

EFFECT OF POSITIVE THINKING AND RAJAYOGA ON PERCEIVED LONELINESS AND DEATH ANXIETY IN AGED PEOPLE

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ABSTRACT

With the growing of age there is obvious change in temperament and outlook. There is a psychological impact of descendancy from active positive role to passive or inactive role. Positive thinking and Yogic practices promote wellbeing by controlling or reducing negative. Keeping this in view the study was conducted on 85 elderly males of age ranging between 66 to 75 yrs. The subjects belonged to upper middle socio-economic status and were retired. Perceived loneliness scale and death anxiety scale were administered. Pre and post testing was done. The Positive Thinking and Rajayoga techniques were introduced to the subjects to follow regularly for 45 days. The significant differences were found in the perceived loneliness and death anxiety in elderly subjects.

INTRODUCTION

The second half of the life is a turning pointing in which personal, social and cultural goals undergo a drastic change from those of the first half of life. Creating a new self image, adjusting to physical and mental changes of aging, adapting to a simpler life style, and seeking quality of life become important objectives that can be realized through the dynamic, integrative process of spirituality (McFadden & Gerl, 1990; O'Brien, 1999). As people live longer into old age, the human race is moving toward an unprecedented phenomenon. Only a century ago, the average life span was 45 years. Today the life span has almost doubled (O'Brien, 1999). It is being estimated that by the year 2016 the elderly (age 65 and above) will constitute 5.9% of the total population of India (RGI, 1996). As life expectancy increases, there is a great deal of interest in promoting feeling of well being in the aging people and to enable them to control or reduce the negative feelings of loneliness, emptiness, death and dying which haunt them day and night. In today's social fabric there is an increased feeling of neglect and meaninglessness in the aged people due to changed family patterns and life styles at large. Death anxiety becomes very obvious in the aged people as aging is viewed from the physiological perspective and is depicted as time of deterioration, a time when body systems "fall apart" and minds "weaken". Aging

individuals often lose or deny their mind body-spirit connection and do not want to be associated with their aging body, especially when a particular body part has lost its youthful capacity (Becker, 2002). While many people talk about aging gracefully, "growing younger", or emphasizing the positive aspects of aging, others in majority dwell on the losses and negative facets with the feelings of loneliness. During this phase, in the normal course of life, the aging people can feel accomplished by fulfilling their responsibilities and feeling free consequently but on the other hand after living an active working and social life with many goals in the view suddenly start feeling hollow and empty as if now nothing remains to be done by them and hence they are no more important and thus the feelings of perceived loneliness get increased. Studies have revealed that elderly suffer from depression, inadequacy, death anxiety, feeling of alienated and marginalized etc. (Peck, 1968). Fischer (1998) addresses these apparent differences of opinion in Winter Grace: "The fact is that aging is both a descent and ascent....Aging is a paradox, the unity of apparent contractions....Emptiness can somehow be fullness, weakness can be strength, and dying can lead to new life".

Since the extension of life is a relatively "new" human experience and very few aging individuals have been provided with any real direction about how to deal effectively with aging

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related issues. Fewer still have a “roadmap” for overcoming death anxiety and feelings of loneliness. The aged people can have this roadmap by positive thinking and Rajayoga. A crucial part of positive thinking is not that the people should have positive thoughts but positive thinking teaches to look at the nature of our being, which infact has a lot more positivity in it than we expect. It aims to make one conscious of all positive virtues, like peace and love, that we all definitely have in us. It makes one more familiar with one's mind, thoughts, feelings, habits, tendencies and so on. As feeling of isolation comes not only due to interpersonal gaps but also and more due to intrapersonal gap and positive thinking helps resolve it. More and more doctors and scientists are becoming aware of the enormous effect thoughts have on the health. The influence of our imagination and beliefs in our healing process, which is the base of the placebo-effect, is already well known and is even effectively used for treating patients. So this is an indication of power of thoughts. The more we activate a certain thought (and react to it), the deeper the imprint in the subconsciousness will become. This is how habits and even addictions come to existence. It does not take long to create a habit. We only have to think something a couple of times and put it into performance and it has almost become an automatism. When one realizes what his/her true nature is and when there is acceptance of the self, one will learn to see his/her original qualities of Peace, Love, Power, Purity, Happiness again. These five qualities are the essence of human nature, this is who we really are behind the outer form. Realizing this leads to positive thinking. A great threat for a positive attitude is narrowmindedness, which means thinking on the basis of concepts and prejudices. An unlimited consciousness can be called spiritual consciousness, because we become aware that we are more than the outer form only. A definition of Rajayoga is : the right use of mind. It is not to deny thoughts, but to use them correctly. Positive thinking is the basis of knowledge and Rajayoga meditation is a method to get to know oneself.

