

ROLE OF *SHIRODHARA* IN MANAGEMENT OF MENTAL DISORDER

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda views mental and spiritual equilibrium as fundamental components of overall health. Disturbances in mental well-being or behavioural functioning are often attributed to mental illnesses or psychiatric disorders, collectively referred to as *Manasa Vikara* in *Ayurveda*. In *Ayurvedic* practice, psychological disorders are intricately linked to imbalances in the mind (*Manas*). The primary aim of *Ayurveda* is to preserve health and prevent disease^[1] This preventive aspect is rooted in the belief that maintaining a state of balance and harmony within the body and mind is crucial for long-term health *Panchkarma*, a cornerstone of *Ayurveda*, offers valuable support in managing mental health through a holistic approach integrating physical, mental, and emotional well-being. *Panchkarma* procedures help in eliminating accumulated toxins (*ama*) and balancing the *doshas* (*Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*), thereby contributing to overall mental clarity and stability. By restoring *dosha* equilibrium, *Panchkarma* aims to address underlying causes of mental disturbances and enhance psychological resilience. Treatments like *Abhyanga* (oil massage), different types of *Murdhni Taila* (*Shiro Pichu*, *Shiro Basti*, *Shiro Abhyanga*, *Shiro Seka*) are known for their calming effects. These therapies help in reducing cortisol levels, promoting relaxation, and improving mood. These positively impact the nervous system, helping to alleviate symptoms of anxiety and stress by promoting overall relaxation and emotional balance also improve sleep quality. *Panchkarma* is often accompanied by personalized dietary and lifestyle recommendations that support mental health. Regular *Panchkarma* treatments may serve as preventive care, helping to manage stress and maintain mental balance before symptoms of mental disorders arise. *Panchkarma* offers a comprehensive approach to managing mental disorders by addressing both the physical and psychological aspects of health.

KEYWORDS: Anxiety, *Ayurveda*, *Murdhni Taila*, *Panchkarma*, Stress.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the number of mental illnesses has increased worldwide, especially in developed countries, and interest in mental health has increased. Mental health is listed as one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be achieved by 2030.^[1] Its aim is to reduce premature deaths from Non communicable Diseases (by at least one-third) through prevention, promotion and treatment of mental health and well-being.^[2] The WHO definition of health articulates the importance of individual mental health. At every stage of one's life, since childhood and adolescence through adulthood, overall health and well-being is also reflected by mental health as well.^[3] It includes all the aspects viz. emotional, psychological as well as social health, not merely the absence of any mental disorder aged 30–49 years and those over 60 years. Additionally, lower income groups are also associated with a higher incidence of mental disorders. In *Ayurveda*, psychological disorders are often linked to the concept of *Manasa Vikara* as described by *Acharya Charaka*. These disorders arise from impairments in the volitional power of the mind, particularly affecting the *Buddhi* (intellect) and its components—*Dhee* (understanding), *Dhriti* (steadfastness), and *Smriti* (memory). Both *Manasa Doshas* (*Rajas* and *Tamas*) and *Shareerika Doshas* (*Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*) significantly contribute to the development of psychological disorders.^[5] The head is considered the primary seat (*Adhithana*) for all the senses (*Indriyas*). According to *Chakrapani*, "*Indriyadhithanam Manasa Karma*" implies that *Ayurveda* views mental and spiritual equilibrium as fundamental components of overall health. Disturbances in mental well-being or behavioural functioning are often attributed to mental illnesses or psychiatric disorders, collectively referred to as *Manasa Vikara* in *Ayurveda*. In *Ayurvedic* practice, psychological disorders are intricately linked to imbalances in the mind (*Manas*). The primary aim of *Ayurveda* is to preserve health and prevent disease.^[1] This preventive aspect is rooted in the belief that maintaining a state of balance and harmony within the body and mind is crucial for long-term health. *Ayurveda* posits that health is achieved when the three *Doshas* (*Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*), the three *Gunas* (*Sattva*, *Rajas*, and *Tamas*), and the body's tissues (*Dhatus*) are in equilibrium. *Ayurveda* emphasizes that a healthy body maintains a balanced equilibrium of *Doshas* (biological energies), *Dhatus* (tissues), and *Malas* (wastes).^[2] A stressful lifestyle and irregular daily routines can lead to psychological disorders in both adults and children. Currently, the prevalence of these disorders in India is around 8%, comparable to the rate observed in Western countries.^[3] Mental health issues are particularly prevalent among individuals the management and control of the senses are a function of the mind (*Manas*).^[6] The head (*Murdhni*) is also the primary seat of *Prana Vayu*, which governs the mind (*Manas*). Consequently, psychological disorders can be understood and treated in a manner similar to *Manasa Vikara*. Both *Ayurvedic* and modern medical sciences agree that the head is the central focus (*Adhithana*) for these conditions. The human body is often likened to an inverted tree, where the head serves as the main trunk and the other organs function as its branches.^[7] Since the head controls every system, *Murdhni Taila* is an appropriate to be choice for this study. *Murdhni* means —Head, *Taila* means oil. The method related to the *Shiro-pradesha* (head) where warm medicated / non- medicated oil (at fixed temperature) remains in contact with the scalp for affixed duration of time is called *Murdhni Taila*. The contact period of oil on the scalp is necessary to achieve maximum benefits.^[8] *Murdhni Taila* comes under the type of *Bahya Snehana*.^[9] (external oleation). Types- *Shiro abhyanga*, *Shiro Seka*, *Shiro Pichu*, *Shiro Basti*. These techniques are considered progressively superior in their therapeutic effects.^[10] Information on *Abhyanga* and *Murdhni Taila* was compiled from various textbooks, published research papers, and previous studies. The review includes a detailed examination of the *Abhyanga* & types of *Murdhni Taila* and its role in addressing psychological disorders.

