

Gayatri Mantra Meditation: A Promising Approach for Enhancing Psychological Capital and Alleviating Psychological Distress

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the transformative potential of Gayatri Mantra Meditation (GMM) in fostering psychological capital (PsyCap) and reducing psychological distress among practitioners. This study investigates the effects of regular GMM practice on enhancing PsyCap components (hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism) and alleviating symptoms of psychological distress. This study used longitudinal pre-post study design and using convenience sampling to assess the effect of practicing GMM for 40 days on 100 young adult participants of age group 22-28 years. The research delves into understanding the underlying mechanisms and its efficacy in promoting mental resources that can in turn enhance work performance and productivity. The findings of this study, revealed that there was a significant reduction in the stress, anxiety, and depression of the participants (all $p < 0.05$) post intervention. Additionally, there was significant improvement in Psychological capital (Hope, Optimism, Resilience, Efficacy) among all participants ($p < 0.05$) post intervention. Findings suggest that GMM holds promise as a holistic intervention for developing psychological capital, offering insights for integrating ancient spiritual practices into contemporary positive mental resource building.

Keywords: *Gayatri Mantra Meditation, Psychological Capital, Alleviating Psychological Distress*

In the quest for organizational success, the spotlight shines brightly on the effective utilization of human capital, a notion deeply embedded in the resource-based perspective (Barney, 1991). Building upon this foundation, researchers have explored positive psychological resources such as Psychological Capital (PsyCap) as a key determinant of work performance. **Psychological capital**, rooted in positive psychology, encompasses those attributes that go beyond traditional human capital measures, focusing on the development of individuals' inner strength and resilience (Luthans & Youssef, 2004). The importance of PsyCap as a positive construct prevalent in professional and personal development literature, lies in the rigorous theoretical underpinnings, empirical grounding, and emphasis on valid measurement (Luthans & Youssef, 2007). It is found to be state-like and open to development which distinguishes PsyCap from other trait-like constructs, such as self-

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Gayatri Mantra Meditation: A Promising Approach for Enhancing Psychological Capital and Alleviating Psychological Distress

evaluations, positive affectivity, and "Big Five" personality characteristics (Luthans et al., 2010). This distinction suggests that attributes of PsyCap are relatively malleable and amenable to change (Luthans & Youssef, 2007).

Although Psychological distress (anxiety, depression, and stress) are all indicators of poor psychological health, positive psychological resources such as optimism, hope, self-efficacy, and grit are found to reduce anxiety (Sheridan et al., 2015), enhance greater academic performance (Carmona-Halty et al., 2019), and facilitate better overall well-being (Hammond, 2004). Developing PsyCap enables persevering toward goals and redirecting paths when necessary (*hope*), making a positive attribution about now and the future (*optimism*), sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond when beset by problems and adversity (*resilience*), and having the confidence to engage in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks (*efficacy*) (F. Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017).

For developing PsyCap a comprehensive model (PCI) outlining its components and processes involved in PsyCap development has been proposed (Luthans et al., 2006). Luthans, Avey, and Patera (2008) report preliminary findings indicating the effectiveness of a PsyCap Intervention (PCI) training model in enhancing individuals' PsyCap levels. However, further research is needed, to explore contemporary intervention techniques that can serve as promising methods for developing PsyCap. Although in the realm of psychology, the distinction between states and traits has been a subject of ongoing discussion (Allen & Potkay, 1981). Building upon previous research, *States* represent momentary and changeable feelings, while *traits* denote more fixed characteristics (Luthans et al., 2006; Luthans & Youssef, 2007; Chen et al., 2000). State like constructs, such as positive psychological resources found in PsyCap (e.g., efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism), are more malleable and open to development. Trait like constructs, like personality traits and strengths, are relatively fixed and difficult to change. Empirical evidence supports this distinction, showing that PsyCap falls in the state like position on the proposed continuum (Luthans, Avolio et al., 2007). Furthermore, findings suggest that PsyCap resources are developable through training exercises (Luthans, Avey, & Patera, 2008), indicating their potential for change and development.

