

Psychotherapy, Buddhism and Tibetan Medicine

**Risk factors of mental health in patients from
Buddhist groups and related diagnostic issues**

A study of group participants of twenty
international Buddhist organizations

Anne Iris Miriam Anders

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3 Abstract

The acute and chronic mental diseases of participants in international Buddhist organizations currently present diagnostic, clinical, and psychotherapeutic challenges. A survey was therefore conducted to assess the harm to mental health that occurs against a background of structural violence, economic, emotional, or physical abuse, and cross-group damaging factors of internalized neologisms, e.g., rationalization of harm with '*karma-purification*', in group members. It includes information on 22 persons from 20 different organizations, 60% of which had left their group.

Methodologically, questionnaires were designed for the particular context where quantification was partly supported by narratives.

The results show acute and chronic mental diseases across the groups as well as mental breakdowns and suicides. The most frequent diagnoses were depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and anxiety disorder. 59,09% of the subjects had been in psychotherapeutic treatment in the past, and 36,36% were currently in psychotherapeutic treatment. Social isolation, a known crucial factor of worsening mental health, was confirmed by 46,67% of the subjects based on their own experiences and by 20% due to witnessing others' experiences. 40% affirmed that it was assumed in their groups that one or more persons could 'purify' someone else through '*karma-purification*'. 40% of the subjects affirmed having experienced violence towards themselves in their Buddhist group, 66,66% of which confirmed justification of violence by religion, and 33,33% reported having been slandered as crazy by nonprofessionals in their group. 33,33% testified to having been abused themselves, the same percentage attested the abuse of others and admitted to having tolerated abuse, and 26,66% confirmed their direct or indirect involvement in abuse. Whereas 33,33% affirmed that actions against themselves had been declared secret, 40% affirmed the same for others, and 26% confirmed that the latter was due to sexual abuse. Furthermore, 35,71% of the respondents agreed having been given wrong promises and 57,14% confirmed having been deceived by their Buddhist teachers, a serious breach of trust that will affect their treatment and spirituality as well. As much of damage seems to be well caused by structural issues in groups and by unreflectedly obeying any orders from above, people were also asked on their self-reflection concerning receiving commands and obedience when hearing someone ought to be punished or avoided, which allows to infer on their self-responsibility.

Key words:

mental diseases, Buddhist groups, risk factors, social isolation, victimization, abuse, diagnosis, psychotherapy, karma-purification

4 Introduction

Legal investigations have revealed harm to physical and mental health based on economic, psychological and physical abuse and respective structural issues in international Buddhist organizations [1] (pp. 16-31), [2] (pp. 20-29), [3] (pp. 38-39), [4]. The mental conditions of those affected, particularly in participants involved for many years [1] (p. 3), pose medical and societal challenges. Using an interdisciplinary approach, probands from Buddhist groups were therefore surveyed regarding their mental health diagnoses, psychiatric and psychotherapeutic treatment, and several specific risk factors arising from their participation in the group, i.e., not only current neologisms and decontextualized concepts [5-7] in this context but also the resulting social isolation that contributes to the development of mental diseases.

As for these contexts of globalized Buddhism where decontextualized concepts are taught widely by self-appointed teachers, special attention should be paid to the impact of the neologism '*karma-purification*' and related concepts that not only facilitate and rationalize violence and economic, physical, and emotional abuse [5] (p. 5); [6] (p. 1), [8-9] but also increase the silencing of group members and trauma itself [6], thereby further advancing the social isolation of victims and witnesses. Whereas such cross-group neologisms and conceptual concerns apply to large organizations with hundreds of centers worldwide as well as small groups in Asia, Europe or the United States, one can currently also observe an intermingling of spiritual and (mental) health issues in this context as seen, for instance, by commercializing Buddhist spiritual methods to be curative techniques for mental health.

A loss of this protective factor of social support within the groups as well as from outside social contacts contributes to the development of mental diseases. Using a mixed methods approach, the quantity of this factor and the descriptions provided by the subjects of different groups in this respect were therefore studied for the purpose of analysis. The results of the study involve 22 probands from 20 different Buddhist organizations. They were asked about their victimization and testimonies, their diagnoses, current and past psychiatric and psychotherapeutic treatment, their monetary and working contributions to or else payment received from the organization, the processes of withdrawal from their group and the help they would have needed, their own reflections on orders to avoid or punish someone, the mechanisms of silencing

people and the experiences with and impact of neologisms like '*karma-purification*' to themselves and others as well as the very testimony of hospitalizing others - whether they had witnessed psychiatric hospitalization of other group members.

In order to disentangle the victim-offender dichotomy that usually does not reflect group realities, the subjects were not only asked whether they themselves had been victimized but also if they had tolerated or even been involved in the abuse of others. Furthermore, the question about the subject's separation from a Buddhist group was intended to determine potential ongoing involvement or contact with a perpetrator, the way and scale of damage to leaving group members as well as particularly the support required for this.

Social isolation based on personal experiences was confirmed by 46,67% of the subjects and additional social isolation due to their witnessing the situation of others by 20%. The results hint at severe harm to mental health and complex mental disorders resulting from indoctrination, *double bind*, and particularly the pressure of mentally mingling with the perpetrator before a background of socially isolating victims.

Thus, for early psychosomatic and psychiatric diagnosis and intervention, some diagnostic elements regarding the patients' own or parental Buddhist group affiliation are particularly relevant in terms of identifying risk factors, patterns of stereotyping, identification with the offender combined with reducing self-responsibility, losing boundaries and identifying with the group collective mentality, personality alteration, and also the conduct of dissociation exercises that maintain the disease. For treatment approaches, the structural issues that lead to breaches in trust, loss of clarity by the *double bind* experienced, the individually formed stereotyping and identification patterns together with introjection are crucial.

5 Background

This introduction to the background covers three sections. The first describes the context and addresses the lack of research about the impact of the various damaging factors in these Buddhist groups to mental health. The second contains references from lawyer's investigations and open letters. The third includes the hypothesis the research is based on and analyzes three facilitating factors, which provided the supporting rationale concerning the choice of questions to the subjects participating in the survey.

Victims in international Buddhist organizations have been silenced for over four decades [4]. Open letters and reports [10-16] and legal investigations [1-3], [17] have revealed facts that go far beyond individual issues, or illnesses of persons who are vulnerable or potentially have preexisting diseases, and have contributed to the discourse on group-specific and cross-group dynamics and damage. However, aside from a few legal investigations, the harm to mental health [5] (pp. 3, 6-8), [6] (pp.1-2, 14-15, 19), [7] (pp. 9, 12, 15) in this context and its impact on diagnosis, treatment, and prevention has not yet been analyzed.

Moreover, whereas the commercialization strategy of seducing people with promises of quick enlightenment (particularly in Vajrayāna Buddhism) is far from the gradual and systematic training taught in original language contexts [6] (pp. 3 ff.), the unreflected medicalizing of these tools, which were designed for and employed in a systematic spiritual path of training [18] (pp. 222, 229), particularly also attracts people who are vulnerable to mental health issues. In particular, constant *double bind* [5] (pp. 1-4), [6] (pp. 3-4, 6, 8-11, 19), decontextualized concepts [5] (pp. 2-3, 5), [6] (pp. 2, 9), [7] (p. 2), and neologisms [5] (p. 1), [6] (pp. 2, 4, 10, 16-17, 19) used to intimidate and silence the victims [6] (pp. 2-3) impact on the mental health of individuals. Furthermore, dubious psychological offers by non-professionals at some centers [5] (pp. 34, 42), [6] (p. 14); [1] (p. 31-32 on 'Rigpa therapy'), [13] (p. 4 on 'Rigpa therapy') can be observed as well, and even continuous education called "*Buddhist psychotherapy*" (e.g., Tariki trust, #18) - making people believe that such would be an established psychotherapeutic approach - was described by the subjects. Such also indicates hazardous substantive and staff overlaps.

In the *Lewis Silkin report*, mental health issues within the *Rigpa* organization were addressed as follows:

“Pushing students to the verge of emotional breakdown A number of the witnesses that I spoke to gave evidence of the serious impact of their involvement with Sogyal Lakar on their health. In addition to numerous examples of witnesses working very long hours, with little sleep, for long periods of time, the following specific examples of long-term harm being caused were given to me: a. Witness F gave evidence of being forced to undergo elocution lessons because Sogyal would refuse to understand anything said by Witness F, insisting that Witness F must speak in a received pronunciation, English accent. Witness F says that this went on for months and months and meant that '*my tongue was taken away from me*' and that '*it was like being gagged*'. Witness F felt that this was an effort to break Witness F's attachment to Witness F's own country and family. Witness F reports being left with chronic fatigue, post-traumatic stress disorder and depression. b. Witness K reported that she suffered from hallucinations and suicidal thoughts and still suffers from chronic insomnia and anxiety. Witness K says she has spent thousands on therapy since leaving Rigpa. c. Witness J reported having suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder and extreme anxiety. Witness J described being terrified of the phone ringing and explained how this anxiety had negatively affected Witness J's relationships. Witness J felt able to start therapy after several years of processing what had happened and the therapy is ongoing. I was informed that there are a number of other students who suffered breakdowns as a result of their involvement with Rigpa. I was not able to corroborate this information with those individuals. Overall, based on the information available to me, I conclude that Sogyal did indeed push some of his students to the verge of emotional breakdowns.” [1] (p. 31)

In the *An Olive Branch Report*, the following dimensions of harm in the organization *Shambala* were described:

“• Sexual Misconduct by Shambala Teachers and Staff • Child Abuse • Physical Violence
• Emotional Abuse • Racial Harm • Abuse of Power • Rumors/Slander” [2] (p. 19)

In the *Open letter to the Shambhala from long-serving Kusung*, a few people of the respective '*inner circle*' broke through the pattern of silencing such issues and shared the following:

“Most of us have been subjected to his abuse. At times we have also been inadvertent enablers of Mr. Mukpo’s behavior. We have each struggled to understand our blind spots. It is a bitter pill to swallow that we were enablers of this man. The more we ignored our own intuition, the more people were harmed, and the more damage was propagated. As was true for us, many other Shambhala leaders may not recognize their role in the propagation of these harms. Indeed many are victims themselves. While we cannot undo the damage, hopefully we can speak to the truth of how his behavior has hurt many of his students. We seek to further validate those who have bravely named this pattern and who likely were subjected to gaslighting or minimization. We hope our personal statements will encourage others to speak and keep speaking.” [19] (p. 2)

Furthermore, someone in the above letter reported:

“I am 60 years old. There is only one fix-it left and that is me. I have very little idea about where to even begin. I have spent my life trying to care for other, as instructed by my family and my guru. I watched hundreds of women go in and out of Mr. Mukpo's bedroom. I held the hands of many. Rocked with them when they sobbed. Stayed with them when they just didn't know what happened. Tried to warn them about what it feels like to be queen for a day. I saw one too many debauched nights and nursed one too many of the king's hangovers. I feared for the women. I was disgusted by what I saw. And yet I stayed. I watched helplessly as donations were spent like tossed candy. Meanwhile I'm wondering if I'll be able to keep what little I have left. [. . .] I wake up everyday, despite all my support systems, weary and broken. Despite my perceived intelligence and my broad-spectrum skill sets, I cannot fathom going to work. I spend days at a time never getting out of my pajamas. I am not yet able to trust people except on occasion, even ones who clearly love me. Yes, I came in with my own history of family trauma making it easy for me to fall in as prey. In no way is it ever okay for any human, or any human society, to use someone's plea for freedom and spiritual awakening as a basis for systemic manipulation across power differentials which indulge cruel, debasing interpersonal relations. And then call it devotion. And use and use and use until it's all used up. And yet here we are. I truly believe that we've all seen or heard something. I believe we all have questions. What remains is for us to put the puzzle together, attending to the details of our own story and finding our own voice. I believe the story is important. But only because, without it, I would be left standing in the dark with my mouth open making no sound.” (Canepa, A.F. in [19] (pp. 30-31))

And another person testified on putting position over care in the ‘*inner circles*’:

“I have rarely felt more humiliated. In that moment something inside me died – my fight and my anger. Now, all I felt was sadness. Now I knew for sure that Mr. Mukpo did indeed set the tone. [. . .] I became disgusted with myself and ashamed [...] that I too had silenced people and put position over care for others [. . .] I had become part of the machinery of normalizing abuse” (Leslie, L. in [19] (pp. 23-24))

The overall design of the ‘*inner circle*’ in many of these groups constitutes a distinctive characteristic within the structures of these international Buddhist organizations. For there is a profiting elite, often traveling from one country to the next, who are complicit and at times were joint perpetrators, and possibly even – at a later point in time or when they no longer keep silent – victims as well. Thus, at some point in time a kind of emotional and financial seduction may have emerged, whereby those individuals responding to such strove to be considered somewhat “special”, or “selected” by any leader into these ‘*inner circles*’. Such could be referred to as spiritual narcissism. It seems to get employed by quite many Buddhist groups, particularly by those who ascribe to the Vajrayāna, and it has tremendous consequences both for group members and the local population of the area in which they operate.

Three manipulative factors currently contribute to damaging mental health in abusive Buddhist groups: First, people having been prescribed to constantly turn inwards continue to merely search for their own faults instead of understanding and taking into account core structural issues, calling in democratic and legal procedures, and, by referring to basic respect and human rights, being able to take timely decisions, that is before they run out of resources or turn severely sick. This highly egocentric constraint to introspection, as if one were the sole cause behind all issues, and particularly also the very Buddhist group dynamics, bears the inherent risk of individualizing even structural issues [18] (p. 229), [20] (pp. 118 ff.), and internalizing misguided concepts and highly damaging stereotypes. For those in Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna groups, this this highly egocentric dictum might serve as a warning that their very core of bodhicitta and compassion is lost. Group members are being indoctrinated such ways, even though it contradicts the basic principles of compassion and bodhicitta in Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism. Such indoctrination, preventing any inspection of structural

grievances, together with other factors may well lead to mental health issues. Therefore, regarding diagnosis and decision for therapeutic procedures, it is necessary to consider the mental impact of such, particularly when endured for years or decades. Furthermore, this very egocentric conceptualizing pattern is what apparently makes the treatment of affected individuals particularly challenging.

Second, the rationalization of inconveniences, unethical or even illegal behavior, and violence as an individual '*karma-purification*' method [5] (pp. 1, 4, 6, 8), [6] (pp. 1-2, 4, 10, 13, 17, 19) builds on the former attitude. This rationalization strategy leads to distorting facts and to blaming and stigmatizing victims and has prevented the necessary processes of democratization in the highly hierarchically organized structures in which privileged elites have created lucrative positions for themselves. This aspect and the associated *double bind* ultimately weaken the participants' self-perception and trust in their own perception [5] (p. 8) [6] (p. 9), which would otherwise afford them a basis for distancing themselves from arbitrariness and for setting timely boundaries.

Third, the slander and stigmatization of group members or visitors as mentally sick [6] (pp. 9, 17) by nonprofessionals appear to be a quite common way of dealing with people who are regarded as rivals of anyone in the elitist '*inner circles*' [1] (p. 4), [3] (p. 39), [6] (pp. 8, 12, 14, 16) or who dare to address the harm to oneself or others. At times, this slander is not even limited to the boundaries of one's own group [7] (pp. 3-4), [8-9] but instead extends to any accessible social networks of the individual, including his or her job or studies, resulting in systematic social isolation [7] (p. 4). In addition, this kind of slander is also used to silence victims and conceal trauma [6]. The second and third factor were addressed explicitly in the questionnaire.

Although a wide spectrum of diseases and diagnoses were found in the narratives of affected persons, including "reactions to severe stress, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety disorders, and dissociative disorder" [5] (p. 8), depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, and anxiety disorder were the diagnoses mentioned repeatedly by the subjects in the questionnaires.

The next subsection discusses the sample and the need for safety measures, and includes a list of the questions asked in the survey. The core hypothesis is that there is a high degree of social isolation (due to personal experiences or the witnessing of

incidents) that contributes to the development of mental diseases over years. Some of the preliminary data were presented at the *World Congress of Psychiatry (WCP)* conference in 2021 and the *Congress of the European Psychiatric Association (EPA)* in 2021 [21-22].

6 Methods and materials

6.1 Sample

Test persons were recruited through the research project website, university channels, the German Buddhist Union, the International Cultic Studies Association (ICSA), and indirectly by affected persons informing each other about the research project in social networks. The links and individual TANs to the questionnaires were sent by e-mail.

6.2 Safety of subjects and the use of pseudonyms

Even though pseudonyms were used, when presenting results, any names and other information that could have indicated the subject's identity had to be redacted for safety reasons. Since for some persons similar dangers as those well-known for leaving cults arise, it was necessary to provide the responses to some questions without the codes - so it would be impossible to assign responses with the same code to one certain individual - and to remove any names mentioned by means of omissions.

6.3 Measurements

The mental health of group participants in international Buddhist organizations was assessed using quantitative and qualitative methods in two questionnaires designed particularly for these groups and their specific concepts, dynamics, and structures in the EvaSys scientific survey system. For further differentiation of quantified questions, respondents were occasionally asked to elaborate on their personal experiences, testimony, and thoughts after answering a question affirmatively. Due to the lack of scientific investigation of these issues, such qualifying comments were particularly important for understanding the subjects' own experiences and for comparing groups or different people's statements in the same group. The replies are appended to the corresponding section of the chapter with results.

