

NURTURING THE MIND: AYURVEDA'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO MENTAL WELLNESS

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ABSTRACT

The current age has introduced unparalleled levels of stress, anxiety, and uncertainty, profoundly affecting mental health. The convergence of technology, social media, and societal pressures has established a complicated environment for mental wellbeing. This conversation will examine the existing condition of mental health, including the increasing prevalence of mental health disorders, the influence of social media on self-worth and relationships, and the repercussions of societal expectations on anxiety and depression. We will additionally investigate the significance of resilience, self-care, and community support in enhancing mental health and wellbeing. By comprehending the challenges and prospects of the current era, we can strive towards fostering a more supportive and inclusive atmosphere for mental health.

KEYWORDS: Mental wellbeing, Anxiety, Depression, Stress management

The critical importance of mental health today.

The findings indicate that mental health in today's world is defined by.

1. Rising prevalence of mental health conditions.

- Increased rates of anxiety (30% increase since 2018)

- Growing concerns about depression (25% increase since 2018)

- Rising suicidal ideation and behaviours (15% increase since 2018)
2. Impact of social media on mental health.
- Connection between social media usage and lowered self-esteem.
 - Correlation between social media engagement and heightened symptoms of depression and anxiety.
3. Cyberbullying and online harassment
- Incidence of cyberbullying (40% of adults report encountering online harassment)
 - Effect on mental health (heightened stress, anxiety, and depression)
4. Decreasing stigma around mental health discussions
- Increasing awareness and advocacy initiatives.
 - Greater readiness to discuss mental health candidly.
5. Expanding access to care
- Teletherapy and online support communities.
 - Enhanced availability of mental health resources.

INTRODUCTION

What Exactly is a Mental Illness

A mental illness refers to a physical condition of the brain that results in disruptions in thinking, behaviour, energy, or emotion that hinder one's ability to manage the usual demands of life. Research is beginning to reveal the intricate causes of these disorders which can involve genetics, brain chemistry, brain structure, experiencing trauma, and/or having another medical issue, such as heart disease.

The two most prevalent mental health conditions are.

Anxiety Disorders

Over 19% of adults annually face some form of anxiety disorder, including.

post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD),

obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD),

panic disorder (panic attacks),

generalized anxiety disorder

specific phobias

Mood Disorders

Mood disorders, such as depression and bipolar disorder, impact nearly 10% of adults each year and are characterized by challenges in managing one's mood.

Mental health is a crucial component of overall wellbeing, and the current era has introduced unparalleled difficulties that influence mental health. The swift pace of technological advancements, social media pervasiveness, and changing societal pressures have formed a complicated environment for mental wellbeing. This document seeks to examine the present condition of mental health, identify primary challenges, and discuss possible solutions for enhancing mental wellbeing in today's context.

An overview of mental health according to the major Ayurvedic Samhitas

1. Charaka Samhita

- **Concept of Mind (Manas):** The Charaka Samhita defines the mind (Manas) as a separate entity from the body, while being intricately linked to it. Achieving mental health involves balancing three qualities (Trigunas) of the mind: Sattva (purity), Rajas (activity), and Tamas (inertia). A disruption in these qualities may result in mental disorders.
- **Causes of Mental Illness:** Charaka highlights the significance of Manasika Doshas (psychological factors) in mental health, which encompass overthinking, emotional strain, and trauma. An imbalance in the Vata, Pitta, or Kapha Doshas also impacts mental health.
- **Types of Mental Disorders.**
 - o **Unmada (Insanity):** Charaka discusses various forms of insanity that result from dosha imbalances, toxins, and inadequate diet.
 - o **Apasmara (Epilepsy):** This is characterized as a mental disorder stemming from the mind's improper functioning due to dosha imbalance.
- **Treatment:** Charaka advocates for Satvavajaya Chikitsa (psycho-behavioural therapy), which incorporates the management of the mind through ethical conduct, spiritual direction, meditation, and yoga. Medhya Rasayanas (herbal nootropics) such as Brahmi and Shankhapushpi are suggested to enhance memory and cognitive abilities.

2. Sushruta Samhita

- **Mind and Body Connection:** Sushruta Samhita recognizes the relationship between the mind and body, noting that mental disorders frequently result from bodily imbalances. It

places greater emphasis on surgical and physical remedies, while still offering guidance on mental wellness.

- **Causes of Mental Disorders:** Sushruta points out improper nutrition, lifestyle choices, and emotional upheaval as the main contributors to mental imbalance.
- **Treatment:** Similar to Charaka, Sushruta advises balancing the doshas and utilizing herbs and meditation to regain mental stability. He also recommends treatments like bloodletting (Rakta Mokshana) and Panchakarma for specific mental issues.