SHIRODHARA

Materials Required

Shirodhara Patra (container), *Shirodhara* stand, *Shirodhara* table, gauze, cotton earplugs, vessels, soft towels, and suitable oil or other liquids. *Shirodhara* is a therapeutic technique involving the continuous pouring of a medicated liquid—such as oil, buttermilk (*Takra*), sugarcane juice (*Ikshu Rasa*), herbal decoction (*Kashaya*), or milk (*Ksheera*)—onto the forehead. The liquid is allowed to flow rhythmically over the scalp.^[16] The patient should lie in a supine position, and the *Dhara Patra* is positioned approximately 4-6 *Angulas* (fingers) above the forehead.^[17] Cotton pads are placed over the eyes and ears to prevent liquid from entering. The *Shirodhara* room should be clean, well-ventilated, and quiet. It is typically performed in the morning on an empty stomach, following a massage. Although morning is ideal, *Shirodhara* can also be performed in the evening, particularly for stress or sleep-related conditions.^[18] The medicated liquid (*Taila*, milk, herbal decoction and *takra*) is placed in the *Dhara Patra* and poured continuously onto the forehead at a steady, moderate pace—not too fast or too slow. The stream of liquid should be continuous and steady, avoiding sudden interruptions or excessive force. The *Dhara Patra* is gently moved in a slow, rhythmic side-to-side motion over the forehead. The liquid is collected, filtered, and reused during the procedure as needed. *Shirodhara* is typically performed for 30-60 minutes (approximately 45 minutes) for a duration of 14 to 21 days.^[19] During the procedure, the liquid should be maintained at a lukewarm temperature (slightly above body temperature), ensuring it remains comfortable for the patient. By this procedure, mind comes down to a tranquil state, it reduces stress, helps in normal and better function of mind. All the benefits of meditation and relaxation are achieved by the procedure of *Shirodhara*. In today's busy world no one gets time to lie down quietly and relax for a while. We are always exposed to lot of stress and tensions. If we lie down in a relaxed state for some time with the practice of meditation we definitely feel better. The process of *Shirodhara* also produces a meditation effect which helps to overcome the complaint of insomnia and stress related disorders. On the other hand procedure of *Shirodhara* acts on the level of *Yogic Chakras*. It stimulates the supreme *Chakras* i.e. *Aagya Chakra* and *Sahasrara Chakra* which are situated in the head region. These *Chakras* govern all the vital energy in the body. Due to the stimulation of these *Chakras* the individual gets good mental condition. Hence Lifestyle disorders are benefitted by the *Shirodhara*.

