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The reality of fostering stress coping skills for lay Buddhists in Hanoi

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Abstract---In reality, in Vietnam, to relieve stress, many people choose to go to the temple to balance life and reduce stress. Religious belief is seen as a means to help them transform their body and mind for peace in life. Therefore, temples in Hanoi have organized many activities to help lay Buddhists have skills to cope with stress. This study aims to find out about activities to foster stress coping skills for Lay Buddhists in Hanoi. The research method includes survey and interview. Research results show that activities to foster stress coping skills for Lay Buddhists (aged 18-25) have been interested by local authorities, social organizations, and pagodas. useful activities to contribute to improving the psychological and spiritual quality of Lay Buddhists.

Keywords---fostering, lay Buddhists, social organizations, stress coping skills, training

Introduction

In the world, research on religious response is still at a very modest level. Specifically, [Carpenter et al. \(2012\)](#), studied on "Religious responses to stress, and depressive symptoms in adolescents" ([Carpenter et al., 2012](#)). The study hypothesized that religious responses would mediate the relationship between stress and depressive symptoms, with negative religious responses exacerbating the effects of stress on depressive symptoms and positive religious responses would reduce the effects of stress and depression. [Kang et al. \(2009\)](#), with the study "Effectiveness of mindfulness meditation in dealing with stress among nursing students in Korea" ([Kang et al., 2009](#)). The study investigated the effectiveness of mindfulness meditation responses to stress, anxiety, and depression among nursing students in Korea ([Stewart et al., 1997](#); [Tukker et al., 2008](#)).

In 2011, Michael Inzlicht and colleagues published the work "Religion, brain and behavior". Research has shown that brain activity and religious beliefs are closely related. Specifically, religious belief provides significant benefits to believers in their search for happiness and health ([Inzlicht et al., 2011](#)). In Vietnam, there are not many studies on this issue. In 2014, Nguyen Hong Quang, published the work "Meditation and health", in this study, the author briefly introduced the benefits of meditation and the relationship between meditation and science ([Nguyen et al., 2021](#)). In 2014, Thich Phung Son published the book "Meditation Vipasana with therapy", with this work, the author presented evidences of the effectiveness of meditation practice to reduce stress and modern diseases ([Thich Phung Son, 2014](#)). The work "Breath nourishes meditation therapy" by Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh written in 2015, has outlined practical methods to help people practice to achieve peace in the present moment. Besides, the work also highlights the value of breathing practice in daily life to help people overcome stress in life ([Daniels, 2005](#); [De Silva, 1984](#)). In brief, it can be seen very clearly that there is no work that deals with stress coping skills of Lay Buddhists deeply and offers any specific solutions and conclusions. Therefore, this is still a gap that needs to be studied ([Felício et al., 2013](#); [Couzin, 2006](#)).

Research Questions and Methodology

Research question

The study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What is the concept of a Lay Buddhists? What is Lay Buddhists' stress coping skills?
2. What is the goal of training in coping with stress for Lay Buddhists? In order to have stress coping skills for Lay Buddhists, what content and through what forms should be fostered?

Methodology

To answer the above questions, this study used the following research methods:

1. Theoretical research methods to analyze and synthesize relevant documents;
2. Survey method by questionnaire and in-depth interview. Using questionnaires and combining with in-depth interviews on identified subjects.
3. The research sample included 258 subjects, of which 196 Lay Buddhists and 62 subjects belonged to the house management board of the pagodas, the abbot of 05 temples in Hanoi.

Research Results

Theoretical research on fostering stress coping skills for Lay Buddhists

The concept of Lay Buddhists

Lay Buddhists are followers of Buddhism and disciples of the Buddha. They are household disciples who still have a family life, wife and children, etc... and follow certain precepts of Buddhism. They are people who are devout Lay Buddhists (the household disciples of Buddhism - people who follow Buddhism but still keep the worldly life, live with their families), have taken refuge in the Triratna (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha).

The ability of Lay Buddhists to cope with stress

The ability to cope with stress of Lay Buddhists is the application of knowledge and experience of those who practice but still live a normal life in terms of study, work and communication that is demonstrated by the identification of stressors, manifest stress, identify options to cope with stress and implement coping plans to reduce personal stress in terms of study, work and effective communication.

From this definition, the thesis raises a number of issues to note as follows

1. The stress coping skill of Lay Buddhists is a combination and flexible application of knowledge and experience to carry out effective actions.
2. The connotation of the above concept includes three groups of component skills such as: the group of skills in identifying stressors and expressing stress; skill group to identify options to cope with stress; skills group to implement coping strategies to reduce and solve stress problems.
3. Lay Buddhists apply stress coping skills in study, work and communication to help themselves face difficulties to deal with stress in order to stabilize and improve their quality of life.

Fostering skills to cope with stress for Lay Buddhists

Fostering stress coping skills for Lay Buddhists is a process of purposeful and planned influence of the fostering subject on Lay Buddhists through the selection of content, programs, methods, and techniques to equip, supplement and improve knowledge about stress and stress coping skills for Lay Buddhists.

