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Role of integral yoga on mental health

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Abstract

Mental health is concerned with well-being, positive attitude, life satisfaction and so on. All these may be influenced by following and practicing integral yoga. The present study was intended to compare mental health between followers of Sri Aurobindo and others. Sixty adults volunteered for the study. Hundred followers of Sri Aurobindo from different ashrams and hundred other adult people were considered as subject for the study. Their mental health was tested with the Mental Health Inventory Questionnaire. All the responses were then converted into scores following the guidelines. T-test was used to compare the result. The level of significance was set at 0.05 level. Significant difference was found in General Positive Affect, Life Satisfaction, Anxiety, Loss of Behavioural / Emotional Control and Mental Health Index among the followers of Sri Aurobindo.

Keywords: Mental health, life satisfaction, Sri Aurobindo, integral yoga

Introduction

Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community. The positive dimension of mental health is stressed in WHO's definition of health as contained in its constitution: "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." [1]

Mental health is a state of emotional and psychological well-being in which an individual is able to use his or her cognitive and emotional capabilities, function in society, and meet the ordinary demands of everyday life [2]. It is the psychological well-being and satisfactory adjustment to society and to the ordinary demands of life [3]. It is the psychological state of someone who is functioning at a satisfactory level of emotional and behavioral adjustment [4].

Mental Health Commission of Government of Western Australia describes, "Good mental health is a sense of wellbeing, confidence and self-esteem. It enables us to fully enjoy and appreciate other people, day-to-day life and our environment." It also says, "When we are mentally healthy we can form positive relationships, use our abilities to reach our potential and deal with life's challenges [5].

The integral yoga is the way of a complete God-realisation, a complete Self-realisation, a complete fulfillment of our being and consciousness, a complete transformation of our nature - and this implies a complete perfection of life here and not only a return to an eternal perfection elsewhere [6].

Man is Nature's great term of transition in which he grows conscious of her aim; in him she looks up from the animal with open eyes towards the divine ideal. - Sri Aurobindo

It is anticipated that the mental aspect of the followers of Sri Aurobindo is better than that of the other general people and the followers of Sri Aurobindo face less psychological distress than that of the other as a result of following Sri Aurobindo. On the basis of that perception, the present study was selected.

Methodology

Sample

Hundred followers (members) of Sri Aurobindo from different ashrams and hundred other adult people were considered as subject for the present study.

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Criterion Measured

The mental health is assessed with the help of an index that is comprised of six subscales i) General Positive Affect, ii) Emotional Ties iii) Life Satisfaction iv) Anxiety, v) Depression and vi) Loss of Behavioural / Emotional Control.

Used tool and data collection

The subjects were given to response against a set of Mental Health Inventory Questionnaire on psychological wellbeing comprising of three subscales as mentioned. All the responses

were then converted into scores following the scoring guidelines [7].

Statistics for Analyzing Data

For this study, mean, standard deviation, and paired t-tests were calculated by statistical software (Mini Tab). The level of significance was set at the 0.05 for this study.

Results and Discussions

Table 1: Mean with SD, T-Value and P-Value of all the variables

Sl. No.	Variable	Groups	Range	Mean SD	T-Value	P-Value
1.	General Positive Affect	Followers	10-60	36.63 6.22	1.78	0.040 *
		Others		34.00 5.19		
2.	Emotional Ties	Followers	2-12	6.40 1.61	-3.32	0.999 NS
		Others		7.70 1.42		
3.	Life Satisfaction	Followers	1-6	4.900 0.75	4.64	0.000 *
		Others		4.000 0.74		
4.	Anxiety	Followers	9-54	30.73 3.50	-4.75	0.000 *
		Others		35.87 4.70		
5.	Depression	Followers	4-23	15.40 3.65	-1.05	0.297 NS
		Others		16.33 3.20		
6.	Loss of Behavioural / Emotional Control	Followers	9-53	34.53 4.27	2.33	0.023 *
		Others		37.13 4.37		
7.	Mental Health Index	Followers	38-226	133.1 12.3	2.22	0.030 *
		Others		126.73 9.63		

*Significant at 0.05 level

General Positive Affect

From the table 1, it is found that there is a significant difference (T-Value = 1.78, P<0.05) in General Positive

Affect between the followers of Sri Aurobindo and others. The first group scored more than 60% where the second group scored 56.66%.

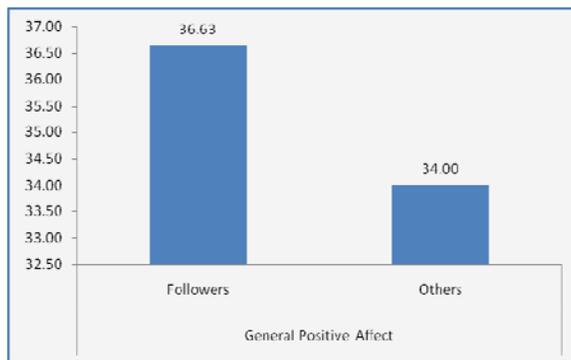


Fig 1: General Positive Affect

Positive affect reflects an individual’s experience of positive moods such as joy, interest, and alertness. Positive affect marks or signals current health and well-being [8, 9]; the broaden-and-build theory goes further to suggest that positive affect also produces future health and well-being [10]. All the

disciples of Sri Aurobindo believe in the fact that ‘man is a transitional being’ and ‘becoming’ is the aim. This thought may help them to grow positivity.

