Indigenous Techniques and Therapies in Psychopathology: The Art of Enhancing Quality of Life

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ABSTRACT

In the wake of the present global scenario there has been a lot of investigation, empirical research, and consequential evolution around the globe in the mode of therapies applied for treatment of psychopathology and enhancing quality of life. The focus is gradually shifting from western approaches to eastern/indigenous techniques and unconventional methods of healing and treatment viz., meditation, yoga, reiki, music, and dance therapy. These indigenous techniques in psychopathology and quality of life are powerful and simple, yet expressive and impressive mediums; and are swiftly gaining commendation as significant therapeutic techniques within the ambit of positive psychology that aids in contributing immensely towards restoring health and well-being of one and all, both at individual and community levels though integrated therapy programs. The present paper seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of the psychological benefits of these traditional modes of healing and treatment and gives profound insight into the fact that they are associated with desirable personality characteristics — enhanced self-efficacy; life satisfaction; happiness; quality of life; longer life span; decrease in tension, anxiety and depression; increased resistance to the common cold; better stress management and coping skills; lower risk of cardiovascular disease-related death; improved physical function and increased physical well-being; and better psychological health.

INTRODUCTION

Lately, in wake of the present global scenario there has been a lot of investigation, empirical research, and consequential evolution around the globe in mode of therapies applied for treatment of psychopathology and enhancing quality of life. The focus is gradually shifting from western approaches to eastern/indigenous techniques and unconventional methods of healing and treatment viz. meditation,
yoga, reiki, music, and dance therapy. These indigenous techniques in are powerful and simple, yet expressive and impressive mediums; and are swiftly gaining commendation as significant therapeutic techniques within the ambit of positive psychology that aids in contributing immensely towards treating psychopathological disorders; restoring health and well-being of one and all, both at individual and community levels though integrated therapy programs.

![Diagram showing indigenous techniques and their impact on quality of life](image)

**Figure-1: Indigenous Techniques and Therapies in Psychopathology – The Evolving Face in Quality of Life**

The novel research findings emphasize the importance of conceptualizing these innovative approaches (indigenous techniques) within a multilevel and multi-specificity framework and make a significant contribution to understanding the way this construct relates to treatment of psychopathology and enrichment of quality of life.

**Research Questions**

The present paper contemplates a few research questions like:

- Is there any relationship between the Indigenous Techniques viz. exercise, meditation, yoga, reiki, music, and dance therapy; and enhancement of quality of life?
- What are the factors affecting this relationship?
- How one can work on these unconventional innovative approaches in the treatment of psychopathology and enhance quality of life?
EXERCISE AND QUALITY OF LIFE

Life quality as employed in this paper refers to a state of subjective well-being, and a preponderance of positive affect (Bradburn, 1969; Diener, 1984). Since exercise has been associated with mood benefits, more positive self-concept and self-esteem, increases in self-efficacy, decreases in psychological and physiological stress indices, and the experiences of joy and fun, it can play a pivotal role in life quality.

The relationship between exercise and psychological well-being, an integral component of life quality, is exceedingly complex. There are many types and forms of exercise. Exercise may refer to (a) group or solitary activities, (b) competitive sport and recreational physical activity, (c) aerobic or anaerobic activity, (d) acute and chronic exercise, and (e) activities performed by individuals who differ greatly in fitness and skill levels. It is likely that the psychological benefits, much like physical benefits, differ across exercise modalities.

Despite such complexities, it is possible to generalise across many types of studies and to conclude that habitual exercise can be associated with enhanced psychological well-being.

