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 making 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) – Vata, 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 – Vata, Pitta & Kapha

- Vata, 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, Vata promotes creativity and flexibility. Out of balance, Vata produces fear and anxiety.
- Pitta, which is mainly composed 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 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, grief and envy.

MYORE TRIDOSHA SCALE

- Researchers, Shilpa and Murthy, developed a personality scale to assess Tridoshas (Vita, Pitta, and Kapha) from a psychological perspective. They validated the classical Ayurvedic concepts from the domain of psychology. They relied only on the Tridoshas that are amenable for psychologists to assess psychological traits as expressed by the Tridoshas of Vata, Pitta and Kapha – 52 items for assessing Vata, 52 items for assessing Pitta and 53 items for assessing Kapha in an individual.

TABLE 2: PRAKRUTI QUESTIONNAIRE SAMPLE

- Researchers, Shilpa and Murthy, developed a personality scale to assess Tridoshas (Vita, Pitta, and Kapha) from a psychological perspective. They validated the classical Ayurvedic concepts from the domain of psychology. They relied only on the Tridoshas that are amenable for psychologists to assess psychological traits as expressed by the Tridoshas of Vata, Pitta and Kapha – 52 items for assessing Vata, 52 items for assessing Pitta and 53 items for assessing Kapha in an individual.

PRAKRUTI QUESTIONNAIRE

- Bell et al. developed a 10-question Prakruti mind-body questionnaire based upon a much longer Chopra Center for Wellbeing Prakruti Patient Intake Form. Each question is scored on a 5-point scale, which are shown in Table 2, corresponds to a specific physiological or psychological characteristic of the three doshas (Vata, 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, stress 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 (imbalance in the doshas) and Western measures of psychological states. They found that the imbalances in all three doshas correlate with certain psychological states.
- A higher score on the Vikruti questionnaire for Vata 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.

REFERENCES