

ROLE OF AYURVEDA IN MENTAL HEALTH CARE: A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW

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Abstract

Ayurveda, the traditional system of medicine of India, emphasizes a holistic balance of body, mind, and spirit in the promotion of mental health. This review examines Ayurveda concepts and interventions related to mental health, based on classical texts and contemporary scientific evidence. Central to this approach are Sattva (mental clarity) and the regulation of the Tridoshas—Vata, Pitta, and Kapha—which influence psychological functioning. Key interventions discussed include Medhya Rasayanas, Panchakarma therapies, constitution-based lifestyle and dietary modifications (Prakriti), and the integration of Yoga and meditation for stress management. Emerging evidence suggests the potential efficacy of Ayurvedic approaches in managing anxiety, depression, and related mental health conditions; however, further rigorous clinical studies are required. This review highlights Ayurveda as a valuable adjunct to contemporary mental health care and supports an integrative approach combining traditional and modern practices.

KEYWORDS: Ayurveda, Rasayana, Sadvrutta, Mental Health

INTRODUCTION:

Ayurveda, the traditional system of medicine of India, offers a holistic approach to mental health by emphasizing the integrated functioning of the mind, body, and spirit. Mental health concepts are first described in the Atharva Veda and are further elaborated in classical Ayurvedic texts authored by Charaka, Sushruta, and Vagbhata, which detail the etiology, symptoms, diagnosis, and management of a wide range of human and animal disorders. Ayurveda conceptualizes mental health and disease along a continuum, ranging from normal emotional states to severe mental disorders, through the dynamic interaction of the Gunas, Tridoshas, and Panchabhutas. An individual's Prakriti, determined at birth by these fundamental factors, plays a crucial role in mental well-being, and maintenance of their balance is essential for optimal health. Ayurvedic management of mental health encompasses a comprehensive therapeutic framework, including Daivavyapashraya, Yuktivyapashraya, and

Satvavajaya Chikitsa, along with Aachara Rasayana, Dinacharya, and Yoga-based interventions, aiming to restore psychological balance and promote overall well-being.

AIM AND OBJECTIVE:

To critically examine the role of Ayurveda in preventing and managing mental health disorders.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

Relevant articles on Ayurveda and mental health were searched in Google Scholar, PubMed, Scopus and using keywords like Ayurveda, Sadvrutta, Mental health, etc. Only English studies focusing on Ayurvedic treatments for mental health were included.

Mental health

According to Ayurveda - Swastha is achieved when the body's three Doshas are balanced, digestion is efficient, tissues function normally, waste elimination is regular, and the senses, mind, and spirit are in harmony. [1]

Mental health is a state of psychological well-being that enables individuals to effectively cope with life's stresses, realize their potential, engage in productive learning and work, and contribute meaningfully to their communities. [2]

Aetiopathogenesis of Mental Disorders

1. Vishada: Acharya Charaka's statement "Vishado Rogavardhananam" suggests that emotional distress, such as sorrow or depression,

can worsen disease conditions. This idea forms a core principle of mental health in Ayurveda.[3]

2. According to Ayurvedic principles, disease originates from three fundamental causes: Pragyaaaparadha, Asatmendriyarth Samyoga (improper interaction between the senses and their objects), and Ayoga of Kala, Karm. Impairment of Dhi (intellect), Dhṛti (self-control), and Smṛti (memory) leads to Pragyaaaparadha, which predisposes individuals to engage in Asubha Karma. This, in turn, results in the aggravation of the Doshas, ultimately contributing to the manifestation of disease.[4]

3. Dhaaraniya Vega: For the attainment of Sukha in both Iha Loka (this life) and Para Loka (the afterlife), one must exercise control over the Manas (mind) and Indriyas (sense faculties). Furthermore, restraining negative mental states such as Lobha (greed), Irshya (envy), Dvesha (hatred), Matsarya (jealousy), and Moha (attachment) is essential, as these contribute to Manasika Vikara.[5]

4. Mansika Doshas The three qualities of the Mana—Sattva, Rajas and Tamas - must remain in balance to support overall health. When this balance is disturbed, it leads to Manasika Doshas, which can result in various mental health issues.

Management of Mental Illness through Ayurveda

In Ayurveda, there are 3 types of Chikitsa- Daivavyapashraya, Yuktivyapashraya and Sattvavajaya Chikitsa.

1. **Daivavyapashraya-** In Ayurveda, Daivavyapashraya represents the spiritual and ritualistic dimension of therapy, particularly significant for maintaining mental well-being. These practices are designed to alleviate anxiety, fear, and negative mental tendencies, thereby promoting emotional stability and psychological resilience. Methods include the recitation of mantras, use of sacred herbs, performance of ritual offerings and sacrifices, observance of moral and ethical regulations, acts of atonement, fasting, pilgrimages, chanting of hymns, and participation in spiritual and healing ceremonies. By integrating these spiritual strategies, Ayurveda addresses not only physical health but also the subtle dimensions of Manas (mind), highlighting the interconnection between mental equilibrium and overall health.

