Buddhists’ Health and Religious Practices*

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Introduction

• Research Needed
  – NonChristians
  – Interdisciplinary
  – Theoretical Foundation
Methods

- Pilot study
- Interdisciplinary team
- Web Survey
- Theory-based
  - Buddhism
  - Health
  - Psychological characteristics
  - & Demographic questions
- Existing Questionnaires

Health Questionnaire

- Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Questionnaire 2000 & 2006
- National Health and Nutrition Survey Questionnaires, Examination Components and Laboratory Components 2005-2006
- National Health Interview Survey 2006 Adult Questionnaire
- Multifactor Screener in the 2000 NHIS Cancer Control Module
Health Questions

- Self-rated health
- Medical and mental health history
- Utilization of medical care and preventive care
- Health insurance
- Disabilities and physical limitations
- Height and weight
- Smoking
- Physical activity
- Dietary intake
- Use of seat belts
- Intimate partner violence
- Social support

Buddhism Questions

- Personal history with Buddhism
- Tradition practiced
- Beliefs
- Participation in organized activities
- Personal practices
- Socially-engaged
Administration

- Recruitment
- August 1, 2007 to January 31, 2008
- 265 questions

Results

- Participants = 1,237
  - Buddhists = 886
  - & Practitioners/believers
## Buddhist Demographic Characteristics

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>47 years (SD = 12)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>54% Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>33% College Graduate&lt;br&gt;49% Graduate/Professional Degree</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Annual Income</td>
<td>10% &lt;$20,000&lt;br&gt;40% $20,000-$59,999&lt;br&gt;44% $60,000-$149,999&lt;br&gt;7% &gt;=$150,000</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Country of Residence</td>
<td>82% U.S.A. or territory</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>90% White</td>
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## Buddhist Characteristics

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Convert</td>
<td>86% n*=883</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of time practiced</td>
<td>12 yrs (SD = 10.66) n=883</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusively one tradition</td>
<td>66% n=748</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regularly attend meetings</td>
<td>58% n=883</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice Buddhist meditation</td>
<td>98% n=740</td>
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*Total number of responses to the Qs
# Health

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<tr>
<td>Self-rated health</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>n=718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routine checkup</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>n=740</td>
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<tr>
<td>Depressive disorder</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>n=213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety disorder</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>n=213</td>
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<tr>
<td>Could not afford meds/health care</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>n=748</td>
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<tr>
<th>Leisure Physical activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>Times per month</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>n=688</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minutes each time</td>
<td>24.38 (SD =27.85)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>55 (SD = 57.92)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Current cigarette smoker</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>n=381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetarian diet</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>n=678</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body-mass index</td>
<td>25.05 Kg/m² (SD = 5.32)</td>
<td>n=284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Servings of fruits &amp; vegetables/day</td>
<td>3.30 (SD=0.99)</td>
<td>n=554</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent energy from fat</td>
<td>33.47% (SD =3.07)</td>
<td>n=767</td>
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Association Between Buddhist Religious Practices and Health

Buddhist Devoutness Index

• Three refuges
• Meetings
• Length of time a Buddhist
• Chanting or mantra at services
• Retreats
• Scriptures
• Instruction
• Meditation
• Eight-fold path
Health Variables

- General health
- BMI
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Smoking
- Physical activity
- Vegetarian diet
- Fruit & vegetable intake
- Percent of diet from fat

Devoutness & Health

Devoutness: Not a current smoker

OR = 1.53 (95% CI = 1.076, 2.196)
  - Adjusted for Age, Gender, Income, Disability, Social support
  - n=126
Conclusions

- Largest known study of Buddhists
- Buddhists in study generally in good health
- Few direct associations between Buddhists’ practices and health
- Buddhists in study are generally devout
- Web survey feasible
- Interdisciplinary team valuable
- Model applicable to future studies

Study Limitations

- Convenience sample
- Self-selection
- Computer, Web literacy, access
- Language
- Missing data
Future Research

• Survey representative sample
• Survey specific traditions
• In-person surveys & biomedical measures
• Survey other religions