Beauchamp-Turner et.al (1992) observed that the frequent meditator has

significantly fewer stressors and illness symptoms, lower level of anxiety, hostility, depression and dysphasia. Aminabhavi (1996) reported in her study that yoga training helped to develop positive attitude and also enhanced the mental health of the subjects. Yoga is a holistic science. It is a conscious and systematic process for the complete physical, mental, emotional and spiritual development of man. The yogic practices help the practitioner to be aware of his inner state and the relation between his mind and body. Vinod et.al (19991) concluded that the yogic practices like meditation, physical training and relaxation can reduce anxiety level by about 28%.

OBJECTIVES

1. To study the effect of Positive thinking and Rajayoga on perceived loneliness and death anxiety in aged people.
2. To study the relationship between perceived loneliness and death anxiety.

HYPOTHESES

1. Positive thinking and Rajayoga will have significant effect on perceived loneliness in aged people.
2. Positive thinking and Rajayoga will have significant effect on death anxiety in aged people.
3. Perceived loneliness will have significant relationship with death anxiety.

SAMPLE

Sample consisted of 85 retired males of age ranging between 66 to 75 yrs. The sample was homogeneous and belonged to upper middle class.

TOOLS

1. Perceived loneliness scale (Jha,1997)
2. Death anxiety scale. (Chouhan & Tiwari,2003)

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

t-test
Pearson Product Moment method of correlation.

PROCEDURE

85 aging persons, retired from the jobs, of age ranging between 66 to 75yrs from upper middle socio-economic class were selected for this study. Perceived loneliness and death anxiety scales were administered on them. Those having higher death anxiety and higher perceived loneliness further participated in the study. Thus 54 subjects were trained in the method of positive thinking and Rajayoga. The one hour session for 45 days regularly was implemented. The post testing on perceived loneliness and death anxiety was done and significance of difference was found out by using t-test.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Results given in the following table show that there is difference in perceived loneliness and death anxiety which are significant at .01 level.

Table-1: Significance of Difference Between Means on Perceived Loneliness and Death Anxiety

Variables	Pre-test		Post-test		t-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Perceived loneliness	151.64	17.98	118.06	16.01	8.29**
Death Anxiety	17.64	2.17	9.73	1.84	2.98**

** Significant at .01 level.

The results depict that the positive thinking and Rajayoga are very effective in reducing feelings of perceived loneliness and death anxiety in the aged people and thus the Hypothesis No. 1 and Hypothesis No. 2 are proven. Some researches conducted in the past also indicate towards the beneficial effect of meditational and yogic practices which in essence comprise of positive thinking and ways of inculcating positive thinking and broadening the consciousness. Beauchamp -Turner et.al (1992) observed that the frequent meditator has significantly fewer stressors and illness symptoms, lower level of anxiety, hostility, depression and dysphasia. Aminabhavi (1996) reported in her study that yoga training helped to

develop positive attitude and also enhanced the mental health of the subjects. The yogic practices help the practitioner to be aware of his inner state and the relation between his mind and body. Vinod et.al (19991) concluded that the yogic practices like meditation, physical training and relaxation can reduce anxiety level by about 28%. McFadden & Gerl (1990) and O'Brien (1999) reported that important objectives of life in the elderly people like creating a new self image, adjusting to physical and mental changes of aging, adapting to a simpler life style, and seeking quality of life that can be realized through the dynamic, integrative process of spirituality (McFadden & Gerl, 1990; O'Brien,1999). Flagg (1898) recognized the effect of yoga on body, mind and soul to be positive and harmonious. Yoga is an art of living and holds the key to youthfulness, vitality and long life leading to harmony and peace of mind. Hewitt (1960) accepted it as a discipline of mind, senses and body. He further explained that balancing of mind helps in gaining self mastery -a complete mastery over emotions. In addition to this significant positive correlation of .76 ($p<.01$) has also been found between perceived loneliness and death anxiety thus proving the Hypothesis No. 3.

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