Mode of Action

When a medicated liquid is poured from a height of 4 *Angulas* (6-8cm) onto the forehead, it generates subtle vibrational effects due to the rhythmic flow of the liquid, influencing the nervous system. The effect of *Shirodhara* is primarily neurophysiological, involving stimulation of mechanoreceptors and thermoreceptors, which influences the autonomic nervous system. The hypothalamus, which plays a crucial role in homeostasis, hormone regulation, and autonomic nervous system control, responds to these vibrations with a soothing effect. This stimulation leads to the release of neurotransmitters such as serotonin, dopamine, and endorphins, promoting relaxation and mental well-being. The hypothalamus regulates the pituitary gland, often referred to as the body's master gland, which oversees the function of all other body systems. Dysfunction of the hypothalamus and pituitary gland can influence mental health conditions, including mood disorders and stress-related conditions. In *Ayurveda*, *Marma* points—vital spots located on the forehead and head—include *Sthapni*, *Utshepa*, *Avarta*, *Shankha*, and *Apanga*.^[20] Acharya Bhela identifies *Bhrumadhya* (the area between the eyebrows) as the site of *Chitta* (mind) and *Sthapni Marma*. Many head-region *Marma* points are associated with the *Agni* (fire) and *Vayu* (air) elements, contributing to mental clarity and nervous system function.^[21] Notably, the *Sthapni Marma* is located in a region that corresponds to the pituitary and pineal glands, which are key regulators of endocrine and circadian functions. The pituitary gland, regulated by hormones, plays a crucial role in maintaining the

endocrine system. Chronic mental stress and emotional disturbances can disrupt the hormonal balance regulated by the HP Axis.^[22] Stimulation of the *Sthapni Marma*, along with the indirect stimulation of the pituitary gland through *Shirodhara*, helps regulate these functions and brings about psycho-somatic changes.^[23] Consequently, *Shirodhara* helps alleviate mental stress by promoting relaxation and influencing neuroendocrine regulation.

DISCUSSION

Diseases are broadly categorized into three main types:^[31] 1. *Sharira Vikara* (Physical Diseases): These include conditions such as *Pandu* (anemia), *Jwara* (fever), and *Gulma* (abdominal distension). 2. *Manasa Vikara* (Mental Disorders): This category encompasses issues like *Kama* (desire), *Shoka* (grief), *Abhyasuya* (jealousy), and *Bhaya* (fear). 3. *Mansika Vikara* (Disorders Affecting Both Body and Mind): These include conditions where both mental and physical health is impacted, such as *Unmada* (psychosis) and *Apasmara* (epilepsy). In cases of *Mansika Vikara*, mental disturbances typically manifest first, with physical symptoms developing later. Emotional and Psychological Disorders: *Abhyasuya* (jealousy), *Bhaya* (fear), *Chittodvega* (anxiety), *Dainya* (inferiority complex), *Harsha* (exhilaration), *Kama* (desire), *Krodha* (anger), *Lobha* (greed), *Mada* (arrogance), *Maana* (pride), *Moha* (confusion), *Shoka* (grief), *Vishada* (anguish), and *Irshya*. *Nanatmaja Mansika Vikara* (Complex Psychological Conditions): *Chittodvega* (anxiety), *Vishada* (anguish), *Ashabda Shrivana* (auditory hallucinations), *Tama* (withdrawal), *Atipralepa* (excessive talking), *Aswapna* (insomnia), *Anavasthitacittatwa* (unstable mind), *Atrpti* (discontent), *Tandra* (stupor), *Atinidra* (excessive sleep), and *Bhrama* (confusion). Other *Mansika Vikara*: *Unmada* (psychosis), *Apasmara* (epilepsy), *Apatanaka*, *Apatantraka* (hysteria), *Atatwabhinivesa* (obsessive syndrome), *Madatyaya* (alcoholic psychosis), and *Sanyasa* (coma).

CONCLUSION

Abhyanga, *Murdhni Taila*, key *Panchakarma* treatment in *Ayurveda*, are renowned globally for their simplicity and effectiveness in addressing psychological disorders and lifestyle diseases. These rejuvenating therapies purify the body, detoxify, and alleviate mental exhaustion and stress, benefiting the central nervous system. Their efficacy in treating psychological conditions is well-established. *Panchakarma* offers a comprehensive and holistic approach to mental health and stress relief. By detoxifying the body, calming the mind, and promoting emotional stability, this ancient *Ayurvedic* therapy helps individuals achieve better mental clarity, improved emotional wellbeing, and a greater sense of peace. With its powerful combination of physical rejuvenation and mental relaxation, *Panchakarma* presents a natural and effective way to manage stress, reduce anxiety, and restore mental health. As people continue to seek natural alternatives for stress management, *Panchakarma* stands out as a time-tested solution for enhancing overall mental well-being.

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