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AYURVEDIC APPROACH IN THE MANAGEMENT OF STRESS AND ANXIETY IN CHILDREN: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Why children experience stress and anxiety is that globalization exposes the child all over the world to various new demands, standards and options. 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 burden of study, relation with friends, comparison with colleagues and many more. Modern society offers plenty of distractions and unwelcome attractions, especially linked to new media technologies. 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 in adults and the disease remains one of the most under diagnosed mental health problem. Although modern therapeutics have modalities for management of this but approximately 30%–40% of patients have a partial response to the available interventions. Therefore, there is wide scope of research to find out a safest remedy or non-pharmacological approach. *Ayurveda* provides multimodality approach in the form of *Yoga*, *Panchkarma* procedures, *Medhya Rasayanas* and behavioral therapy through natural techniques that enhances mental ability.

Keyword: *Stress, Anxiety, Ayurveda, Kaumarbhritya.*

INTRODUCTION

According to *Ayurveda* a healthy body cannot be attained without a healthy mind. There is interrelationship of body, mind and soul and these are considered as the three pillars of life.¹ 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 evaluation of their performances. Children dislike upsetting their parents and being the reason for adding to existing parental stress. Children interact with everyday life situation 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 and anxiety are 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 are also having serious side effects and habit-forming nature. The

purpose of this paper is to have a look at the increasing level of stress and anxiety found in children and what can be done in *Ayurveda* to help these children.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

To study in detail regarding *Ayurvedic* multimodality approach in the form of *Yoga*, *Panchkarma procedures*, *Medhya Rasayanas* and behavioural therapy through natural techniques that enhances mental ability.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The materials were collected from the classical *Ayurvedic* literatures, magazines and research journals.

STRESS AND ANXIETY

Stress is a part of human being and begins even before birth. It plays an important part in the development from learning to eat to trying to memorize. In order to learn and grow, a degree of stress is important! A small degree of stress during tests is important as it produces extra energy in the brain to concentrate and do well. But too much stress can have a profound impact on children.³

Even a constant low level of stress can take a toll and can change children's mood and behavior and cause hyperactivity, depression, anxiety, etc. Big stressors for children are parents fighting, moving, taking a test, fighting with a friend or sibling, difficulty at school and

appearance.⁴ Smaller stressors are homework, too many chores, acne, being sick and being tardy to school.

Anxiety is the uneasiness, worry, or tension we experience when we expect a real or perceived threat to our welfare. 10-20% of school age children experience this.

Typical anxieties are⁵

- ❖ Infants: stranger anxiety 7-9 months
- ❖ Early Childhood: separation anxiety, ghosts, monsters
- ❖ Elementary: school performance, burglars, hurricanes, and illness
- ❖ Middle childhood: academic difficulties, social issues, natural dangers, death
- ❖ Adolescence: moral issues, relationships, future etc.

Anxiety is considered to be harmful when it affects child's ability to learn, making friends, or having fun. When it begins to have impact on child's functioning. Child's thinking becomes unrealistic, catastrophic, and pessimistic.⁶ There is appearance of physical symptoms like stomach-ache, nausea, vomiting. Severe anxiety like this can harm children's mental and emotional wellbeing, affecting their self-esteem and confidence.⁷ They may become withdrawn and go to great lengths to avoid things or situations that make them feel anxious. Anxiety disorders also often co-occur with other disorders such as depression, eating disorders, and

attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) etc.⁸

Sources of Stress

Stress is a function of the demands placed on us and our ability to meet them. These demands often come from outside sources, such as family, jobs, friends, or school. But it also can come from within, often related to what we think we should be doing versus what we're actually able to do. So, stress can affect anyone who feels overwhelmed even kids. In pre-schoolers, separation from parents can cause anxiety. As kids get older, academic and social pressures (especially from trying to fit in) create stress. Many kids are too busy to have time to play creatively or relax after school. Kids who complain about all their activities or who refuse to go to them might be overscheduled. Talk with your kids about how they feel about extracurricular activities. If they complain, discuss the pros and cons of stopping one activity. If stopping isn't an option, explore ways to help manage your child's time and responsibilities to lessen the anxiety. Kids' stress may be intensified by more than just what's happening in their own lives. Kids who see disturbing images on TV or hear talk of natural disasters, war, and terrorism may worry about their own safety and that of the people they love.

When is anxiety a problem for children?

When it starts to get in the way of their day-to-day life it becomes a problem for children.

“We all get anxious at times, but some children seem to live a life of anxiety, where it’s not short-term and it’s not just an occasional thing,” says Paul Stallard, Professor of Child and Family Mental Health at the University of Bath.

“If you go into any school at exam time all the kids will be anxious but some may be so anxious that they don’t get into school that morning,” says Professor Stallard. “Some will sit in an exam and their mind freezes and they can’t get anything down on paper. This is when anxiety starts to interfere with what children need to do or would like to do in everyday life.” Severe anxiety like this can harm children’s mental and emotional wellbeing, 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. What can be done?

