

# THE TRANSCENDENTAL MEDITATION PROGRAM AND DRUG ABUSE: A RETROSPECTIVE STUDY

W. THOMAS WINQUIST, B.A.

Department of Sociology, University of California at Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California

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Subjects practicing the Transcendental Meditation technique were found to stop or greatly decrease their use of marijuana, hallucinogens, and "hard drugs."—EDITORS

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*This study was designed to determine the extent of nonprescribed drug usage in individuals practicing the Transcendental Meditation technique. A questionnaire requesting information on amount and type of drug use before and after beginning the practice was distributed to 525 subjects attending an advanced course on Transcendental Meditation at Squaw Valley, California. The results indicated a dramatic decrease in drug abuse. Of 143 subjects who were regular users of marijuana, hallucinogens, or "hard drugs" before beginning Transcendental Meditation, 119 (83 percent) discontinued all drug use and 22 (15.5 percent) reduced drug use 50 percent or more, whereas only two (1.5 percent) continued regular drug use. The Transcendental Meditation program would appear to have potential as a therapeutic program for drug abuse.*

## INTRODUCTION

Individuals practicing the Transcendental Meditation (TM) technique describe a wide range of benefits that result from the TM program, including decreased use of nonprescribed drugs. The purpose of this study was to examine by means of a retrospective questionnaire the effect of the Transcendental Meditation program on users of various drugs.

## METHODS

**SUBJECTS**—The subjects were approximately 525 individuals practicing Transcendental Meditation who were attending an advanced course on Transcendental Meditation at Squaw Valley, California, 14–21 June 1969. About 90 percent of the subjects were between 15 and 30 years of age. This biased group of subjects was chosen because it was expected that they would all have been practicing the TM technique regularly for a minimum of three consecutive months immediately prior to the study.

**PROCEDURE**—On the morning of 21 June, the last day of the advanced course, each subject was given a questionnaire and was asked to complete it before the termination of the conference four hours later. The questionnaires used were designed by J. P. Kulka, M.D., of Harvard Medical School and contained various questions about the subject's present and past use of drugs, as well as ques-

tions concerning the date of beginning TM, age, and number of meditations missed per month. Approximately 525 subjects received questionnaires, and 484 were turned in completed.

The questionnaires were evaluated to determine if the subjects had been regular users of marijuana, hallucinogens other than marijuana, or "hard drugs" immediately before beginning the practice of TM. To be rated as a regular user, a subject must have used marijuana twice per month for three consecutive months immediately prior to beginning the practice of TM or hallucinogens or "hard drugs" once per month for three consecutive months immediately prior to beginning the practice of TM. The few subjects who suddenly discontinued the regular use of drugs within six weeks of beginning the practice were rated as regular drug users before beginning TM.

The category of hallucinogenic drugs other than marijuana included DMT, STP, LSD, hashish, peyote, psilocybin, morning glory seeds, and woodrose seeds. The "hard drug" category included heroin, opium, methedrine, amphetamines, barbiturates, etc.

The regular drug users were separated into the following categories based on their use of drugs after starting TM:

1. Subjects who had completely discontinued the use of all drugs for a minimum of three months

2. Subjects whose use of all drugs had decreased 50 percent or more for a minimum of three consecutive months
3. Subjects who had maintained or increased the use of one or more of the drugs

The results were also analyzed in terms of the number of subjects who had used marijuana, the number of subjects who had used hallucinogens other than marijuana, and the number of subjects who had used "hard drugs" prior to beginning TM and then either discontinued, decreased, or increased their use of those drugs (as defined above) after starting TM.

## RESULTS

**QUANTITATIVE RESULTS**—Of the 484 subjects, 143 (30 percent) had been regular users of drugs for at least three consecutive months immediately prior to beginning the TM program. All of these 143 had used marijuana regularly, 111 had regularly used hallucinogenic drugs other than marijuana, and 42 had regularly used "hard drugs." All of the subjects who had used "hard drugs" had also used hallucinogens, including marijuana.

