International Journal of Research and Review
[Indexed, Peer-Reviewed Journal]
Volume 13; Issue: 11; November 2026
Website: www.ijrrjournal.com
E-ISSN: 2349-9788; P-ISSN: 2454-2237

Indigenizing Mental Healthcare: Bridging Indian Knowledge Systems and Contemporary Psychology for Family Caregivers

Tulika Sharma[1], Sunita Purty[2]

[1,2]Department of Clinical Psychology
Mahatma Gandhi University of Medical Sciences and Technology

Corresponding Author: Tulika Sharma

DOI: https://doi.org/10.52403/ijrr.20261115

ABSTRACT

Mental health care in India has long leaned on biomedical models, often overlooking the culturally embedded and holistic approaches found in Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS). This study explores the integration of IKS in mental healthcare through a qualitative review of published literature and grey data, focusing particularly on their application in caregiver mental health support. Drawing from Ayurveda, Yoga, and Vedantic psychology, the paper highlights how traditional practices such as asanas, pranayama, rasayana therapies, and teachings from the Bhagavad Gita can complement modern therapeutic models. Evidence suggests that these approaches enhance emotional stability, reduce stress, and improve coping mechanisms among caregivers. By examining intersections between ancient wisdom and contemporary psychological needs, this review advocates for an integrative model of care that is culturally relevant, sustainable, and deeply rooted in India's rich philosophical heritage.

Keywords: Caregivers, Ayurveda, Yoga Psychology, Vedantic Psychology, Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS)

INTRODUCTION

Caregivers are essential to the national healthcare system, with family members frequently taking on the primary responsibility of providing home-based care and support for aging relatives. If the economic worth of these caregiving efforts were calculated, it would total hundreds of billions of dollars annually.

Caregiving involves all the hallmarks of long-term stress, resulting in sustained physical and emotional exhaustion. It is often characterized by unpredictability and limited control, which can lead to additional stress affecting multiple areas of life, such as employment and personal relationships. The ongoing need to remain alert further amplifies the burden, positioning caregiving as a key example for examining the health impacts of chronic stress. (Schulz & Sherwood, 2008)

Mental health has become a pressing global issue, with growing awareness of the significant demands placed on both professional and family caregivers who support individuals experiencing psychological distress and mental disorders.

In the Indian context, mental healthcare has historically been shaped by Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) such as Ayurveda, Yoga, and Vedantic psychology. These systems emphasize the integration of

mind and body, lifestyle changes, and spiritual well-being.

In recent decades, various Western approaches, including social casework and psychotherapy, have been introduced to tackle mental health challenges. However, many Indian mental health professionals have observed that these Western models often lack cultural relevance and fail to resonate with the Indian socio-cultural environment. In contrast, Indian philosophical thought, particularly from the Atharva Veda, views mental illness as a disruption in the harmony between mind and body. This approach underscores the dynamic relationship between mental qualities (Gunas) and bodily elements (Doshas), promoting the idea of holistic balance as key to recovery.

Research has investigated the role of yoga as a supportive therapy for individuals with conditions like schizophrenia and depression, as well as for their caregivers. Specific techniques, such as *trataka*, have been studied for their benefits on cognitive function in the elderly. Challenges in applying yoga therapy for schizophrenia have led to the development of a community-based initiative by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), which uses digital platforms to deliver yoga-based interventions to caregivers in rural and semi-urban Indian communities. (Dutt, n.d.)

Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) in Mental Health

Ayurveda

- **Ayurveda and Mental Health**

"Samadoshah samagnishcha, samadhatu malakriyah, prasannatmendriya manah, svastha ity abhidyiyate."

This Ayurvedic verse portrays health as a harmonious state of balance between the body and mind. It considers a person truly healthy when the doshas (vital bodily energies) are balanced, metabolic processes are functioning efficiently, bodily tissues and elimination systems are well-maintained, and the senses and mind are aligned with the inner Self. This equilibrium leads to a deep sense of inner peace and contentment. (Pandey & Tiwari, 2015)

- **Concept of Mind in Ayurveda**

Ayurveda conceptualizes *Manas* (the mind) as a vital entity closely connected with three primary mental faculties: *Dhi* (intellect), *Dhruti* (information processing), and *Smruti* (memory). *Dhi* governs the ability to learn, understand, and concentrate, and functions optimally when the *Vata dosha* is balanced. *Dhruti*, linked to the processing of chemical and electrical signals, is influenced by the *Pitta dosha*. *Smruti*, responsible for storing and recalling information, relies on the balance of *Kapha dosha*. According to Ayurveda, true mental health arises from the harmonious functioning of these faculties and their corresponding doshas, leading to holistic well-being.