An initial necessary step in understanding the development of childhood depression and anxiety is to expand assessment of these conditions in the clinical and research setting through multi-method, multi-session and multi-informant techniques.

Ayurvedic approach

In *Ayurveda* physical and psychological diseases are two separate specialized subjects. However, no line of demarcation has been drawn between them and a flexible psychosomatic approach has been worked out. The psyche and the soma have been considered as a single unit.⁹ The physiological and psychological phenomena occurring in the living body are by the virtue of this unit of psyche and the soma.¹⁰ Various stressors lead to disturbances in *Manasika Bhavas* by vitiating *Manasika Doshas*, *Sharirika Doshas* and *Agni*. Hence for the proper management more comprehensive treatment modalities including both pharmacological and non-pharmacological strategies are required. There are three main strategies for any disease in *Ayurveda*.¹¹

I. Pharmacological Management

➤ *YuktivypashrayaChikitsa*

II. NON-Pharmacological Management

➤ *Dev-vyapashryaChikitsa*

➤ *SatvavajayaChikitsa*

Yuktivypashraya Chikitsa

In *Ayurvedic* texts various drugs are described for promotion of mental health and management of various psychological and psychosomatic problems. Collectively these drugs are called as ‘*Medhya dravyas*’. These drugs are used to restore *Medha* in patients where it is found deranged and also to promote the functions

of *Medha* where it is diminished to a subnormal level. *Mandukaparni*, *Yashtimadhu*, *Guduchi* and *Shankhapushpi* are the four *Medhya* drugs mentioned in *CharakSamhita*.¹² These drugs show antioxidant, anxiolytic, neurodegenerative, antiamnestic, antidepressants, nootropic, adaptogenic and cognitive properties. Hence can be beneficial in anxiety disorders in children by deciding proper dose and mode of administration.

Panchakarma therapy

Shirodhara - An experimental study conducted by Kazuo Uebaba et al. demonstrating the probable mode of action of *Shirodhara* showed that the subjects 'feelings during *Shirodharahad* deep restfulness with less anxiety—as if the subject were between the sleep and awoken states. *Shirodharainduces* bradycardia and the relative suppression of LF/HF power spectrum density, which indicated lowered sympathetic tone. Expired gas analysis showed a decreased tidal volume and CO₂ excretion. The EEG showed the slowing of the wave, an increase in α and θ activity, and an increase in right-left coherence. These metabolic, ECG, and EEG findings support the reported experiences of relaxed and low metabolic states during *Shirodhara*. Physiological changes during

Shirodhara were similar to those of meditation, including α -wave dominance in the frontal area and a decrease in heart rate and CO₂ excretion. These findings indicated a change in the function of the frontal lobe, limbic system, brain stem, and autonomic nervous system. The neurophysiological mechanism of the effects of *Shirodhara* on the psychophysiological changes may be related to the tactile stimulation of the skin or hair follicles innervated by the first branch of the trigeminal nerves (ophthalmic nerve). The impulses would be transmitted to the thalamus through the principal nucleus and forward to the cerebral cortex (somatosensory field) or limbic system.¹³

DevavypashrayaChikitsa

It comprises of *Mantra*, *Ausadhi*, *Mani*, *Mangala*, *Bali*, *Upahara*, *Homa*, *Niyama*, *Prayascitta*, *Upavasa*, *Svastyayana*, *Pranipata*, *Gamana*etc.¹⁴ It has empirical powers to eradicate diseases. All the items enumerated under this therapy are effective in the eradication of disease only due to the divine influence.

SattvajayaChikitsa

The treatment which is use for the management of Psychiatric disorders is known as *Sattvavajaya*. Having control over the *Manas* (Psyche) such as to control it or withdraw it from coming into contact

with harmful or unwholesome objects is the main object of this modality.¹⁵ The five aspect of *Sattvavajaya* treatment includes *Jnanam* (spiritual knowledge), *Vijnanam* (Knowledge of the scriptures related to truth), *Dhairya*(increasing the patience of the person by counseling or meditative procedures), *Smriti* (memorizing the past incidences) and *Samadhi* (meditation).¹⁶ Whole of the modern psychiatry can be included into these five types. Good conduct, following ethics of good moral, having spiritual knowledge, believing in Supreme Being, developing forgiving attitude and selfless devotion are important dimensions of *Sattvavajaya Chikitsa*.