The following questions were asked:

1. Psychotherapy

1.1 *Have you ever been in psychotherapeutic treatment?*

1.2 *Are you currently in psychotherapeutic treatment?*

2. Psychiatry

2.1 *Have you ever been in psychiatric treatment?*

2.2 *Are you currently in psychiatric treatment?*

2.3 *Did you witness or experience someone from the Buddhist group moving into psychiatry?*

3. Diagnoses:

Due to which disease(s) are you or have you been in psychotherapy? [Have you ever been in psychotherapeutic treatment?] If so, on what diagnoses? [Have you ever been in psychiatric treatment?] If so, on what diagnoses?

4. Social isolation

4.1 *Have you been feeling lonely or isolated due to personal experiences in one or more Buddhist groups?*

4.2 Those who have agreed to the above question were asked: *Please describe in detail: Name the experience, describe how you felt about it and how you think and feel about that now. Describe what the group and your family and friends said about it.*

4.3 *Do you feel lonely or isolated because of experiences of others in Buddhist centers you have witnessed?*

4.4 Those who have agreed to the above question were asked: *Please describe in detail: Name the experience of others that you have observed. Describe how you felt about it and how you think and feel about it now. Also describe if the group has said anything on this and what has been said.*

5. Personal experience of violence

5.1 *Have you as an adult experienced violence in a Buddhist group?*

5.2 *If so, please describe what has happened. Who was violent towards you? How did you feel? What did you think at that time? What do you think about it today? Were there witnesses and how did they respond?*

5.3 *Was the violence you experienced justified by religion?*

6. Concept and neologism of 'karma-purification'

6.1 *In Buddhist groups in which you participated in seminars: was it assumed that one or more persons could 'purify' someone else, e.g. in the sense of 'karma purification'?*

6.2 *If so, which actions were performed, how were they explained and what did you think about them?*

6.3. *Were any actions toward you by a Buddhist group, translator or a teacher labeled 'karma cleansing' specifically for you?*

6.4. Those who had agreed having experienced harmful actions labeled as 'karma-purification' specifically for themselves were asked: *If so, how has this affected yourself, your contacts, your social environment and your further life?*

7. *Have you been called crazy by that group or the people around them?*

8. Abuse

8.1 *Have you yourself experienced abuse by a Buddhist group?*

8.2 *Have you witnessed abuse in Buddhist groups?*

8.3 *Have you tolerated abuse in Buddhist groups in which you are a participating person due to any particular explanation?*

8.4 *When you think of abuse in Buddhist groups - the abuse of people who have been manipulated and of minors, including sexual abuse - how do you think and feel about it? How do you evaluate the responsibility in the group? Who is responsible for what?*

8.5 *Have you been directly or indirectly involved in the abuse of others within Buddhist groups?*

9. Commands, obedience and testimony of abuse

9.1 *Please describe what you have in mind about orders and commands you receive from the group and how you behave when you receive them.*

9.2 *How would you think and behave if you were informed in your group that a certain person should be avoided?*

9.3 *How would you think and behave if you were informed in your group that a certain person should be punished?*

10. Secrecy

10.1 *Have any acts against you been declared secret by a Buddhist group or a teacher?*

10.2 *If so, which actions? Please describe the physical and psychological aspects of the actions. Also describe how you yourself felt about it and which doubts may have arisen in you.*

10.3 *Have you witnessed acts directed to others being sworn to secrecy by a Buddhist group or a teacher?*

10.4 *If so, was it because of sexual abuse of this person or any other person?*

11. Wrong Promises and deception

11.1 *Have you been given wrong promises by Buddhist teachers?*

11.2 *If so, which ones?*

11.3 *Have you been deceived by Buddhist teachers?*

11.4 *How were you deceived? How did this deception affect you? What would have happened if you would not have been deceived? How has this deception affected the group?*

12. Contributions and work at seminar centers

12.1 *Has your professional education and expertise been taken into account for your assignments (paid or unpaid) in a Buddhist seminar or meditation center?.*

12.2 *If no, why not?*

12.3 *Has the decision on your activities in a Buddhist seminar or meditation center been made in dialogue with the leadership of the organization which was informed about your professional education and competence?*

12.4 *If no, please explain how decisions are made in your organization. Please describe whether the decision-making process is transparent and who is accountable.*

12.5 *Which group members (in which position and with which educational background) decided on the assignment of activities: who assessed your professional qualification for the activities? Who assessed the equivalence between any of your*

activities and your participation in Buddhist courses? Who decided on the amount of hours to be worked?

13. Withdrawal or separation from a Buddhist group

13.1 *Have you withdrawn from any Buddhist organization*

13.2 *Did you separate from any Buddhist organization?*

13.3 *Why did you take this decision?*

13.4 *How long did it take after your decision until you left the group? Did you have help with this? Did you have to take measures for your personal safety (changing your place of residence, keeping your place of residence secret, changing your name, etc.)? Please, describe the process of separation and the measures necessary for you.*

14. Help to distance oneself, its quality and psychological impact

14.1 *Please, describe whether anyone has helped you to distance yourself or part. How did these people help you? What did this mean and how did it effect for you?*

14.2 *What personal protective measures did you have to take? How long have you maintained these? Was there something that helped loosen them?*

14.3 *How has this distancing or separation impacted you psychologically and professionally since then?*

15. Lacking help

15.1 *What help were you missing yourself?*

15.2 *What kind of support have you lacked?*

16. *Have you witnessed others get sick? What did they experience and how did it affect them?*

17. *Have you tried to help others who got sick? If so, how and how was that?*

In the following presentation of results, the results for each question are presented under one headline. All answers in German were translated into English by the author. As explained above, in some of the subsections, the respondent codes are omitted for their personal safety due to possible recognizability.

7 Results

The results presented are from 22 people representing 20 Buddhist organizations, fourteen females and eight males, each of whom filled out one or two questionnaires. As several people reported flashbacks, the second questionnaire was designed with many open questions, particularly for them. Six of the subjects filled out both questionnaires, while the others only completed one of them. Their age range is from 23 to 68. Eight subjects (with codes #1-#7 and #20) are concerned with Germany, and the responses of fourteen subjects (with codes #1-#5, #8-#14 and #18-#22) refer to Vajrayāna groups (Tibetan Buddhism).

Fifteen of the subjects were asked how long they had attended Buddhist seminars, ranging from only a few months to 34 years with a payment up to 50 000 dollar. 21,4% agreed to having been persuaded by their Buddhist group to give up their most important relationships and one person to even additionally give up his job. 14,2% of them confirmed having been a paid member of their group with an income up to 40 000 dollar per year (one person did not reply to that question). However, as it was two other subjects who have confirmed having held a position in their group, in this group these two factors -of payment and of holding a position- did not overlap with regard to individuals and thus could not be correlated with each other either.

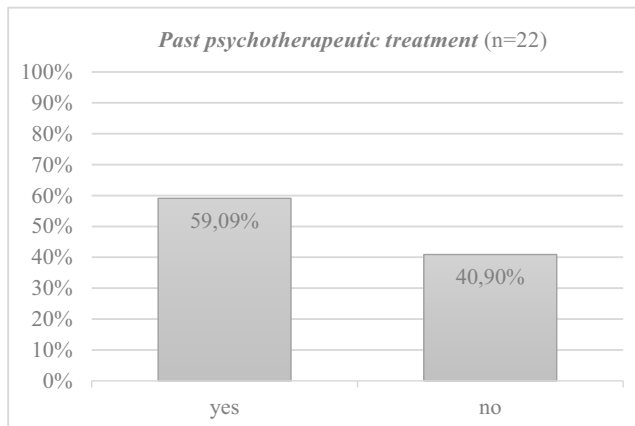
57,14% confirmed having worked for free in the context of Buddhist seminars (one did not reply to that question) and 13,33% agreed having provided any favours other than free work and monetary 'donations' to Buddhist seminars or at Buddhist centers. 46,66% of fifteen people agreed having attended between three and one hundred and fifteen seminars free of charge in their Buddhist centers, 40% agreed having been offered free accommodation in their seminar center from one month up to all year long, and 53,33% agreed having been offered food for free from seven days up to all year long. None of them agreed to currently live as an ordained person. Someone who was formerly ordained commented: "I was a Buddhist monk for 18 years and most Western monastics receive little to no support. The most I got were free or discounted teachings. The west does not support its monastics well and a lot of them end up disrobing as a consequence." (see [9])

7.1 Psychotherapy

7.1.1 Past psychotherapeutic treatment

Past psychotherapeutic treatment was addressed with the question: *Have you ever been in psychotherapeutic treatment*; and responded to by 22 subjects. 59,09% of them reported having been in psychotherapeutic treatment.

Figure 1

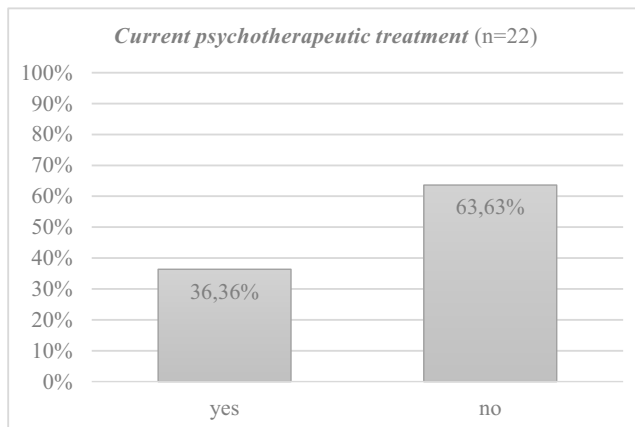


7.1.2 Current psychotherapeutic treatment

Current psychotherapeutic treatment was addressed with the question: *Are you currently in psychotherapeutic treatment?*

36,36% of the 22 subjects reported that they were currently (at the time of filling out the questionnaire) in psychotherapeutic treatment.

Figure 2



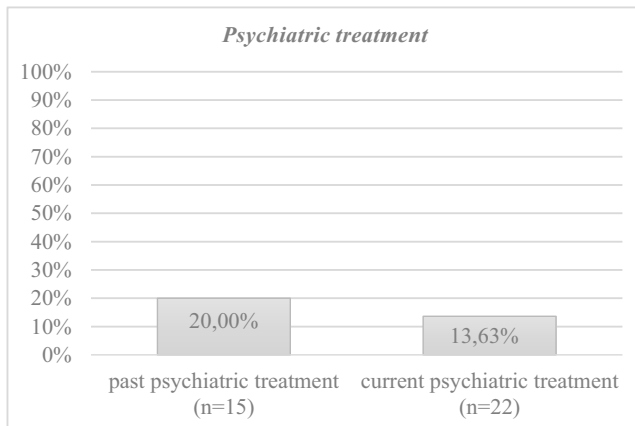
7.2 Psychiatric treatment

7.2.1 Current and past psychiatric treatment

Of 15 subjects, three had been in psychiatric treatment in the past, one of which is still in psychiatric treatment now. Current psychiatric treatment was asked about directly in one questionnaire and via a question about psychiatric medication in the other questionnaire.

Three of 22 subjects reported current psychiatric treatment, while another one indicated taking psychiatric medication.

Figure 3

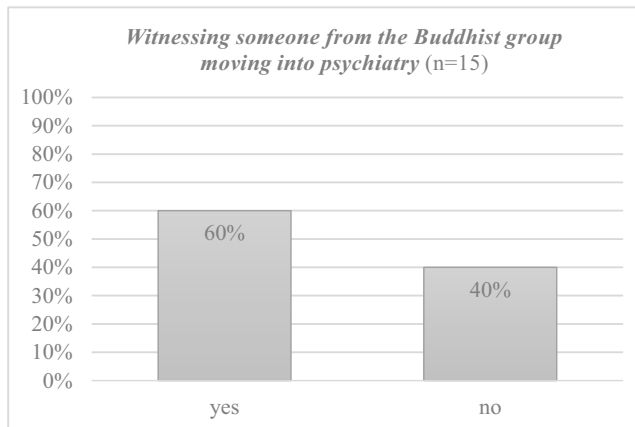


7.2.2 Witnessing others from the Buddhist group moving into psychiatry

The witnessing of psychiatric diseases in others was addressed with the question: *Did you witness or experience someone from the Buddhist group moving into psychiatry*; and was responded to by all 15 subjects who filled out the questionnaire.

Of them, 60% had witnessed someone moving into psychiatry.

Figure 4



7.3 Diagnoses

All 22 probands were asked about diagnoses with regard to their psychotherapy or psychiatric treatment. An additional list of mental health diagnoses was provided for 13 of them, who were then asked about their medication. Three of the ten people reporting no diagnoses were in psychotherapy. Many of the other 12 had been given more than one diagnosis. Four subjects reported having been diagnosed with psychiatric illnesses or taking psychiatric medication. Eight of the 22 probands had been diagnosed with depression, four with posttraumatic stress disorder, and four with anxiety disorder. Together with the diagnosis of depression, one person had been diagnosed with psychosis and another one with bipolar disorder and narcolepsy, or with obsessive-compulsive disorder, or psychophysical exhaustion. One person reported bulimia and another one having been diagnosed with a reaction to acute stress. One person reported having been diagnosed with a mild narcissistic disorder before he came to his Buddhist group. People with personality disorders, like narcissism, seem to be particularly attracted not only by the visualizations of Vajrayāna Buddhism, which methodologically were intended for training the goal on the path based on the realization of śūnyatā, but also by acting as self-appointed teachers in such contexts. This in turn provokes corresponding group dynamics and harm to mental health in group members. A psychotherapist who was asked about her diagnosis responded as follows:

“Personal psychotherapy is a requirement of my training programmes, as a psychotherapist [...] I have no mental health diagnosis. I am in therapy because it is healthy for me to be able to speak honestly and fully about my experiences. I enjoy that” [#18]

Two of 13 people reported taking psychiatric medication. Two of 15 people indicated being partially or fully disabled due to “post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), autoimmune disease, orthopedic issues” [#8] and “concussion [. . .] - visual trauma” [#12]. In addition, several people reported via e-mail that they were unable to fill out the questionnaires because of their self-diagnosed traumatization in their Buddhist group and flashbacks.

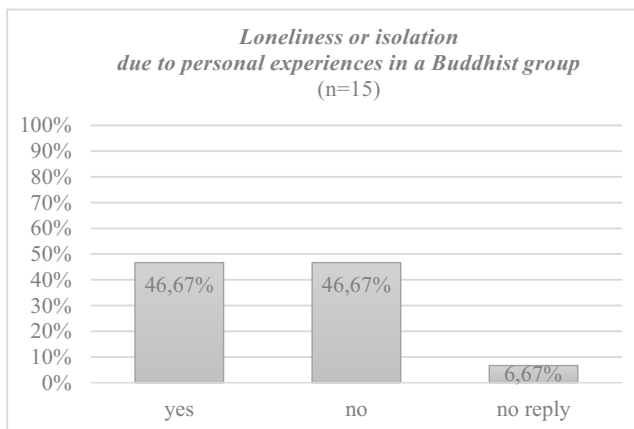
7.4 Social isolation

7.4.1 Isolation due to personal experiences

Subjects were asked: *Have you been feeling lonely or isolated due to personal experiences in one or more Buddhist groups?*

46,67% of the subjects reported having felt lonely or isolated due to their own experiences in a Buddhist group.

