

REVIEW ARTICLE

An Integrated Approach in the Management of Stress in Children- A Critical Review.

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda, the ancient science of life, views stress as an imbalance in the body's natural energy systems or doshas. The reason our children experience stress is that globalization exposes them to various new demands, standards, and options all over the world. Everyone feels sad, excited, or angry, but when kids feel too good or too mad, they may be dealing with stress and anxiety due to the burden of study, relationships with friends, comparisons with colleagues, and many more. The dominant presence of multimedia devices and the time spent on them by children are clear indicators of the shift in lifestyles and priorities of our new generation. Also, children don't exhibit symptoms of stress as adults do, and the disease remains one of the most underdiagnosed mental health problems. Although modern therapeutics have modalities for the management of this, approximately 30%–40% of patients have a partial response to the available interventions. Therefore, there is a wide scope of research to find a safe remedy or non-pharmacological approach. *Ayurveda* provides a multimodality approach in the form of *Yoga*, *Panchkarma* procedures, *Medhya Rasayanas*, and *Sadvrittupalana* through natural techniques that enhance mental ability.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda, an ancient system of healing originating in India, offers holistic approaches to managing stress. By addressing the mind, body, and spirit as interconnected elements, Ayurveda aims to restore balance and harmony. According to *Ayurveda*, a healthy body cannot be attained without a healthy mind.¹ There is an interrelationship of body, mind, and soul, and these are considered the three pillars of life. Children not only have new resources in their lives but are also expected to perform well. Different people in

children's lives, such as family, school, media, and friends, constantly provide stimulation as well as expectations. These expectations and demands create stress in children's lives, especially related to the evaluation of their performances. Children dislike upsetting their parents and being the reason for adding to existing parental stress. Children interact with everyday life situations with worldviews that could be different from those of adults. Children depend on the environment set by society to facilitate their potential for development. Also, stress is the most common cause of premature mortality, acceleration of aging, and reduced life expectancy.² As providers and caretakers, we tend to view the world of children as happy and carefree. Being an alarming problem in children, the disease needs effective and safe treatment. Modern therapeutics, though, have a spectrum of drugs for the management of such disorders; they also

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have serious side effects and a habit-forming nature. In this, we study in detail regarding the Ayurvedic multimodality approach in the form of *Panchakarma* procedures, *Medhya Rasayanas*, *Yoga*, *Sadvrittupalana*.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

2.1 Objectives:

Investigate the role of Yoga in improving mental health and cognitive function.

Examine the effectiveness of Panchakarma procedures in detoxifying and rejuvenating the mind and body.

Study the impact of *Medhya Rasayanas* on cognitive function, memory, and mental clarity.

Analyze the benefits of behavioral therapy through natural techniques, such as meditation and relaxation, on mental well-being.

2.2. Expected Outcomes:

A comprehensive understanding of the Ayurvedic multimodality approach to mental health.

Identification of effective natural techniques for enhancing mental ability and cognitive function.

Development of a holistic treatment plan incorporating *Yoga*, *Panchakarma*, *Medhya Rasayanas*, and behavioral therapy.

3. MATERIAL AND METHODS

3.1 Stress in children

In today's fast-paced world, stress can be an overwhelming challenge that affects both the physical and mental health of children. Stress can affect how you feel, think, behave, and how your body works. In fact, stress can create a variety of symptoms, including anxiety, fatigue, insomnia, eating disorders, depression, headaches, difficulty concentrating, and increased anger in children. Stress is a natural response to challenging situations that trigger feelings of pressure or tension. It can manifest in various forms, such as physical, emotional, or behavioral changes in children. Common stressors include schoolwork deadlines, multiple competitions at a time, career issues, parents fighting, and fighting with friends or siblings. Prolonged exposure to stressful situations can lead to a range of negative effects on both the body and mind, impacting overall well-being.

Understanding the root causes of stress is essential for effectively managing and coping with its effects. External factors like school demands, family issues, and societal pressures can contribute to heightened stress levels. Internal factors, such as perfectionism, negative self-doubts, and unrealistic expectations, can also intensify stress responses in children. Identifying and addressing these underlying causes is crucial in developing healthy coping mechanisms and reducing the impact of stress on one's health³.