Yoga

The ancient practice of yoga may help children cope up with stress and thus contribute positively to mental health. In a recent book of yoga education in India, the author claims that in a nutshell, *Yoga* is a powerful medium for developing the personality of children and making them capable of facing the-present-day challenges and problems.¹⁷ In her review article "Effect of *Yoga* on mental health in children ", one of the world's most prominent yoga researchers, Shirley Telles, concludes that *Yoga* improves children's physical and mental well-being.¹⁸ It is a mind-body practice that includes postures, breathing

techniques, relaxation techniques, mindfulness, and meditation.¹⁹ It counteracts psychological and physical stressors, enhances self-regulation, and assists stress management.²⁰ It also yields positive effects such as reduce test anxiety, increase academic performance, concentration, coping ability with stress, reduce aggression, improve ability to handle pressure from academia, lower levels of rumination, less intrusive thoughts, increase emotional regulation among children.²¹ As children typically cannot remain still for long sessions of therapy, alternative ways of connecting with children are essential. Instead of the quiet and calming yoga as many adults enjoy, *Yoga* for kids can be noisy and funny. In case of children meditation cannot be practiced as their brain is not fully matured. In them *Trataka Karma* can be done to enhance the concentration. Before doing *Yoga*, simple stretching exercises should be done. Like: Closing and opening up of hands, circular movement of wrist, elbow, shoulder joint, neck, ankle joint, knee joint, waist and hip joint. After light stretching exercise, an *Asana* should be done.

Yoga's positive impact on the physical and mental health of individuals and their well-being has been an established truth in the

ancient as well as contemporary *Yoga* literature.²²

SOME YOGA FOR CHILDREN'S BODY AND MIND HEALTH

1. *Viparita Virabhadrasana* (Reverse warrior pose) - This posture helps to open the ribs and make the body more flexible. It also gives a boost to self-confidence.

2. *Navasana* (partner boat pose/ double boat pose) - It improves the digestion system, strengthens back bone and help to learn teamwork. It is a great stress-buster pose.

3. *Urdhva Mukha Svanasana* (upward facing dog pose) - It makes the spinal cord strong. This posture not only opens your chest but stretches it too. It decreases the stress level and helps in asthma.

4. *SetuBandhaSarvangasana* (bridge pose) - It helps to stretch your back and neck. It is a great yoga posture to remove stress and depression along with strengthening the legs and improving the digestion.

5. *Ananda Balasana* (happy baby pose) - It helps to pacify the mind and body and decreases the level of stress.²³

Cognitive-behavioural therapy

CBT is a type of talk therapy that teaches skills and techniques to recognize and challenge problematic thoughts, which are borrowed and modified, from the adult literature. Child will learn to identify and replace negative thinking patterns and

behaviours with positive ones. He will also learn to separate realistic from unrealistic thoughts and will receive homework to practice what is learned in therapy.²⁴

Parenting-based approaches

Parents are often very preoccupied with seeing their children succeed and intolerant of anything other than excellence.²⁵ It's just not fair for parents to demand higher standard for their kids than they themselves face. Instead, we should remind ourselves that sustained excellence is not natural.²⁶

- ✓ They should. Spend time with the children.
- ✓ Give the kids a stable home environment.
- ✓ Negotiate home rules-including consequences for rule breaking and stick to these rules.
- ✓ Monitor their eating habits.

Don't just talk to your kids. Communicate with them. When children misbehave, try to understand their behaviour instead of merely punishing it.

- ✓ Acknowledge and accept his or her needs. Know that school is a long-term process. One immediate success or failure is not going to determine a child's life. Growth will happen. What we can do is show constant love and support and presence. Part of this support is setting up a daily routine.

Routines are good. They help alleviate stress.

- ✓ Stay calm when the child becomes anxious about a situation or event.
- ✓ Recognize and praise his small accomplishments.
- ✓ Don't punish mistakes or lack of progress.
- ✓ Be flexible, but try to maintain a normal routine.

DISCUSSION

Children today are faced with everyday stressful events such as overexposure to the media (war, extreme weather, terrorism, illness and death), family related issues (divorce, single parent families, addictions, illness and death), and school (the ever-rising expectations, over scheduling, bullying, and peer pressure). Society has given our children adult sized problems to deal with, without giving them adult sized coping skills. Often time 's children take what they are presented with and internalize these problems, or deal with them in a harmful or hurtful way.

Yoga could provide tools for children to remain centered or regain focus, so they may cope with the stress and challenges, they experience in their everyday lives. The results of such all investment can be observed over the long term by having future generations experience less stress.²⁷

CONCLUSION

We as a society need to begin to take a proactive approach to help elementary children to deal with the everyday problems they are being faced with. Since it is nearly impossible to remove most of the stressful events from the Children 's lives, we need to work together to teach them positive coping skills. Teachers and counselors as well as parents can implement simple things into everyday activities, things such as relaxation techniques, increased physical activity, healthy eating, daily journaling, and free time for kids to just be kids. A combination of *Ayurvedic* treatment and modern Cognitive therapy with parents-based approaches can be used to deal with stress and anxiety in a holistic empowering way.

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