

Integrating Ayurvedic Concepts with Western Measures for Treating Mental Health in India



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INTRODUCTION

- India's large population, which is steeped in cultural traditions of centuries past, is now experiencing economic, technical, and scientific development, as well as cultural changes at a remarkable pace that has a great impact on mental health.
- In a culture where mental health was considered to be a product of one's actions (karma) or one's nature (swabhava), the issue of mental health treatment is becoming increasingly important.
- While the "Western" ideas and concepts of mental health are fairly well established, they may not be well-received in many parts of India where mental health is still considered taboo due to socio-cultural reasons. Thus, implementing western concepts of mental health care without recognizing indigenous beliefs and practices would be extremely short-sighted and unproductive.
- However, the integration of indigenous Ayurvedic concepts and techniques with western treatment measures can ameliorate socio-cultural concerns and thus be the key to make progress addressing mental health in India.

AYURVEDA

- Ayurveda, which means knowledge of life, is a system of healing based on a holistic approach of mind, body and consciousness working together to maintain balance.
- Ayurveda considers the entire cosmos to be an interplay of energies of five universal elements – Ether (space), Air, Fire Water and Earth.
- These five elements are bound to the human body in different proportions through three "doshas" (tridoshas) - Vāta, Pitta and Kapha – that drive our mental and physical tendencies.
- When the Tridoshas are in balance, the mind and body will be functioning in harmony. When they are out of balance, mental and physical wellbeing are adversely affected.
- An understanding of how the Tridoshas work together is necessary to learn how to balance mind, body and consciousness.

TRIDOSHAS – Vāta, Pitta & Kapha

- Vāta**, which is primarily composed of ether (space) and Air, is the subtle energy associated with movement. It governs breathing, blinking, muscle and tissue movement, pulsation of the heart, and all movements in the cytoplasm and cell membranes. In balance, Vāta promotes creativity and flexibility. Out of balance, Vāta produces fear and anxiety.
- Pitta**, which is principally made up of Fire and Water, expresses as the body's metabolic system. Pitta governs digestion, absorption, assimilation, nutrition, metabolism and body temperature. In balance, pitta promotes understanding and intelligence. Out of balance, pitta arouses anger, hatred and jealousy.
- Kapha**, which is mostly a combination of water and earth, is the energy that forms the body's structure, including bones, muscles, tendons, and provides the "glue" that holds the cells together. Kapha supplies the water for all bodily parts and systems and lubricates joints, moisturizes the skin, and maintains immunity. In balance, kapha is expressed as love, calmness and forgiveness. Out of balance, it leads to attachment, greed and envy.

PRAKRUTI (Balanced) & VIKRUTI (Imbalance)

- Prakruti** or the constitutional psychobiological tendencies refers to the inherent balance of a unique combination of mental and physical qualities in terms of Tridoshas that show up as predictable patterns in the mind-body system within an individual. When Prakruti is out of balance, illness can ensue.
- Vikruti** is the imbalance itself and is defined as a vitiation of the constitution or inherent doshic imbalance that provides strong tendencies towards pathological states. While Prakruti describes the balance of the doshas at conception, Vikruti refers to the balance of the doshas in the present and thus defines the nature of imbalance or illness

RESEARCH FOCUS

- The integration of the fundamental Ayurvedic Tridosha concepts with western measures of mental health offers a path to overcome socio-cultural concerns, and thus alleviate the availability of mental health treatment to masses in India.
- One method of integration is the use of contemporary standardized scales/questionnaires incorporating the Tridosha concepts to determine the relationship between the attributes of Tridoshas and western measures of mental health. A review of literature indicates several researchers have conducted correlation studies to successfully establish relationships between classical Ayurvedic concepts and western measures of mental health.
- In this research, three examples of the use of questionnaires/assessments to successfully pair classical Ayurvedic concepts and contemporary western measures are presented.

MYSORE TRIDOSHA SCALE

- Researchers, Shilpa and Murthy, developed a personality scale to assess Tridoshas (Vāta, Pitta, and Kapha) from a psychological perspective in human beings by validating the classical Ayurvedic concepts from the domain of psychology. They relied only on the Tridosha constructs that are amenable for psychologists to assess psychological aspects of the Tridosha Prakruti. A few samples of the constructs are shown in Table 1.
- The Mysore Scale is a self-rating scale, which has 157 items of the psychological correlates of the physical physiological traits as expressed by the Tridoshas of Vāta, Pitta and Kapha - 52 items for assessing Vāta , 52 items for assessing Pitta and 53 items for assessing Kapha in an individual.
- Telles et al. used an abbreviated Mysore Scale with 60 questions along with a sleep questionnaire to successfully establish that Tridoshas can influence the quality and quantity of sleep. They found statistically significant relationships: Vāta predicted the time taken to fall asleep, and the feeling of being rested in the morning; and Kapha scores predicted daytime somnolence and the duration of day-time naps in minutes, with higher kapha scores being associated with longer day-time naps.

