

Research on the Maharishi Effect

In 1960, Maharishi predicted that one percent of a population practicing the Transcendental Meditation technique would produce measurable improvements in the quality of life for the whole population. This phenomenon was first noticed in 1974 and reported in a paper published in 1976. Here, the finding was that when 1% of a community practiced the Transcendental Meditation® program, then the crime rate was reduced by 16% on average. At this time, the phenomenon was named Maharishi Effect. The meaning of this term was later extended to cover the influence generated by the group practice of the TM-Sidhi® program. Generally, the Maharishi Effect may be defined as the influence of coherence and positivity in the social and natural environment generated by the practice of the TM and TM-Sidhi programs.

Maharishi introduced the TM-Sidhi program, including Yogic Flying, in 1976. Group practice of this program was observed to be particularly beneficial. On the basis of analogies to physical systems, scientists estimated that the coherence generated by group practice of the TM-Sidhi program should be proportional to the square of the number of participants. Taking into account the “1%” finding, it was predicted that a group with size equal to the square root of 1% of a population would have a measurable influence on the quality of life of that population. For example, a group of 200 practicing the TM-Sidhi program together in a city of four million (100x200x200) would be sufficient to produce a measurable influence on the whole city; a group of 1600 in the U.S. would influence 256 million (100x1600x1600) people, the whole population of the U.S.; and a group of 7000 would influence 4.9 billion (100x7000x7000) people, the population of the world at that time.

The TM-Sidhi program was practiced in large groups on numerous occasions in the following decade, and the first statistical analysis of the effects was published in 1987. These showed a decrease of about 11% in violent crimes in Washington, D.C., in total crimes in Metro Manila, and in total crimes in the Union Territory of Delhi. The p values (the probabilities of the observed changes happening by chance) of these three effects were 0.01, 0.005, and 0.001, which are excellent for results in social science. (Summary and chart)

Subsequent research has confirmed the existence and the universality of the Maharishi Effect. It has become possible to lodge a prediction in advance with the police and the Mayor of a city and then create the effect. This was put to the test under the careful scrutiny of a distinguished review board in 1993 in Washington, D.C. The maximum decrease in violent crimes was 23.3%. The statistical probability that this result could reflect chance variation in crime levels was less than 2 in 1 billion ($p < .000000002$). (Summary and chart)

Not surprisingly, since the theory and the phenomenon are so new to modern science, the methodology of a study is subjected to rigorous analysis by the journal review boards before a paper on the Maharishi Effect is accepted for publication. As a result, the research is really a gem of social science, not only on account of its significance, but also for the quality of its methodology.

“I think the claim can be plausibly made that the potential impact of this research exceeds that of any other ongoing social or psychological research program. It has survived a broader array of statistical tests than most research in the field of conflict resolution. This work and the theory that informs it deserve the most serious consideration by academics and policy makers alike.”

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