- Acute decrease in common stress symptoms such as anxiety, depression, and anger have been associated primarily with single exercise sessions in members of the normal population.
- Long-term decrease in the occurrence of anxiety and depression associated with chronic exercise programs in the psychiatric populations.
- Exercise has been shown to be as effective as more traditional stress reduction approaches in reducing anxiety, tension, depression, and anger (Bahrke & Morgan, 1978). These effects were particularly impressive because the participants in these studies were randomly assigned to treatment. Thus exercise was stress reducing even for individuals who were not self-selected exercisers. The observation that exercise was not superior and other stress reduction techniques for realistic claims regarding the benefits of exercise.
- Aerobic exercise involvement and/or high fitness have been associated with attenuated physiological responses following exposure to psychosocial responses.
- Participation in aerobic and in less intense exercise such as walking may serve as a buffer between negative life events and physical illness. (Brown & Seigel, 1988)

Participation in exercise on a regular basis has major implications for slowing age-related physical deterioration: cardio respiratory decline, osteoporosis or skeletal decalcification (Smith & Gilligan, 1989), and decreases in muscle fibre size, number, and metabolic rate (Bouchard et. al 1991). Joggers who are 60 years of age have the same maximal oxygen uptake as 20 year old active men. These improvements in physical capacity have major implications for the quality of life.

Spirduso and Cronin (2011) carried out a research to determine if exercise operates in a dose-response fashion to influence well-being and to postpone dependency using resistance training, strength training, function, exercise, elderly, quality of life, frailty, physical activity, independence, performance, aerobic training, mobility, well-being, and disability. The most consistent results were that long-term physical activity is related to postponed disability and independent living in the oldest-old subjects. Even in individuals with chronic disease, systematic participation in physical activities enhances physical function.
MEDITATION AND QUALITY OF LIFE

Meditation is an internal personal practice done without any external involvement, except perhaps prayer beads to count prayers. It often involves invoking or cultivating a feeling or internal state, such as compassion or attending to a specific focal point. Meditation has been practiced since antiquity as a component of numerous religious traditions, especially in Monastic settings. However, it is now been widely used for purposes like exercise, and treatment of psychopathology.

Meditation (a type of yoga practice) occupies an important place in the scheme of spiritual practice. The aim of meditation is to eliminate irrelevant thought processes through training of internalized attention, thought to lead to physical and mental relaxation, stress reduction, and psycho-emotional stability.

Meditation can also be defined as “self regulation of attention”. The various techniques of meditation can be classified according to their focus. Some focus on the field or background perception and experience, called mindfulness meditation; others focus on a pre-selected specific object, and are called concentrative meditation. There are also techniques that shift between the field and the object.

Health Benefits of Meditation

Though meditation is usually recognised as a spiritual practice, it also has many health benefits.

• It leads to a deeper level of relaxation.
• Meditation reduces anxiety attacks by lowering the levels of blood lactate.
• It decreases muscle tension or any pain due to tension and headaches.
• Meditation builds self-confidence.
• It increases serotonin production which influences mood and behaviour. Low levels of serotonin are associated with depression, obesity, insomnia and headaches.
• Meditation reduces pre-menstrual syndrome. Meditation can help to resolve the deepest of neuroses, fears and conflict which play their part in causing stress and ill health.

Research Overview

In a recent research by Singh et al. (2011) to study the effects of meditation (nad-yoga) on the self-confidence of 20 students of Dev Sanskriti Vishwavidhalya in Haridwar, India where meditation process went for 15 days, 15 minutes each day in the evening from 6.00 pm-6.15 pm, the pre-post results showed that nad-yoga significantly improved self-confidence. In a similar study by Mundhra et al. (2011), the effect of twin heart meditation on general well-being of individuals was studied. The study was conducted at Dev Sanskriti Vishwavidhalya, Shantikunj at Haridwar in India for 30 days. The results showed that twin heart meditation was significant on general well-being implying that it makes an impact to develop general well-being of the person. Chaudhary and Khokhar (2011) studied the effects of meditation as an enhancer of mental health among 40 girl students of Firoj Gandhi Degree College at Rae-Barely. For one month meditation was practiced for 30 minutes. Two group pre-test and post-test design was applied and the results indicated that the subjects of experimental group found better and improved pattern of mental health due to one month regular
practice of meditation whereas no such kind of improvement was noticed among the subjects of control group.