Figure 5



7.4.2 Qualitative data on loneliness and isolation due to personal experiences

Those who had agreed to the above question were asked to specify their experiences with: *Please describe in detail: Name the experience, describe how you felt about it and how you think and feel about that now. Describe what the group and your family and friends said about it.*

Someone from the *Rigpa* organization shared:

“When I left *Rigpa* and went to another lama, I experienced that unless one demonstrates blind fervor, one isolates oneself quickly, one is totally subordinate to anything, and also has to put up with a lot by the functionaries. One might be discredited as a 'samaya breaker', one gets a sense of what it would be like to be called a child molester.” [#3]

Another person from the *Rigpa* organization mentioned:

“The general culture was one of backhanded gossip and jealousy. I was only there for the teachings, so I ignored it. I realized that the people were not true friends to one another, so it was no loss.” [#9]

Someone from an organization linking itself to the *Drikung Kagyu* tradition of *Vajrayāna* reported:

“Being a Buddhist and monk was a huge part of my identity, social interaction, and worldview and leaving put me into an existential and psychological crisis. I'm doing better now, but it was scary. My therapist was not really familiar with spiritual crises.” [#8, cited in [6] (p. 20)]

A person from the *Dharma Ocean* organization shared:

“The loneliness is heartbreaking. On facebook I have around 140 friends from the sangha. Maybe 8 of them still talk to me. I realized that the relationships that I thought were real that I had invested in for a decade were highly contextual and not resilient. I often feel that there is no one who can help me and no one who can understand what I am going through, except maybe the Executive Director who was even closer to [...] than I was. I feel trapped by memories and flooding thoughts sometimes about the group. Other times I feel fine and just want to move on with my life.” [#12]

Someone from the *Pathgate* organization reported:

“There were multiple times where I was criticised by [...] for certain behaviours or choices, but since we were conditioned not to talk to other students about them, I would feel lonely and isolated, because we could not share our thoughts and feelings about it.” [#10]

Someone from the German *Pagode Phat Hue* organization stated:

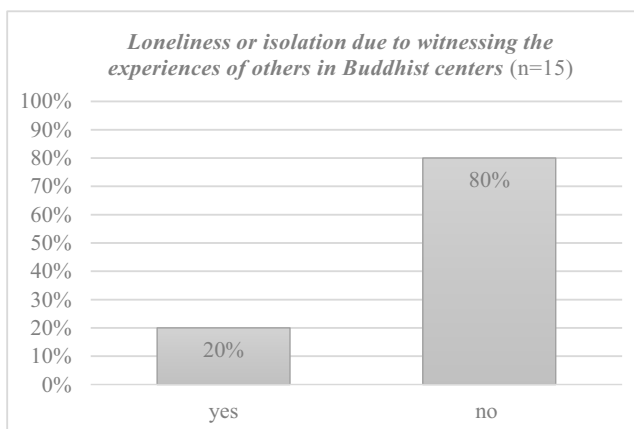
“It was difficult for me for a long time to find meaning in my life. I felt lonely in a world that does not want me. To this day I have no one with whom I have really felt a sense of walking along a path together. I think I need a group, even though small, in order to live a fulfilling life, to achieve something meaningful. But I slowly begin to doubt whether this is really the case. Probably the truth is that one always goes his way alone and just has to learn to do it with pleasure. And I do not have any real surrounding. I know a lot of people but I still don't have regular and intensive contact.” [#7]

7.4.3 Isolation of witnesses

The isolation of witnesses was addressed with: *Do you feel lonely or isolated because of the experiences of others you have witnessed in Buddhist centers?*

This questionnaire was filled out by 15 subjects. 20% of them reported having experienced loneliness or isolation due to witnessing the experiences of others in Buddhist centers.

Figure 6



7.4.4 Qualitative data on loneliness and isolation due to others' experiences

Those who answered yes to the above question were asked: *Please describe in detail: Name the experience of others that you have observed. Describe how you felt about it and how you think and feel about it now. Also describe if the group has said anything on this and what has been said.* A person in Germany from the Rigpa organization described as follows:

“Crude public denigration of a student I knew to be honest and sincere, who was very responsible and particularly ensured a great deal of authentic Dharma material came to Rigpa, she was ridiculed for no reason, and much later I heard from an ex-student well informed and not a liar, that she was also repeatedly asked to give 'blowjob service'. Group: this was not discussed altogether. Such incidents were frequent, and everyone knew that this was considered crazy wisdom.” [#3, see also [8]]

Someone from the *Drikung Kagyu centers* organization shared:

“I feel like I'm the only one who is sane sometimes because the others just behaved like blissed out automatons and spoke in platitudes. I think they don't behave like real people.”
[#8]

A person from the *Dharma Ocean* organization reported:

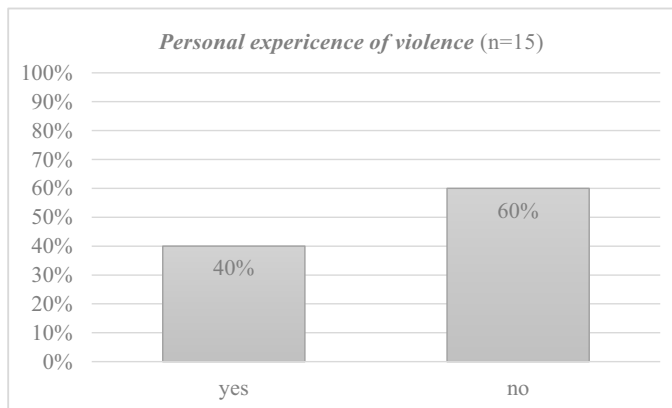
“I reached out to long time 'disappeared' sangha members to make sure they got the letter and to find out what had happened to them. So many people I didn't even know had been hurt reported going through years of therapy, cult deprogramming, and severe depression. Hearing about their pain and knowing that they suffered mostly alone and in silence broke my heart. It is still deeply unsettling to me that these people were 'kept secret' or that I didn't do more to find out what had happened, I just believed the misleading hints from my former teacher. I have tried to get a full count of how many tantrikas have left due to abuse over the years and found it impossible because *Dharma Ocean* kept deleting the lists and no full list exists of everyone who has taken pointing out with [...]. From all the lists we were able to compile I estimate 100-250 tantrikas departed over the years” [#12]

7.5 Personal experience of violence

7.5.1 Quantification of the violence confirmed

40% of the 15 subjects affirmed that they themselves had experienced violence in a Buddhist group: *Have you as an adult experienced violence in a Buddhist group?*

Figure 7



7.5.2 Qualitative data specifying violence experienced

Those who confirmed having experienced violence were asked: *"If so, please describe what has happened. Who was violent towards you? How did you feel? What did you think at that time? What do you think about it today? Were there witnesses and how did they respond?"* In this subsection, the respondent codes are omitted for their personal safety due to possible recognizability.

Someone replied:

“[. . .] used all kinds of psychological violence, allegedly for the benefit of the students. The day I realised that this is nonsense as a method of teaching, and that all those who engage in it are somehow mentally blinded, I resigned. A lama like [. . .] was simply brutal and despotic to his monks.” (see also [8])

Another person told:

“This was to do with the Vajrayana. I fell and it was as if someone pushed me in the back. It sprained my knee aggregating arthritis. I got a clear remote image of the teacher saying 'give it to me'. I believed he wanted to live off my energy and health. I saw directly that he wanted to harm me and use my health and energy.”

One person shared:

“Not towards me. But there was once a 'bar fight' (we celebrate a lot and wildly) at a party where a very drunk person went berserk. As a result, [. . .] eventually banned alcohol consumption at courses and in the centres.“

Another person shared:

“A male student was verbally and emotionally violent towards me - frequently screaming and shouting abuse in the group therapy sessions, directly at and to me. I also observed him frequently doing this to other students in the group.”

Someone replied:

“I did not experienced violence towards me personally. I saw PY verbally abuse students on multiple occasions. I saw him humiliate students publicly several times. I saw him physically strike a female student on 1 occasion. On these occasions the students were upset and crying after. I felt uncomfortable but I justified PY's abuse as 'crazy wisdom', that the teacher was using skilful methods to teach the students and 'purify their negative karma', Now I realise that there was no wisdom in PY's methods, he was simply abusive and there was no justification for it. Many students are so brainwashed and fearful of PY that they are conditioned to accept the abuse.” (see also [9])

7.5.3 Religious justification of violence

Those people who had agreed to having personally experienced violence in their Buddhist group were further asked: *Was the violence you experienced justified by religion*; and 66,66% agreed to that.

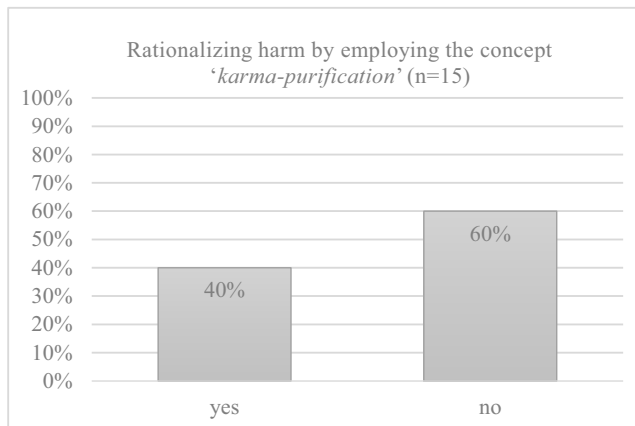
7.6 The neologism 'karma-purification'

7.6.1 Rationalizing harm with the neologism 'karma-purification'

The aforementioned 15 subjects were asked the following question on the neologism 'karma-purification': *In Buddhist groups in which you participated in seminars: was it assumed that one or more persons could 'purify' someone else, e.g. in the sense of 'karma purification'?*

40% affirmed that, in their Buddhist seminars, it was assumed that one or more persons could 'purify' someone else through 'karma-purification'.

Figure 8

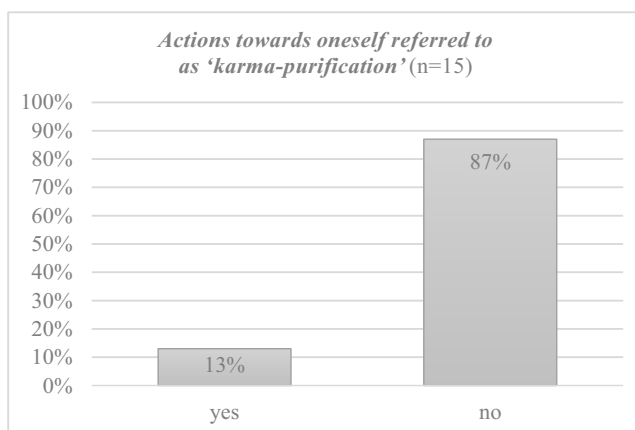


7.6.2 Actions towards oneself referred to as ‘karma-purification’

The 15 subjects were also asked if they had personal experience with the neologism: *Were any actions toward you by a Buddhist group, translator or a teacher labeled 'karma cleansing' specifically for you?*

13% affirmed that actions performed on them had been labeled to as ‘karma-purification’.

Figure 9



7.6.3 Qualitative data on reporting experiences with explanations of harm due to ‘karma-purification’

Those who confirmed the above question were asked to explain: *If so, which actions were performed, how were they explained and what did you think about them?* One person from the *Rigpa* organization replied: “By allowing negative karma to mature (i.e. all kinds of punishment)” [#3] and another person from the same organization shared: “Any correction of student mistakes was being done to purify karma” [#9]. Someone from the German *Pagode Phat Hue* organization replied: “Family positioning and other exercises from psychology were very common. I thought those were helpful even though they were emotionally really challenging, and one felt relieved afterwards.” [#7] Another person from a group in France linking itself to Tibetan Buddhism shared:

“Chakra breathing and alchemy of energy in pairs” [#14]. A person from *Pathgate* reported: “Participation in Buddhist teaching, retreats, prayers, meditation, getting healed by [... the leaders'] energy, down to his verbal and psychological abuse, we were conditioned to believe that all these are part of purification” [#10]. One person from the *Drikung Kagyu* tradition of Tibetan Buddhism replied: “My first lama told my best friend that the sexual abuse he perpetuated against her could heal and purify her childhood sexual abuse trauma” [#8] (see also [9]).

7.6.4 Personal impact of the experience of ‘*karma-purification*’

Those who had agreed having experienced harmful actions labeled as ‘*karma-purification*’ specifically for themselves were also asked: *If so, how has this affected yourself, your contacts, your social environment and your further life?*

Someone replied:

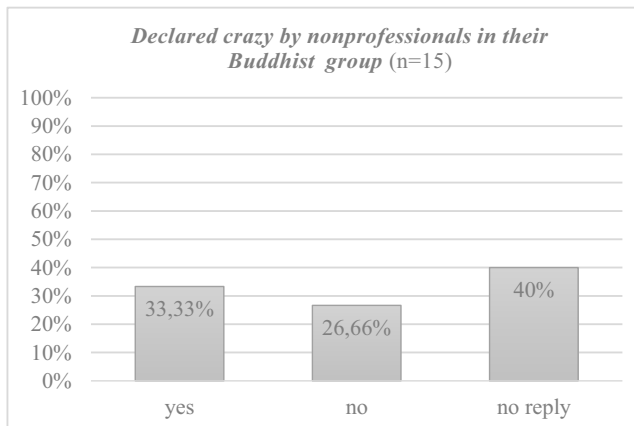
“Something must be wrong with me, and it has to do with my karma. There is no logical explanation for it, it is invisible, and yet there is talk about having the effects due to any cause. It was pointed out to me that something about my energy field and probably kidney energy (the ancestral energy) was not okay.”

Another person shared: “at the time, it made me feel like I was unclean and dirty, but now I see it as a silencing tactic”.

7.7 Slandered as severely mentally diseased by nonprofessionals in the Buddhist groups

33,33% of the 15 subjects affirmed that they had been slandered as severely mentally diseased by their Buddhist group - *have you been called crazy by that group or the people around them* - while 40% did not reply to this question.

Figure 10



7.8 Abuse

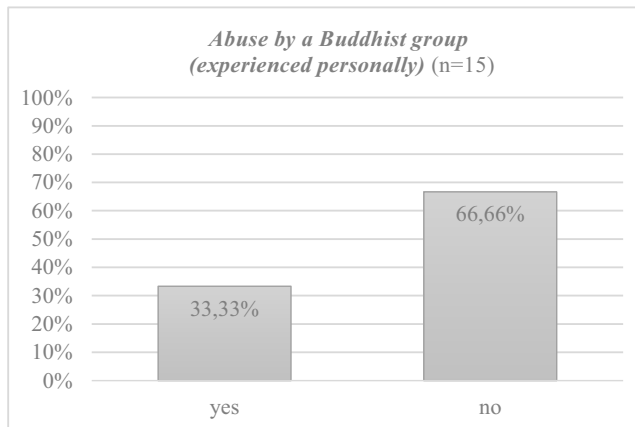
The questions concerning abuse were about victimization, witnessing abuse, and the toleration of, or direct and indirect involvement in abuse.

7.8.1 Victimization by a Buddhist group

Victimization was addressed with the question: *Have you yourself experienced abuse by a Buddhist group?*

33,33% of the 15 subjects affirmed having been a victim in this respect themselves.

Figure 11

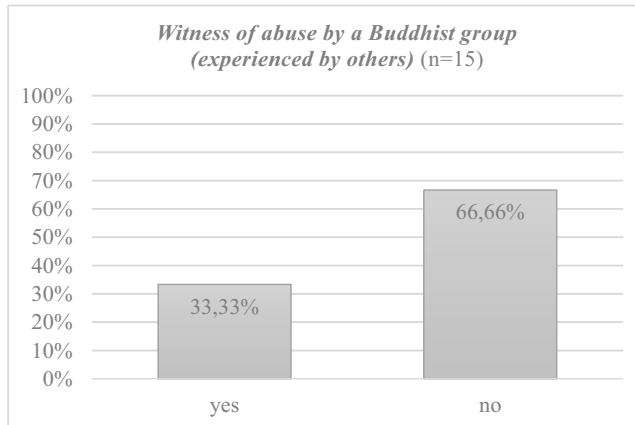


7.8.2 Witnessing abuse by a Buddhist group

Witnessing abuse was addressed with the question: *Have you witnessed abuse in Buddhist groups?*

33,33% of the 15 subjects affirmed that they had been witnesses of abuse.

Figure 12

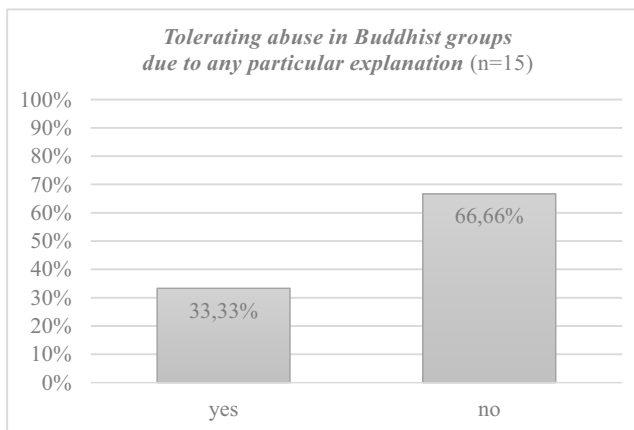


7.8.3 Tolerating abuse as member of a Buddhist group

Tolerating abuse was addressed with the following question: *Have you tolerated abuse in Buddhist groups in which you are a participating person due to any particular explanation?*

33,33 % of the 15 subjects affirmed having tolerated abuse.

Figure 13



7.8.4 Individual reflections on abuse

Next, probands were asked to state their own reflections with the question: *When you think of abuse in Buddhist groups - the abuse of people who have been manipulated and of minors, including sexual abuse - how do you think and feel about it? How do you evaluate the responsibility in the group? Who is responsible for what?*

In this subsection, the respondent codes are omitted for their personal safety due to possible recognizability. Someone replied:

“I feel it is truly tragic and unfortunate. The victim would be scarred, perhaps turned away from the dharma. The perpetrator would carry a dark mind, maybe repeat the action, and suffer the karma too. The main responsibility lies with the rule setter of the group, and the one who inducts new members. If 'karmic cleansing' and sexual acts are considered okay in the rulebook it's a recipe for eventual disaster imho. I know mahayana teachers who talk

against doing anything of the sort, even if they accept it's a possibility. Sexual tantra should not be in the manual. Plenty of other ways to cultivate. But that is my opinion, I am not well versed in vajrayana. The goals of prospective are important when being accepted as teachers. Policing existing members would be hard, as detection would often come too late.”

Someone else stated:

“Neglect, fear, striving, dependency - it is highly complex and certainly also individually different degrees. Jealousy in groups should not be underestimated. Possibly it is not seen as abuse by the group members, but the person concerned is even confronted with jealousy and envy because of being regarded as 'favoured'. Unfortunately, the Master is often seen as being infallible. In our sangha, a saying circulated with a laugh [. . .] which meant: He has said so - although we laughed, his word carried weight.”