Stress and anxiety are considered to be harmful when they affect a child's ability to learn, make friends, or have fun. When it begins to have an impact on a child's functioning,

a child's thinking becomes unrealistic, pessimistic, and catastrophic. There is the appearance of physical symptoms like stomachache, nausea, and vomiting. Severe stress and anxiety like this can harm children's mental and emotional well-being, affecting their self-esteem and confidence. They may become withdrawn and go to great lengths to avoid things or situations that make them feel anxious. Stress and anxiety disorders also often co-occur with other disorders such as depression, eating disorders, and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)⁴.

3.1. Ayurvedic Approach to Physical and Psychological Diseases

Ayurveda treats physical and psychological diseases as interconnected aspects of a single unit, comprising the psyche (mind) and soma (body)⁵. This approach recognizes that disturbances in one aspect can affect the other.

3.2. Impact of Stressors

Various stressors can disrupt the balance of Manasika Bhavas (mental states) by vitiating *Manasika Doshas* (mental imbalances), *Sharirika Doshas* (physical imbalances), and *Agni* (digestive fire).

3.3. Comprehensive Treatment Modalities

To manage diseases effectively, Ayurveda employs a comprehensive approach that combines⁶:

1. Pharmacological Management (*Yuktivyapashraya Chikitsa*):

Using medicinal herbs and plants to restore balance.

2. Non-Pharmacological Management (*Dev-vyapashrya Chikitsa* and *Satvavajaya Chikitsa*):

Employing lifestyle modifications, dietary changes, and stress management techniques.

3.4. *Medhya Dravyas* for Mental Health

Restore Medha (mental clarity and intelligence) in patients with imbalances.

Promote mental health and well-being.

These *Medhya dravyas* play a crucial role in Ayurvedic psychiatry and psychology, offering a natural and holistic approach to managing mental health. *Medhya dravyas* are Ayurvedic herbs that promote mental health and well-being. Four key *Medhya dravyas* mentioned in *Charak Samhita* are⁷:

Mandukaparni

Yashtimadhu

Guduchi

Shankhapushpi

These herbs exhibit antioxidant, neuroprotective, anxiolytic, antidepressant, nootropic, adaptogenic, and cognitive-enhancing properties, making them beneficial for anxiety disorders in children.

3.5. Panchakarma Therapy: *Shirodhara*

Shirodhara is a Panchakarma therapy that involves pouring a continuous stream of warm oil on the forehead. Research has shown that *Shirodhara*:

- Induces deep relaxation and reduces anxiety
- Lowers sympathetic tone and heart rate
- Decreases tidal volume and CO₂ excretion
- Slows brain waves and increases right-left coherence

These physiological changes are similar to those experienced during meditation, indicating a positive impact on mental health and well-being.

3.6. Neurophysiological Mechanism

The effects of *Shirodhara* on psychophysiological changes may be related to the tactile stimulation of skin hair follicles, which are innervated by the trigeminal nerves. This stimulation can transmit impulses to the thalamus and cerebral cortex, influencing the limbic system, brainstem, and autonomic nervous system.

3.7. *Devavypashraya Chikitsa* (Divine Therapy)

*Devavypashraya Chikitsa*⁸ is a form of therapy that utilizes spiritual and divine interventions to eradicate diseases. This approach includes:

- Mantra* (sacred sounds)
- Ausadhi* (medicinal herbs)
- Mani* (gemstones)
- Mangala Bell* (auspicious bell)
- Upehara* (offerings)
- Homa* (fire rituals)
- Nyama* (restraints)
- Prayascita* (atonement)
- Upavasa* (fasting)
- Shrastyayana* (purification)
- Pronipata* (prayer)
- Gamanote* (chanting)

3.8. *Sattvavajaya Chikitsa* (Psycho-Spiritual Therapy)

Controlling the mind: Regulating the psyche to prevent it from coming into contact with negative influences.

Withdrawing the mind: Detaching the mind from worldly attachments and desires.

Spiritual practices: Engaging in spiritual practices such as meditation, yoga, and prayer to promote mental well-being.

3.9. Yoga for Children

Yoga can help children cope with stress and contribute positively to their mental health. Yoga education in India emphasizes that yoga is a powerful medium for developing children's personalities and enabling them to face modern-day challenges⁹.