Of the 143 regular drug users, 119 (83 percent) completely discontinued their use of all drugs just before or after they began TM, 22 (15.5 percent) significantly decreased their use of all drugs by 50 percent or more for at least three months after beginning TM, and two (1.5 percent) maintained or increased their use of one or more drugs after beginning TM (table 1 and fig. 1).

Of the 143 subjects who had regularly used marijuana before beginning TM, 120 (84 percent) stopped completely, 21 (14.5 percent) decreased their use, and two (1.5 percent) maintained or increased their use (table 1 and fig. 2). Of the 111 subjects who had regularly used hallucinogens other than marijuana, 95 (86 percent) stopped and 16 (14 percent) decreased (table 1 and fig. 3).

Of the 42 subjects who had regularly used "hard drugs," 36 (86 percent) stopped and six (14 percent) decreased (table 1 and fig. 4).

One question on the questionnaire was *If your use of stimulant or depressant agents has changed since starting to meditate, state why*. The subject's answer was classified according to one of the following five types:

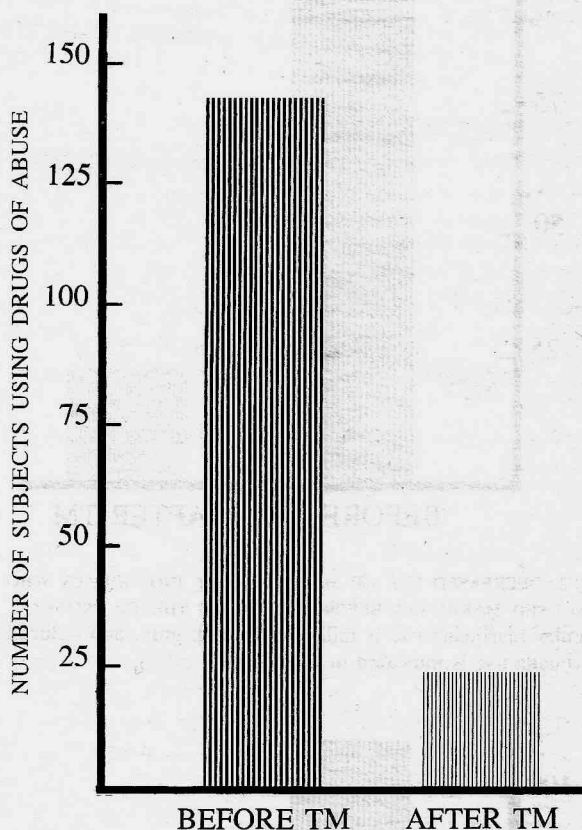


FIG. 1. DECREASED USE OF ALL DRUGS BY INDIVIDUALS WHO HAD USED DRUGS BEFORE BEGINNING THE TM PROGRAM. Regular drug use is indicated in dark gray, and reduced drug use is indicated in light gray.

TABLE 1  
DRUG ABUSE BEFORE AND AFTER INSTRUCTION IN TRANSCENDENTAL MEDITATION

DRUGS OF ABUSE	BEFORE BEGINNING TM		AFTER BEGINNING TM					
	Regular Drug Use		Discontinued Drug Use		Reduced Drug Use*		Continued Drug Use	
	N		N	%	N	%	N	%
All drugs	143		119	83	22	15.5	2	1.5
Marijuana	143		120	84	21	14.5	2	1.5
Hallucinogens other than marijuana	111		95	86	16	14	0	0
"Hard drugs"	42		36	86	6	14	0	0

\*Use of drugs reduced 50 percent or more for at least three consecutive months.

