

Need and Willingness to Use 'Meditation on Twin Hearts' for Management of Anxiety and Depression for the Transgender Community: A Pilot Study

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Abstract : Transgenders are a marginalized section of the community, who are at high risk of mental health problems due to their stigmatization, abandonment by family, prejudice, discrimination by society at large, and the physical, emotional, and sexual abuse from both within and outside their community. Their mental healthcare needs remain largely unaddressed due to lack of access, discrimination by healthcare professions, and lack of resources, including time and money, to seek conventional medical and psychotherapeutic treatments. Meditation is increasingly receiving acceptance as a tool for managing stress and anxiety by the patients as well as mental healthcare professionals. "Meditation on Twin Hearts" is a no cost, self-administered intervention that a person can practice anywhere and at any time of the day. This pilot study evaluates the need for alternate traditional and ingenious interventions like "Meditation of Twin Hearts" to address the mental healthcare needs of the transgender community and acceptance of such an intervention by the community. Thirteen individuals identifying themselves as transgender were invited to participate in one (Hunsur Taluk) of the five scheduled free meditation camps in Mysore. After obtaining informed consent for participation in the study, their mental health status is captured using an anonymous survey using standard, validated, self-reported questionnaires Generalised Anxiety Disorders (GAD)-7 for anxiety, Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) for depression, and Suicidal Behavior Questionnaire-Revised for suicidality. Then, they were requested to attend a session on "Meditation on Twin Hearts." After the session, their feedback on willingness to further explore the meditation technique for managing their mental healthcare need was assessed through another survey form. Out of the 13 participants, 92% scored for anxiety (4 mild, and 8 moderate anxiety). In the depression scale, 5 scored for mild and 5 for moderate depression, with a total of 77% (10/13) scoring positively on depression scale. Nearly 70% of participants (9/13), scored greater than the clinical cutoff for the need for clinical intervention. The proportion of individuals at risk for suicide was particularly high in this group, with 8/ 13 (61.5%) participants scoring the clinical cutoff score of ≥ 7 . Surprisingly, none of the participants had ever consulted a mental healthcare professional. All the participants (13/13; 100%) responded in affirmative to the question, "Will you be willing to continue meditation for management of your anxiety?" Six out of 13 participants described their experience of meditation as "happy" and 3 described it as "peaceful". None of the participants reported any negative beliefs or experience regarding the meditation. The study provides evidence for the urgent yet unmet mental healthcare need of the transgender community. The findings of the study also supports the rationale of conducting future systematic research to evaluate and explore ingenious and traditional practices, such as meditation, to meet the healthcare needs, especially in marginalized populations in a low income setting such as Lower and Middle Income countries. Based on these preliminary findings, the Principal Investigator (PI) is planning to cover 4 more areas of Mysore district.

Keywords : anxiety, depression, meditation on twin heart, suicidality, transgender

Conference Title : ICCSP 2019 : International Conference on Cognitive Science and Psychology

Conference Location : Amsterdam, Netherlands

Conference Dates : May 14-15, 2019