

News and events

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Could violent offenders benefit from meditation?



Almost half of prisoners go on to reoffend within a year of release

The effects of meditation on violent offenders are to be investigated as part of a research project at Nottingham Trent University. The impact of 'Meditation Awareness Training' on prisoner reoffending levels – as well as anger levels, impulsivity, drug-use, mood state, optimism and self-harming – will be monitored as part of the study.

The training, which will be delivered to prisoners by experienced meditators over an eight week period, will incorporate ancient practices traditionally followed by Buddhist meditation practitioners. This includes techniques aimed at cultivating generosity, ethical awareness, patience and compassion, as well as a range of more subtle concepts.

Almost half of prisoners go on to reoffend within a year of release and reoffending is estimated to cost the UK economy up to £13bn a year. This latest study, from within the University's School of Social Sciences, comes amid a growth of interest in employing 'mindfulness' and other Buddhist-derived interventions for offender rehabilitation.

Doctoral research psychologist Edo Shonin in conjunction with fellow researchers William Van Gordon and Professor Mark Griffiths, will also study the effects of meditation upon patients suffering with fibromyalgia – a medical disorder characterised by widespread pain – as well as the general population, as part of the project.

The team wishes to assess whether the training could be an effective treatment for fibromyalgia and its impact on a range of factors including pain levels, pain perception, sleep quality, anxiety and depression. Work productivity, emotion regulation, various forms of intelligence, stress and psychological wellbeing will be measured in the general population.

Edo, who is part of the University's Psychological Wellbeing and Mental Health research unit, has been a Buddhist monk for more than 25 years. His monastic training has involved an extensive study of Buddhist practice, ministry, philosophy and psychology.

He said: "We are hoping to show that when properly executed, meditation can be an enriching and life-changing experience and that it can facilitate personal as well as transpersonal development. The main criteria for selecting the three groups was the immediate fit with strategic governmental policy, particularly in terms of helping to reduce costs.

"Reoffending costs a huge amount of money, while fibromyalgia costs the healthcare system so much as it is very difficult to treat. Finally, absenteeism is estimated to cost £11bn a year, almost half of which can be attributed to stress.

"If the findings are positive the next step will be to carry out further empirical evaluations with different groups, such as those with chronic illnesses or behavioural addictions. The long-term plan will be to place the intervention on the grounds of evidence-based medicine and to make it more widely available to service-users."

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Doctoral research psychologist, Edo Shonin

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