Basic elements of training in coping skills with stress for Lay Buddhists
The goal of fostering stress coping skills for Lay Buddhists

The goal of the training process is to raise awareness, form attitudes and take action in accordance with stress among Lay Buddhists.

Contents of training skills to cope with stress

1. Fostering awareness for Lay Buddhists about the group of skills to identify stressors and manifestations of stress in study, work and communication.
2. Foster awareness, attitude and behavior for Lay Buddhists on the group of skills to identify options to cope with stress in study, work and communication.
3. To foster awareness, attitude and behavior for Lay Buddhists about the group of skills to implement coping strategies to reduce stress and solve problems in study, work and communication.

Forms of fostering skills to cope with stress

1. Organize short-term training courses in the locality
2. Organize theatrical form, thematic contests
3. Organizing counseling and advising on stress-related issues and stress coping skills for Lay Buddhists
4. Organize retreats: summer retreats, recitation retreats... teaching about the Buddha's teachings
5. Organize for Lay Buddhists to participate in service activities in the temple and experience activities, organize volunteering in the locality and vicinity.

Survey results on the current situation of fostering stress coping skills for Lay Buddhists in Hanoi
Current situation of implementing the goal of fostering stress coping skills for Lay Buddhists in Hanoi

Table 1
 Survey results on the implementation of the goal of fostering stress coping skills for Lay Buddhists in Hanoi

Training goals	Mean	SD
Help Lay Buddhists properly perceive stress and resolve their own conflicts.	3.67	0.47
Develop positive attitudes to stress	3.50	0.66
Choose appropriate ways to cope with stress	5.57	0.86
Distinguish positive and negative ways of coping with stress	3.75	0.34
Accurately identify stressors and manifestations of stress.	3.82	0.91
Total	3.66	

In general, the implementation of the goals of fostering stress coping skills for Lay Buddhists focuses on three basic aspects: Awareness. their attitudes and behavior. Most of the comments showed quite high agreement with the above training objectives. For example, the goal: Accurately identify stressors and manifestations of stress (Mean = 3.82). Distinguish positive and negative ways of coping with stress (Mean = 3.75). Help Lay Buddhists to properly perceive stress and resolve their own conflicts (Mean = 3.67). These are all cognitive goals in the process of fostering Lay Buddhists's stress coping skills. Most of the survey respondents showed a high agreement with the training goal of "Helping Lay Buddhists to properly perceive stress and resolve their own conflicts". This is considered a macro goal that covers the rest of the goals. In fact, the main purpose of the training is to help Lay Buddhists understand stress and develop stress coping skills. Accept stress as a normal psychological phenomenon that young people in this period will encounter more and calmly face it. When Lay Buddhists have full awareness, they will also develop a more positive attitude and make better choices about coping strategies in the face of stress. Exchanging more with Master T.T.T, abbot of Sung Phuc Zen Monastery, he said: "When Lay Buddhists have improved stress awareness and stress coping skills, it will be easier for them to cope with stress. Therefore, if a Lay Buddhists want to find a way to overcome stress, they must be aware of the problems they face and choose how to deal with them, to cope with stress...". So, it is really important to foster stress coping skills towards the above goals (Moos, 2002; Wagner et al., 1999).

Situation of selection and implementation of content to foster stress coping skills of Lay Buddhists in Hanoi

Table 2
Implementation of the content of fostering stress coping skills for Lay Buddhists in Hanoi

Content	Level of relevance		Level of implementation	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<i>Group of skills to identify stressors and manifestations of stress</i>	4.0	0.54	3.0	0.25
Ability to identify stressors	4.3	0.15	2.9	0.81
Ability to recognize the expression of stress	3.8	0.58	3.1	0.51
<i>Group of skills to identify solutions to deal with stress</i>	4.0	0.66	2.76	0.52
Ability to mobilize information sources, documents on solutions to response	3.9	0.51	2.6	0.22
Ability to analyze response plans	4.0	0.28	2.7	0.71
Ability to make decisions and choose response solutions	4.1	0.59	3.0	0.69
<i>Skill group to implement coping strategies to reduce stress and solve problems</i>	3.9	0.33	2.5	0.47
The ability to consistently implement response plans	3.8	0.97	2.5	0.21
Ability to implement response plans	3.5	0.74	2.7	0.85
Time management skills	4.5	0.29	2.4	0.26

Looking at the above data table, the author finds that the training contents are highly appreciated for their relevance, but the implementation of the above-mentioned training contents has not been effective. Specifically: Regarding the relevancy of the training contents: The survey results showed that there was a high consensus on the content of fostering skills to cope with stress in all 3 skill groups. In which, the group of skills to identify stressors and manifestations of stress and the group of skills to identify solutions to deal with stress of Lay Buddhists had a higher consensus rate than the remaining skill group, however, the difference was not large (the overall average of the contents is 4.0 compared to 3.9, respectively). This proves that most of the officials and managers at the temples and localities saw the necessity and high relevance of the content of training in stress coping skills for Lay Buddhists (Deveugele, 2015; Berkhof et al., 2011).