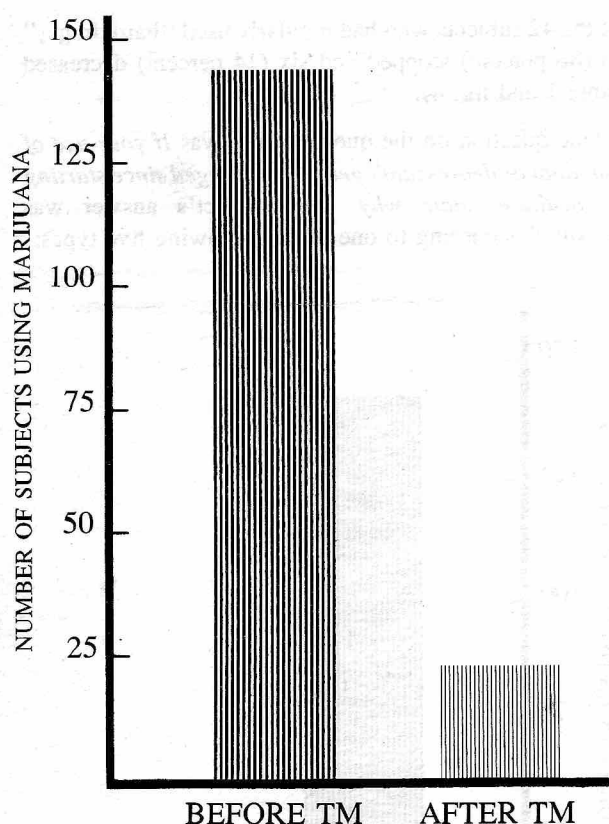


FIG. 2. DECREASED USE OF MARIJUANA BY INDIVIDUALS WHO HAD USED MARIJUANA BEFORE BEGINNING THE TM PROGRAM. Regular marijuana use is indicated in dark gray, and reduced marijuana use is indicated in light gray.

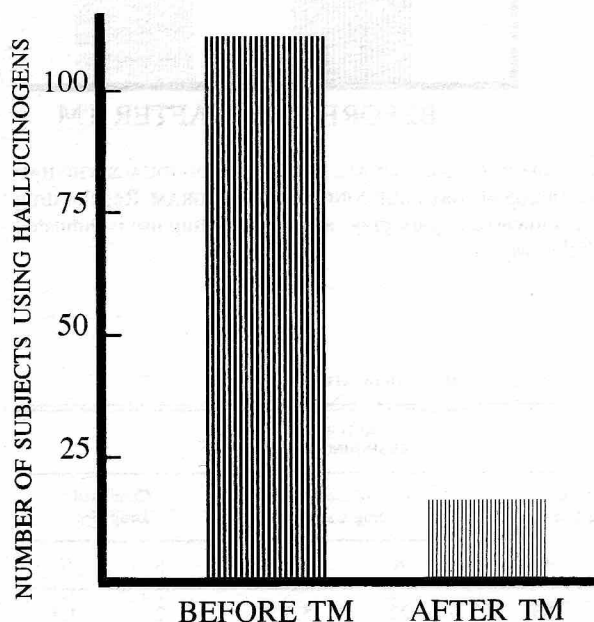


FIG. 3. DECREASED USE OF HALLUCINOGENS OTHER THAN MARIJUANA BY INDIVIDUALS WHO HAD USED HALLUCINOGENS BEFORE BEGINNING THE TM PROGRAM. Regular drug use is indicated in dark gray, and reduced drug use is indicated in light gray.

- A. Life more fulfilling (49 percent of regular drug users)
- B. Drug experience less pleasurable (24 percent of regular drug users)
- C. Desire for drugs gone (eight percent of regular drug users)
- D. Other (four percent of subjects)
- E. Not stated

These categories were determined by examining about 25 answers and then dividing them into these five distinct types. Typical answers for each type were as follows:

*Type A—Life More Fulfilling*

*When I used drugs, I was looking for something from life that I didn't have. I have no need for drugs anymore, for I have now found what life is and how I want to live it.*

*Every part of my life has greatly benefited, and now I have extreme contentment.*

*Life after meditation finally became satisfying. I no longer needed drugs.*

*Transcendental Meditation gets me subtly and progressively higher, more relaxed, more "in tune," more energized.*

*Because all aspects of my life have become better; in school, at work, my inner personal life—everything.*