Although the study by Paul and Shah (2016) suggests that spirituality can enhance psychological capital for students and can help them in coping with academic stress. PsyCap, which encompasses hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism, is crucial for students' positive psychological development. Academic stress, characterized by pressure, depression, anxiety, and tension, can severely disrupt a student's wellbeing and academic performance. A positive academic environment is essential for optimal performance, and various strategies exist to manage academic stress, with spirituality being a key tool. Spirituality provides an inner path for individuals to discover happiness and personal fulfillment, helping them manage stress effectively. Previous studies have also explored the effect of different meditation practices on PsyCap. PsyCap has been recognized for its positive impact on attitudes, behaviors, and well-being, correlates negatively with stress, anxiety and lack of productivity due to depressive symptoms (Avey et al., 2009; Avey et al., 2010).

Mantra meditation, an ancient self-management technique encompassing practices like yoga and meditation, holds profound significance in promoting mental well-being and relieving distress. Rooted in Sanskrit, mantras are Vedic verses repeated to quiet the mind, with the belief that sustained repetition leads to liberation from ignorance and the cycle of birth and

Gayatri Mantra Meditation: A Promising Approach for Enhancing Psychological Capital and Alleviating Psychological Distress

death (Baba, 1976). These sonic vibrations induce psycho-physiological changes, facilitating transcendental experiences (Lynch et al., 2018; Travis, 2014; Forem, 2012). Among the vast array of mantras, the Gayatri mantra stands out, revered across various Eastern traditions for millennia (Acharya, 2003). Gayatri mantra meditation (GMM) has also shown tangible effects on brain waves, as evidenced by EEG changes in patients (Thomas & Rao, 2016). Additionally, chanting 'OM' and 'Gayatri mantra' stimulates brain cells, enhancing activation and concentration (Balaji, 2017). The Gayatri mantra, deeply ingrained in Hindu culture, is believed to foster thinking skills, character development, and emotional control, if practiced consistently (Baba, 1976; Dudeja, 2017).

Although previous studies have extensively examined the effects of modern meditation techniques, like mindfulness, on PsyCap. Although there is a notable gap in the literature regarding the impact of ancient practices like GMM on PsyCap development, which has yet not been explored. In this present study, it is hypothesized that participation in GMM intervention will lead to a significant increase in PsyCap levels among young adult participants. Additionally, GMM is expected to positively influence general well-being and reduce psychological distress (stress anxiety depression), similar to the effects observed in studies on modern meditation practices. Hence, this study aims to explore the role of Gayatri Mantra Meditation (GMM) intervention in developing Psychological Capital (PsyCap) among young adults preparing for competitive exams in different organizational settings like coaching, where task demand and performance pressure is way too high.

METHODS

Study design and Settings

This research was longitudinal research, employed a single group pre-post research design, consisting of an intervention of Gayatri Mantra Meditation. The study was conducted from 20 May 2023 to 30 June 2023 at Gayatri Shaktipeeth, Kankarbagh, Patna. The baseline data was collected on a day before the start of intervention and post-intervention data was collected after 40 days of Gayatri mantra meditation intervention.

Participants

Participants were recruited based on convenience sampling. Total 101 participants were recruited for the study. The participants consisted of (n=50) males and (n=51) females in the age group of 22-28 years. The educational qualification of the participants ranged from graduation to post graduation, belonging to rural and semi-urban background.

Ethical Consideration

Prior to conduction of research the signed consent was taken from participants. The participation in study was purely voluntary. Ethical approval for the study was taken from the Ethics Committee of Dev Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya, Haridwar (Ethics REF. DSVV/PSY/2023/01/001).

Data collection

Data was collected at the pre-sadhana and post-sadhana intervention of 40 days, using a printed booklet comprising demographic details, a consent form, and scales measuring Psychological Capital (PsyCap-24) (Luthans, Avolio, & Avey, 2007), as well as the Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21) (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). The research adhered to the ethical guidelines outlined in the Helsinki Declaration.