3. Ashtanga Hridaya (Vagbhata's Text)

- **Psychosomatic Approach:** Ashtanga Hridaya adopts a comparable approach to Charaka and Sushruta in acknowledging the psychosomatic link. Mental health is viewed as the harmony between the mind and body, underscoring prevention through lifestyle choices and mental discipline.
- **Mental Disorders:** Vagbhata details conditions such as Bhaya (fear), Chittodvega (anxiety), and Vishada (depression), interpreting them as dosha imbalances, particularly in Vata.
- **Treatment:** Vagbhata emphasizes discipline (Niyama), emotional regulation (Samadhi), and diet (Ahara) for sustaining mental health. Rasayana therapy is also advocated for mental revitalization.

4. Kashyapa Samhita

- **Paediatric and Maternal Mental Health:** Kashyapa Samhita concentrates more on the health of mothers and children, yet it recognizes the significance of mental health during early childhood and pregnancy. The mental condition of the mother is deemed crucial for the child's well-being.
- **Emotional Well-being:** The emotional health of both mother and child is addressed, with suggestions for a proper diet, herbal remedies, and maintaining a serene environment during pregnancy to enhance the child's mental health.

5. Bhavaprakasha

- **Mind-Body Interaction:** Bhavaprakasha builds upon earlier Samhitas, examining the mind-body relationship in the framework of overall health maintenance.
- **Treatment:** This text also explores Rasayanas and their importance in nurturing the mind, recommending herbs like Ashwagandha and Vacha to enhance mental capabilities and alleviate stress.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

A thorough examination of current literature regarding mental health was performed, which included.

- Articles reviewed by peers from scholarly journals (2018-2024)
- Reports and data from authoritative sources (e.g WHO, CDC, NIMH)
- Internet resources from recognized mental health organizations (e. g. APA, NAMI) Main themes and issues were recognized and evaluated through a qualitative method.

Key Concepts in Ayurvedic Mental Health

- Trigunas: The equilibrium of Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas is vital for mental well-being.
- Satvavajaya (Psychotherapy): Mastery of the mind through knowledge, guidance, and self-discipline.
- Medhya Rasayanas (Nootropics): Plants that enhance cognitive abilities and mental sharpness.
- Nidana (Causes): Poor nutrition, adverse emotions, stress, and lifestyle discrepancies lead to mental health disorders.

Each of these Samhitas presents distinct viewpoints, yet the overarching idea in Ayurveda is that mental wellness is interwoven with overall health, and sustaining balance through lifestyle choices, nutrition, and emotional self-control is essential for well-being.

Causes

Numerous elements in today's society contribute to mental health challenges. These reasons comprise a blend of societal, environmental, and personal factors, such as.

1. Chronic Stress: Ongoing pressure from work, relationships, finances, and personal aspirations can result in anxiety, depression, and burnout.
2. Social media and Technology: Overuse of social media can lead to feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, and depression, as well as interfere with real-life social interactions and sleep cycles.
3. Work-Life Imbalance: Many individuals find it difficult to balance their professional and personal lives, resulting in fatigue and mental health complications.
4. Lack of Social Support: Increasing isolation and diminished community connections can lead to loneliness, which contributes to anxiety and depression.
5. Economic Uncertainty: Financial instability, job insecurity, and escalating living expenses can result in anxiety, depression, and persistent stress.

6. Environmental Stressors: Noise pollution, urban living, overcrowding, and even anxiety related to climate change can significantly impact mental health.
7. Substance Abuse: Growing dependence on alcohol, drugs, or other substances as coping strategies can worsen mental health issues.
8. Unrealistic Societal Expectations: Societal pressures surrounding achievement, body image, and lifestyle often cause low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression.
9. Information Overload: Constant exposure to negative news or conflicting information can overwhelm individuals, leading to anxiety and stress.

These elements produce a complicated environment in which mental health is continually influenced by the strains of contemporary life.

The Importance of Mental Health Awareness

Mental health disorders impact 19% of the adult population, 46% of teenagers, and 13% of children each year. Individuals battling mental health issues may be within your family, next door, teaching your children, working in the adjacent cubicle, or sitting in the same church pew.

Nonetheless, only half of those afflicted seek treatment, often due to the stigma surrounding mental health. If left untreated, mental illness may lead to increased medical costs, decreased performance in academic and professional settings, fewer job opportunities, and a heightened risk of suicide.

Ayurvedic methods to protect your mental health

Ayurveda provides a comprehensive approach to preserving mental health by concentrating on the equilibrium of the mind, body, and spirit. Below are some essential Ayurvedic practices to protect mental well-being.

1. Balancing the Doshas

Ayurveda holds that mental health is shaped by the harmony of the three doshas—Vata, Pitta, and Kapha.

- Vata (air and space): An imbalance may result in anxiety, fear, and agitation.
- Pitta (fire and water): An imbalance causes irritability, anger, and impatience.
- Kapha (earth and water): An imbalance leads to sluggishness, depression, and attachment.

To enhance mental health, determine your predominant dosha and strive to harmonize it through diet, lifestyle, and specific Ayurvedic techniques.

2. Meditation and Mindfulness (Dhyana)

Consistent meditation calms the mind and boosts self-awareness. Methods such as.

- Pranayama: Breathing techniques, including alternate nostril breathing (Nadi Shodhana), assist in balancing mental energy and soothing the nervous system.
- Trataka: A meditation involving a focused gaze, often on a candle flame, fosters concentration and clears mental disarray.

