would develop particular teaching and training techniques of instruction specifically orientated to enable the elderly to derive the most benefit with greater ease to ensure the success and development of the correct outcome. Following this initial experience in guiding meditation with older people, my observation is that such training exercises should be undertaken at least three times per week, and follow-up discussion after each session should be part of the whole program. I have no reason to believe from the results of my study that there was anything inappropriate or misplaced in the research process used.

Throughout this research I realised I have acquired considerable new understanding about the topic of Mindfulness Meditation, and through this enterprise I found new ideas on how to share the positive qualities with those who joined with me in this venture. Among the several challenges I encountered during this time, in particular I should mention the language element. Even though I had a competent English-Finnish interpreter, I feel that entire process could have been a different and better experience altogether if I had greater fluency in the Finnish language and did not have to rely upon an English-to-Finnish language connection.

## 6.2 Conclusion

Mindfulness Meditation can be a valuable activity for training of the mind, and can bring discernible benefits to one who learns and practises it regularly and has had



correct instruction in its application. Meditation does not belong to any particular culture or religion, though it is to be found in religious and spiritual practises in various forms as part of training and rituals throughout the world. It is a simple, uncomplicated method for exploring the inner dimensions of one's life. Though some religions employ meditative practises as part of their rituals, meditation itself is far removed from any set of beliefs or the distinctions of class or creed. In Finland about 76% of the population are members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. There does exist some misunderstanding that meditation is somehow connected with specific religious or spiritual practises, and that they may be in conflict with one's personal spiritual or religious commitments. From this misunderstanding comes the view that since they have their own beliefs, of which meditation does not play a formal role, they do not need anyone else's practises such as meditation. As a formalised practise, meditation as found in some Eastern religions and philosophies did spread to Western countries during many years, but it is still not widely familiar to many Westerners, especially in Finland. For the Fins of this older generation, religious association plays such a central role in their lives that they feel that they do not need additional practises. There is the added element that for many people meditation is thought of as religious practises. I suggest that this is one reason why there is so little awareness of meditation and a degree of reluctance at the time the participants joined the mediation class (Wikipedia, religion, 2013).

In the introduction chapter I had asked the following questions:

- Is meditation a technique which is suitable for older people to practise?
- Is such a technique helpful for the elderly to cope with different feelings and situations?
- How does meditation help the elderly in keeping harmony physically and mentally with the problems of stress, loneliness and depression?

Having concluded this research project I shall attempt to answer these questions:

From the perspective of helping older people to learn the practise of Mindfulness Meditation and observing the whole result of the research process, I am confident in my belief and trust that Mindfulness Meditation is suitable for older people to practise. In general, meditation can be practised by anyone who wants to do it, but I do not

recommend it for older people who have suffered severe memory loss or who have difficulties with mental disabilities. However, the practise of Mindfulness Meditation can help older people to harmonise conflicting and differing feelings, and in facing difficulties situations. Moreover, it could help them to prevent those kinds of emotional and psychological problems often resulting from the onset of old age and the stress and emotional conflicts often associated with this time of life. Mindfulness Meditation can be an important tool to address the mental and emotional distress that from loneliness and a sense of isolation often found with this age group when they find themselves mostly alone, possibly leading to depression. In order to gain maximum benefit from this meditation technique, it must be learned properly, and practised regularly. The more it is practised the greater the benefit.

By working on this research project, I too have gained more valuable experience and challenge in the field of studying and working with older people, and I am very pleased to have had this opportunity to work in such a special way. The more I worked with them the more I could understand them and their special needs and interests. If I again have a chance to teach Mindfulness Meditation to the elderly I shall have better skills as a result of this opportunity and experience just completed.

I personally believe that Mindfulness Meditation is very useful in helping us to live peacefully despite various disturbances that are so prevalent in the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century with all its pressures. Through the practise of meditation people can feel comfort and find renewed strength in facing pressures of modern living. Meditation practised conscientiously will help a person to face, understand and overcome every problem appertaining to life. It is possible for anyone to recognise the value of meditation, and how it can contribute towards inner peace and training of our mental faculties to best advantage to achieve a balanced, stress-free perspective on our lives and the world about us. Meditation strengthens the mind and helps it to understand things properly. Just as the body needs washing, feeding and medicating so too does the mind require nurturing and support to perform its functions to the best of its ability? The mind too needs the same kind of maintenance, by washing the mind through calm meditation.