Gayatri Mantra Meditation: A Promising Approach for Enhancing Psychological Capital and Alleviating Psychological Distress

Measures Used

1. **Psychological Capital Scale:** was developed by (Luthans, Avolio, & Avey, 2007). It measures the dimensions of Efficacy, Hope, Resilience and Optimism on the Likert scale of 1 to 6. Where 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= somewhat disagree, 4= somewhat agree, 5= agree, 6= strongly agree. It has six questions in each dimension of Self efficacy, Optimism, Hope and Resilience. The reliability test of the scale in the present study was conducted in SPSS and the Cronbach alpha for each factor was found to be 0.73 for efficacy, 0.74 for Hope, 0.74 for resilience, 0.76 for optimism and 0.78 for the whole PsyCap scale.
2. **DASS-21:** scale was created initially by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995). The DASS-21 is a 21-item self-report questionnaire designed to measure the severity of various Depression and Anxiety-related symptoms. The DASS-21 is scored on a four-point Likert scale (0 = not applicable, 1 = somewhat applicable, 2 = significantly applicable, and 3 = very applicable). The DASS-21 has excellent Cronbach's alpha values for reliability of depression, anxiety and stress 0.84 and 0.74, 0.83 respectively. The DASS-21 was adapted for the Indian population by (Singh et al., 2013).

Data Analysis

Initially, normal distribution of the data on each scale was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests, revealing a non-normal distribution (all $p < 0.05$). Therefore, the nonparametric Wilcoxon signed-rank test was employed for data analysis as an alternative to the paired t-test, suitable for comparing paired data when normality assumptions are violated. The study then proceeded to examine the effects of 40 days of Gayatri mantra meditation (GMM) on psychological capital (efficacy, hope, resilience and optimism) and psychological distress (Stress, Anxiety, Depression) variables using the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, comparing baseline (pre) and post-intervention data. Additionally, Cohen's d was calculated to determine the effect size of the paired differences between baseline and post-intervention means. The results of this analysis are summarized in Table 1. Furthermore, correlation analysis was conducted using the Spearman correlation coefficient to explore the relationship between psychological capital and psychological distress factors both before and after 40 days of Gayatri mantra meditation intervention, as detailed in Table 2.

RESULTS

Table 1. Wilcoxon test for pre and post comparison of Gayatri mantra intervention

S.N.	Scales and factor	Pre-Intervention	Post-Intervention	Z-stats	p-value	Cohen's d
		Mean \pm SD	Mean \pm SD			
1	Efficacy	20.46 \pm 4.89	28.72 \pm 4.62	-7.898	0.000	1.73
2	Hope	20.54 \pm 5.05	29.54 \pm 4.13	-8.013	0.000	1.95
3	Resilience	19.21 \pm 4.64	27.93 \pm 4.80	-7.979	0.000	1.84
4	Optimism	18.33 \pm 4.12	26.51 \pm 4.11	-8.211	0.000	1.98
5	PsyCap	78.53 \pm 15.23	112.71 \pm 15.494	-8.260	0.000	2.22
6	Depression	12.26 \pm 5.65	7.81 \pm 5.74	- 4.607	0.000	0.781
7	Anxiety	12.40 \pm 5.57	6.13 \pm 4.64	-6.978	0.000	1.223
8	Stress	12.11 \pm 5.84	8.59 \pm 5.82	-5.628	0.000	0.603

Gayatri Mantra Meditation: A Promising Approach for Enhancing Psychological Capital and Alleviating Psychological Distress