Another person shared:

“Every single person has his share of responsibility, even if he acted in blind trust. These are mitigating circumstances, of a sort. In [...]: The higher the position, the greater is the degree of blindness. And the fish is always stinking from its head. Those at the top of an authoritarian structure, and who, due to their position as lama per se are endowed with particular abilities, ought to take responsibility for the consequences of their actions. Responsibility in groups is usually given to older students, who may be accordingly indoctrinated and bring the relevant skills. Sociological studies might show 80% of leadership in Western Buddhist groups are female, except for the top positions. A psychologist and Buddhist, who I know well, even claims that women are more susceptible to manipulating behaviours in these positions” (see also [8])

One person stated:

“It is the responsibility of each individual in the group to be aware of this. I think it is less important how. Everybody has to act, whether it's the police, the press, the public prosecutor's office or oneself. I feel disgust and maybe even dislike towards these groups. And when I see Buddhists today, the word 'child molester' immediately rings through my head, even though one of the most important people in my life is a Buddhist.”

Someone told: “Incomprehension, disgust and revulsion We all share responsibility for each other”.

Another person stated:

“What can I say - this is horrible and it enrages me that this happens even in Buddhist groups. I think anyone who witnesses and does nothing about it is complicit. I cannot understand how anything like that could develop in Buddhist circles, it's very scary.”

One person shared:

“This should not happen at all and ought to lead to an immediate criminal report. The person abusing is responsible, however, depending on the circumstances, also the group involved and the structures prevailing within it. The veneration of the teacher in Tibetan Buddhism unfortunately also creates conditions for abuse, be it physical or authoritative, even if the teachings clearly do not provide for that. In my opinion, Tibetan Buddhism needs some effort towards adjustment to at least make abuse more difficult.” (see also [7])

Another person said:

“I think leaders of Buddhist groups are individuals and it is unavoidable to find some 'black sheep' among them. Certainly I regret such incidents and would feel a serious betrayal of trust if I were to experience this from someone at the centre where I frequently visit. Once someone in the group hears about such, I believe it is their responsibility to communicate to stop it.” (see also [7])

One person told:

“I feel angry and a huge sense of injustice about it, because it totally goes against the spirit of Buddhism, which is compassion, kindness, and bringing people to enlightenment. The teacher and the Buddhist institution the teacher is affiliated with is responsible.” (see also [7]) Another person replied as follows:

“Disgusted and annoyed. Everyone is responsible in particular the people who know directly about it and keep silent. However, I know some people did try to bring abuse to light in the group I knew many years ago. Everything was ignored. They kept files which they later gave to an investigation. Yet the group or the lama has still not admitted abuse.” (see also [7])

Another person mentioned:

“Abuse is unethical and illegal and we always have an obligation to stop it. I don't think most groups are capable of policing themselves. they are too insular and secretive and outside law enforcement should be contacted. I tried to contact the Dalai Lama and other leaders repeatedly, but they never respond.” (see also [7]) One person told:

“Angry; sad; helpless. The teachers are responsible for the abuse, the board of directors is responsible for not intervening.” (see also [7])

Another person replied:

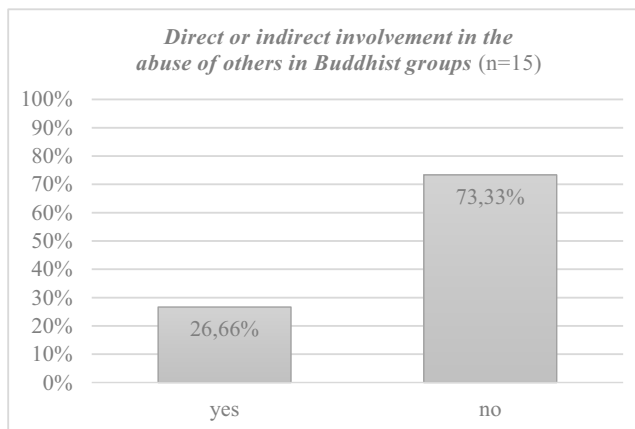
“I feel guilt and shame that I did not do more to speak up against the psychological and emotional abuse that I endured and that I saw others endure at [. . .]. I do bear some responsibility for letting it continue, if I am honest with myself. It would have been better if the other trainers could have spoke up.”

7.8.5 Involvement in the abuse of others as member of a Buddhist group

Direct or indirect involvement in the abuse of others was addressed with the following question: *Have you been directly or indirectly involved in the abuse of others within Buddhist groups?*

26,66% of the 15 subjects affirmed having been directly or indirectly involved in the abuse of others.

Figure 14



7.9 Reflection on the interaction with commands, obedience and testimony of abuse

People were asked about their self-reflection on receiving commands in the traditionally extremely strict hierarchies in Buddhist groups that were unreflectively copied to western Buddhist centers with: *Please describe what you have in mind about orders and commands you receive from the group and how you behave when you receive them.*

In this subsection, the respondent codes are omitted for their personal safety due to possible recognizability.

Someone replied to feel obliged: “feel obliged to obey the instructions, even if I feel uneasy about them sometimes”. One person replied as follows:

“My project-related tasks came only from [. . .] or I suggested them myself. Others were related to living together - cleaning, cooking food, etc. - there we were all the same.”

Another person told:

“I tried to be cheerful and accommodating within reason, but they expect way too much from people. At a certain point after working between 8-10 hours or if I got injured, I started telling people I was going to bed. They looked shocked like someone slapped them. Those who worked to exhaustion were seen as the most devoted until they could no longer complete tasks. After I threw my back out building the foundation for the lama's cabin, I refused to do work that would harm me physically (I already had back problems from excessive manual labor during formative years in foster care)”. (see also [9])

One proband shared:

“Back then, I did what I thought was right. I stayed away from everything I didn't feel good about, e.g. the 'inner circle'. I was too far away from the top 100 to actually be involved in any direct orders. Intuitively, I didn't want to go there either. Quite frankly, there was way too much wrong there for me”. (see also [8])

Two people replied they did not receive orders from their Buddhist group or during Buddhist seminars and one person said that this question wouldn't be of relevance for him. One person said: “I formerly held various roles in the group, paid and volunteer.” Another two persons replied to not be with their Buddhist groups any longer: “I don't receive any as not now with group. When I was attending teachings it was there is the

job just do it or very little instruction” and “I no longer am affiliated with any Buddhist group”.

7.9.1 Reflection on orders to avoid certain group members

The probands were then asked: *How would you think and behave if you were informed in your group that a certain person should be avoided?*

In this subsection, the respondent codes are omitted for their personal safety due to possible recognizability. Three people recollected that this actually had happened in their groups: “It happened. We had meetings about it and our group split up” and

“We actually had such a case once. We received an email saying that a man had behaved in a sexually inappropriate way towards women and that it had therefore been decided that this man was no longer wanted in our centres. At first I thought it was good that so much attention was paid to it and that women were protected. However, I couldn't put a face to the name in the email and then, months later, I met this person by chance at another event, we had known each other by sight. Of course he told me a completely different story - I was open to him, I couldn't imagine that he would do something like that. He said he had voiced criticism and they had wanted to get rid of him. I really can't judge what is true. Such accusations of sexual assault are common, I've seen it happen in other circles too. Then one does not know what to believe”

as well as

“This happened many times. Often I was skeptical at first, but both [. . .] are so good at subtly planting doubts about people to their staff that eventually I would find myself avoiding or judging the person in line with what they were suggesting. Very often these were people who had expressed doubts or had seen through the manipulation. I was told that a former assistant who wrote an article that mentioned [. . .] was 'weak', 'sick', and 'needed help'. I did not believe it at first, then 4 months later I remember thinking that I suddenly had seen the light and now I agreed with my teacher about this woman.”

Another person emphasized his conditioning: “I was conditioned to listen to the teacher and avoid them, and not think about them much.”

Another person described her adjustment to seemingly Dharma conceptualizations as follows:

"In the past: saying nothing against it, because there is always some truth in this, and seek explanations from the Dharma: karma etc. But nowadays I want to know exactly what it's all about. However, most Buddhist groups I know reject critical questions rigorously."

Some people stressed that they would question such policies: "I would refuse to accept it unless there was a really obvious reason", "not relevant to me, but I would leave immediately unless it was a person who was obviously abusive" and

"I would wonder why this person is still allowed to come to the centre. I would first ask for more detailed information about the reasons and try to understand the situation mentally and emotionally, as independently as possible from the outside context".

Others replied:

"I would ask why they should be avoided, and discuss this with few other teachers too. Hopefully their judgement will coincide with mine. I won't maintain long contact with the person unless I have strong reasons to believe I can help them. If my judgement is contrary to my teachers' I would first question my ties to the organisation."

Another person told:

"Curious and try to find out who or what the person was like and why that was being said. I would probably speak to the person myself and try to find out their point of view."

Someone else said: "I would question it and want to know why to make my own decision, especially since I became one of the people to be avoided when I tried to help students being physically and economically exploited."

One person said this did not happen and she was no longer affiliated with that Buddhist group.

7.9.2 Reflection on the information one person ought to be punished

The probands were then asked: *How would you think and behave if you were informed in your group that a certain person should be punished?* In this subsection, the respondent codes are omitted for their personal safety due to possible recognizability.

Some emphasized they would have accepted such based on obedience:

“I was conditioned to listen to the teacher and thought that if they should be punished, there was indeed some justification for the punishment.”

and: “I probably would have gone along with it.” Another person describes a dynamic characteristic of such contexts of building pressure and obligation to confess rather than punish

“There was no punishment. However, there was the pressure to confession. That is, if you didn't show up for meditation in the morning, you had to come before the sangha before breakfast and confess to not having been there. I actually experienced that as releasing. I didn't come, I was too tired', but I think it also put some pressure on the younger monks and nuns.”

Someone used in his answer the euphemism of having to correct mistakes, which is very typical wording for Buddhist centers and groups, as if punishment of adult, self-responsible persons were normal:

“I had no direct contact with punishment actions, or rather peripheral, when persons had to correct 'mistakes'. Today concerning punishment: who why, by whom, rule of law. No more acceptance.”

Two people stressed that they would question such: “astonished and ask why and by whom for what” and “I would question why and probably try to help and talk to the person being punished”. One person stressed that he would refuse.

Two people emphasized that such would result in their decision to leave: “However, I would leave immediately” and “I would leave the group. None of my groups so far have punished someone. At worst they have asked them to stop volunteering, not 'teach' the newcomers to the group, while allowing contact directly with the teacher and other volunteers. I'm not sure what 'punishment' would entail, but if its anything physical or severely verbal for a long time, I would leave the group.”

Two people stressed they would be surprised: “This would surprise me a lot as it would not fit into the atmosphere of the centre. I would proceed as described above

[questioning]" and "we don't have that". Someone emphasized to no longer being affiliated.

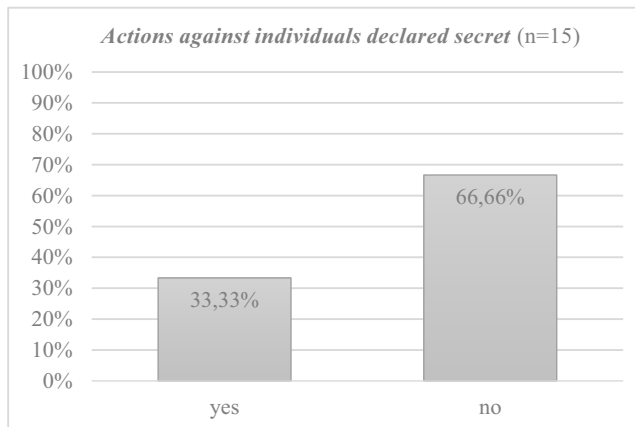
7.10 Secrecy

7.10.1 Actions against individuals declared secret

Secrecy surrounding actions personally experienced by subjects was addressed with the question: *Have any acts against you been declared secret by a Buddhist group or a teacher?*

33,33% of the 15 subjects affirmed that actions against them had been declared secret.

Figure 15



7.10.2 Qualitative data reporting on secrecy involving the subjects themselves

Those who answered yes to the above question were asked: *If so, which actions? Please describe the physical and psychological aspects of the actions. Also describe how you yourself felt about it and which doubts may have arisen in you.* Someone from the *Rigpa* organization replied:

“It was never said directly but I know Tibetan Buddhism does not want people to know how the Vajrayana can really be used. That people can be remotely attacked or injured. Read in a History of the Dalai Lamas that they can use black magic. No one wants this known or is prepared to confirm it.” [#9]

Another person of a group linking itself to the *Drikung Kagyu* tradition stated:

“When my first teacher made me his regent, he swore me to secrecy. when he sexually abused my best friend, he swore her to secrecy. being sworn to secrecy was confusing and creepy.” [#8]

Two people from *Pagode Phat Hue* in Germany reported:

“It is indirect. By the fact that I was declared with the 'honor' as a trusted disciple, I automatically did not talk about what I learned or what was being discussed in the inner Sangha. This included correspondence etc.” [#6]

and

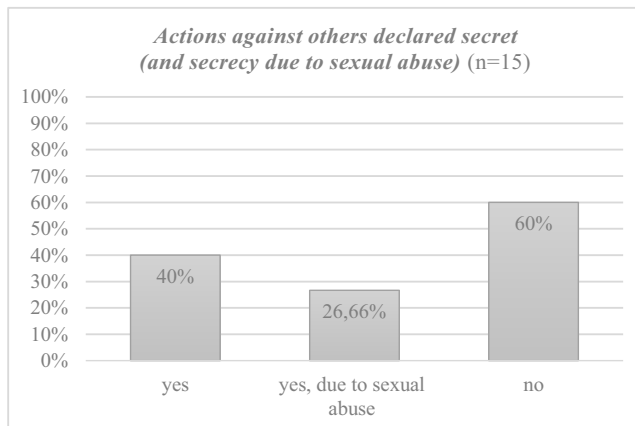
“I have confronted the master at a meeting of the order with the fact that I know about his previous offenses of sexual abuse of a 12 year old and also about his recent denial of this case, and that I will not accept this under any circumstances. In the subsequent part of the meeting we talked about it with several attempts of manipulation on part of the master and the group, but I insisted on my statement and tried to convince those who doubted about the master's lies. All order meetings get recorded. This one as well. At the end of this meeting, the nun in charge of the recordings immediately announced that no one would receive a copy of this tape and that it would be destroyed. That meeting did not cause any doubts to me, rather the certainty of having fallen prey to a charlatan. It was only later that I had serious doubts and a crisis of faith, because I could not forgive myself for not having opened my eyes earlier. However, I began to ask myself how I could get into this.” [#7]

7.10.3 Actions against others declared secret

The witnessing of the secrecy of actions performed on others was addressed with the following question: *Have you witnessed acts directed to others being sworn to secrecy by a Buddhist group or a teacher?*

40% of the 15 subjects affirmed having witnessed actions against others being sworn to secrecy.

Figure 16



7.10.4 Secrecy about actions to others due to sexual abuse

Secrecy about others due to sexual abuse was addressed with the question: *If so, was it because of sexual abuse of this person or any other person?*

26,66% of the group affirmed having witnessed sexual abuse being sworn to secrecy.

7.11 Wrong promises or deception by Buddhist teachers

In the following subsections, the respondent codes are omitted for their personal safety due to possible recognizability.

7.11.1 Wrong promises

35,71% of the 15 probands who were asked: *Have you been given wrong promises by Buddhist teachers*; agreed while one did not reply to that question.

These were then asked to exemplify with: *If so, which ones?* They replied as follows:

“Happiness, well-being, better karma, balance, quick enlightenment. Good understanding of the Western students respectively their valuable soul would exist” and “having a home in the center. Transforming sexual energy into whatsoever”.

One person replied:

“All of them as far as I can see. They talk about leading people to enlightenment when all they want is money, sex, property and power. If they don't want it for themselves they cover up for those who do.”

Another person stated: “my first lama and my second lama and many I've taken teachings from”

7.11.2 Deception

57,14 % of the 15 probands who were asked: *Have you been deceived by Buddhist teachers*; agreed while one did not reply to that question.

They then were asked: *How were you deceived? How did this deception affect you? What would have happened if you would not have been deceived? How has this deception affected the group?*

Someone wrote:

“The group has fallen apart, there are probably only 3 nuns left from the initial Sangha when I was there (hearsay). I had thought I would spend my life with the master and the sangha, living and working for dharma - writing, workshops, etc.”

Another person replied:

“Pretending skills and abilities they do not have, up to and including omniscience. Supernatural abilities, holding authentic lineages and being certified by real lamas was pretended. Quite often the special lessons are believed to come soon at the condition. This carrot-stick motivation constantly raises unrealistic expectations with the respective consequences.”

Someone told:

“I was promised a home, a family and also the development of spiritual skills. Consequently, I put all my time and work into the master's projects for no pay. I was utterly dependent on the group and had almost no contacts outside the group. Also, my Tai Chi practice suffered, because I was prohibited from taking part in the training of my former teacher. Social contact outside the centre was hardly possible.”