Furthermore, in accordance with the findings of this research, the experiences related to

the practise of Mindfulness Meditation may initiate exploration and discussion of the relationship between cognitive and mind relaxation, and the role of acceptance and letting go of stressful thinking, emotions and attitudes. The results of my research have proven that this is possible. Even though I did not have much time and there were language obstacles, the outcomes were clear and as positive as I had expected them to be.

### **Implications of Findings for Future Research**

I encourage and support the idea that in future there should be research to investigate the effectiveness of various types of meditative and spiritually-based practises to nursing home residents and the elderly. With more sessions such as the one I have just concluded for this research, the more information can be built up in support of the benefits they can have for this particular group of vulnerable, special people. It is my sincere hope and desire that such a program can be instigated gradually into a wider scale and that one day before long more and more of the elderly can take advantage of Mindfulness Meditation. If this is possible, I am convinced from my own research and experience that it can only result in a beneficial contribution to their present and longer term well-being. It would be gratifying if one day too, it were accepted as the norm and a common practise available for our senior citizens.

Future research also needs to address the role of instructor training and personal engagement in Mindfulness Meditation practises which is recommended by Kabat-Zinn (2003). Although this research process was guiding and practising together with all participants, it was seen as sufficient in explaining and clarifying concepts relevant to Mindfulness Meditation. The participants more easily followed the instruction while being engaged in each session. Although discussion groups are recommended for that purpose, future research needs to simplify aspects related to theoretical and practical application for participants.

In this study, I have attempted to show a viable way on how elderly people can improve their mental and physical health using Mindfulness Meditation. As I have emphasised, more investigation and research should be done on this subject. In a final summary of my studies, I would be very pleased if Mindfulness Meditation could become an important part of the overall health care program for Finland's elderly.

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## APPENDIX 1

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Are you familiar with meditation? Have you practiced meditation in the past, or is this a first time? What is your impression of your experience?
2. Can you describe your general state of health and emotions at the beginning of this meditation class? Do you think the method you have learned is suitable for older people?
3. How do you yourself understand the concept of meditation? Would you like to see the practice introduced to others?
4. Can you describe any benefits you experienced while practicing meditation? Can you identify likes and dislikes arising from your exposure to the meditation practices? How easy or difficult was it to follow your breath and thoughts, workings of the mind?
5. Do you close your eyes and watch the space in front of your closed eyes?
6. Do you have many thoughts and your thinking process at the time?
7. During meditation, do you use the repeat counting approach, or feeling your breath?
8. How easy do you find it turning your attention back to counting or the breath, whenever you find yourself forgetting?
9. Do you become aware that you are the knower of your thoughts?
10. Do you fall asleep, or find yourself nearly asleep?
11. Can you describe your state of being after the practice: calmness, peaceful, or no difference?
12. As a result of your being introduced to meditation through these sessions, have you experienced greater ease in your life, particularly while dealing with difficult situations?
13. What are the most important and interesting things that you have learned about meditation these three months?
14. What were the least important and interesting things that you have learned about meditation during these three months?
15. Have you practiced at your home or elsewhere since taking the course?
16. How does meditation makes you feel in general? Did you notice any change to your daily life, and can you say that meditation helped/ did not help you cope with different feeling/ situation you encountered?
17. Did you learn anything new about yourself through meditation? If yes, can you describe examples?

18. Do you have any suggestions or comments about the meditation sessions you wish to share?
  
19. Do you think that if you were to practice meditation everyday there will be benefit for you?
  
20. What is the most difficult/ complicated aspect for your in practicing meditation, and what do you find the most difficult when you practice?
  
21. Is there anything about meditation practice or themes you would like to know that may have not yet been explained or covered?
  
22. Do you have any additional comments about this introduction to meditation in which you have participated?