- **Concept of Body in Ayurveda**

In his influential writings, Charaka emphasized the importance of the *Trigunas*-*Sattva*, *Rajas*, and *Tamas*. He noted that *Rajas* and *Tamas* continuously affect an individual throughout life, comparing their influence to the unending rotation of a wheel from birth to death. Attaining *Moksha* (liberation) is described as being free from the dominance of these two gunas. While the *Trigunas* primarily relate to mental attributes, the *Tridoshas*-*Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*-are linked to physical and physiological processes. However, they also play a significant role in influencing mental health and emotional balance.

- **Causes of Mental Illness in Ayurveda**

Mental illness, according to Ayurveda, arises from a combination of factors, including hereditary influences, life experiences, personality traits, physical health conditions, and one's social and familial environment. Imbalances in the *Tridoshas* and *Trigunas* are seen as core contributors to psychological disturbances. Additionally, overwhelming negative emotions such as *shoka* (grief), *krodha* (anger), *chinta* (worry), *kama* (desire), *lobh* (greed), *moha* (delusion), *irshya* (jealousy), *abhimana* (ego), *mada* (intoxication of

pride), and *bhaya* (fear) can further disrupt mental harmony, leading to emotional and psychological distress. (Pandey & Tiwari, 2015)

Yoga Psychology

- **Yogic Psychology**

The word *yoga* comes from the Sanskrit root *"yuj,"* meaning "to yoke" or "to unite," symbolizing the union of body and mind, as well as the focused direction of one's consciousness. Yoga is a comprehensive discipline that blends physical postures with mindful attention to breath, bodily sensations, and energy flow, thereby nurturing both mental and physical health.

Rooted in ancient Indian tradition, yoga has evolved over thousands of years and is now widely recognized for its contributions to health and well-being. With increasing interest in natural and holistic approaches to healing, practices such as yoga and pranayama have gained prominence as effective tools for maintaining wellness, preventing illness, and managing various physical and psychological conditions. (Sengupta, 2012)

- **Yoga and Health**

Yoga contributes significantly to physical and mental well-being by improving flexibility, enhancing muscular strength, and supporting better respiratory and cardiovascular function. It is also beneficial in addiction recovery, reducing symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression, improving sleep, and fostering overall wellness. Rooted in the eight-limbed path of yoga, it incorporates ethical principles (*yamas*), personal disciplines (*niyamas*), postures (*asanas*), breath regulation (*pranayama*), sensory withdrawal (*pratyahara*), focused concentration (*dharana*), meditation (*dhyana*), and self-realization (*samadhi*). Among these, *asanas*, *pranayama*, and *meditation* are foundational for achieving holistic health.

- **Asana and Pranayama**

Asana refers to stable, comfortable physical postures that support both physical and psychological balance. Derived from the Sanskrit terms "prana" (life force) and "ayama" (regulation or control), *pranayama* consists of breath control techniques that improve mental clarity, vigour, and general health.

Consistent practice of pranayama improves chest expansion, enhances lung function, and strengthens the use of diaphragmatic and abdominal muscles, leading to better respiratory efficiency. It also supports the regulation of autonomic cardiac functions and contributes to improved cardiovascular health. In cases of mild hypertension, pranayama can act as a complementary therapy alongside conventional medication.

- **Meditation**

Developed in 1979 by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn, the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program is a structured intervention that blends hatha yoga and mindfulness meditation to manage stress. Yoga-based interventions, particularly meditation, have shown to be effective in easing caregiver burden, lowering stress levels, and reducing symptoms of depression.