7.12 Contributions and work at seminar centers

Concerning the many contributions at the seminar centers, 40% of people agreed that their professional education and expertise was taken into account for their paid or unpaid assignments in their Buddhist seminar or meditation center: *Has your professional education and expertise been taken into account for your assignments (paid or unpaid) in a Buddhist seminar or meditation center?*

Only 33,33% agreed that the decision on their activities in a Buddhist seminar or meditation center been made in dialogue with the leadership of the organization which was informed about their professional education and competence: *Has the decision on your activities in a Buddhist seminar or meditation center been made in dialogue with the leadership of the organization which was informed about your professional education and competence?*

7.12.1 Reasons for not taking into account professional education

Those who told their professional education was not taken into account for all the many tasks enumerated - which was basically everything for running hotel- and seminar-organization, from cleaning and cooking, to organizing seminars and representing the center - were asked: *If no, why not?*

The replies were as follows: “because they treat everyone as an underclass of servants that exist to serve the lama” (see [6]), and “momentary needs, the degree of blind enthusiasm and surrender, as well as relationships decided” as well as “probably just that I was educated was important. My degrees in psychology and [. . .] seemed irrelevant”.

One reply explicitly referred to the seminar organizers actually in the position of power of deciding over others on the core issue of managing the high amounts of people in seminars: “Because the course organizers wanted help dealing with so many people and they didn't necessarily care about people's professional skills. You didn't need to be a professional to clean toilets”.

Some replies were not only unreflected concerning checking education – as to whether their teachers had at least studied (and applied) the subject they taught or other group participants who had studied Buddhism without being allowed to use that knowledge – or the dynamics of possibly denigrating well educated people and wasting their capacity for the group or others in case they'd make use of their education instead of running after orders to only clean and wash etc. replying: “what would that be good for” or even “was not necessary”.

7.12.2 Blurred deciders on permitted and unpermitted work in the Buddhist groups irrespective the education of participants and their hierarchical status

Those who have disagreed that the decision on their work in the groups and centers was done in agreement with the leadership were then asked: *If no, please explain how decisions are made in your organization. Please describe whether the decision-making process is transparent and who is accountable.*

Someone in his response referred to the anticipatory obedience expected in very many of the Buddhist groups and centers: “It was based on what the lama decreed. Almost everyone obeyed like slaves”. (see [6])

Another person emphasized the issue of intransparency in Buddhist groups and centers, repeated the intransparency observed in the organization *Rigpa* and argued for having observed using incompetence to create chaos in the group:

“At Rigpa everything is completely intransparent, and a lot happens due to knowing the relevant people and then being tied into a web of favors, commitments, etc. From a certain height of donations, degree of reputation, there are certain privileges, combined with the danger of being brought back to normal zero. Very often, utterly incompetent people were appointed, and I got the impression that the permanent chaos that comes with it makes it easier to manipulate. Particularly in 'Care', there were usually gross miscasts. In the end, all positions of importance were taken from the top management around [. . .]”. (see [8])

In the following response, the power of the organizers and managers of seminars became evident:

“Not transparent or accountable. As stated previously whoever was in charge of organizing the seminar ensured there were volunteers to cover the jobs that had to be done eg photocopying.”

The fact someone had pre-sorted the approved activities as a kind of jobmanager was not reflected in the following response: “there were three activities to choose from, I made the decision myself”. There were also responses that are highly unreflective about the processes of work, hidden hierarchies and internal policies of humiliating and elevating people through the very act of assigning tasks:

“I don't know, it just happens that way. There is no particular structure. But there are also official regional or Germany-wide Sangha meetings. When it comes to the association or the trust, of course the rules have to be observed, especially when it comes to handling funds. But I was not involved in that.”

Another person replied:

“As I do not work with a background of education at the centre, I have not been involved in such decision-making processes.”

7.12.3 Achieving control over others within Buddhist groups and one's own hierarchical standing by controlling their work duties and workloads

Probands were asked: *Which group members (in which position and with which educational background) decided on the assignment of activities: who assessed your professional qualification for the activities? Who assessed the equivalence between any of your activities and your participation in Buddhist courses? Who decided on the amount of hours to be worked?*

Someone replied:

“At Rigpa everything is completely intransparent, and a lot happens due to knowing the relevant people and then being tied into a web of favors, commitments, etc. elsewhere it's similar.”

Another person shared: “It was pretty chaotic, but the monastics and poor students did way more work than the affluent students”. One person regarded herself to be in a special

role which was elaborated in other places of the questionnaires, and earned money from that work unlike most others, and was lecturing although having no education for that, and told:

“[. . . the group leader] or I myself. I have decided about all my hours and work myself. I could have worked less. There was nothing predefined for me and my contract covered a part-time job. However, it was not stated there that I have been staying and eating for free at the monastery. This could have been integrated there. I always felt somehow guilty: a) that I was paid for working in/ for Dharma b) I always calculated that I was supposed to bring in the money I cost through my lectures and my work.”

In the strict hierarchies of the Buddhist centers, that was copied from Asian monasteries, the seminar managers and property managers - not requiring relevant education for their jobs - are mostly in the top and core positions, right below the leadership, which gives them tremendous power. This has been illustrated here, for example:

“The final decision remained with the master. Below him, there was a property manager appointed by him. By this appointment this person got the judgement of others qualification. This person did not have a long education or anything like that. People who exercise power are primarily characterized by loyalty to the master. Whoever was not devout to the master did not obtain power”

One person replied:

“[. . .] makes the decision. [. . .] gauged our personal inclinations and manipulated us to contribute to whatever work accordingly. [. . .] encouraged us to work on the [. . .] projects as much as possible.”

Others also referred these core decisions to the course organizers and course leaders:

“The course organizers decided on what was called rota jobs to help the smooth running of the course/ retreat for everyone. People could specify where they wanted to work eg cleaning, clerical, driving but were not always assigned what they asked for”

and “the programs team in combination with senior teachers/course leaders”.

Some people replied that they would generally have had some choice with regards to their work at the centers, but again any ordained ones were defined above everyone else regardless the education:

“For the most part we decided how much we wanted to work. Delegation was done by the monk, regardless of their education, but they had at least a bachelors.”

In response, one person used a pattern of argumentation that is very common in Buddhist groups to cover up actual facts, namely “we are all the same” and “everyone pays”:

“No one is interested in any educational background. Everyone just does what they are good at. So everyone looks for the task that he/ she can do best. No one decides on the number of hours to be worked. Everyone pays for the courses, even though they help out. Sometimes there were reduced course fees for the core team, mostly the kitchen staff, because some of them work in the kitchen all day and can't participate much in the programme. Cooking food for 5,000 people is a lot of responsibility.”

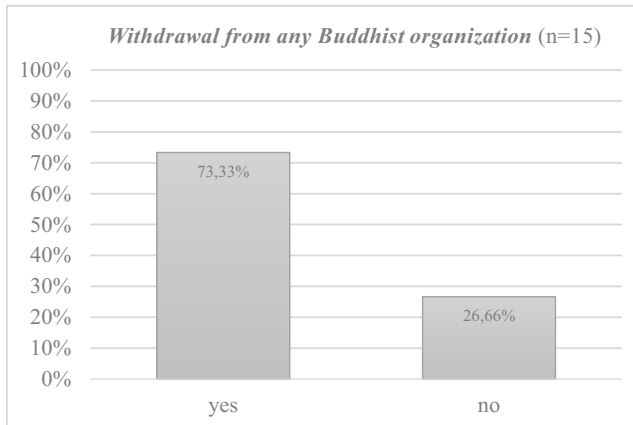
Other replies were as follows: “Nobody, I have volunteered without any form of organization of others”, “we could choose ourselves” and “[. . . the group leader] made all of these decisions”.

7.13 Withdrawal or separation from a Buddhist organization

7.13.1 Quantification of withdrawal

73,33% of the 15 subjects who were asked the question: *Have you withdrawn from any Buddhist organization*; affirmed having withdrawn.

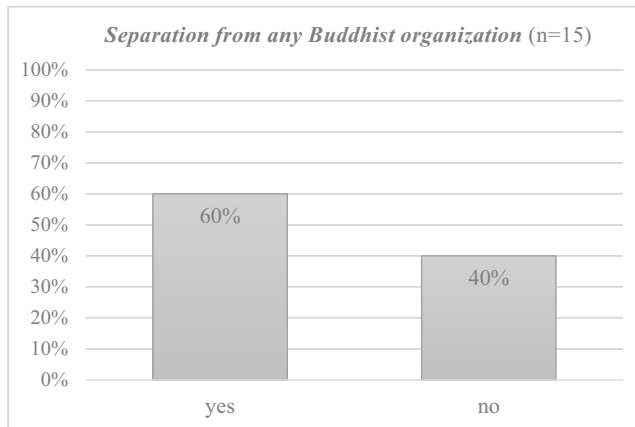
Figure 17



7.13.2 Quantification of separation

60% of the 15 subjects who were asked the question: *Did you separate from any Buddhist organization*; affirmed having separated from a Buddhist organization.

Figure 18



7.13.3 Reporting reasons for separating from Buddhist organizations

They were then asked: *Why did you take this decision?* Someone in Germany from the *Rigpa* organization reported:

“With Rigpa: Refusal of any discussion on the part of Rigpa, I felt the situation to be hopelessly stuck. My person as a critic was accordingly ridiculed, portrayed as psychologically 'strange'. Usually this happened with most 'dissidents', that was one reason to go, some form of ethics was completely missing. Right was what was in the mind of the master or what was thought to be so. One could call it a general refusal to engage in dialogue. Other organizations: Even if the lama is okay and doesn't abuse students, unfortunately there are always various phenomena: worship of the lama in a western, blind and seemingly naive way, completely untransparent structures regarding money, power, ways of decision. Fixation on career in the ranking within the 'Sangha'. Willing adaptation of authoritarian structures. Those who don't want to or can't fit in will fall out sooner or later, the social pressure is often subtle but very high. Mixing of the whole sub-cultural mishmash of hippie, New Age-small ideologies, green alternative behaviors with the traditional ballast from Asia: feudalistic structures, special hierarchies, outdated interpretations, etc. Efforts to mix psychological methods with Buddhism.” [#3, see also [8]]

Someone else from the *Rigpa* organization reported:

“I saw directly that while they present a very acceptable public image behind that is a lineage of pure violence. They believe they are accountable to no one and are quite capable of taking someone's head off believing they are above any law. They also use remote viewing to injure people. One of their major teachers publicly said Tibetan Buddhism was a system that could be used by a good person or a terrorist. I have seen both sides.” [#9, see also [9]]

Someone from the *Pathgate* organization shared:

“I realised that Pathgate was a cult and [...] was behaving like an authoritarian cult leader. I concluded that his behaviour was unethical, narcissistic, manipulative and aggressive, which is not what an authentic Buddhist teacher should have.” [#10]

Someone from the *Dharma Ocean* organization reported:

“I realized after being one of the employees closest to my teacher for many years that he was a narcissist who was constantly abusing power. He was cruel, judgmental, undermined student's most valuable awakening experiences as well as their confidence, gaslit and manipulated people, and believed that no senior teacher or student was ever good enough. He constantly tried to turn people against each other, spreading rumors about each person's 'neurosis'. I realized that he was sick and the whole system he had created was sick and I could not live a compassionate life and be a part of it. Part of what helped me realize this was one three week long retreat in which I worked closely with him. He asked me to do something unethical and outside the bounds of my employment agreement. I said no. He yelled at me, told me that if I would not do it he was not going to teach at the retreat anymore, and hung up the phone. He then triangulated with other people for hours, threatened my employment, and we were only able to 'repair' and continue on with the retreat by me affirming loyalty and making myself submissive to him. He refused to acknowledge that he had asked me to do something unethical and outside of my job description. He wrote me a hateful and threatening email during the middle of the retreat telling me that only he speaks 'for the lineage' and 'my view was weak' for disagreeing with him. This was one of many counts of abuse, but eventually contributed to my leaving.”
[#12]

Someone from several American centers linked to *Vajrayāna* shared:

“I separated from my first guru [. . .] because he sexually violated my best friend. The lama chose her because she was mentally ill and had a history of abuse. He told her he could heal her trauma through sexual acts. I separated from another center and lama [. . .] because students were being worked to exhaustion, financially exploited, and discarded. They were told if their minds were pure, they would not need much sleep and their bodies would not get injured from backbreaking labor. People were told the world was ending and they should use their credit cards and savings to make donations because the merit they would get would be incalculable. This place was run like a cult. [. . .] One of the students worked so much, she had a nervous breakdown and ended up in an institution. No one from the sangha visited her and they banned her from the center. I practiced on my own for years after this [. . .] after I discovered that my best friend's child had been raped by the lama/tulku [. . .], in addition to other children. [. . .] I don't even know what enlightenment means anymore.” [#8, see also [9]]

Someone from a Buddhist organization in France shared:

“They claim to work on the basis of Indo-Tibetan principles, but true affiliation to any living or dead master has never been clearly communicated. I think it was more of a New Age movement that had used various techniques: yoga, qi-gong, family constellations, massages, mantra, litho energy, ascended masters, etc..” [#14]

Someone from the *Diamond Path* shared:

“Political reasons: the right-wing shift since the refugee-crisis in some parts of the community. I have observed many who were simply increasingly agitated about refugees and Islam and spoke in a manner [. . .] which for me was quite fearful and hateful. [. . .] All that mattered is building new centers, remodeling, and raising money to buy land somewhere. Moreover, I had doubts about the teaching methods, especially the ongoing triggering of "disturbed feelings", which grew ever stronger within - in the end, I felt angry all the time and had no control over it any longer. While we were given explanations about how to deal with disturbing emotions, it didn't help me at all. Often I have only felt comfortable and happy when I was with Ole or the Sangha - I developed an addiction and felt ashamed because I could not maintain the happiness feelings that I had experienced during the course for long on my own. Well, after the course, one falls into a hole. Already before I started in the Diamond Path, I had poor impulse control. But it has gotten worse instead of better. So maybe it was just me and it wasn't the right way for me, but for others it is, I can't judge that. I also had doubts about the effectiveness of this meditation practice - in the first years it was fantastic and so I am very grateful for it, it had a really positive effect on my psyche. But after sometime this overturned. Although the meditation practice is beautiful with all those ideas, one is oriented strongly towards the outside and is somehow no longer conscious of oneself, one does no longer reflect one's own feelings and needs, it was like that for me. So, I guess it's fine for a while, but perhaps not forever, certainly not as the stand-alone method. You also need some mindfulness training - I believe. Without that you get kind of mentally 'rigid' doing nothing but ngöndro. In any case, I experienced to become more and more bizarre and entranced. That's the reason I quit.” (#20)

Someone from the *Pagode Phat Hue* organization in Germany shared the following:

“Abuse of confidence, manipulation, disappointment. [. . .] was confronted with abuse allegations on the Internet and legal proceedings were conducted against him. I had his

lawyer's statement of defense submitted to the state prosecutor's office. I was involved personally on many levels, because at the same time as the accusations were made [. . .] When I read the lawyer's defense statement and as it was proven over 30 pages with all the psychological tricks as to why the affected boy I knew was lying, I knew something was wrong. The boy had come to the monastery at the age of 13, had been entrusted to [. . .] and lived there as a young monk. I knew him. Whatever had happened, I was shocked by the way he was portrayed in the letter. And that prompted me [. . .] until things were clarified. Since then, I have never been able to talk to [. . .] again [. . .] wrote him, asked for a conversation, even went there, but he ignored me (horrible when I think about it) but there was no honest conversation.” [#6, see also [8]]

Another person from the *Pagode Phat Hue* organization referred to the same series of incidents:

“The leader of the group had sexually exploited several of his students in the past, including a 12-year-old boy. I was one of only a few of his students who knew about this, since the group consisted almost entirely of recent students. In the past, this master had expressed his remorse in a letter without being very specific. Because of this declaration of repentance, I stayed in his environment and later joined his newly established order (his old one had largely turned away from him). However, after a while it came out that he denied his deeds. I was afraid that a repetition of abuses could occur. So, I positioned myself against him and tried to shake up the newcomers. But they met me only with rejection and before long, slander, verbal hostility and threats of expulsion were added. I fought to the point of hopelessness, because nobody listened to me, provided I was a 'confused brother who no longer knows what he is saying'. When I realized that I would not achieve anything, I resigned.” [#7]

Someone else shared: “Didn't find their centers in my cities [. . .] or didn't speak their language well.” [#16]

Someone from *Tariki Trust* reported: “I felt uncomfortable with the attempts to humiliate me and control me, so I finished my studies, got my certificate, and left.” [#18]

7.13.4 Time period between the parting decision and separation itself, and the protective measures required

Next, people were asked: *How long did it take after your decision until you left the group? Did you have help with this? Did you have to take measures for your personal safety (changing your place of residence, keeping your place of residence secret, changing your name, etc.)? Please, describe the process of separation and the measures necessary for you.* In the following subsections, the respondent codes are omitted for their personal safety due to possible recognizability.

One person shared:

“My wife has helped me with this. We moved from Paris to Munich and the geographical distance helped me to see more clearly, and to understand that this is no longer beneficial to me in the way I expected it to be (or in the way I experienced it at the beginning of the meetings).”

