

EXPLORATORY STUDIES ON IMPACT OF GAYATRI MANTRA SADHANA ON PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL BEING PARAMETERS

Abstract

The increasing prevalence of mental health problems and the declining mental wellbeing of individuals is a growing concern for society that needs to be addressed. Meditation and yoga have been ancient techniques practiced for thousands of years in many cultures and traditions across the world to enhance mental wellbeing and spiritual growth. Meditation using mantras has been a prominent spiritual practice in the Indian subcontinent for a long time. Among mantras, Gayatri Mantra (GM) is one of the most popularly chanted mantras in Indian tradition, known for its potential benefits in enhancing mental wellbeing and the realization of spiritual potentials. Despite its spiritual and traditional significance, the scientific research on the practices of GM has been relatively limited, particularly in the context of neurophysiological and psychological aspects of wellbeing. This thesis explores the impact of practising GM sadhana on wellbeing parameters. Five independent and interconnected studies were conducted to develop an understanding of the GM practices and their potential effects. The first study involved in-depth interviews with thirty-five long-term GM practitioners, to explore and analyze their experiences with long-term GM practices. The second study explored the effect of short-term intensive GM *sadhana* on wellbeing parameters among participants of a nine-day residential *sadhana* camp at an ashram. The third study was a cross-sectional survey that compared the wellbeing measures of GM practitioners and yoga practitioners with those of non-practitioners. The fourth study examined the role of traditional *Diksha* (spiritual initiation) in relation to various wellbeing parameters. The fifth study examined the effect of GM practices on neural responses to affective stimuli using EEG-ERP. The findings suggest that long-term GM sadhana is positively associated with mental wellbeing, peace of mind, satisfaction with life, emotional balance, and resilience, while also contributing to the enhancement of positive thoughts and reduction of psychological distress. Even a short-term intensive GM sadhana was observed to show significant improvement in wellbeing parameters. Further, the GM practices combined with yoga were observed to have a greater positive impact on wellbeing than yoga practices alone. Traditional *Diksha* (spiritual initiation) prior to GM practices was also found to positively influence the outcome of sadhana and wellbeing of practitioners. The reduced EEG-ERP amplitudes in GM practitioners compared to non-practitioners, particularly in response to negative stimuli, showed greater emotion regulation abilities among GM practitioners. Overall, the findings of the thesis suggest that GM practice has the potential to enhance mental wellbeing and may serve as a complementary intervention for the promotion of psychological wellbeing.