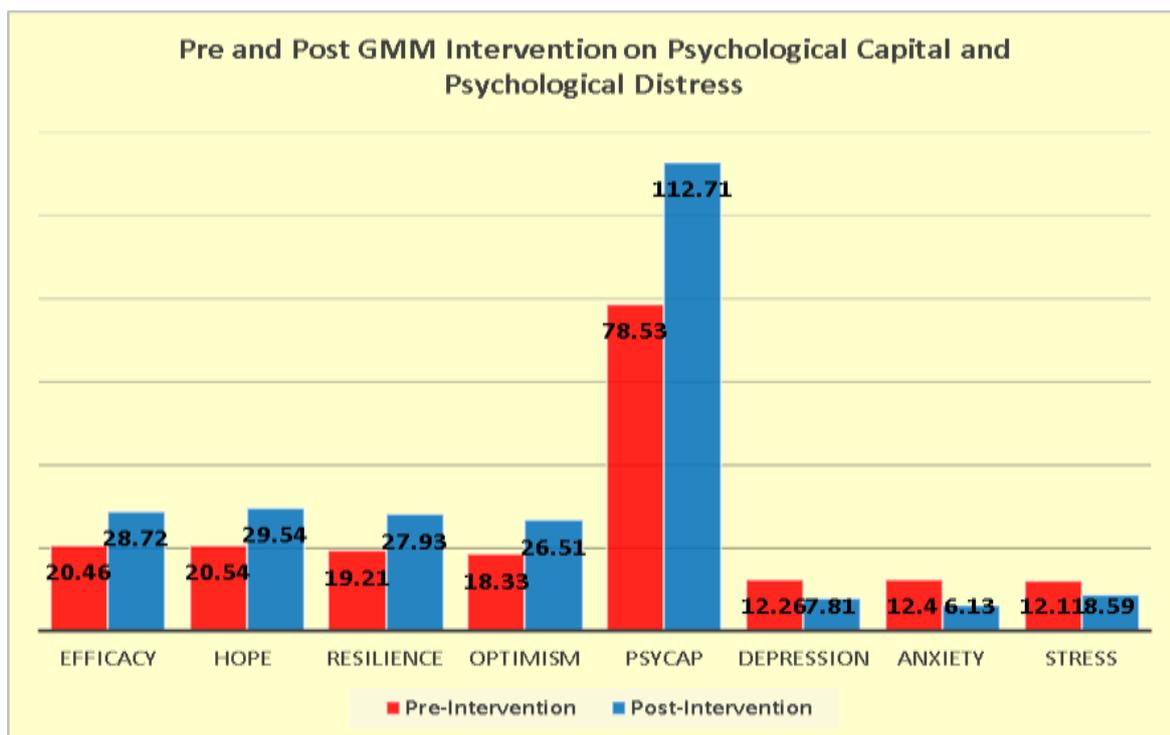


Figure 1. Showing the pre -post comparison of Gayatri mantra intervention on Psychological Capital and Psychological Distress parameters.

The result table 1 shows pre- and post-intervention comparison of psychological capital and psychological distress related measures. The Wilcoxon test results showed that there was a significant improvement in the scores of Efficacy ($z = -7.898, P = 0.000$), Hope ($z = -8.013, P = 0.000$), Resilience ($z = -7.979, P = 0.000$), Optimism ($z = -8.211, P = 0.000$) and overall PsyCap ($z = -8.260, P = 0.000$) and significant reduction in Depression ($z = -4.607, P = 0.000$), Anxiety ($z = -6.978, P = 0.000$), and Stress ($z = -5.628, P = 0.000$), all $p < 0.01$ after the intervention of 40 days of GMM. The changes from pre- to post intervention mean scores in psychological capital and psychological distress parameters are represented in the form of a bar graph in Fig. 1.

Correlation analysis

Further correlation analysis was conducted between parameters of Psychological Capital (efficacy, hope, resilience, optimism) and Psychological distress (depression, anxiety and stress) to examine how these variables were correlated at the beginning or pre-intervention and whether there is any change in their correlation after the 40 days intervention of Gayatri mantra meditation (GMM). The spearman correlation test has shown that there was negative correlation between the factors of PsyCap and the psychological distress, before the beginning of the intervention but was not significant ($p > 0.05$). However, after the 40 days of GMM intervention, a more negative correlation has been seen between factors of PsyCap and Psychological distress which was highly significant ($p < 0.05$). These findings show that with the practice of GMM, there is improvement in efficacy, hope, resilience, optimism (PsyCap) and at the same time there is reduction in stress, anxiety and depression (Psychological distress). The more negative correlation between these variables shows a more positive indicator of enhanced PsyCap and reduction of distress. The spearman correlation coefficient is shown in Table 2.

Gayatri Mantra Meditation: A Promising Approach for Enhancing Psychological Capital and Alleviating Psychological Distress

Table 2. Showing the pre- and post-intervention correlation between Psychological Capital and Psychological distress.