Another person reported:

“Rigpa: I talked to my wife, who was also with Rigpa, and I told her I was leaving, as soon as it dawned to me. I am comfortable in taking decisions and consistent. And my wife left after a while. It took about 6 weeks for my mental and external process to officially exit - I tried to tell the master my mind, which didn't work out. I have contributed to awareness on Rigpa in some places (internet) using fake names, because at least one fanatical Rigpa follower had smeared excrement at my front door and the like. If I would have had proof, I would have reported her to the police. At some point it subsided. Various Rigpa friends were unable to understand my decision and generally nobody was willing even considering the reasons for it. Some even believed that someone like me, who would criticize Rigpa, would have mental health issues. There were 'offers of help' from Rigpa, which I non-thankfully rejected; I knew the Rigpa Care Department well enough to see no point in it for sure. Now I'm only on the web under a pseudonym. Not using the real name was useful, because facts are easier to accept if one doesn't think one knows the person saying them and already has sorted them into the category of too much ego. Now and then Rigpa students also read information blogs. However, the Rigpa boss then publicly speaking badly about me confirmed my decision. At first, they wanted to hide the fact that I was leaving, and when that didn't work out, the 'Sangha' was 'informed' accordingly. And I really was a minor light at Rigpa and there were waves of people leaving, after all. Other

organisations: If I notice that a teacher, lama or roshi refuses open dialogue, attributes the responsibility for everything less favourable in his organization to the students, if there is financial intransparency, if the power structures are unbalanced, if there is cultural ignorance towards westerners, if unhealthy structures predominate, e.g. blind adoration, strong superstition, examples of self-sacrifice, then I leave. It was striking that Rigpa wanted to find out at all costs which teacher, if any, I would turn to. It was indeed one with a sounding name. The first time I went to a seminar, quite soon after I had resigned, I met a Rigpa 'senior student' there, we knew each other. He was somewhat uncertain about me. He had often conveyed messages from Sogyal Lakar to other lamas, I knew. Anyway, he paid his respects as Rigpa's representative and handed over a letter. Then the lama intensely looked at me, and upon parting he told me to come again, in a compassionate tone. I cannot prove it, but I know of similar cases where lamas were informed that student xyz would come, he/ she would have difficulties, or too much lung [rlung – a concept in Tibetan medicine referring to mental diseases, currently commonly used in Western Buddhist groups to spread rumors of someone having psychosis that is not diagnosed by professionals at all and stigmatize the person in such ways; note by the author] or something similar. At this point, I would consider that a precaution against negative information about Sogyal Lakar which ex-disciples could tell” (see also [8])

One person told:

“I left immediately I heard about the abuse because I knew one person who highlighted it and knew they were honest and reliable. No help with the decision, didn't need it. I was already separated from the group or organisation so leaving was easy.” (see also [9])

Another person replied:

“I had lived in the monastery for three years and already left in [. . .]. Actually, that really was a first step, but at that time I was not quite aware of the reasons for it. I attributed it to the sangha - the fact no real friendships were possible there, there was always mistrust and competition - [. . .] played us all off against each other, very subtly. However, I was also aware that I didn't want to somewhat 'hide' in the monastery any longer. My wish was to live the Dharma and live for the Dharma, although I was no nun; and in the long run lay people don't really have a place in the monastery. It took me about 5 months to take the decision to leave the monastery. The grieving process was intense, and I was scared of the consequences and was crying all the time. When I left and tried to build a new life in Berlin,

it was as if a spell had been put over me, no one contacted me - I was without ground at first. I have cried every day from September to March. It took a retreat to recover, and I decided to write a book and started attending seminars and retreats regularly back in the monastery. The separation only came in [. . .], when I was presented the allegations of abuse and drew the consequences. It shook me, it is hard to find words to describe. In [. . .] I consulted a psychotherapist and have been working through this with her, and also on the parts of myself that have enabled such. I have no contact with anyone from the monastery or the sangha, except for the friends whom I knew before the time there, whom I had somehow brought along. There is only one of them who has not distanced herself. And it is challenging to nevertheless find ways in our friendship (we have known each other for over 20 years, still from our university student times, maybe we can still have some contact only because she lives in [. . .] and we cannot meet. We have also avoided the subject until recently.” (see also [8])

One person told:

“about 5 weeks have passed from the moment I was informed about the suppression of the fact of sexual exploitation and abuse of the 12 year old until I left. I have asked my father for advice two or three times, but I have not taken safety measures.”

One person shared:

“one week. I was helped by an ex-student whom I approached online through a cult education forum. He was able to explain that I was being brainwashed and convinced me to leave [. . .] influence as soon as possible. I did not believe I was in any physical harm, but I needed to extract myself quietly because I was still in his presence during that week. I did not need to take any other measures, but I have been keeping my identity secret [. . .] so that I won't be harassed and that [. . .] would not use me to brainwash the other students.”

One reply was:

“My extraction process was very delicate because of my roles. I was the assistant to the head teacher and founder for longer than any other assistant had served [. . .]. I was a member of the board. I was a long-time community volunteer. I decided to quit my job [. . .]. I had mixed feelings about it and I was only seeing part of the picture. I moved to another country to get space from the whole thing, but I still was just putting puzzle pieces together. When I finally was able to let in the reality of the abuse and see the patterns clearly, I had

help from a Somatic Experiencing Therapist, an Acupuncturist [. . .] when I was ready to fully extract myself, leaving my last formal roles as board member and meditation instructor. I left the board quietly, trying not to draw any attention to myself, and cut off contact with [. . .] (not answering their calls or emails). I changed my phone number and still saw a call from [. . .]. I removed my phone number from my website. I told all my meditation students that I could no longer teach this work because of the abuse. I sent my former teacher a brief card saying he was not my teacher anymore. I wrote a 9 page statement about the abuse and sent it to 260 sangha and former sangha members, but did not make it fully public. I eventually asked friends who may still be semi-involved to not speak about me to [. . .], since I had seen them both re-write the narratives around students who had left calling out abuse. A few friends agreed to this boundary. One woman who still worked at [. . .] did not respond. I waited two weeks, then sent her a gentle email explaining that I was removing her from all of my social media as I did not want information about me going to [. . .].”

Another reply was:

“first lama: I left almost immediately; second lama, I withdrew slowly at first, then cut off all contact abruptly after several people came to me for help with the financial pressure they were under. They were being asked to get into debt they couldn't afford and I told them to take care of themselves and their families rather than give all their money away to the lama. Word spread that I was sympathetic and I think my status as an ordained monastic helped people break away and also pissed off the lama, so I cut ties with all the true believers and I legally changed my name, moved, changed my phone number, etc. These people also threaten you with curses/ bad karma, etc. and I didn't want them to scare my child”

And one person said:

“I knew by middle 2018 that I wanted to finish with [. . .]. It took me until the end of 2019 to sever all contact with [. . .] and the group. I had the help of my therapist and a trusted friend, especially during the final 6 months of 2019. I just had to complete some course work and some paperwork in order to get my certificate. And I stopped attending any training [. . .]. I did not have to change my name or move, thank goodness. For a long time I got emails about training [. . .] and I even got a Christmas card this year (in December 2020.) But all I have had to do is ignore any attempts to contact me - that seems to be

working effectively. I live in [. . .] - so the distance helps. Plus blocking their phone numbers on my phone and on WhatsApp, as well as diverting any emails to spam/ junk. I haven't been threatened, though I wonder what might happen if certain individuals knew that I am completing these surveys.”

Another proband reported:

“Between the first doubts until I stopped joining the group: about two to three years, I think. However, I still went to the courses with [. . .]. And I might join again when Covid-19 is behind, although I’m not sure. Relocating for professional reasons also helped me to get out of it. Then I went to another Kagyu group, they are quite different. However, I didn't like it there and am currently without sangha. Here, one does not have to take any measures for personal safety. I also can't imagine that something like that would ever happen in [. . .]. The emphasis is on not trying to get people coming back if they want to leave the group. That's what [. . .] himself has said over and over again, that it's okay if people need a break from the sangha for a while, and we accept that, and everyone comes in voluntarily. Nevertheless, I have seen psychological pressure being exerted when someone left, i.e. they were made up as losers, because they didn't manage the quick path or broke off their ngöndro, because that wouldn't have a good imprint in their minds. But this is coming from certain sangha members and certainly not from [. . .]. However, when you have no social contacts beyond the sangha any longer, which is the case for many people, this is not easy. That makes you afraid of suddenly being alone. Some people are living right in the centre or in shared flats close to the centre, which also has economic aspects, because living in a community is quite cheap. However, that was not the case with me. I had no help and I wouldn't have known where to turn either.”

One person shared: "No, none of that. Was pretty normal."

7.14 Help with and psychological impact of distancing

7.14.1 Help for distancing and its impact

The probands were asked: *Please, describe whether anyone has helped you to distance yourself or part. How did these people help you? What did this mean and how did it effect for you?* In the following subsections, the respondent codes are omitted for their personal safety due to possible recognizability. Two people replied that they had no help. One person shared:

“I think that psychotherapy has helped. Getting feedback from the therapist who made me aware that it was a manipulative system, and that my reactions are normal and reasonable in such circumstances. All this time, my husband has accompanied me through this process. He also supported me during my time in the monastery. I also especially benefited from teachings by other spiritual teachers through youtube. Being able to listen to the Dharma, and connecting with my intention, and not losing it all. For I was for some time doubting everything, just as if I no longer would know how to meditate.”

Another person told:

“It helped me that people have begun writing openly about unpleasant issues concerning the Buddhist movement [. . .]. In the beginning we were a small group of three people and we came together after leaving Rigpa. We gathered material, wanting to write a book, of our four stories in Rigpa. However, nobody was keen to take on the organization. When the well-known 'letter' was published, we found that there was enough to read for anyone interested, and adopted the plan. We were actually relieved of a burden. We are still exchanging information from time to time in a small group.”

One proband replied:

“I got help from my family where I could stay for a while. I also communicated with former monks of that same master, which was helpful for me. This help allowed me the time to overcome isolation as well as clarify what I would like to do with my life.”

Another person wrote:

“Other than the ex-student I reached out to online, I made contact with other ex-students locally, who left [. . .] due to various reasons. [. . .] has warned us against communicating with them. But having heard their stories, I understood that he wanted to prevent us from knowing his bad behaviour from these ex-students. Understanding what they had went

through to cause them to leave [. . .] convinced me that my decision was right.” (see also [9])

Yet another person told:

“After I distanced myself I heard that the teacher had a life threatening illness. One day I began to feel unwell and got the image of a needle in my left arm. I knew it had nothing to do with me. I immediately emailed the office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. I explained what happened and that I wanted this stopped. [. . .] Afterwards I came to understand that the teacher was using techniques of the Vajrayana that I did not know against me to make me unwell [. . .] I had to write a second time to the office of HHDL and another teacher to try and get this activity stopped. I also started to use healing and light to keep it at a distance.”

Another person told:

“People telling me horror stories helped me distance myself and see the behavior more clearly. Some people were quite supportive when I made the decision to disrobe as a monk. They listened to me and what had happened to my best friend and her child and told me their own stories. I started an online support group for survivors of Vajrayana abuse and met many psychologists and cult experts who were helpful in deprogramming.”

One female shared:

“My husband helped when we agreed to no longer speak about the sangha or to limit it to set times. It helped us both to focus on things we are excited about. [. . .] All helped me to have a positive sense of myself outside of the tradition, to feel my energy body as my own again. Often I had a big boost of energy after. A former senior teacher from the lineage met with me at my request and honestly answered my questions about why he left, confirming my worst fears that my teacher was a narcissist and was very sick. It was confirming and clarifying and good to know I was not crazy. An acupuncturist has helped by focussing on separation, endings, and protection [. . .]. I tracked down a number of former tantrikas who had 'disappeared' and asked them why. The abuse reports I got back were confirming and helped me to take further steps to distance myself. I have been working with an EMDR therapist on trauma targets related to my former teacher. After each session a lot comes up for days, then the triggers die down.”

One person reported:

“The main things that my therapist and my trusted friend did were to listen to me, believe me, and encourage me to sever contact [. . .]. It was vital that I felt validated by them - I knew that I would have to do the work, but I also knew that I wasn't 'crazy' to be appalled at what I saw and experienced [. . .] I needed those other perspectives in order to see the reality of her and the situation that I had been in for years.”

7.14.2 Protective measures

Furthermore, the probands were asked: *What personal protective measures did you have to take? How long have you maintained these? Was there something that helped loosen them?*

Three people replied that they took no protective measures. Others shared:

“Not much. I just needed to stay away from current students. I also needed to keep my identity hidden”

and

“changed my name and phone number, moved. For advocacy online, I use a fake name with no photo and claim to be in another country. Some of these people are dangerous. The lama Shenpen who raped my friend's kid is connected to bad people. He sent thugs to harass a nun he screwed out of a lot of money. [. . .] I already had PTSD from prior trauma, so I already have a tendency to see the world as a fundamentally chaotic and hostile place; my experiences in Buddhism only reinforced this. There is no refuge anywhere and I only trust and rely on myself.” (see also [9])

One person shared:

“I have to keep recalling that the practice I have learned has remained with me. Moreover, I continue not to joining a group, although I am often feeling some longing toward belonging to a community.”

Another person told:

“Anonymity in the internet, to date due to convenience. Well, uncovering efforts have now been successful, and it seems more acceptable to adopt a more critical stance towards a range of issues.”

One person stated:

“Leaving my job, moving residence, avoiding contact with people still involved in the group, stopping talking to people who are fixated on it and want to only talk about the group. Have maintained avoiding contact with current group members for 4 months and plan to continue. Stopped talking with ex-members who were a support but were also often cycling in the trauma vortex and wanted to talk about nothing else 3 months ago. Have maintained a few friendships with former sangha members with reduced contact. Removed myself from email lists and most related facebook groups. I also practice energetic clearing and protection and call upon the support of my ancestors and other compassionate beings. Each time I loosen these measures, my former teacher pulls a big dramatic move in the community - such as firing the board in order to stop the Olive Branch investigation into his behavior or emailing the whole community to tell them to practice silence. When I hear about these things I am still really hurt, and I feel them energetically more than I would like to, then I increase my protective measures again.”

One proband described:

“The first protective measure was to break up completely with the location. I still keep it this way until now. The second protection measure was to stop all contact with the group except for one person. Apart from this one person, I keep it that way to this day. The third measure was to abstain from further contact with the people of the order. I also do this to this day. For example, I do not intermingle people I have met recently with people I know from the surroundings of that order.”

Another one told: “I have described what I did to cut contact and maintain no contact above.” and one person said: “I contacted the office of HHDL twice and another lama once. I have also contacted and continue to use people outside of Buddhism.”

7.14.3 Psychological impact

The probands were also asked: *How has this distancing or separation impacted you psychologically and professionally since then?*

One person stated:

“Leaving Rigpa was liberating. However, I had been committed for a long period of time and, above all, as I had practiced for longer periods every day a considerable portion of my social life had fallen apart. I was able to cope with this well. Above all, I was freed from all the tacit conventions within the 'sangha', that is, the behaviors that had prevailed within, the insider language, the anticipatory complacency, etc. That had positive effects on my job and family, because I finally had more time. In particular, my professional life had always kept me grounded. A certain change came about, since I also changed my practice habits. This was positive for me as I have examined what was conditioned and what was based on deeper understanding.”

Another person replied:

“Major insecurity, sadness, and depression, shame as well. It is very difficult to describe. I still experience it as a great loss and also as a betrayal. Hard. I also lost friendships, the whole sangha and also friends who weren't in the Sangha and were unable to understand this and what has happened to me. Now, I have very few contacts and friends. I'm only just beginning to reopen a little or even start to talk about the last years. Many people around me didn't know what the situation was, they just wondered how I had ended up so broken and depressed from an initially happy time and adventure in the monastery (whereas one would think I ought to know the path now and be inwardly stable and joyful). Only since a Spiegel article [. . .] I became aware of my shame - which also confronts me with my own ambivalence as the good time in the monastery is still the most fulfilling time of my life.”

One proband shared:

“I am doing better, particularly since I have allowed for the first time perspectives from other Dharma teachers and have begun to practice another way of dealing with myself. Professionally no effects”

One person said:

“Not a lot because I was reared a Catholic and knew that people in religion were often not good. I was mainly disappointed that a good system that could help a lot of people was hijacked for the complete benefit of lamas only”

And another person told:

“Better now, although I still notice introjects, which the ' teacher ' had said then, running through my mind as constant thoughts: how things should be and how I should think about them.”

Yet another one explained:

“I had access to regular Sanghas when I was studying for a semester in [. . .]. I keep in touch with dharma friends when I can. It has also made me decide to finally settle in a country where I can settle with a good sangha. ”

Someone shared:

“Psychologically, I feel anger, depression and a sense of injustice. Professionally, I have not been in a stable job for 6-7 years because PY has discouraged his students to detach from mainstream society.”

Another person:

“Professionally I make less money, but I have been able to instigate a career change that I have wanted to make for many years. Psychologically I have required therapy and ongoing energy work for the last 9 months and I imagine this could go on for a year or many years, given what other students have been through.”

Yet another one noted:

“Professionally very good, because I now get money for my work! Psychologically in the long run also good. The first time was tough, but precisely as I was strict with my own protective measures, I quickly got a handle on the emotional sense of loss. I have only been off for 16/17 months now and am much more at peace with myself and much more relaxed than I was before. In terms of my own inner stability, I would say I have even grown through this separation process.”