Regarding the level of implementation of the content of fostering skills to cope with stress for Lay Buddhists in Hanoi: The survey results showed that the implementation of these training contents was not high, as shown in the average score in most of the contents is only at 2.4-3.1. In particular, the training content on the group of skills to identify stressors and manifestations of stress and the group of skills to identify solutions to deal with stress of Lay Buddhists was done more than the remaining content. But in general, all 3 training contents have not been implemented on a regular basis. Therefore, the training of stress coping skills for Lay Buddhists still has certain limitations, especially in influencing the perception of Lay Buddhists so that they can identify and make solutions to cope with difficulties and stress that is commonly encountered in life. Therefore, in the near future, managers and abbots of pagodas need to pay more attention on choosing appropriate content and conducting regular and more methodical training on stress coping skills for the Lay Buddhists in the city.

Situation of selection and use of organizational forms to foster stress coping skills among Lay Buddhists at Hanoi pagodas

Table 3
Level of implementation and effectiveness of forms of organizing training in coping skills for Lay Buddhists

Forms	Level of implementation		Level of efficiency	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Short-term maintenance	3.8	0.65	3.2	0.64
Chemical stage. contest	2.4	0.21	3.0	0.35

Consultation. psychological counseling	3.4	0.51	3.5	0.44
Retreat	3.9	0.64	4.0	0.37
Practical experience	3.5	0.90	4.1	0.21
Volunteer activities. volunteer	4.0	0.14	4.2	0.78
Live talk	3.0	0.95	3.7	0.90
Online Courses	3.6	0.62	3.1	0.42
Thematic activities	3.4	0.93	3.0	0.33
Seminar	2.7	0.66	2.8	0.16

Considering the level of performance, the author surveyed on 5 levels of assessment: Very often, often, medium, occasionally, infrequently. Considering the level of effectiveness, there are also 5 rating levels: Very effective, effective, moderate, less effective, ineffective. The survey results show that there are differences in the implementation of organizational forms to foster stress coping skills for Lay Buddhists. In which, a number of forms are carried out quite often such as: Volunteering and volunteering activities; Short-term fostering; retreat; practical experience; online course (Mean of 3.5-4.0). Particularly, the online course started to be implemented a lot in 2020-2021, the years when the Covid-19 pandemic broke out across the country, switching to this form because of social distancing. This form is also organized on a large scale, through online software. As for volunteering and volunteering activities, the pagoda is regularly carried out as a regular activity, attracting many Lay Buddhists to participate such as: charity cooking meals, free of charge in some hospitals, organizations Mid-Autumn Festival, Lunar New Year for nursing homes, orphans... These are activities to help Lay Buddhists understand about Truthfulness, goodness, beauty, happiness, optimistic, and to reduce anxiety and psychological stress.

Besides, a number of other forms of training are organized such as: theatricalization, contests, seminars, counseling and psychological counseling, thematic activities... were also selected to organize, but they were not held regularly and faced certain obstacles such as: funding sources, human resources, and diseases. On the basis of determining the frequency in the process of organizing the above forms, the author also surveys to find out the level of evaluation of the effectiveness of those forms. The obtained survey results show the following aspects: Firstly, there are forms of training organization that are implemented a lot and offer high efficiency. Such as: Practical experience activities, retreats. Secondly, there are small but highly effective forms of organization such as: Live seminars, theatrical, and contests. Thirdly, there are regular but ineffective forms of organization, such as: short-term training; Thematic activities; Online course. Talking more with Mr. T.B.N, he shared: "Two years ago due to the impact of the Covid pandemic, some of the training content was converted into online courses that also attracted many Lay Buddhists, but this form also revealed certain limitations such as: ineffective internet connection, exchange and practice, mainly one-way lectures, not promoting the activeness of participants.

The author also learns more about the correlation of some forms of training organization in terms of performance and effectiveness such as: Retreat. With the correlation coefficient $r=0.848$ and $\text{sig}=000$, it shows that there is a strong positive correlation between the level of performance and the effectiveness of this form of training. Considering the correlation of other forms such as volunteering, volunteering also has similar results. That proves that some forms of training, if maintained regularly, will bring greater effect to the training of stress coping skills for Lay Buddhists. Thus, it can be affirmed: The training of stress coping skills for Lay Buddhists is carried out in many different forms. Besides the regular and effective forms of organization, there are still forms of organization that have not been evaluated as effective as expected. Therefore, in order to improve the effectiveness of the organization of forms of fostering skills to cope with stress for householder, it is necessary to have some suitable and practical solutions (Akanbi & Adetunji, 2016; Maba et al., 2018).

Conclusion

The work of fostering stress coping skills for Lay Buddhists has been interested by local authorities, pagodas and families, and organized many useful activities to contribute to improving the psychological and spiritual quality of Lay Buddhists. A number of pagodas in Hanoi city have organized various forms of fostering stress coping skills for Lay Buddhists, especially retreats that have contributed to relieving stress for Buddhist associated with humanitarian activities. That helps Lay Buddhists become more aware of their problems and know how to find the root of their stress.

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