2. **Yuktiyapashraya-** Ayurvedic medicinal therapies are guided by two principal approaches: Shodhana and Shamana. These methods determine how medicines are selected and administered to support both physical and mental health. Medicated Ghee preparations (Ghrithas), such as Panchagavya, Brahmi Ghrita, and Maha Kalyanaka Ghrita, are used to enhance cognitive function and overall vitality. Herbo-mineral formulations, including Brahmi Vati, Vata Kulantaka Rasa, Smriti Sagar Rasa, Yogendra Rasa, and Manasamitra Vatakam, are employed for mental clarity, emotional balance, and alleviation of psychological disturbances. Additionally, single-herb (Medhya) drugs serve as targeted therapies to improve memory, intellect, and

resilience of the Manas (mind), reflecting Ayurveda's holistic approach to mental and cognitive well-being.

3. **Satvavajaya-** Psychotherapy aims to promote mental stability by helping individuals stay centred, gain insight into the true nature of the self, and progress toward spiritual awareness. Its key approaches include Gyana (acquisition of divine knowledge), Vignana (patient education), Dhairya (fostering moral values and resilience), Smruti (restoration of memory), and Samadhi (minimizing excessive attachment to materialistic pursuits).

4. **Rasayana-** Rasayana therapy is believed to promote longevity, enhance intelligence, and maintain vitality, efficiency, and overall well-being. It also supports a youthful, disease-free state along with improved voice quality and complexion.

5. **Aachara Rasayana -** It is a non-drug therapeutic approach that enhances the overall functioning of life. It advocates truthful conduct, emotional composure, avoidance of alcohol and excessive intake, maintenance of personal hygiene, adequate rest, and a well-balanced, nutritious diet. Additionally, it aids in the proper regulation of the sensory organs, thereby promoting holistic physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.

6. **Sadvritta -** Sadvritta refers to the observance of ethical conduct, which plays a vital role in promoting mental well-being. Showing respect for all living beings and maintaining control over one's actions, thoughts, and speech are in harmony with

Achara Rasayana, thereby enhancing overall happiness. Furthermore, avoiding misconduct such as theft, harmful behaviour, and negative speech contributes to psychological balance.

DISCUSSION:

Ayurveda, a long-established holistic system, approaches mental health through the integration of body, mind, and spirit. In contrast to Psychiatry, which often emphasizes pharmacological interventions, it adopts a personalized perspective that considers lifestyle, diet, emotional balance, and spiritual well-being. This discussion highlights key insights into the role of Ayurveda in the management of mental health.

Conceptual basis and diagnostic approach

Ayurveda associates mental disorders with imbalances in the three Doshas—Vata, Pitta, and Kapha—which influence both physiological and psychological functions. Disturbances in Prana and Manas are considered key factors in the development of illness, guiding a holistic approach that addresses the underlying causes rather than merely alleviating symptoms.

Herbal interventions and neuroprotective properties

Several Ayurvedic herbs, including *Bacopa monnieri* (Brahmi), *Withania somnifera* (Ashwagandha), *Centella asiatica*, and *Convolvulus pluricaulis*, have demonstrated anxiolytic, antidepressant, and cognitive-enhancing effects in both preclinical and clinical studies. These herbs are

rich in bioactive compounds such as withanolides, bacosides, and Asiatic sides, which possess antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and neuroprotective properties. They also modulate key neurotransmitter systems (e.g., GABAergic, serotonergic) and neuroendocrine pathways involved in mood regulation.

Mind-Body Interventions and Mental Resilience in Ayurveda

Ayurveda emphasizes practices such as meditation, Pranayama (breathing exercises), Yoga, and detoxification therapies like Panchakarma. These interventions have been shown to reduce stress, regulate the autonomic nervous system, and enhance neuroplasticity, thereby improving mental resilience. Research linking these therapies to changes in stress biomarkers (e.g., cortisol) and functional brain imaging provides scientific support for their effectiveness in managing anxiety, depression, and cognitive disorders.

Lifestyle and nutritional approaches in Ayurveda

Ayurveda emphasizes individualized lifestyle and dietary interventions tailored to a person's constitution (Prakriti) and existing Doshic imbalances. These include customized dietary plans, structured daily routines (Dinacharya), and seasonal regimens (Ritucharya), all designed to foster mental harmony and overall well-being. Contemporary research in nutritional psychiatry underscores the critical role of diet in maintaining neurotransmitter precursors and supporting gut-

brain axis function, reinforcing Ayurveda's holistic strategies for optimizing mood, cognitive performance, and mental resilience.

CONCLUSION:

Ayurveda offers a comprehensive, holistic framework for mental health by integrating the mind, body, and spirit. Knowledge of Doshas and Gunas aids in maintaining equilibrium, which underpins effective therapeutic interventions. Treatments such as Daivavyapashraya, Yuktivyapashraya, and Satvavajaya Chikitsa support psychological well-being, while Rasayana and Achara Rasayana promote rejuvenation and vitality. Incorporating Ayurvedic principles can enhance mental resilience, cognitive clarity, and overall life satisfaction.

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