Meditation supports the regulation of stress by stabilizing the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, while asanas and pranayama enhance cellular oxygenation and physiological performance. Together, these practices serve as powerful tools in maintaining health and addressing lifestyle-related challenges. (Sengupta, 2012; Martis et al., 2023)

Vedantic Approach

- **The Role of Karma, Bhakti, Jnana, and Dhyana Yoga**

The Trimarga-or the threefold spiritual path in Vedanta-comprising Bhakti Yoga (path of devotion), Jnana Yoga (path of knowledge), and Karma Yoga (path of action), mirrors the modern psychological understanding of emotion, cognition, and volition.

- **Bhakti Yoga**

Bhakti Yoga emphasizes heartfelt devotion to the Divine, ultimately leading the practitioner to experience *ananda* (pure

bliss). This state of bliss, whether perceived as a feeling of unity or divine connection, is boundless, limited only by an individual's capacity to experience it. As it transcends external events and personal identities, Indian philosophy views *ananda* as an innate aspect of existence.

- **Jnana Yoga**

In the *Shrimad Bhagavad Gita*, Jnana Yoga—also known as Sankhya Yoga-is presented as a path to liberation (*Mukti*) through the realization of *Tattvajnana* (true, experiential knowledge). In Vedantic practice, this pursuit of wisdom is at the heart of Jnana Yoga. It teaches that the *Atman* or *Paramatma* (supreme self) is inherently blissful (*Ananda-svarupa*), composed of pure knowledge (*Jnana-svarupa*), eternal (*Nitya*), truthful (*Satya*), and pure (*Shuddha*). According to this philosophy, only *Brahman* is everlasting and real. Everything in the cosmos is both illuminated by and exists within Brahman, which, though singular in nature, is expressed in countless forms. (*Jnana, Bhakti and Karma Yoga | Health*, n.d.)

- **Karma Yoga**

Karma Yoga promotes union through selfless service. It cultivates inner purity by guiding individuals to act without personal expectations or attachment to results. Actions are surrendered to *Ishwara*, helping transcend ego and fostering spiritual growth. As described in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Karma Yoga is the dedication of all thoughts and deeds to the Supreme, offered as a sacrifice to the eternal source of energy and discipline.

Gita Verse 2.47:

"You have a right to perform your prescribed duties, but you are not entitled to the fruits of your actions. Never consider yourself the cause of the results of your activities, nor be attached to inaction."

Psychological Pathology: Indian Knowledge Systems vs. Modern Psychology

Blending Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) with contemporary psychological frameworks presents a holistic view for managing conditions like anxiety, depression, trauma, and caregiver burrnout. This integration brings together traditional healing with evidence-based practices.

Anxiety Disorders

IKS View:

Anxiety often arises from an imbalance in *Vata dosha*, resulting in restlessness and agitation. Management includes:

- *Pranayama* and meditation to stabilize the mind
- Herbal remedies like *Ashwagandha* known for calming effects

Modern View:

Anxiety is associated with heightened sympathetic nervous system activity. Common treatments include:

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) for restructuring negative thought patterns
- SSRIs to regulate mood-related neurotransmitters

Depression

IKS View:

Linked to Kapha imbalance, depression is addressed through:

- A *Sattvic* diet and yoga for mental clarity
- Herbs like *Brahmi* and *Ashwagandha* to enhance mood and resilience

Modern View:

Often tied to neurochemical disturbances, depression is treated with:

- Antidepressant medication
- Therapies like CBT and Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT)

Caregiver Burnout

IKS View:

Seen as a Pitta and Vata imbalance, burnout is managed by:

- Self-care practices like *Abhyanga* (Ayurvedic oil massage)

- Engaging in *Bhakti Yoga* to nurture emotional strength and surrender

Modern View:

Defined as physical and emotional exhaustion, caregiver burnout is addressed through:

- Stress reduction strategies and mindfulness
- Professional therapy and support group participation

Trauma and PTSD

IKS View:

Trauma is understood as embedded impressions or *Samskaras*. Healing techniques include:

- Meditative detachment and mantra chanting
- *Trataka* (focused gazing) to enhance mental clarity and inner healing

Modern View:

PTSD involves persistent intrusive memories and hyperarousal. Treatments include:

- Trauma-focused CBT
- EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing)

