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Impact of Vedic and Non-Vedic School Cultures on Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Among Adolescents: A Comparative Study

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Abstract
Adolescence is often recognized as a particularly challenging phase of life, characterized by increasing societal demands and expectations. Previous research has highlighted that many mental health issues, including mood disorders, stress, anxiety, depression, and substance abuse, tend to emerge before the age of 14. Among adolescents aged 15 to 18, depression and anxiety are especially prominent, acting as significant precursors to a range of psychological challenges. The present study aimed to investigate the influence of school culture—specifically Vedic and Non-Vedic educational systems—on reducing depression, anxiety, and stress among school students.
The study was conducted on a random sample of 800 students, aged 12 to 18, from grades 6 to 12 across schools in Uttar Pradesh, India, following Vedic or non-Vedic cultural practices. The sample consisted of an equal number of boys and girls, all with at least two years of exposure to their respective school cultures. To assess mental health outcomes, the students were asked to complete the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995).
Data analysis was performed using the independent t-test at a 0.05 significance level, utilizing IBM SPSS version 24 software. The results demonstrated that students attending schools with a Vedic cultural framework exhibited significantly lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress compared to those in Non-Vedic culture schools. Furthermore, no significant differences were observed between boys and girls regarding their DASS scores, regardless of school culture. The findings suggest that Vedic school culture is associated with lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress, and this positive relationship is not influenced by gender.

Keywords: Adolescents, Vedic culture, Non-Vedic culture, Depression, Anxiety, Stress, School Culture, Mental health, DASS-21, Comparative study, Gender differences, Educational systems

Introduction

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2007), approximately 37% of India's population falls within the 12-24 year age group, indicating that India has a substantial young population. In recent years, depression and anxiety have emerged as significant factors contributing to psychological disorders among students, especially in the context of rapid social change (Emslie et al., 2005). A study on psychiatric disorders found that 29% of school girls and 23% of school boys were reported to suffer from depressive disorders (Sidana & Nijhawan, 1999). Research has shown that depression and stress are strongly associated with adverse life events in the future (Bhasin et al., 2010), and academic pressure has been

identified as a critical factor contributing to stress, depression, and even suicide on a global scale (Ang & Huan, 2006).

The consequences of stress, depression, and anxiety during adolescence are significant and can lead to severe outcomes such as substance abuse and suicidal ideation (McCabe & Schneiderman, 1983; Gallegos et al., 1990; Johnson et al., 1990). Adolescence is often considered a crucial stage in a person's life, where family and society impose multiple demands on the individual (Tung & Sandhu, 2008). Academic pressure, peer pressure, relationship difficulties, low socioeconomic status, and negative emotions in the societal context further contribute to elevated stress levels. The most common source of stress for students is anxiety related to academic achievement (Bartwal & Raj, 2013). If stress persists over time, it can significantly deteriorate an individual's physical and mental well-being (Selye, 1976).

Chronic anxiety can impair a child's ability to problem-solve, reduce academic performance, and increase school avoidance (McLoone et al., 2006). It negatively impacts emotional, social, and academic functioning (Essau et al., 2002). It can lead to poor social and coping skills (Albano et al., 2003), low self-esteem, and loneliness (Kumar & Kumar, 2014). Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to social phobia or social anxiety disorder, which can lead to more severe mental health conditions and suicidal thoughts (Wittchen et al., 1999). Alarmingly, a significant proportion of suicide victims are under the age of 30, with mental disorders contributing to nearly 90% of these cases (Vijaykumar, 2007).

The distressing reality is that students, who are expected to enjoy, learn, and grow during their school years, are increasingly burdened with stress and depression, primarily due to academic pressure (Anderman, 2002). Schools, traditionally places of value-based education, are now contributing to the rising levels of anxiety and depression among students (Kritek, 1996). This suggests that schools may fail to instill core values and beliefs about what is right, wrong, or significant in life (Oxford Learner's Dictionary, 2008). As Krishnamurthy (1962) pointed out, the modern education system has become conventional and insufficient in preparing students for life's fundamental challenges, leading to issues like stress, depression, anxiety, frustration, and even suicidal thoughts.

Students in non-Vedic or modern education systems are often not exposed to practices that promote positive outlooks, self-motivation, and life satisfaction as part of their daily routines, unlike students in Vedic culture-based schools (Chaudhary & Joshi, 2017). In light of this, there is a pressing need for a school culture grounded in a value system capable of instigating positive change in individuals, society, and the broader educational framework. Research has shown that values are critical in strengthening cultural beliefs (Levine & Lezotte, 2004) and improving academic performance (Zephaniah, 2013). A well-structured school culture can impart essential values such as integrity and honesty (KNEC, 2012), which can help prevent the development of negative emotions and thoughts.