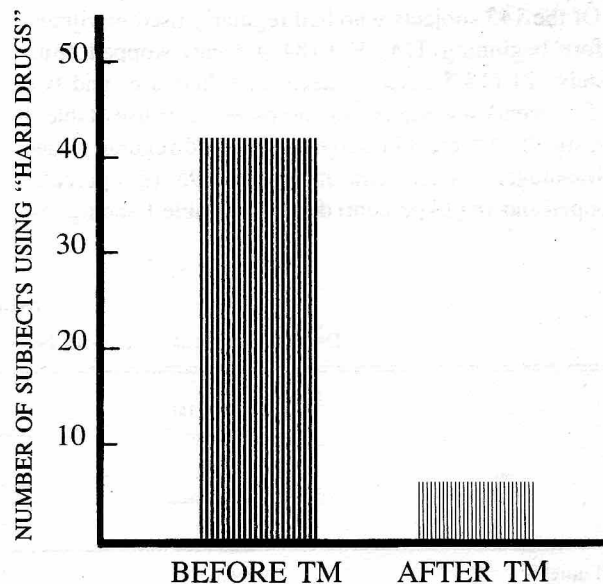


FIG. 4. DECREASED USE OF "HARD DRUGS" BY INDIVIDUALS WHO HAD USED "HARD DRUGS" BEFORE BEGINNING THE TM PROGRAM. Regular drug use is indicated in dark gray, and reduced drug use is indicated in light gray.

*Life is getting less fearful and more joyful.*

*I have not taken drugs since meditation because I feel better now than I ever did with drugs.*

*Since beginning meditation, I'm beginning to have a "real thing" about the nervous system and life-supporting action. Even coffee and beer and smoking are disappearing in my life.*

*Now I have peace of mind that I am on the fastest and safest road of expansion of consciousness and evolution.*

*I enjoy life more now than when I was taking drugs.*

#### Type B—Drug Experience Less Pleasurable

*My use of marijuana since I had started meditating was on two occasions, first, for curiosity of my evaluation of the change in my reaction to the drug and, secondly, for "social" reasons. I found it not at all enjoyable anymore, and it felt most uncomfortable.*

*The drug effect interfered with the good effects of meditation.*

*Now I think dope makes me frazzled and passive.*

*Drugs bring me down.*

*Three recent experiences by way of experiment proved temporarily (24 hours) dulling and moody. The continuance of drug use would be absurd. The choice is obvious.*

*The reason for no more drugs is that I have no desire to become disoriented or to be unclear in my thoughts.*

*After meditation, taking drugs produced unwanted effects like "bringdown."*

#### Type C—Desire for Drugs Gone

*Drugs have naturally fallen by. I didn't try to stop—after a while I just found myself not taking them anymore.*

*I no longer have any desire to use drugs.*

*I used marijuana and LSD regularly for a year prior to starting meditation. After hearing the first introductory lecture, I was ready and willing to stop taking drugs prior to beginning meditation. After I started TM, there was no desire to ever take drugs again.*

#### Type D—Other

*The use of drugs disturbed my meditation.* (Reported by three subjects)

*Prior to this I had not been meditating regularly, and I lived in Yosemite all my life and moved into a drug environment.* (Reported by a subject who had increased her use of drugs)

### DISCUSSION

The conclusion drawn from these results is that the Transcendental Meditation program produces a dramatic reduction or even elimination of the use of various types of drugs, including "hard drugs." However, this conclusion must be qualified in the light of three limitations inherent in the experimental design. First, this was a retrospective rather than a prospective study. Second, the sample was biased in that it consisted of meditators attending a one-week advanced course in residence on Transcendental Meditation, who therefore do not truly represent the large number of meditators who do not attend such courses. Third, no attempt was made to evaluate what effect the 15-day nonprescription drug abstinence period (required of all who learn the TM technique) may have on drug use a few months after people begin the practice. Nevertheless, these results do clearly demonstrate that, at least for this sample, the Transcendental Meditation program has a marked effect on drug use and that its potential as a therapeutic program for drug abuse should be examined in detail in extensive, well-controlled prospective studies.