Emotional Ties

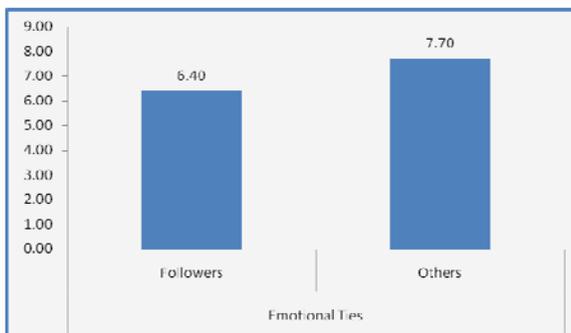


Fig 2: Emotional Ties

Table 1 shows that there is no significant difference in Emotional Ties (T-Value = -3.32, $P > 0.05$) between the followers of Sri Aurobindo and others. Here the second group scored higher. This may affect on the result. The spiritual belief may reduce human bonding in the followers of Sri Aurobindo.

Life Satisfaction

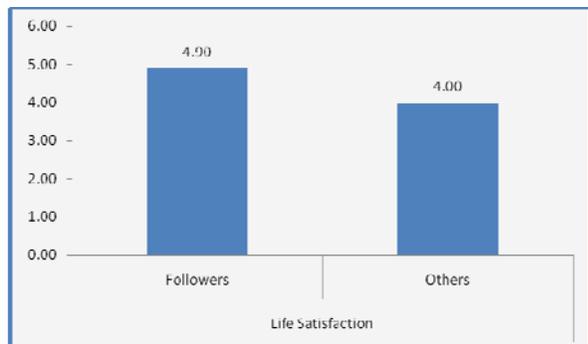


Fig 3: Life Satisfaction

From the table 1, it is clear that there is a significant difference (T-Value = 4.64, $P < 0.05$) in Life Satisfaction between the followers of Sri Aurobindo and others. Here the first group scored 81.66% where the second group scored 66.66%. Following and practicing integral yoga may increase life satisfaction among the disciples.

Anxiety

At present, almost all people suffer from anxiety due to some reasons or others. Many of us worry. The rates vary, but in western countries between 14 and 29% of us are likely to suffer from an anxiety problem in our lifetime [11]. Meditation helps to reduce anxiety as learning mindfulness also teaches how to work with difficulties and stress in general [12]. A study conducted by researchers at the University of Massachusetts Medical School shows that 90% experienced significant reductions in anxiety - and depression too [13]. Meditation practice had an overall substantial positive effect on improving psychological factors including negative personality traits, anxiety and stress [14].

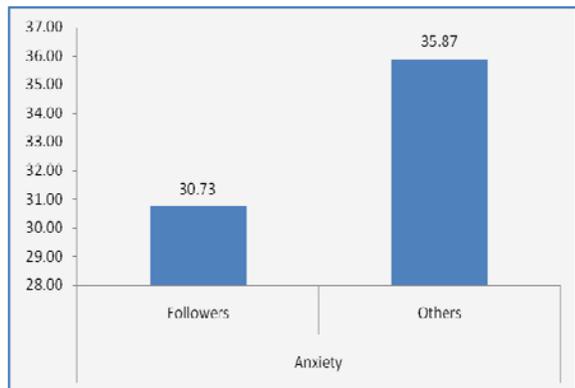


Fig 4: Anxiety

From the table 1, it is found that there is a significant difference (T-Value = -4.75, $P < 0.05$) in anxiety between the followers of Sri Aurobindo and others. Higher the score of anxiety is equal to greater psychological distress. Sri Aurobindo described the Ashram as a laboratory in which the inner and the outer nature of man is sought to be brought

under the influence of a higher consciousness, leading ultimately to a supramental transformation of human nature [15]. The followers of Sri Aurobindo believe in the 'development of consciousness'. This helps them to reduce their level of anxiety in their lives.

Depression

Depression is a state of low mood and aversion to activity that can affect a person's thoughts, behavior, feelings and sense of well-being [16]. People with depressed mood can feel sad, anxious, empty, hopeless, helpless, worthless, guilty, irritable, ashamed or restless. Depressed mood is a feature of some psychiatric syndromes such as major depressive disorder [17] but it may also be a normal reaction to life events such as grief, a symptom of some bodily ailments or a side effect of some drugs and medical treatments.