In non-Vedic or modern education systems, professional ethics are becoming increasingly complex and demanding (Strahlendorf, 2010). According to the Adolescent Depression Awareness Program (2010), approximately 5% of adolescents suffer from depression as a clinical illness. The prevalence of depression and stress in adolescence is often attributed to lifestyle factors and school environments that fail to teach self-control and restraint. Given that most of an adolescent's time after age three is spent in school, the school culture plays a significant role in shaping a student's unique personality (Gruenert, 2000). The school culture encompasses traditions, functioning, approaches, codes of conduct, and discipline (Peterson, 1998), making teachers essential role models for adolescents (KNEC, 2012).

While modern education systems emphasize overall development, including social well-being, intellectual freedom, and creative thinking (Sharma, 1975), Vedic school cultures offer a more holistic approach. In

Vedic education systems, particularly those based on the Gurukul tradition, students regularly practice Yoga, recite Vedic chants (Ved-Paath), and participate in spiritual activities such as Havan (Chaudhary & Joshi, 2017). Yoga, in particular, has been shown to effectively reduce anxiety and stress, enhancing overall well-being (Nagendra, 2008; Simard, 2009). Even short-term yoga practice has significantly reduced stress and depression among students (Simard & Henry, 2009).

Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that a positive school culture is essential for the overall welfare of students. A productive school environment is built on shared vision and goals, a conducive learning environment, and positive reinforcement (Levine & Lezotte, 2004). Schools should foster values that help students become disciplined, self-sufficient, and well-integrated citizens in the future (KNEC, 2012). This paper proposes that adopting a value-based school culture, such as the Vedic school culture, can provide a long-term solution to mitigating the rising levels of depression, stress, and anxiety among students, as the formative years of value and behavior development are predominantly spent in school.

Objective

1. To compare the levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among students exposed to Vedic and Non-Vedic school cultures.
2. To analyse the differences in depression, anxiety, and stress levels based on gender among students in Vedic and Non-Vedic school cultures.

Hypotheses

1. There will be a significant difference in the levels of depression, anxiety, and stress between students of Vedic and Non-Vedic school cultures.
2. There will be no significant difference in the levels of depression, anxiety, and stress based on gender among students in both Vedic and Non-Vedic school cultures.

Methodology

Research Design

The present study utilizes a control-experimental group design to investigate the impact of school culture on depression, anxiety, and stress among students. The experimental group comprises students from Vedic schools who have been practicing rituals such as Havan, reciting Ved-Paath, and engaging in daily Yoga as part of their routine curriculum for at least two years. In contrast, the control group consisted of students from non-vedic schools who did not participate in these activities and only completed the required questionnaire. In this study, the school culture (Vedic vs. Non-Vedic) serves as the independent variable (IV), while the levels of depression, anxiety, and stress represent the dependent variables (DV).

Sample

The study sample consisted of 800 students, aged 12 to 18 years, enrolled in grades 6 to 12 in various Vedic (experimental group) and Non-Vedic (control group) schools in Uttar Pradesh, India. The sample was equally divided between the two groups, with 400 students from Vedic schools and 400 students from Non-Vedic schools, ensuring an equal representation of boys and girls. The participants were randomly selected from schools and Gurukuls in Aligarh, Hathras, Hapur, Meerut, and Moradabad. All students had been exposed to their school culture for at least two years.

Tool & its Measure

The Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21), developed by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995), was used as the assessment tool to measure depression, anxiety, and stress among the students. This 21-item self-report scale evaluates the three negative emotional states on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 ("Did not apply to me at all") to 3 ("Applied to me most of the time"). The DASS-21 is a reliable and valid tool, with Cronbach's alpha values for the Hindi version indicating acceptable internal consistency for stress ($\alpha = 0.63$), depression ($\alpha = 0.70$), and anxiety ($\alpha = 0.74$) (Henry & Crawford, 2005; Daza et al., 2002).

Statistical Analysis

The collected data were screened to identify the minimum and maximum values for each item of the DASS-21 scale. The study hypotheses were tested using independent t-tests at a 0.05 significance level. IBM SPSS Version 24 was employed for statistical analysis.

Procedure

To facilitate data collection, permission was obtained from the principals of various Vedic and non-Vedic schools in Uttar Pradesh. The sample comprised 800 randomly selected students from grades 6 to 12 exposed to their respective school cultures for two years or more. The researcher distributed the Hindi version of the DASS-21 questionnaires to the students, who were then asked to complete them. Once the completed questionnaires were collected, the responses were tabulated, and the data were analysed using SPSS software to compute the results.