Hence, the role of meditation techniques is opening new horizons and challenges for future research in the treatment of psychopathological disorders.

**Yoga and Quality of Life**

Yoga is the oldest, natural, culture friendly, and an inexpensive technique growing positive and sound mental health. The tradition of yoga was born in India several thousand years ago. *Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahar Dharna, Dhyan,* and *Samadhi* are the core building blocks and discrete stages of yoga commonly known as *yog sutras* given by Patanjali (1989) dating to India’s Mauryan period which have proved their worth in maintaining and developing mental health in India as well as across the globe. Yoga has many benefits like balance and flexibility of body, increase in knowledge and wealth, mental peace and balance, clarity in thought, ability to concentrate, improvement in mental health, development of personal and social values.

**Exploring the Research Findings**

In India, the most researched is the practice of *Pranayama* (core building block of yoga) through which fluctuations of mind are controlled and the mind is prepared for meditation. It is means of stress-absorption and mental-rejuvenation.

With the practice of *Pranayama* one starts experiencing lightness of body, feeling of inner peace, better sleep, better memory, better concentration, and provides freedom from negative and harmful mental conditions like anger, depression, lasciviousness, arrogance, and stress – the indispensable implements for a healthy human.

A study in India by Sao et al. (2011) attempted to explore the effect of *Om* chanting and *prenakarshan pranayama* on emotional maturity on 30 adolescents. *Om* chanting and *prenakarshan pranayama* was given for 30 minutes up to one month and the emotional maturity was assessed. The results of the pre-post analyses indicated a significant enhancement in the *emotional maturity* of the subjects. Another recent study in India by Rastogi (2011) where 25 persons were introduced with some practices in a camp at Haridwar, India viz., *mantra* recitation, *pranayama*, rehabilitation program, group discussion, and some physical exercise to see its result on *neuroticism and self-confidence of persons* attending the camp. The results showed that attendance in the camp and following the practices for one month significantly decreased the *level of anxiety and depression* as well as increased *self-confidence*.

Sahu (2011) conducted a study to observe the effects of *pragya yoga sadhna* on stress on a group of 20 students taken from Dev Sanskriti Vishwavidhalya in Haridwar, India, with the help of accidental sampling. The pre-test and post-test design was followed, the experiment was conducted for 25 days with *pragya yoga sadhna* in the morning and evening. The result indicated that *pragya yoga sadhna* was effective to release stress. In another similar study by Kumari (2011), the effect of *atma bodh* and *tatva bodh sadhna* for 15 minutes each day for 30 days *sadhna* on mental health of graduate students. The results revealed that *atma bodh* and *tatva bodh* positively affects the mental health.
The yogic practice *Pranayam and Om chanting* described in the ancient India scripture were devised as experimental method for systematic training towards the realisation and reusing otherwise dormant capabilities of the brain. When practised together *Pranayam* and *Om chanting* are the direct Ayurvedic tools for healing the mind with the deepest layer to its surface action and allows one to change the structure of mind, Srivastava and Joshi (2011).

In a study by Prabha and Kumari (2011) conducted to examine the conceptual effects of one type of yoga called ‘*Pranakarshan Pranayam*’ – the fourth *Anga* of *Astanganyoga* — given by Pt. Shri Ram Sharma Acharyaji for force vital capacity. They reported that regular practice of this yoga increased the vital capacity as a divine type of aura is felt and absorbed in this yoga which is felt in the universe.