Someone told:

“It has been psychologically and professionally freeing - it's been healthy for me physically, emotionally, and mentally - cutting contact and maintaining no contact with [. . .] is one of the best decisions that I have made in my life.”

One proband shared:

“I was working on a Buddhist anthology and that became awkward. I told the editors that I had lost my faith and why; one of them asked me to lie and pretend I was still Buddhist [. . .] I was very active as a monk and gave speeches and talks [. . .] but those people aren't interested in being friends now that I've lost my faith. I don't actually care.”

7.15 Lacking help or support

7.15.1 Missing help

The question: *What help were you missing yourself*; was responded to as follows. Someone of the German *Karma Kagyu* group of Chime Rinpoche stated: “Solidarity and support from responsible sangha-members; disclosure and information of the sangha; joint confronting of the teacher by the sangha” [#1]. Someone from the *New Kadampa Tradition* organization reported:

“I had very little social support, apart from online. I was socially isolated and my friends and family did not understand my experience. There was no support from the police or a route to take with lawyers or the Charity Commission in the UK due to the use of fake identities to attack me.” [#11]

A person from the *Dharma Ocean* organization shared: “Friends and family support, normal people being able to understand. I feel nervous being public about it because I am ashamed.” [#12] And someone from the *Ratna Ling* organization said: “Guidance, limits when it was needed, understanding, support. I was left alone.” [#13]

Someone, after having participated in quite a few traditional Tibetan Buddhist contexts, responded:

“I was a severely abused child. After 10 years of living in India I returned to NYC for therapy and entered therapy at age 32, continued that therapy for many years. After that main therapy felt complete, I put a focus on healing from the damage I experienced as a former Tibetan Buddhist.” [#19]

Someone from the *Diamond Way* in Germany shared:

“I was not looking for help. But contact with others who have distanced themselves from the Diamond Way would have been helpful. Unfortunately, it is hard to tell for sure who has distanced oneself and who has not.” [#20] A person from *FPMT* told: “Any insight. Professional psychological help.” [#21] And a person from the *Drikung Samten Ling* in South Africa reported: “A Geshe assisted me by explaining a number of concepts that I had been abused by - Wrathful Compassion, Crazy Wisdom etc etc. He told me clearly that the lay teacher was not enlightened and that I needed to see his rants for what they were: a sex obsessed individual who cannot see his addiction, like an alcoholic who cannot see his addiction, and with whom no discussion can be entered into regarding his alcohol abuse. I

was also told by the Geshe and a Rinpoche, that I needed to do all that was in my power to keep the Centre open (I was the one who ran it on a daily basis and who single handedly funded the entire operation out of my retirement savings for 10 years). If however, I could no longer do this, I was to report the behaviour of the lay teacher to the Spiritual Director and / or His Holiness Chetsang Rinpoche, and to ask them for help.” [#22]

Someone from the German *Pagode Phat Hue* organization shared:

“I lack of any of the witnesses from the Sangha Phat Hue who have distanced themselves and with whom I can exchange views freely. No one else knows that, nobody can reflect to me, since they know what happened and how it is there, particularly since outwardly everything is great, inspiring and [...] gave me great creative tools that inspire me to this day and I also learned a lot. [...] Those who left are really out of reach, and those who are there are just there. Not much to say about that. And even those I liked and miss, are not a real option for talking about it. I miss the reality check with fellows, who knew me and whom I also experienced there.” [#6, see also [8]]

7.15.2 Missing support

The probands were asked: *What kind of support have you lacked?*

In this subsection, the respondent codes are omitted for their personal safety due to possible recognizability as well.

Someone replied:

“I would have preferred to have a psychotherapist with me, but that was and still is not possible for me financially and probably also due to administrative reasons, since I do not have any papers or health insurance. Emotionally, it was very stressful, even my family is of no help to me in such a situation, but rather amplifying negative emotions.”

Another person replied:

“The attitude towards thinking on the master at all times, that each gesture of him would contain wisdom- this kind of feeling supported and the bond with him I have missed. I probably also missed myself with all the enthusiasm and surrender I have had, and I still miss that surrender, openness and enthusiasm.”

Another proband stated:

“The German Buddhist Union has not considered possibilities to work as an umbrella organization against abuse and sectarian tendencies in the past. It seems this has changed”

One person shared:

“I think it would have been good to have contact with other ex-Diamond people, because one can talk about one's experiences and they can understand. But I didn't dare to look for those. It seems that no one really dares to admit that they already have doubts.”

Someone told:

“I felt that not only the main teacher was against me personally and wanted to make me physically insecure [. . .] but I also felt abandoned by my friends and girlfriends [. . .] I then felt very lonely in this spiritual crisis.”

7.16 Witnessing others getting sick

The following questions were asked of seven people: *Have you witnessed others get sick? What did they experience and how did it affect them?* Someone from the *Karma Kagyu* organization of Chime Rinpoche in Germany reported:

“There are two suicides in our community, both related to an amorous relationship with the lama, besides that some people do not get rid of their drug addiction. And depressive moods, when thrown back on themselves, are common in the Sangha.” [#1]

A person from the *New Kadampa Tradition* organization stated: “No I did not witness this, but others have told me about their posttraumatic stress disorder following leaving” [#11]. Another person from the *Dharma Ocean* organization shared: “Depression, anxiety, prolonged grief, posttraumatic stress disorder, suicidal tendencies in others. A few psychotic breaks from people on retreat” [#12]. Someone from the *Ratna Ling* organization at Cazadero reported: “Yes I saw others get badly depressed” [#13]. Someone from the *Diamond Way* related: “No, but I strongly believe that there are some sangha members who became ill - particularly among the long-term participants who were very involved” [#20]. Someone from *FPMT* reported:

“The kinds of abuse that others have experienced are similar to my own experiences and testimony. Conditions of illness include sleep disorders, depression, panic attacks, adaptive disorders.” [#21]

And someone from *Drikung Samtenling* in South Africa shared: “Depression, anxiety, PTSD, suicidal ideation” [#22].

7.17 Experiences when trying to help those in the group who got sick

The following questions address the actions and feelings of the witnesses: *Have you tried to help others who got sick? If so, how and how was that?* Three people reported they did not try and four did not respond to the question. Someone from the *Karma Kagyu tradition of Chime Rinpoche* in Germany reported:

“My best friend through many conversations and being there for each other. Making this public in order to encourage and warn others concerned about the continuation/ imitation of the incident.” [#1]

Someone from the *New Kadampa tradition* organization shared: “Sharing peoples testimonies.” [#11] Someone from the *Dharma Ocean* organization related:

“I tried to support a friend with posttraumatic stress disorder who was suicidal, and it was horrible. She only wanted to talk about the trauma over and over and I eventually realized I could not support her, and she was not available to talk about anything else and had to end the relationship.” [#12]

A person from the *Ratna Ling* organization at Cazadero responded:

“I tried to help most community members who had problems, one of my best friends got so badly confused and depressed. The community thought it is a good idea to move to her house, but I started to cry, cry from deep, deep down, because I was so exhausted emotionally.” [#13]

Another person who had participated in many traditional Tibetan Buddhist contexts reported: “Become an activist in speaking out about the abuse. I helped one woman [. . .] file a lawsuit [. . .]. I've spoken out on the internet for [. . .] about the sexual abuse by Tibetan lamas” [#19]. Someone from *FPMT* shared: “I have recommended to distance oneself from the group and to seek professional psychological help” [#21].

8 Interpretation

8.1 Data interpretation with respect to the overall context with decontextualized use of Buddhist terms and concepts, and neologisms in international Buddhist organizations

While the globalization of Buddhism has led to the developing of a subculture beyond organizations using similar simplistic terminology and dubious concepts, such as the ‘*karma-purification*’ of others for removing ones accountability and responsibility regarding any damage inflicted on people, the high level of its idealization has still contributed for many years to disregarding the damaging incidents and circumstances, or individualizing them to be a kind of ‘*bad karma*’ of a few unfortunate persons only. Thus, due to the unreflected idealization of Buddhism and the pattern of *double bind* that permeates through many of the traditional as well as newly established structures attributing themselves to Buddhism, the substantive and structural grievances in numerous organizations have remained undisclosed and uncontrolled for decades. In such ways violence and abuse in the internationally operating Buddhist organizations have remained largely inaccessible to the legal procedures of the countries in which they have been operating for decades. While these issues are outside of Buddhist practice and ethics, they have long been controlled by specific regulations, such as preventing state jurisdiction with keeping such secrets strictly private inside communities, and denigrating victims. It seems crucial to analyze the core substantive and conceptual dimensions of a subculture, that continues to ascribe itself to Buddhism, and particularly to investigate its sustaining elements.

8.2 A cross-group subculture attributing itself to Buddhism with shared linguistic use of neologisms and identical decontextualized, oversimplified concepts

In different countries and cultures, seminar- and retreat-centers, at times even associated with any medical-psychological offers, have been established. They are often maintained based on the donations for participation in events and the unpaid labor of many, obviously providing lucrative incomes for local as well as travelling instructors, managers and translators, by means of internal transnational networks.

Due to their similarities in decontextualized concepts and terms as well as the very same neologisms employed, the variety of Buddhist groups with their sustaining

structures, such as seminar and retreat centers, could be considered a coherent subculture. Apart from some unique wordings, expressions and constructs that predominate in those groups attributing themselves to Tibetan Buddhism (e.g., '*karma-purification*', '*crazy wisdom*', etc.), many similarities beyond organizations are evident from the research data. Thus, for the sake of clarity, the term subculture here initially refers to all those subgroups ascribing themselves to Buddhism while using common simplistic, decontextualized concepts or neologisms. It is their shared linguistic and decontextualized concepts that have been introduced as Buddhism, with the corresponding behavior patterns and stereotyping of group members, that are sufficiently formative and characteristic for assuming a subculture.

Furthermore, also the strict hierarchies superimposed on the different sections of the organisations, which resemble the Asian monastic structures although actually designed for mostly unordained paying individuals residing in democracies, also resemble each other across organisations.

However, despite longstanding traditional efforts of overcoming divisions and historical fights, the conveyed differences in approach of the Buddhist philosophical and training traditions currently seem to internally serve to try to demarcate one group from another.

Particularly, the self-elevation of defining oneself a practitioner of the fastest path of training, Vajrayāna, regardless the necessity of considering one's own character, maturity and capabilities for the choice of spiritual training, or the arrogance considering oneself among the privileged ones in a group, often called 'inner circle', is striking. While this may well be based on the contemporary mainstream using narcissistic behaviors to achieve success in society with ease, the very spiritual intent of Buddhism actually extends far beyond worldly success, which just does not show in such centers.

However, due to the development of a somewhat elite religious culture and the complexity of its structures and topics, requiring an interdisciplinary approach of analysis, it has been difficult to conduct legal proceedings and investigations. Furthermore, the *double bind* with its concept of spirituality on the surface and seducing people with promises for quick enlightenment while the focus rests on monetary gain for those placed on the top of the hierarchies, is confusing at first glance.

Although hiding abuse from the outside world is a characteristic structural rule elsewhere as well, concealing them by means of *double bind* and the indoctrination with rationalizations such as alleged '*karma-purification*' is specific to Buddhist contexts. Enduring such indoctrinations over years and even decades causes mental diseases. Furthermore, they not only hinder timely departure of participants, but the early treatment of those with mental illness, and the prevention of further cases within the same organization as well.

However, even though the ways of transforming large established structures are not yet clear and currently many group members of so-called Buddhist organizations still fear for their own safety, some even for their lives, after leaving their group (some of which is portrayed in chapter 7.14), it seems that a turning point is reached.

8.3 Interpretation of the results in the questionnaires

The survey has revealed emerging complex mental health issues of seminar- and retreat-participants in international Buddhist organizations. They develop before a background of violence, abuse and silencing, particularly their rationalization in using neologisms and distorted concepts ascribed to Buddhism as well as resulting misguided practice. In such contexts, conceptualizing purification as Buddhism (*'karma-purification'*) while talking about love and compassion and promising enlightenment is far from spiritual and particularly confusing. From a psychological perspective, such is called *double bind*, and exposure to it for extended periods, especially without correcting relationships in the outside world, is known to leave damaging traces.

8.3.1 The ways of conceptualizing contributions at seminar facilities and centers

Traditionally, work in or monetary donations to teaching or retreat facilities are regarded as methods of training (in the sense of giving - Skt. *dāna* - for the accumulation of merit and wisdom - Skt. *pūnyasambhāra* and *jñānasambhāra* - on the spiritual path). As this has been considered and interpreted as a method of internal training towards a spiritual goal it is voluntary and corresponds with the methods of training on the path employed. However, since the monasteries or any seminar centers have long ceased to function as the one and only places for school education and Buddhist studies, and actually the unordained are the majority of the working participants in the seminar centers of the Buddhist organizations, one might ask as to which extent their qualification in the field of Buddhism, Sciences or any other subject of knowledge or handicrafts has been considered, respected and valued in such contexts at all.

It seems important to mention the pressure for donations and work combined with lacking social security contributions for people who have been working regularly at many of these Buddhist centers (even in the countries where social security is compulsory). Thus, one gets the overall impression that exploitation of people for the profits of a few of the elite members, together with an arbitrary substitution of people with newcomers as if slaves of the elite, are standard handling in those locations. However, such has obviously left traces, both financially and psychologically, and a negative formative impact, on the lives of too many current and former group members

and the further courses of their lives, not to mention the impact on confidence and their spirituality.

One respondent vividly described how the labor exploitation was mixed with the imbalances and ingrained misconduct at the leadership level:

"The worst abuse happened to me when I was working for free for 27 days straight at a Vajrayana Retreat. I had a recent head injury and still decided to go to help others. I feel bitter about that favor because [. . .the leadership - comment by the author] were very badly behaved the whole retreat and instead of treating me gently because of my injury, used me and other staff members as their abuse targets including: yelling, hanging up the phone, threats, threatening my paid job if I did not agree to shut down a facebook page on which people were criticizing [. . .], gaslighting, love bombing and devaluation, triangulation and creating drama between staff members, speaking poorly of staff members and using them as 'examples' to teachers in training."

The perspective on and treatment of Western ordained persons is yet another concern that shows precisely on these issues. One respondent described it as follows:

"I was a Buddhist monk for 18 years and most Western monastics receive little to no support. The most I got were free or discounted teachings. The west does not support its monastics well and a lot of them end up disrobing as a consequence."

In the questionnaire only 40% of the participants agreed that their professional education and expertise was taken into account for the work done at their Buddhist groups and only 33,33% agreed that this decision on their activities was made in dialogue with the leadership of the organization at all. In turn, this means that the house and seminar managers are provided the position to decide on any activities allowed for others at the location, which in turn has tremendous consequences not only for the group dynamics but also the substantive content and direction of courses.

A common cross-organizational narrative is everyone would work for free, and all would be equal. However, looking more closely into the opacity here, it is obvious that there are people holding positions benefiting financially and others that work for free and pay; and that those who have obtained positions in the organizational hierarchy even have control over others' work and consequently the expertise of highly qualified people is not being used.

Equality in Buddhism does not refer to a one-size-fits-all approach in which not even skills and abilities are allowed for, because other people might have an issue with it. Rather it refers to the basic underlying respect for (and compassion to) others, regardless their position or status.

In this subculture the division of some who are to provide unpaid contributions and others continuously profiting from these tend to be demonstratively interpreted as the ‘*good karma*’ of the latter. Over the decades, the fate of people was decided at precisely this point, because the former just ran out of resources over time.

However, currently the questions being raised include for how long society in the different countries and cultures will pay for the treatment of those who have been seriously damaged by their groups, and also at which point the Buddhist organisations will be required to provide compensation for their victims.

8.3.2 Autonomy versus blind obedience in the strictly hierarchical structures, and intransparency

Before addressing the topic of violence and abuse, some reflection on the rigid hierarchies in which people at the top are ascribed omniscience is useful, because this attribution not only isolates those at the top from social contacts, response and feedback to their behavior, it also prevents consequences in the case of patterns of depersonalizing and controlling the crowd by inadequate means. Furthermore, in travelling from one country to another for teaching, and of advertising seminars on social media designed for self-promotion, the level of social control required is just not sustainable in the way spiritual teachers used to enjoy it and, thus, even gross misconduct remains unreplied to. And even in the case of apparent misconduct, the group pressure to idealize everything prevents shared reflection and adequate consequences, and at times even tries to shift the responsibility for the misconduct of one elitist member back to group members as if they were responsible for it.

Also, since this subculture provides little means to assess spiritual teachers initially, people unqualified for such position, easily gain such positions. Consequently, means for evaluation and defined processes with regard to misconduct are particularly important.

One might also wonder why the topic of obedience in democracies, in which structures for learning introspective methods or developing one’s own spirituality are

established for self-responsible adults, was introduced and established as if it had anything whatsoever in common with spirituality or Buddhism. It seems that the subculture attaching Buddhism to its marketing line has apparently linked two quite incompatible issues - spirituality and obedience - and the impact of this is now emerging. In turn, it is precisely such incompatible interconnections that would allow to identify challenging groups.