Results Table & Interpretation

The study aimed to assess and compare the levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among students from Vedic and non-Vedic school cultures. The data were analysed using the Mean, Standard Deviation, and independent t-tests. The results are presented in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

Table 1: Mean comparison of depression, anxiety and stress of the students studying in Vedic & Non-Vedic culture schools for 2 years.

Area of DASS	Vedic Schools Mean (SD)	Non-Vedic Schools Mean (SD)	't' value	P value
Depression	5.01(1.621)	7.40 (1.041)	-24.871	000**
Anxiety	7.05(1.200)	9.52 (2.269)	-19.206	000**
Stress	8.57 (1.914)	9.39 (2.097)	-5.776	000**
Total DASS	20.63 (2.919)	26.31 (2.679)	-28.694	000**

N=800 (Vedic & Non-Vedic Students=400 each, equal no. of Girls and Boys) *p<.01 **p<.001

Table 2: Mean comparison of depression, anxiety and stress of the students studying in Vedic culture schools for 2 years (based on gender difference).

Area of DASS	Girls Mean (SD)	Boys Mean (SD)	't' value	p-value
Depression	5.02 (1.629)	4.99 (1.616)	.185	.914NS
Anxiety	7.01 (1.169)	7.04 (1.233)	-.666	.338NS
Stress	8.61 (1.904)	8.53 (1.923)	.417	.953NS

Total DASS	20.64 (2.862)	20.61 (2.982)	.103	.563NS

N=400 (Girls=200, Boys=200)*p<.01 **p<.001

Table 3: Mean comparison of depression, anxiety and stress of the students studying in Non-Vedic culture schools for 2 years (based on gender difference).

Area of DASS	Girls Mean (SD)	Boys Mean (SD)	't' value	p-value
Depression	7.39 (1.046)	7.41 (1.038)	-.192	.756NS
Anxiety	9.50 (2.257)	9.53 (2.286)	-.132	.893NS
Stress	9.45 (2.093)	9.33 (2.106)	.572	.756NS
Total DASS	26.34 (2.691)	26.27 (2.673)	.261	.944NS

N=400 (Girls=200, Boys=200)*p<.01 **p<.001

Table 1 presents the mean comparison of the different components of the DASS (Depression, Anxiety, and Stress) between students studying in Vedic and Non-Vedic culture schools. The analysis reveals a significant difference in the levels of depression, anxiety, and stress between these two groups of students ($t = -28.694$, $p = .000$). Students from Vedic culture schools exhibited significantly lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress compared to those from Non-Vedic culture schools, highlighting the positive impact of Vedic school culture on mental health.

Table 2 shows the mean comparison of the DASS components (Depression, Anxiety, and Stress) based on gender differences among students from Vedic culture schools. The results indicate no significant difference between boys and girls in this group ($t = -.103$, $p = .563$), suggesting that both genders experience similar levels of depression, anxiety, and stress in Vedic culture schools. This implies that the Vedic educational environment positively affects students' mental health, regardless of gender.

Table 3 presents the mean comparison of the DASS components based on gender differences among students from Non-Vedic culture schools. Similar to the results in Table 2, there was no significant difference between boys and girls in this group ($t = -.261$, $p = .944$). Both boys and girls in Non-Vedic culture schools showed comparable levels of depression, anxiety, and stress, indicating that gender does not influence these outcomes in the Non-Vedic school environment either.

Overall, the findings suggest that while Vedic culture schools reduce depression, anxiety, and stress compared to Non-Vedic schools, gender does not play a significant role in the mental health outcomes in either school culture.

Discussion & Conclusion

The findings of the current study provide significant insights into the influence of Vedic school culture on students' mental health, specifically depression, anxiety, and stress. The study's null hypothesis was rejected, which proposed no significant difference between students of Vedic and Non-Vedic school cultures. This demonstrates that Vedic school culture, integrating daily practices such as Yoga, Ved-Paath recitation, and Havan, plays a crucial role in positively influencing students' emotional well-being. Previous research has established that Yoga helps students manage and regulate their emotions and behaviors (Dariotis, 2016), alleviates anger and tension (Bellinger et al., 2015), and enhances both physical and mental well-being (Miller, 2014). The present study supports these findings by showing that students exposed to Vedic practices have lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress.

The Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21) has been widely used across various cultural and ethnic groups to measure mental health issues (Daza et al., 2002). It has been validated in medical and non-medical populations (Henry & Crawford, 2005). The scale has been effectively applied to adolescent populations in previous studies (Sawrikar & Hunt, 2005; Einstein et al., 2000), and this study adds to the existing literature by validating the role of Vedic school culture in mitigating adolescent mental health challenges. Schools inherently influence students by embedding the school's philosophy and vision into their daily experiences (Bolman & Deal, 1997), and this study confirms the impact of Vedic school culture in shaping positive emotional outcomes.

The current study further reveals that students who have been exposed to Vedic school culture for over two years show significantly lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress (refer to Table 1). This indicates that prolonged exposure to a school culture rooted in value-based education contributes positively to students' mental health. While this study focused on adolescents, future research could explore the long-term effects of Vedic education on individuals into adulthood by comparing those who attended Vedic schools with those who attended mainstream or Non-Vedic schools. Such comparisons provide a deeper understanding of the lasting influence of Vedic school culture on mental well-being.

Although previous research has indicated higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among females compared to males (David, 2013), the present study finds no significant gender differences in mental health outcomes among students in Vedic schools (refer to Table 2). This can be attributed to the equal exposure of both boys and girls to the same environment, values, and practices. The Vedic school culture promotes a sense of connectedness, present-mindedness, focus, and attention while improving self-esteem and creating a positive school climate (Finnan, 2015; Wang & Hagins, 2016; Sethi et al., 2013; Kielty et al., 2017; Wimmer et al., 2016).

In contrast, students in Non-Vedic schools exhibited higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress (refer to Table 1), which aligns with existing literature suggesting that modern school environments often fail to inculcate values that promote ideal living (Dash, 2003). Non-Vedic schools tend to emphasize career-oriented education, contributing to academic pressure, a major trigger for depression, anxiety, and stress among adolescents (Ang & Huan, 2006). The pressure to achieve high academic performance can lead to feelings of failure, further exacerbating mental health problems (Gallegos et al., 1990). This highlights the importance of fostering a school culture that reduces stress and promotes mental well-being.

The current study also underscores schools' critical role in shaping students' personalities by nurturing social competence, cognitive development, and pro-social behavior (Sanson et al., 2004). Depression is often a precursor to various somatic diseases (Prince et al., 2007), and social anxiety disorders are especially prevalent in adolescents, leading to social isolation and suicidal ideation (Wittchen et al., 1999; John & Cherian, 2001; Bhasin et al., 2010; Vijaykumar, 2007; Cuijpers & Smit, 2002). However, the findings of this study suggest that Vedic school culture can help mitigate these risks by fostering a supportive and balanced educational environment.

Based on the Gurukul model, the Vedic education system emphasizes the importance of a simple, value-driven lifestyle. Students residing with their teachers (Guru) in an ashram follow practices that promote nobility and positive character development (Chaudhary & Joshi, 2017). This holistic approach to education, which includes regular recitation of mantras and spiritual practices such as "tan me manaḥ shiva-saṅkalpam astu" and the Gayatri mantra, instills positive thought patterns, reduces stress, and enhances mental clarity. These practices improve students' concentration and help them lead balanced, stress-free lives.

In addition to spiritual practices, Vedic education emphasizes the importance of self-discipline, self-control, and idealistic living (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 1.3.28). Havan (fire rituals) and chanting mantras are integral parts of the daily routine, and these practices have been shown to reduce stress by producing positive mental vibrations (UNESCO, 2008). Reciting "OM" has been found to stimulate brain cells and aid in concentration, contributing to academic success (Anita et al.).

The findings of this study suggest that students exposed to a positive school culture enriched with values and practices such as Yoga and Ved-Paath benefit both mentally and physically. Practicing Yoga regularly has been associated with improved academic performance (Butzer et al., 2015), emotional well-being (Monk-Turner & Turner, 2010), and physiological health (Pilkington et al., 2005). The impact of such a school culture extends beyond academic success, contributing to the overall development of well-rounded, emotionally balanced individuals.

In conclusion, this study offers compelling evidence supporting the implementation of a value-based educational framework, such as Vedic school culture, as a means to alleviate depression, anxiety, and stress in adolescents. By incorporating Yoga, Ved-Paath, and Havan, Vedic education fosters a holistic development model that nurtures academic skills and emotional and mental resilience. Schools are vital in shaping future generations, and this research emphasizes that their role must extend beyond academic performance to include cultivating disciplined, self-sufficient individuals who can thrive both intellectually and emotionally. The adoption of such frameworks may offer a proactive solution to the growing mental health challenges faced by today's youth. Further research should investigate the long-term impact of these practices, potentially reinforcing their integration into diverse educational systems worldwide.

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