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## Depression, Guilt, and Tibetan Buddhism

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### ABSTRACT

Depression appears to be somewhat epidemic in the modern world. In prior empirical studies we found depression significantly associated with empathy-based guilt, empathic distress, and an overly active or misattributing moral system. In this study, we compared 98 Buddhists, who were primarily Tibetan meditation practitioners to 438 non-Buddhist, non-practicing community adults on a measure of depression along with measures of maladaptive guilt, empathic distress, anxiety and altruism. Our findings demonstrated that practitioners were significantly lower in depression, pathogenic guilt, anxiety, and empathic distress, and significantly higher on agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness to experience and compassionate altruism directed towards strangers. Intensity of practice significantly correlated with positive outcomes. In addition, we found that within the population of Tibetan Buddhist practitioners, those who endorsed the statement that the goal of meditation was other-focused (for the benefit of all sentient beings) were significantly lower in depression, empathic distress, and anxiety, and significantly higher in cognitive empathy (perspective-taking) compared to practitioners whose goal of meditation was self-focused.

### KEYWORDS

Depression; Resilience; Meditation; Religion; Compassion

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