

Editorial

Chanting Mantras : A Timeless Antidote to Anxiety, Stress and Depression

Mental health concerns such as anxiety, stress, and depression have become pervasive in contemporary society, affecting individuals across age groups and socioeconomic strata. According to the World Health Organization, depression is a leading cause of disability worldwide, and the global prevalence of anxiety disorders continues to rise alarmingly¹. While pharmacological and psychotherapeutic interventions remain mainstays of management, there is increasing recognition of the role of complementary and integrative therapies in promoting psychological resilience. Among these, the practice of mantra chanting – a centuries-old spiritual tradition in India – has drawn growing scientific interest for its potential neuropsychological benefits.

Mantra as Medicine : The Ancient Science of Sound

The Sanskrit term “mantra” derives from “man” (mind) and “tra” (tool or instrument), implying an instrument to train or liberate the mind. Across Vedic, Buddhist, and other spiritual traditions, rhythmic repetition of sacred syllables or phrases is believed to harmonize mental and physical energies. In modern neuroscientific terms, chanting may modulate neural circuits involved in attention, emotion regulation, and self-referential processing².

Studies using functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) have shown that repetitive chanting reduces activity in the brain’s Default Mode Network (DMN) – a neural system linked to rumination and anxiety³. This aligns with the subjective sense of calm and focused awareness often reported during mantra practice.

Physiological and Psychological Benefits

Mantra chanting induces a parasympathetic response, slowing respiration, lowering heart rate, and stabilizing blood pressure⁴. The rhythmic breathing and auditory-vibrational feedback promote coherence between mind and body.

Clinical research supports these findings. Bernardi et al. demonstrated that the rhythmic recitation of the Ave Maria or Om Mani Padme Hum produced a consistent six breaths per minute pattern, leading to enhanced baroreflex sensitivity and autonomic balance⁵. Similarly, a randomized controlled trial by Bormann, *et al* found that veterans who practiced mantram repetition therapy experienced significant reductions in stress, anger, and depressive symptoms compared to controls⁶.

A 2020 study published in the *Journal of Behavioral Medicine* further reported that 15 minutes of daily Om chanting over four weeks led to reduced cortisol levels and improved mood scores among healthcare workers⁷. A recent systematic review and meta-analysis by Bormann and colleagues (2022) concluded that mantra-based meditation interventions are safe, cost-effective, and beneficial as adjunctive therapies for anxiety and depression⁸.

Integrating Chanting into Holistic Health Practice

Mantra chanting offers several advantages: it is non-invasive, inexpensive, culturally adaptable, and requires no special equipment. As a form of sound-based mindfulness, it can easily be incorporated into community health programs, workplace wellness initiatives, and medical education to promote stress resilience.

However, standardization remains a challenge. The choice of mantra, frequency, and duration of practice vary across studies, complicating comparison. More longitudinal research with physiological, biochemical, and neuroimaging markers is needed to establish robust causal evidence.

CONCLUSION

In the pursuit of modern mental well-being, we may be rediscovering what ancient traditions have long understood – that sound and rhythm can heal. Mantra chanting harmonizes the breath, stills the mind, and connects individuals to a sense of inner stability and peace. As evidence mounts, it is time that healthcare professionals and policymakers recognize chanting not merely as a ritual, but as a science of resonance with demonstrable therapeutic potential.

Integrating mantra-based interventions into preventive and promotive mental health strategies could serve as a bridge between ancient wisdom and contemporary neuroscience, helping restore balance in an increasingly turbulent world.

REFERENCES

- 1 World Health Organization. Depression and Other Common Mental Disorders: Global Health Estimates. Geneva: WHO; 2017.
- 2 Tomasino B, Fregona S, Skrap M, Fabbro F. Meditation-related activations are modulated by the practices needed to control the focus of attention. *J Cogn Neurosci* 2013; **25**(5): 626-41.
- 3 Brewer JA, Worhunsky PD, Gray JR, et al. Meditation experience is associated with differences in default mode network activity and connectivity. *Proc Natl Acad Sci USA* 2011; **108**(50): 20254-9.
- 4 Streeter CC, Gerbarg PL, Saper RB, Ciraulo DA, Brown RP — Effects of yoga on the autonomic nervous system, gamma-aminobutyric-acid, and allostasis in epilepsy, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. *Med Hypotheses* 2012; **78**(5): 571-9.
- 5 Bernardi L, Sleight P, Bandinelli G, et al. Effect of rosary prayer and yoga mantras on autonomic cardiovascular rhythms: Comparative study. *BMJ* 2001; **323**(7327): 1446-9.
- 6 Bormann JE, Oman D, Kemppainen JK — Mantram repetition for stress management in veterans and employees: A randomized trial. *J Altern Complement Med* 2006; **12**(8): 951-60.
- 7 Telles S, Singh N, Joshi M, Balkrishna A — Effects of chanting and breath awareness on anxiety and stress: A randomized controlled trial. *J Behav Med* 2020; **43**(6): 1089-99.
- 8 Bormann JE, Thorp SR, Wetherell JL — Mantram repetition: A review of its psychophysiological and clinical effects. *Front Psychol* 2022; **13**: 826585.

Hony Editor, JIMA

Kakali Sen