3. Herbal Support (Rasayana)

Ayurveda suggests using adaptogenic herbs to enhance mental clarity and emotional stability:

- Ashwagandha: Lowers stress and anxiety, boosts mood.
- Brahmi (Bacopa Monnieri): Enhances cognitive performance and mental clarity.
- Shankhpushpi: Calms the mind, improves memory, and minimizes mental fatigue.
- Tulsi (Holy Basil): Balances stress and fosters emotional resilience.

4. Dinacharya (Daily Routine)

Adhering to a daily regimen promotes harmony in the mind and body:

- Wake Up Early (Brahma Muhurta): Rising around 4-6 AM, during the Vata phase, helps create a positive and tranquil beginning for the day.
- Abhyanga (Self-Massage): Routine oil massage with sesame or coconut oil calms the nervous system and aids in releasing stored emotions.
- Adequate Sleep (Nidra): Quality sleep is vital for mental balance. Ayurvedic practices like massaging the feet or temples with Brahmi or Ashwagandha oil can encourage restful sleep.

5. Sattvic Diet

A Sattvic diet focuses on foods that support purity, clarity, and tranquillity of the mind:

- Fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, and legumes.
- Stay away from processed, fried, or overly spicy foods, which can irritate the mind.
- Consume warm water or herbal teas to ease Vata and Pitta imbalances.

6. Emotional Detox (Shirodhara)

Ayurvedic therapies like Shirodhara—a continuous flow of warm oil on the forehead—assist in releasing emotional toxins and enhancing mental clarity and serenity.

7. Connecting with Nature

Spending time in natural environments, especially in the morning sun or near bodies of water, helps ground emotions and balances the Vata dosha, associated with mental agitation.

8. Positive Social Connections

Fostering strong relationships and engaging in nurturing interactions is considered a crucial element of mental well-being. Ayurveda highlights Sattvic companionship—relationships that are peaceful, harmonious, and uplifting.

9. Avoid Mental Agitation (Pragyaparadha)

Pragyaparadha signifies intellectual mistakes like overthinking, excessive technology use, or clinging to negative feelings. Mindful practices like journaling, expressing gratitude, and allowing time for mental rest are encouraged to prevent such disturbances.

By implementing these Ayurvedic principles, you can improve mental resilience, emotional equilibrium, and overall mental health.

10. Virechana (Purgation Therapy)

Virechana is one of the Panchakarma therapies designed to detoxify the body by removing excess Pitta (fire element) from the digestive system. It aids in balancing emotions such as anger, irritability, and frustration that stem from Pitta imbalances, resulting in clearer thought processes and calmer feelings. By eliminating toxins (Ama) from the body, it enhances overall mental clarity and emotional steadiness.

11. Yog (Yoga)

Yoga, especially its mental and physical practices, plays a crucial role in maintaining mental health. Asanas (postures) enhance physical wellness, while Pranayama (breathing exercises) such as Nadi Shodhana harmonizes mental energy. Dhyana (meditation) improves concentration and alleviates stress, while Yoga Nidra promotes deep relaxation. Collectively, these practices create balance between mind and body, bolstering resilience against mental health difficulties.

12. Aachar Rasayan (Code of Conduct)

Aachar Rasayan focuses on developing virtuous habits and lifestyle practices to support mental well-being. It encompasses.

- Speaking the truth.

- Being kind and compassionate.
- Avoiding excessive anger and stress.
- Cultivating patience, humility, and respect for others. By adhering to these ethical principles, one nurtures peace of mind and emotional equilibrium, averting mental disruptions.

13. Sadvritta (Right Conduct)

Sadvritta serves as a wider moral and ethical framework for balanced living, addressing physical, mental, and social dimensions. It includes.

- Maintaining mental discipline.
- Engaging in self-care and establishing regular routines.
- Showing gratitude and steering clear of greed.
- Developing a positive outlook and embracing forgiveness. Sadvritta fosters a healthy environment for the mind, preventing the entrenchment of negative emotions such as jealousy, anger, and fear.

14. Dharniya Vega (Suppression of Unwanted Urges)

Dharniya Vega pertains to the regulation of impulses that may disrupt mental health. Ayurveda highlights the importance of suppressing detrimental urges such as anger, greed, excessive talking, and hasty actions. Mastering the control of these urges aids in sustaining emotional stability, alleviates stress, and encourages a calm and composed mental state. This principle promotes emotional intelligence and self-regulation.

DISCUSSION

The current age offers both hurdles and prospects for mental health. Although technology and social media can worsen mental health problems, they also present potential solutions through enhanced access to care and assistance. To enhance mental well-being, it is vital to:

1. Address the underlying causes of mental health difficulties.
2. Foster resilience and self-care.
3. Create supportive communities.
4. Develop effective interventions and treatments.
5. Encourage open dialogues and reduce stigma.

By comprehending the intricacies of mental health in today's era, we can strive towards establishing a more inclusive and supportive environment for mental wellness.

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