Some people in the survey admitted they have felt obliged to obey. And one may wonder how far they would go in this kind of blind obedience, together with the group pressure. Others had started reflection processes on obedience which they have shared (see chapter 7.9.1 and 7.9.2). Particularly, three people noted that they had received an instruction from above to avoid someone (see chapter 7.9.1). And as some people even emphasized that they would have accepted an instruction from above to punish someone based on obedience (see chapter 7.9.2), it is necessary to reflect on individual maturation and analyze maldevelopments in such groups and define clear guidelines for such contexts.

8.3.3 Violence, secrecy and the impact of the neologism and concept of a '*karma-purification*' of others

The quantitative and qualitative data on the individual experience of violence and its religious justification as well testimonies on damage by means of employing the concept of '*karma-purification*' and its personal impact are presented in the chapters 7.5 and 7.6. 40% of the subjects affirmed that they themselves had experienced violence and those who had agreed to this question specified their experiences. However, the 66,66% agreement that such violence was justified by religion are particularly alarming.

First, Buddhism would not be expected to be used to justify violence and this very point illustrates the doublespeak as well as the consequences of the before-mentioned unreflected decontextualization of Buddhist terms, and the implications of introducing neologisms, such as the term '*karma-purification*'.

As for the neologism '*karma-purification*', which is currently used to rationalize many ways of harm to others, 40% of the participants affirmed that, in their Buddhist seminars, it was assumed one or more persons could '*purify*' someone else and 13% stated that such had been applied in actions performed on them directly (see chapter 7.6). This concept has nothing in common with traditional Buddhist terminology other

than employing seemingly Buddhist terms. It is used to rationalize arbitrariness, bullying, and violence at every level (see also [5, 6]). Relating it to Vajrayāna and its narratives of unusual cases and equally unusual bonds, reaching far beyond one lifetime, between a highly realized spiritual master and an exceptional disciple is misleading, because the narrative is taken for real. Furthermore, not everyone is such an unusual case nor are self-appointed teachers themselves endowed with the skills of a highly realized meditation master. Thus, '*purification*' here is regarded as having taken place even when performed by ordinary people or merely on behalf of or by order of someone else. Combined with the longing for enlightenment and spiritual transformation of the seminar- and retreat-participants, this egocentric construct assuming everything happening is merely about one's own karma together with insufficient self-responsibility which even enables others to engage in damage framed as cleansing, constitutes an extremely dangerous aberration, both in terms of group dynamics and psychology.

Beyond misleading people with seducing to and promising of quick paths to enlightenment although lacking the basics, e.g. the continuous training of bodhicitta and corresponding gradual techniques for meditation, such attitudes and behaviors of arrogance, elevating oneself above and the corresponding pattern of humiliating others, have nothing to do with '*karma-purification*', but rather contributed to highly dangerous structural issues, group-dynamics and psychological processes for group members, that are currently surfacing.

The psychological impact of enduring such concepts was described by several probands (see chapter 7.6.3).

8.3.4 Individual loss of trust due to wrong promises and deception by so-called Buddhist teachers, and its impact on the treatment of the diseased as well as on the reputation of Buddhism

Replies to the questions on wrong promises and deception are presented in chapter 7.11. Whereas 57,14 % of the probands consented to having been deceived 35,71% of them agreed having been given wrong promises and both groups subsequently elaborated by means of examples. False promises and deception are factors that add to the damage caused by violence, seduction to sexuality (even through the desire to be considered somewhat special due to physical proximity to the master) and abuse on various levels. It requires a certain extent of freedom from internalized peer pressure and of autonomy to admit this to oneself and others. However, as society expects that someone who appears as a Buddhist teacher would not have behaved in such ways, at times has made it particularly difficult for victims to communicate.

8.3.5 Testimony of others getting sick and experiences when trying to help them

The testimony of others getting sick and peoples' experiences when trying to help them are presented in chapter 7.16 and 7.17. Witnessing such, concerning the victims as well as co-offenders and long-term accomplices, may cause tremendous psychological burden. 60% agreed to having witnessed psychiatric diseases in others (chapter 7.2.2).

8.3.6 Abuse and secrecy

As for abuse, 33,33% of the 15 subjects affirmed their own victimization and 33,33% had been witnesses of abuse, whereas 33,33% also admitted that they had tolerated the abuse of others. 26,66% had even been directly or indirectly involved in the others' abuse (see chapter 7.8). This chapter also contains individual reflections on responsibility, thoughts and feelings of the probands on abuse in Buddhist groups.

As far as secrecy is concerned (see chapter 7.10), whereas 33,33% reported that actions against themselves had been declared secret and elaborated on examples for such, 40% had witnessed actions directed against others being sworn to secrecy, and 26,66% mentioned sexual abuse of others to be sworn to secrecy.

For the sake of conceptualizing the dimensions of damage that is a necessary basis for treatment approaches, one might summarize that people have been harmed by economic, emotional, and physical abuse as well as by "religious-related abuse, or spiritual abuse" [23] (p. 32). The latter as well as background for the other dimensions

of abuse may well satisfy the definition of DSM diagnosis code 62.89 “religious or spiritual problem” [24] (p. 772), [25].

8.3.7 Slander as mentally diseased

33,33% of the subjects affirmed that they had been slandered as severely mentally diseased by their Buddhist group (see chapter 7.7). It is important to understand that such ways of diagnosing are commonly performed by nonprofessionals and is designed for healthy and rather autonomous or critical individuals. However, this has particularly severe consequences for the individual when systematically employed together with social isolation or even involving their private or professional contacts.

8.3.8 Psychological impact of withdrawal or separation and protective measures

73,33% of the subjects participating in the survey had withdrawn and only 60% of them had separated from their group. The explanations for this (see chapter 7.13.3 - 7.13.4), which are accessible due to the qualitative aspect of this evaluation, clearly reveal structural imbalances and unacceptable situations in the respective groups, and thus also indicate that such decisions were not reached at inconsiderately. Since the time span between decision and actual parting differs considerably between the different subjects, further surveys could be conducted to further differentiate this process of parting, and the ambivalence and fear of negative consequences - for example, some groups ascribing to Vajrayāna are intimidating people with the threat of hells after death.

Furthermore, probands even described having implemented various protective measures (see chapter 7.14.2), which indicates that for their groups it was about far more than parting. Unfortunately, these narratives of retirement all too often resemble those of people leaving cults.

For people who had given all their resources to the group for a long period of time, sometimes only leaving once they were already diseased, finding themselves without resources or stable outside relationships is a major additional burden. The unquestioned idealization of anything labelled Buddhism has far too often impeded building stable networks for the necessary support and counselling of those in need.

The participants also wrote about the psychological impact of distancing or separating (reported in chapter 7.14.3). Initially, it was mostly about creating a stable and secure environment and receiving counselling on the indoctrination with strange concepts

(‘*pure view*’, ‘*karma-purification*’ etc.) and psychotherapy, if necessary. It seems that the issue of being misled regarding one’s own spirituality and mourning the loss of time come into focus only at a later stage.

However, the concepts pretending that someone else would be required as a necessary intermediary for one’s own spirituality are rarely reflected on.

8.3.9 Social isolation of people in Buddhist groups

In this subculture of organizations and groups ascribing themselves to Buddhism despite having very little respect for people and their welfare, the social isolation of people seems to be used not only for punishment but also to systematically weaken personalities or anyone regarded as rival.

46,67% of the probands confirmed that they have experienced social isolation personally, and 20% had witnessed it in others in their Buddhist centers, and they elaborated on their experiences of both (see chapter 7.4). Considering the fact that some of them had participated for decades, up to 34 years, their social isolation can be interpreted as a crucial factor in developing mental diseases. This very social isolation, in turn, may well be one of the reasons why even severely damaged people did not appeal to legal procedures.

The lack of resources after economical exploitation over years contributes to people's isolation as well, which is especially – but not exclusively – the case with former Buddhist nuns and monks, who at times had worked years for nothing in return and consequently not only lack financial means but have also lost social insurance coverage for all those years of service.

Thus, in addition to dealing with the individual levels of subjugation of the individual by “group psychological abuse” [26] (p. 31), as shown in the above reports and “betrayal trauma” [27] (p. 122), the societal challenges [5] (p. 10) [6] (pp. 1, 7) in this context also need to be studied further and addressed.

Given the constant and confusing *double bind*, the indoctrinating dynamics, the misguided meditation techniques where people train in constant mental merging with any group leader, and practice dissociation assuming this would be a quick path to what is framed as ‘*enlightenment*’ in such contexts, their lack of social support is particularly alarming, because it puts those already harmed at risk of having their condition deteriorate considerably and contributes to mental illness, particularly in long-term group members. Thus, the damaging concepts, introjection, and personality changes need to be considered both in diagnoses as well as in treatment approaches.

8.3.10 Mental health and treatment

This research indicates damaging effects to the mental health of individuals based on oversimplified and misrepresented concepts, and neologisms, ascribed to Buddhism. Further challenges to this include the individualization of structural issues by means of absurd prescriptions to introspection - as though structural and violence issues were solvable by introspection only - and the idealization of mindfulness ascribed to Buddhism, with its resulting impact in the context of psychotherapy and personal overlaps between these two contexts. Moreover, not only pseudotherapeutic methods employed in several groups surfaced, e.g. the '*Rigpa therapy*', but there are also testimonies by professionals who participated in advanced educational courses named '*Buddhist psychotherapy*'. In brief, these oftentimes individually disastrous situations pose considerable societal, medical and psychotherapeutic challenges.

Thus, while failing to follow traditionally systematic gradual learning and training processes, people got accustomed to distorted exercises and, at times, even consider dissociation an advanced method leading to enlightenment (Anders 2019a, 2019b, Anders & Utsch 2020, Anders 2020). Furthermore, as the subjects would not leave their groups timely for a variety of reasons (e.g. lack of resources, fear of encountering hell after death), or the group had even provided pseudotherapeutic approaches, their mental illnesses have often been left untreated for many years. Thus, the challenge is a chronification together with lacking trust in others and even one's own perception, together with ingrained patterns of stereotyping, subtle adjusting to the wants of a perpetrator and damage, considering damage for spiritual help with the rewards of enlightenment, and introjects.

The diagnoses mentioned by the participants most often referred to severe depression, anxiety disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder (see chapter 7.3). 59,09 % of the 22 subjects reported past and 36,36% of them present psychotherapeutic treatment (see chapter 7.1). As for psychiatric treatment and psychotherapy, 13,63% of 22 subjects stated that they were currently in psychiatric treatment or taking psychiatric medication. 20% of 15 subjects had been in psychiatric treatment in the past, and 60% of them had witnessed someone start psychiatric treatment (see chapter 7.2). Suicides due to secret

relationships with the Tibetan group leader were also attested and reported in the qualitative part of the questionnaire.

A common attitude in the subcultures is to interpret abuse and resulting mental health issues as merely individual problems, which in turn increases the social isolation and conceals the underlying structural conditions. The use of qualitative methods allowed for due consideration of structural and individual perspectives in such contexts.

The four key issues in resolving social isolation are overcoming the loss of confidence in one's own perception [5] (p. 8) and in others with the attitude of "reframing the perception of group members" [6] (p. 12), understanding the misguided conceptualizations of having to give up one's 'self' to suppress personal subjectivity [28] (p. 48), thus forming a pseudo-identity [29] (p. 106), the patterns of identifying with group leaders [5] (p. 4), [6] (pp. 2, 4, 13, 14, 17, 20), which certainly do not stop simply by leaving a group, and the internalized concepts [6] (p. 5) and introjection [5] (p. 9) resulting from so-called '*pure view*' indoctrinations [5] (p. 4) [6] (pp. 1, 4-5, 9, 12-13, 15, 17).

The help people missed (see chapter 7.15.1) reach from someone to listen and understand, to fellows who also had left the group which were assumed to understand better than anyone else, or psychotherapy and explanation on the distorted concepts encountered. Talking about the support they missed (see chapter 7.15.2) seems to hint to bondage, and people relating respectfully and responsibly to each other as well as Buddhist head organizations taking on their very responsibility for the misbehavior of member organizations towards their participants.

8.3.11 Limitations

There are five main limitations of these findings. The first is the small number of people who took part in the survey, which limits further quantitative analyses. This may be due to mainstream silencing dynamics in the respective groups over decades, the threats with rebirth in hell, etc., and attacks by people whenever there is loss of members, not unlike in cults. There is certain to be specific hesitation in those who were in '*inner circles*' or who profited thereby. As Buddhism continues to be idealized and no training is needed or qualification required to start out teaching Buddhist meditation, philosophy, or

retreats, such groups have been and continue to be profitable opportunities for narcissists and people in the '*inner circles*' as well.

Second, information from the numerous e-mails from severely ill people who did not fill out questionnaires and their counselling requests were not considered in the above analyses.

Third, as far as dropouts are concerned, some of those who requested the link to the questionnaires have sent a link to their blogs instead of filling out the questionnaire. Public portrayal as a victim could be interpreted as an attempt to overcome the above-mentioned social isolation. However, such an approach disregards that people have put themselves at risk and that the issues usually are just not all that simple, since adults do have self-responsibility for their own decisions. Moreover, those previously having been part of '*inner circles*' - in which they were complicit or co-perpetrators, profiting financially and in other ways at the expense of the other group members and considering themselves superior and privileged with 'the good karma' as compared to the 'normal' members - have a particularly difficult time balancing the tension between complicity, silent consent and victimization. Narcissistic tendencies have been particularly nourished in groups promoting themselves as Vajrayāna and are still reflected in narcissistic victim narratives.

Fourth, some people were unable to fill out the questionnaires they had asked for due to flashbacks and various reactions when writing down their experiences, which also means that the acutely and highly traumatized people were not included in the survey.

Fifth, the time since distancing from the group and the kind of involvement seem to heavily impact on some of the responses, yet it would only be possible to analyze this in more detail with a greater number of subjects. Not everyone who responded reporting the duration and kind of involvement, the direct or indirect financial profits. and the time that had passed since leaving a group, etc., has somewhat complicated the interpretation of results.

8.4 Impact on quality assurance and qualification of teachers

The assessment of education, qualification and integrity for the many self-proclaimed teachers in the context of this subculture is a crucial response to this complex situation.

8.5 Impact on the psychotherapy for those affected

Patients in psychotherapeutic or psychiatric treatment at times go unnoticed when employing methods attributed to Buddhism, mindfulness methods ascribed to Buddhism, or a combination from their own needs, all referred to as meditation, in which high expectations or even hope for alleviating one's suffering and finding a cure might be placed.

For the diagnosis of patients and the diagnostic process, it is important to take into account any experiences in, and misleading concepts from groups attributed to Buddhism, as well as ongoing practices that are possibly sustaining factors. Reinforcing factors, such as self-blame, tendencies to discard self-responsibility or regression, or the ways dissociation becomes routine training, which at times is regarded as advanced meditation, need to be targeted.

Challenging structural conditions rationalized by misguided concepts for the individual, such as a '*karma-purification*' have often led to further isolation of the affected individuals, first from their existing social relations, and then from their insider group as well. When analyzing the prevailing *double bind* in quite a few of these groups, it becomes clear that, under the cover of a rhetoric employing compassion and seduction to quick enlightenment, the protective factor of social relationships collapses. The initially rather subtle fracture in the individual's social connections is countered by a solving approach entailing identifying and constantly mentally merging with the group leader as well as with the group's unconscious dynamics. This results in relinquishing self-responsibility and in regressing to early childhood patterns of behavior, which at times may even be rewarded by being given paid leading positions in the group. However, intra-psychically, enormous pressure for dissolving one's own boundaries results, which is further supported by crude conceptual distortions and misinterpretations, e.g. labeled as dissolving one's self based on a concept aimed at nonduality.

Without diagnostically inquiring into these aspects and the promises of self-appointed teachers operating in such contexts, these exercises, and habitual sustaining patterns of the diseased person will remain unnoticed.

This additional diagnostic approach, complementing the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD) diagnosis and the diagnostics associated with the respective psychotherapeutic approach, is not only relevant with respect to any personality changes of the patients that may have occurred after very many years of exposure to damaging structures, but also to identify their protective behaviors developed against structural damage, their stress response, the context and quality of traumatization, and the acquired stereotypes and introjections.

In this way, it will have a crucial impact on the therapeutic approach and therapy outcome. For the psychotherapy process, initially developing trust in one's own perception and others is crucial (see [5]).

9 Conclusion

Society is currently challenged by the impact of globalization, commercialization, and decontextualization of Buddhism. The social isolation of victims points to structural issues behind the damage to individual mental health. Rationalizations employed in these contexts need to be understood as decontextualized concepts that may accompany the diseased as stereotypes and introjections even after having left the group. It is vital to factor in these concepts for the diagnosis and treatment of people from such groups. Furthermore, unless comprehensive qualification measures for teachers and instructors in such groups are mandatory, the indoctrination and proliferation of cross-group neologisms, like the concept of '*karma-purification*' used to justify damage, will continue to spread and have an impact on future generations as well as Buddhist traditions and heritage itself. Thus, in addition to diagnosing risk factors, the persistence of detrimental behaviors such as dissociation that is mistaken for advanced meditation, and introjected stereotypes, and employing the respective curative clinical methods, it is essential to adopt legal, preventive, and educational measures on a global scale to minimize further damage.

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