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

Samarth Rao
samarth.rao@valpo.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.valpo.edu/cus

Recommended Citation

This Poster Presentation is brought to you for free and open access by the Office of Sponsored and Undergraduate Research at ValpoScholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Symposium on Undergraduate Research and Creative Expression (SOURCE) by an authorized administrator of ValpoScholar. For more information, please contact a ValpoScholar staff member at scholar@valpo.edu.
Integrating Ayurvedic Concepts with Western Measures for Treating Mental Health in India

Samarth Rao
Department of Psychology, Valparaiso University

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 (svabhava), the issue of mental health treatment is becoming increasing 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 shortsighted 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 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 and 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, 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, greed and envy.

PRAKRUTI BALANCE & Vikruti Imbalance

• PRAKRUTI (Balance) refers to the constitutional psychological tendencies referred 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 (Imbalance) 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 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 to successfully pair classical Ayurvedic concepts and contemporary western measures are presented.

TABLE 1: MYSOR TRIDOSHA SCALE SAMPLE CONSTRUCTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Vata</th>
<th>Pitta</th>
<th>Kapha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>rarely represents me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>secondarily represents me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>most accurately represents me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Researchers, Shilpa and Murthy, developed a personality scale to assess Tridoshas (Vata, Pitta, and Kapha) from a psychological perspective using the Tridosha theory to validate the classical Ayurvedic concepts from the domain of psychology. They relied only on the Tridoshas that are amenable for psychologists to assess psychological aspects of the Tridosha Prakriti. 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 Vata, Pitta and Kapha. Shilpa and Murthy, in 2011, developed 153 items for assessing Vata, Pitta and Kapha for assessing Kapra in an individual.

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.

VIKRUTI QUESTIONNAIRE

• The program 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 2. 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 correlated 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