IKS vs. Contemporary Psychology: A Comparative Snapshot

Criteria	Indian Knowledge System	Contemporary Psychology
Diagnosis	Rooted in dosha imbalances, karma, and spiritual insight	Based on clinical symptoms, DSM/ICD criteria
Treatment Approach	Holistic: diet, yoga, meditation, herbal remedies	Evidence-based: therapy, medication, lifestyle changes
Caregiver Support	Encourages spiritual self-care and detachment	Focuses on counseling, psychoeducation, peer support
Efficacy	Effective for mild-moderate distress and stress management	Effective for clinical disorders and emotional regulation

IKS-Based Interventions for Caregiver Mental Health

1. **Yoga Therapy**
   Postures like *Balasana* and breathing techniques like *Bhramari Pranayama* enhance emotional regulation and reduce stress.
2. **Ayurvedic Stress Relief**
   Use of adaptogens like *Ashwagandha*, combined with *Rasayana* therapy and lifestyle practices, builds emotional resilience.
3. **Vedantic Insight**
   Practicing *Karma Yoga* and *Jnana Yoga* helps caregivers maintain a healthy balance between empathy and emotional detachment.
4. **Integrative Models**
   Modern interventions like Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) already incorporate yogic and meditative techniques, aligning well with IKS.

DISCUSSION

Integrating Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into mental healthcare offers a culturally grounded and holistic support system for caregivers, who often face high levels of stress, emotional fatigue, and burnout. Practices from Ayurveda—such as Ashwagandha for stress reduction, *Abhyanga* (oil massage), and diet regulation—help restore balance and build resilience in caregivers.

Yoga and meditation, especially techniques like *Balasana*, *Bhramari pranayama*, and guided mindfulness, provide emotional stability and regulate the nervous system. These are especially beneficial for caregivers dealing with chronic caregiving roles.

Philosophies like Karma Yoga and Jnana Yoga promote detachment from outcomes and foster a deeper sense of meaning and purpose in caregiving. By emphasizing action without expectation, they reduce

emotional burden while nurturing compassion.

Modern interventions like Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) resonate with these IKS principles, and combining both can create hybrid models that are not only effective but also culturally sensitive. Research supports the feasibility and acceptability of such integrative approaches in caregiver support programs.

Overall, IKS provides practical and philosophical tools that promote sustainable caregiving by addressing both psychological needs and spiritual well-being.

CONCLUSION

Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) offer a holistic approach to mental healthcare by integrating Ayurveda, Yoga, and Vedantic psychology. These traditional practices provide effective strategies for managing stress, anxiety, depression, and caregiver burden through meditation, pranayama, and herbal interventions. While empirical studies support the benefits of yoga-based therapies and Ayurvedic approaches, further research is needed to establish their efficacy in clinical settings. By integrating IKS with modern psychological frameworks, a more comprehensive and culturally relevant mental healthcare model can be developed, enhancing well-being and resilience.

Declaration by Authors

Acknowledgement: None

Source of Funding: None

Conflict of Interest: No conflicts of interest declared.

Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0

This is an open-access article published under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0).

https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0

REFERENCES

1. Pandey A, Tiwari M. Concept of mental health in Ayurveda. World J Pharm Res. 2015;4(3):2004-13.
2. Sengupta P. Health impacts of yoga and pranayama: a state-of-the-art review. Int J Prev Med. 2012;3(7):444-58. Available from: https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3415184/
3. Goyal P. Jnana, Bhakti and Karma Yoga. Vikaspedia [Internet]. 2023 May 30 [cited 2025 Mar 26]. Available from: https://en.vikaspedia.in/viewcontent/health/ayush/yoga-1/jnana-bhakti-and-karma-yoga?lgn=en
4. Schulz R, Sherwood PR. Physical and mental health effects of family caregiving. Am J Nurs. 2008;108(9 Suppl):23-7. doi: 10.1097/01.NAJ.0000336406.45248.4c
5. Martis CS, Chandrababu R, Ravishankar N, Bhandary RP, Mohammed CA, Tolson D, et al. The effectiveness of yoga therapy on caregivers of people living with dementia: a systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. Clin Epidemiol Glob Health. 2023; 19:101192. doi: 10.1016/j.cegh.2022.101192

How to cite this article: Tulika Sharma, Sunita Purty. Indigenizing mental healthcare: bridging Indian knowledge systems and contemporary psychology for family caregivers. *International Journal of Research and Review*. 2026; 13(11): 168-173.

DOI: *https://doi.org/10.52403/ijrr.20261115*

******