PRAKRUTI QUESTIONNAIRE

- Bell et al. developed a 10-question Prakruti mind-body questionnaire based upon a much longer Chopra Center Prakruti Patient Intake Form. Each response to survey items, which are shown in Table 2, corresponds to a specific physiological or psychological characteristic of the three doshas (Vāta, Pitta, Kapha). The participants rate the Prakruti characteristics as rarely represents me, secondarily represents me; and most accurately represents me with a score of 1, 3, and 5, respectively.
- Bell et al. examined if significant statistical correlations exist between Ayurvedic Prakruti characteristics and self-reported integrative medicine disease diagnosis. They found seventeen statistically significant correlations between Ayurvedic Prakruti and self-reported medical diagnoses. These included mental health related diseases like anxiety, depression, sleep disorders and panic attacks. Bell et al. were able to scientifically validate anecdotal Ayurvedic concepts dating back thousands of years.

VIKRUTI QUESTIONNAIRE

- The physicians of the Chopra Center for Wellbeing developed a 60-item Vikruti Questionnaire designed to identify imbalance associated with each of the Tridoshas, and includes the Prakruti assessment developed by Bell et al.
- The Vikruti questionnaire uses a rating system to assign scores based on the frequency of occurrence of classical Ayurvedic symptoms. A sample of the Vikruti questionnaire is shown in Table 3. The participants rate the symptoms as "very often", "sometimes", or "not often" with a score of 5, 3, and 1, respectively. For a particular dosha, a higher Vikruti score equates to more imbalance, or accumulation of that dosha.
- Mills et al. used the Vikruti questionnaire along with other scales of psychological states to examine relationships between Vikruti (imbalances in the doshas) and Western measures of psychological states. They found that the imbalances in all three doshas correlated with certain psychological states.
- A higher score on the Vikruti questionnaire for: Vāta indicated more anxiety and rumination, as well as less mindfulness and poorer overall quality of life; Pitta correlated with more anxiety and stress, and less mindfulness; and Kapha was associated with more stress and rumination and less reflection.

TABLE 1: MYSORE TRIDOSHA SCALE SAMPLE CONSTRUCTS

Mysore Scale - Description of Tridosha Constructs	
1.	Food habits, hunger, appetite, thirst, and digestion.
2.	Dietary likings and taste preferences.
3.	Liking for coldness, warmth, and tolerance to heat.
4.	Fondness for flowers and garlands.
5.	Courteous behavior.

TABLE 2: PRAKRUTI QUESTIONNAIRE SAMPLE

Score: 1, 3 or 5 for each column in each row without repeating the score so total for each row is 9 1- rarely represents me; 3 – secondarily represents me; and 5 – most accurately represents me				
#	Characteristic	Vāta	Pitta	Kapha
3	Eyes	My eyes are small and attractive.	I have a penetrating gaze.	I have large pleasant eyes.
8	Under Stress	I become anxious and/or worried.	I become irritable and/or aggressive.	I become withdrawn and/or reclusive.
10	Temperament	I am lively and enthusiastic by nature. I like to change.	I am purposeful and intense. I like to convince.	I am easy going and accepting. I like to support.

TABLE 3: VIKRUTI QUESTIONNAIRE SAMPLE

MIND				
Scores: 1- Not at all; 2- Somewhat Occasionally; and 3 – Very often				Scores*
1.	I've been having difficulty with mental clarity or the ability to focus my attention.	1	3	5
2.	I've been feeling overwhelmed, worried, or anxious.	1	3	5
BODY				
12.	I've been experiencing gas, cramping, or bloating after meals.	1	3	5
13.	My appetite has been inconsistent.	1	3	5

CONCLUSIONS

- The studies reviewed for this poster indicate that it is possible to integrate classical Ayurvedic concepts and techniques with western measures for mental health treatment. Specifically, these studies illustrate the effective use of contemporary standardized questionnaires/scales incorporating Ayurvedic concepts to assess both physical and mental well-being of patients.
- These studies not only established statistically significant correlations between the Tridosha attributes and mental health issues like anxiety, depression, stress and sleep disorders, they also validated Ayurvedic concepts dating back from thousands of years.
- Given the current Indian government's interest in promoting reliance on Ayurvedic concepts in its healthcare system, timing is optimal for practice of integrative medicine, especially in the arena of mental health.
- By integrating Ayurvedic concepts with western measures using effective assessment tools like questionnaires, mental health treatment could be made available to the masses without limitations due to socio-cultural factors.

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