Phase 1. Pre-intervention spearman correlation coefficient between Psychological Capital and Psychological distress.			
Factors	Depression	Anxiety	Stress
Efficacy	-0.168	-0.168	0.059
<i>P- value</i>	0.092	0.093	0.559
Hope	-0.095	-0.038	0.107
<i>p-value</i>	0.347	0.705	0.286
Resilience	-0.092	-0.182	0.046
<i>p-value</i>	0.358	0.068	0.648
Optimism	-0.300	-0.230	0.055
<i>p-value</i>	0.002	0.021	0.585
Phase 2. Post-Intervention spearman correlation coefficient between Mindfulness and Psychological distress.			
Factors	Depression	Anxiety	Stress
Efficacy	-0.092	-0.136	-0.160
<i>p-value</i>	0.363	0.176	0.110
Hope	-0.030	-0.122	-0.215
<i>p-value</i>	0.768	0.222	0.031
Resilience	-0.208	-0.077	-0.302
<i>p-value</i>	0.037	0.445	0.002
Optimism	-0.225	-0.034	-0.347
<i>p-value</i>	0.024	0.733	0.000

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to investigate the efficiency of Gayatri Mantra Meditation (GMM) in enhancing Psychological Capital (PsyCap) and alleviating psychological distress among young adult participants. The findings of this study revealed that regular intervention of Gayatri Mantra meditation for 30 minutes per day has shown significant improvements in PsyCap components (hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism) and significant reductions in symptoms of psychological distress (stress, anxiety, depression) following the 40-day GMM intervention. Further correlation analysis has shown that there was a drastic increase in negative correlation between Psychological Capital and Psychological Distress factors, after the intervention of GMM which is a positive indicator of overall wellbeing achieved and positive mental resources enhanced by GMM practices among young adults.

These results suggest that GMM holds promise as a holistic intervention for promoting mental well-being and building positive psychological resources. Gayatri Mantra, an ancient Vedic hymn revered for its spiritual significance, holds profound significance in promoting mental well-being and relieving distress (Sharma and Soni, 2022). Rooted in Sanskrit, mantras are phrases repeated to quiet the mind, with the belief that sustained repetition leads to liberation from ignorance and the cycle of birth and death (Aacharya, 2000). The Gayatri mantra, deeply ingrained in Hindu culture, is believed to foster thinking skills, character development, and emotional control through repetition (Aacharya, 2003). While previous research has extensively examined the effects of modern meditation techniques, such as

Gayatri Mantra Meditation: A Promising Approach for Enhancing Psychological Capital and Alleviating Psychological Distress

mindfulness, on PsyCap, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding the impact of ancient practices like GMM on PsyCap development.

The observed improvements in PsyCap following GMM intervention align with previous research highlighting the positive effects of meditation on psychological health and well-being. PsyCap, characterized by attributes such as hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism, represents a crucial aspect of individuals' positive psychological state, facilitating adaptation and thriving in challenging circumstances. The significant enhancements in PsyCap components post-intervention indicate that regular practice of GMM may cultivate inner strength and resilience, thereby equipping individuals with the resources necessary to cope with stressors and challenges effectively.

Furthermore, the substantial reductions in symptoms of psychological distress, including stress, anxiety, and depression, following the GMM intervention underscore the potential of this ancient spiritual practice in promoting mental health and well-being. These findings are consistent with previous research demonstrating the beneficial effects of meditation on reducing psychological distress and improving emotional regulation. GMM may offer individuals a practical tool for managing and alleviating symptoms of psychological distress, thereby enhancing overall psychological well-being.

The correlation analysis revealed a negative correlation between PsyCap and psychological distress parameters both before and after the GMM intervention, with the correlation becoming more significant post-intervention. These findings suggest that the practice of GMM may enhance mindfulness and reduce psychological distress, leading to an overall improvement in well-being. The negative correlation between PsyCap and psychological distress underscores the importance of cultivating positive psychological resources in promoting mental health and resilience.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of this study highlight the transformative potential of Gayatri Mantra Meditation (GMM) in enhancing Psychological Capital (PsyCap) and alleviating psychological distress among young adults. Regular practice of GMM was associated with significant improvements in PsyCap components and substantial reductions in symptoms of psychological distress. These findings underscore the value of integrating ancient spiritual practices like GMM into contemporary well-being interventions, offering individuals a practical tool for fostering mental resilience and promoting overall psychological well-being. The study successfully filled the research gap by demonstrating the positive effects of GMM on PsyCap development and psychological distress reduction, thus contributing valuable insights to the field of positive psychology and mindfulness research.

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Gayatri Mantra Meditation: A Promising Approach for Enhancing Psychological Capital and Alleviating Psychological Distress

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Gayatri Mantra Meditation: A Promising Approach for Enhancing Psychological Capital and Alleviating Psychological Distress

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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