**MUSIC THERAPY AND QUALITY OF LIFE**

Music therapy is an interpersonal process in which a trained music therapist uses music and all of its facets viz., physical, emotional, mental, social, aesthetic, and spiritual to help clients to improve or maintain their health. Music therapists primarily help clients to improve their health across various domains (*e.g.*, cognitive functioning, motor skills, emotional and affective development, behaviour and social skills, and quality of life) by using music experiences (*e.g.*, singing, song-writing, listening to and discussing music, moving to music) to achieve treatment goals and objectives. It is considered both an art and a science, with a qualitative and quantitative research literature base, incorporating areas such as clinical therapy, bio-musicology, musical acoustics, music theory, psychoacoustics, embodied music cognition, aesthetics of music, and comparative musicology.

**Benefits of Music Therapy**

Medical research from across the world has shown the remarkable therapeutic qualities relaxation music can have in treating conditions ranging from muscular tension and stress relief to pain management, sleeping problems and depression, as well as memory loss and speech therapy.

Listening to soothing melodies and rhythmic music is a gentle joyous way to lower stress levels, alleviate muscle tension and enhance the physical, mental and spiritual benefits of relaxation. Many people enjoy taking time out to relax and listen to music or put it on when having a bath.

**Exploring The Research Findings**

Researchers have proven that music therapy combined with other relaxation techniques based on guided imagery reduces pain, depression and anxiety, and improves sleep among patients suffering from fibromyalgia. Thus, relaxation techniques and music therapy enhances patients’ quality of life.

Music has been shown to affect portions of the brain. Part of this therapy is the ability of music to affect emotions and social interactions. Research by Nayak et al. (2000) showed that music therapy is associated with a decrease in depression, social and behavioural outcomes, improved mood, and a reduction in anxiety. Both descriptive and experimental studies have documented effects of music on quality of life, involvement with the environment, expression of feelings, awareness and responsiveness, positive associations, and socialisation.

Those who practice music therapy are finding a benefit in using music to help children with ADD, and even hospitals are beginning to use music and music therapy to help with pain management,
to help ward off depression, to promote movement, to calm patients, to ease muscle tension, and to bring a more positive state of mind, helping to keep depression and anxiety at bay which can help prevent the stress response from wreaking havoc on the body, and can help keep creativity and optimism levels higher, bringing many other benefits.

DANCE THERAPY AND QUALITY OF LIFE

Dance has been shown to uplift mood, concentration, and is a means of restoring and maintaining mental health. Her et al. (2011) studied the effects of Indian classical dance in rejuvenating psychological well-being in persons. Indian classical dances involve some physical activities to enhance mental capabilities, various mudras through which one can attain holistic health and can release the suppressed emotions which may lead to stress while performing and playing.

Health Benefits

The effects of dancing are multi-faceted, e.g., there is the sense of wellbeing associated with any form of regular exercise. Neurotransmitters such as serotonin, nor-epinephrine, and endorphins are produced during exercise, increasing physical feelings of wellbeing, which in turn translate into emotional and mental wellbeing, as well as a reduction in tension.

Dancing has cardiovascular effects, helping to increase health and decrease blood pressure, as well as improving fitness levels and helping to reduce obesity. This increased level of healthiness often increases a sense of wellbeing and the reduction in risk factors may help alleviate anxiety and stress about future ill health.

Social interaction resulting from dancing also helps to combat depression, and the non-verbal expression of feelings that is possible in dancing may also help people resolve underlying psychological problems. Dancing also helps in improved co-ordination and concentration levels, all helping to combat stress.

Research Overview

Kane (2011) recently in a very interesting pilot study completed in Sweden investigated the effects of dance therapy in two very different groups of children — young ADHD boys and depressed teenage girls. The results of the study reported dramatic effects of the dance therapy on the ADHD boys. According to the study, the parents and teachers reported improvement in their schoolwork, and they were able to attend the entire lesson, thus showing improvement in social skills. The ADHD boys were also able to play with other children without getting into conflict and fights. The dance therapy proved to be a good way to increase their energy level and enhance their joy of living. Certain dance styles, flamenco for example, helped to give the girls an increased sense of pride and improved their self-esteem. The overall effect was that the girls were happier and the depression was alleviated.