3.10. Benefits of Yoga for Children

Research by Shirley Telles, a prominent yoga researcher, suggests that yoga¹⁰:

- Improves physical and mental well-being.
- Enhances self-regulation.
- Assists with stress management.
- Reduces test anxiety.
- Increases academic performance.
- Improves concentration and coping ability.
- Reduces aggression.
- Lowers levels of rumination and intrusive thoughts.
- Increases emotional regulation.

3.11. Adaptations for Children

Since children cannot sit still for long periods, alternative approaches are necessary. Yoga for kids can be noisy and fun, incorporating games and interactive activities. For children, *Trataka Karma* (concentration exercises) can be used to enhance focus instead of meditation. Simple stretching exercises should precede yoga practice.

3.12. Parenting-Based Approaches

Effective parenting involves setting high standards, spending quality time with children, and providing a stable home environment. Here are some key strategies¹¹:

Set a good example: Demonstrate excellence in your own life, as children learn from what they see.

Spend quality time: Engage with your children, listen to them, and show interest in their lives.

Establish a stable home environment: Provide a safe and predictable space for your children to grow.

Negotiate and set clear rules: Establish clear expectations and consequences, and be consistent in enforcing them.

Show physical affection: Display love and affection through physical touch, such as hugs and kisses.

Practice active listening: Engage with your children, listen to their concerns, and validate their feelings.

Avoid punishment: Instead of punishing misbehavior, try to understand the underlying reasons and address them in a constructive manner.

Focus on long-term growth: Recognize that childhood is a journey and that growth and development are ongoing processes.

3.13. Establishing a Daily Routine

Establish a morning routine: Start the day with a predictable routine, such as breakfast, dressing, and morning greetings.

Set aside dedicated time for homework and study: Provide a quiet and distraction-free space for children to focus on their studies.

Schedule regular breaks and physical activity: Encourage children to take breaks, engage in physical activity, and practice relaxation techniques.

Establish a bedtime routine: Wind down the day with a calming routine, such as reading, storytelling, or relaxation exercises.

4. DISCUSSION

The Challenges Facing Children Today

Children are exposed to numerous stressful events in their daily lives, including:

Media overexposure: War, extreme weather, terrorism, illness, and death.

Family-related issues: Divorce, single-parent families, addictions, illness, and death.

School pressures: Rising expectations, overscheduling, bullying, and peer pressure.

The Need for Effective Coping Skills

Society has placed adult-sized problems on children without providing them with adequate coping skills. As a result:

Children often internalize problems, leading to emotional distress.

Children may adopt harmful or hurtful coping mechanisms. The Potential of Yoga in Supporting Children's Mental Health

Yoga can provide children with essential tools to:

Remain centered and focused.

Cope with stress and challenges.

Develop healthy coping mechanisms.

Long-Term Benefits

Investing in yoga and mindfulness programs for children can have long-term benefits, including:

Reduced stress levels in future generations.

Improved mental health and well-being.

Enhanced resilience and coping skills.

By investing in yoga education for children, we can:

Reduce stress and anxiety: Help children manage stress and anxiety, leading to improved mental health.

Improve academic performance: Enhance focus, concentration, and cognitive function, leading to better academic outcomes.

Promote emotional intelligence: Help children develop essential life skills, such as empathy, self-awareness, and self-regulation.

Foster a positive and resilient mindset: Encourage children to develop a growth mindset, coping skills, and resilience in the face of challenges.

As we mentioned, the long-term benefits of yoga education for children can be profound, leading to future generations experiencing less stress and improved overall well-being.

5. CONCLUSION

As a society, it's essential that we adopt a proactive approach to support elementary children in managing everyday challenges. Given that it's impractical to eliminate most stressors from their lives, we must collaborate to teach them

constructive coping mechanisms. Educators, counselors, and parents can

- Relaxation techniques

- Increased physical activity

- Healthy eating habits

- Daily journaling

- Unstructured free time for self-expression

A holistic approach combining Ayurvedic principles, modern cognitive therapy, and parent-based interventions can empower children to effectively manage stress and anxiety.

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10. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Nil

11. DATA AVAILABILITY

This is an original manuscript and all data are available for only review purposes from principal investigators.

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