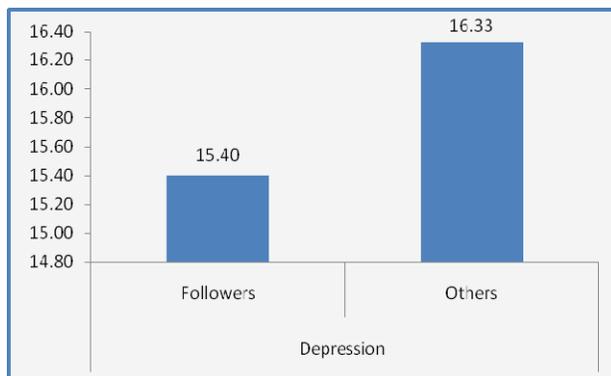


Fig 5: Depression

Table 1 shows that there is no significant difference in depression (T-Value = -1.05, $P > 0.05$) between the followers of Sri Aurobindo and others.

According to the guidelines, higher the score indicates greater depression. Here the first group scored lesser but as not less as to differ significantly.

Loss of Behavioural / Emotional Control

Practicing yoga, specially *pranayama*, has direct impact on emotional control. It is clinically established that *Anulome vilome* balances the hemispheres of the brain and Autonomic Nervous System and other types of Yoga breathing. The different types of Yogic breathing procedures affect the ANS. Right nostril breathing activates the sympathetic nervous system and increases the heart rate. Alternate nostril breathing brings about a balance in the ANS [18]. Kapalabhati practice showed an increase in the low frequency band and decrease in the high frequency band of the heart rate variability spectrum indicating increased sympathetic activity [19].

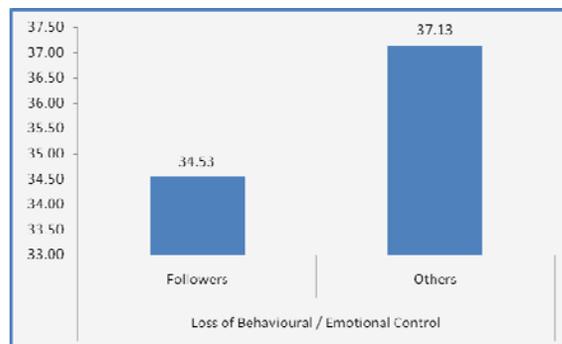


Fig 6: Loss of Behavioural / Emotional Control

From the table 1, it is clear that there is a significant difference (T-Value = 2.33, $P < 0.05$) in Loss of Behavioural / Emotional Control between the followers of Sri Aurobindo and others. Here the first group scored lesser than the second group. Higher the score is equal to greater psychological distress.

Swami Divyananda Saraswati used to quote Sri Aurobindo's statement: "Most of our lives are lived in empty agitation". The practice of Integral Yoga, Sri Aurobindo explained, "does not proceed through any set mental teaching or prescribed forms of meditation, mantras or others, but by aspiration, by a self-concentration inwards or upwards, by self-opening to an influence, to the Divine Power above us and its workings, to the Divine Presence in the heart, and by the rejection of all that is foreign to these things."^[20]

Believe in *karma yoga*, having positive attitude, following and practicing integral yoga may help the followers to control behavior or emotion better than others.

Mental Health Index

Mental health index is a process for assessing mental health related topics such as anxiety, depression, behavioral control, positive effect, general distress etc. Here scores of all the six subscales are added to form the score of mental health index.

From the table 1, it is clear that there is a significant difference (T-Value = 2.22, $P < 0.05$) in mental health index between the followers of Sri Aurobindo and others. Following and practicing integral yoga may increase mental health index among the disciples.

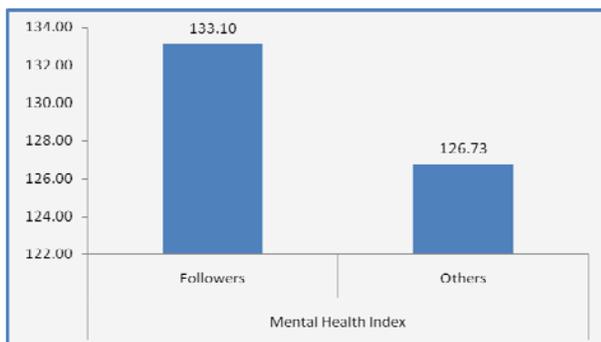


Fig 7: Mental Health Index

Conclusions

On the basis of the results mentioned above, it can be concluded that

- i) General Positive Affect of the followers of Sri Aurobindo is higher than that of the other general people.
- ii) The difference in Emotional Ties between the followers of Sri Aurobindo and others is not significant.
- iii) Life Satisfaction among the followers of Sri Aurobindo is significantly higher than other people.
- iv) The followers of Sri Aurobindo are having less anxiety than that of the other general people.
- v) The level of depression of the followers of Sri Aurobindo is not significantly lower than others.
- vi) Loss of Behavioural / Emotional Control among the followers of Sri Aurobindo is significantly lower than other people.
- vii) The followers of Sri Aurobindo are having significantly higher mental health index than that of the other general people.

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