REIKI AND QUALITY OF LIFE

Reiki is a system for personal growth and healing which gives us tools to create positive changes in our lives and to gradually eliminate or minimise the damaging effects of the world in which we live and work. It is a Hand-on healing art, powerful adjunct to the conventional therapeutic
modalities, fuels the body homeostatic mechanism and thereby assists in the restoration of balance of the physical, mental, and emotional levels.

Because this life-force energy supports optimal development and fulfilment, Reiki promotes the highest healing good for all things (Barnett & Chambers, 1996). It is also a powerful process for self and distant healing through the connection of the practitioner in the flow of the life force from a universal energy field to the human energy field (Aura), flowing through the affected parts of the energy field via chakras, nadi, meridians, cells, tissues, and organs, replacing it with positive energy, raising vibratory levels through which negative thoughts, feelings, and blockages are dissipated. This nourished the mind and body in a natural and healthy way accelerating healing from illnesses ranging from anxiety, CHD, multiple sclerosis, chronic pain, diabetes, cancer, and many more fostering inner growth and transformation. It balance the energy in the body, replenish and add to the body energy, inducing relaxation, supports and enhances all medical treatments, treats symptoms and causes of illnesses, accelerate healing, increasing vitality, and no contra-indications.

**Reiki Overview**

In a study, the Reiki Research Foundation reported that Reiki as a treatment for multiple sclerosis led to a 92% reduction in lethargy, 87% in depression, 78.7% in cognitive problems, 75.3% in motor problems, 73.5% in pain, 70.2% in fatigue, and 69% in walking time. In another study by Daniel Wirth of Healing Sciences International, Orinda, California, identical mirror wounds were inflicted by doctors in the right and left shoulders of 44 male college students, 23 out of them then received therapeutic touch. The study was tightly controlled with students extending their arms through holes so that there was no eye contact, and the same touching techniques used on each enquiry. The doctors evaluated the results were told that the study was about electrical conductivity of the body and not about healing. After 8 days the treated wound had shrunk 93.5% compared to 67.3% for those not treated. After 16 days, figures were 99.3% and 90.95% (Rand, 1998).

Shore (2004) investigated the long-term effects of energetic healing on psychological depression and self-perceived stress on 46 participants who were randomly assigned to hands-on Reiki group or a distance Reiki group or a distance placebo group. They received 1-1.5 hour treatment once weekly for six weeks. Prior to the treatment all groups have demonstrated similar scores but in post treatment, there was a significant reduction in symptoms of depression, perceived stress, hopelessness, and physiological stress in the threatening group when compared with the group that received placebo treatments. In a study by Janett Quinn, Assistant Director of Nursing, University of South Carolina, in conjunction with St. Vincents Medical Centre, New York. The design of the study was to rule out the placebo effect. It included 30 heart patients who were given a 20-question psychological test to determine their level of anxiety, then treated by a group in therapeutic touch. A control group was treated by sham healers who imitated the same action as healers. The group treated by trained practitioners of Therapeutic touch showed 17% drop in anxiety level after only 5 minutes of treatment. There was no change in the control group (Rand, 1998).

To sum-up, Reiki is fast emerging as a powerful alternative therapy and carving a valuable niche for itself across the globe, which is truly a changing Face in the New Millennium thereby providing a platform and challenge for conducting future research in Psychopathology.
CONCLUSION

The effect of such methods of healing can be looked at from the lens – pleasures of life driving to a happier and more satisfied state of existence. With this shift of focus towards the above mentioned unconventional methodologies for developing and sustaining positive mental health there is prospect of approaching a better mind and body balance and a better world to dwell in altogether, with much more ease than is usually anticipated. These indigenous techniques and therapies are beneficial for the persons suffering from various psychopathologies at various stages of life. These guidelines have opened new horizons and challenges for exploring different domains in the areas of new research in the treatment of psychopathology and enhancement of quality of life.

REFERENCES


