

A Contemporary Study of Philosophical Analysis on Mental Health

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ABSTRACT

Mental health is the most discussed topic in medical and psychological science in the present era because the most common disease affecting people in the world today is mental health related diseases, so a deep analysis of mental health is needed. But if this analysis is only based on science, the discussion remains incomplete, so there is a great need for its philosophical analysis and its reflection in real life. In this paper, we will explore mental health through Indian and Western philosophy, and try to find answers to what is meant by mental health? What does it mean to be mentally healthy? How is mental health possible to improve? The philosophical perspective of mental health examines that mental health is not only a matter of brain chemistry but also a matter of meaning, authenticity and social context. Based on data from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the National Mental Health Survey (NMHS) of India, the paper highlights the increasing global prevalence and its philosophical implications. The analysis argues for a holistic approach that unifies medical, social, and philosophical dimensions to promote human well-being. In contrast to Western dualism in the discussion of modern medicine and psychology, Indian philosophical thought emphasizes the integration of body, mind, and soul. Discussions of concepts such as citta (consciousness), mana (mind), triguna (sattva, rajas, tamas), and atma (self) provide a holistic framework for understanding mental well-being. Indian philosophical thought such as yoga, Vedanta, and Ayurveda provide practical approaches to developing mental balance and treating disorders. This article explores these philosophical foundations, their relevance to mental health, and their contribution to contemporary wellness practices.

Keywords: *Mental health, Indian philosophy, Western philosophy, Yoga, Ayurveda, Vedanta*

Mental health is not just a medical problem; it is a philosophical puzzle and a social challenge. We will explore how western and Indian philosophy have approached mental health and how these perspectives can influence our understanding of well-being. Mental health is one of the most important global challenges of the 21st century. The World Health Organization (2023) reported that more than 1 billion people worldwide suffer from mental disorders, of which depression and anxiety are the leading causes of disability. Modern psychiatry often approaches mental health through biological and psychological models, focusing on diagnosis and medication. However, Indian philosophy provides a holistic and spiritual foundation for mental health. Similarly, in western philosophy, various

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philosophical schools have discussed how mental health can be improved. The first thing that needs to be discussed is what is mental health? In this context, various philosophical schools say about mental health that mental health is included in our psychological and social well-being. It affects our thoughts, feelings and behavior. Mental health is crucial at every stage of life from childhood, adolescence, through adulthood and into old age helping to determine how we manage stress relate to others and make choices in all areas of life.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to both the American Psychiatric Association and the World Health Organization (WHO) stress related disorders must be able to be linked to a “traumatic or stressful event” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 265). That is, symptoms by themselves are not enough to classify such disorders. Such stressors can be common like divorce or socio-economic hardship. “With all disorders in this grouping, it is the nature, pattern, and duration of the symptoms that arise in response to the stressful events—together with associated functional impairment—that distinguishes the disorders” (World Health Organization, 2018, ch. 6). Some of the earliest research on psychological trauma in the 20th century revolved around military veterans. During World War I British officials recognized the term “shell-shock” to describe a condition they were observing in many servicemen. “Symptoms included fatigue, tremor, confusion, nightmares and impaired sight and hearing. It was often diagnosed when a soldier was unable to function and no obvious cause could be identified” (Jones, 2012). Charles Myers was eventually assigned a post where he was able to investigate shell-shocked soldiers. He believed that the problem these soldiers were having was primarily psychological and was manifesting with physical and psychological symptoms. His opinion was that the root cause of symptoms was repressed trauma. His treatment plan was to revive repressed memories so these memories could be retrieved and integrated. In addition, Abram Kardiner was an important figure in early trauma research. In 1948 he coauthored a book with Herbert Spiegel Kardiner, *War Stress and Neurotic Illness* where they “described a chronic traumatic war neurosis that involved preoccupation with the traumatic stressor, nightmares, irritability, increased startle responsiveness, a tendency to angry outbursts, and general impairment of functioning” (Friedman, Schnurr, & McDonagh-Coyle, 1994, p. 265). Earlier in 1941 Kardiner published *The Traumatic Neuroses of War* where he recounted his experience with World War I veterans. Summarizing Kardiner’s findings, van der Kolk writes, “Kardiner noted that sufferers from traumatic neuroses develop a chronic vigilance for and sensitivity to threat...[Kardiner argued that] posttraumatic stress isn’t ‘all in one’s head’” (2014, p. 11)

RESEARCH GAP

This study identifies a conceptual gap in defining mental health philosophically beyond biomedical classifications like the diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders. While evaluate such as Plato and Martin Heidegger explored mind, anxiety and well-being their modality remain insufficiently integrated into recent mental health.

ANALYSIS OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT ON MENTAL HEALTH

In Indian tradition, mental health is not separate from physical health or spiritual development. Instead, mental health is seen as a state of balance between the mind (mana), consciousness (chitta) and the self (atma). Mental suffering is seen as the result of ignorance, attachment and imbalance, whereas the development or improvement of mental interests is associated with self-realization, ethical living and harmony with the universe.

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While psychiatry and psychology attempt to define and treat mental illness, they often ignore deeper questions: What does it mean to be mentally healthy? Is mental illness purely biological, or does it involve meanings, values and social contexts? Indian philosophy attempts to find answers to these questions, viewing mental health not simply as the absence of disease, but as a state of balance, harmony and integration of body, mind and soul. Different branches of Indian thought have looked at mental health from their own perspectives, yet all emphasize self-realization, ethical living, and inner peace as central to well-being.

Yoga Philosophy

In Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, mental health is described as *citta-vrtti-nirodha* - the cessation of fluctuations in consciousness and the stabilization of the mind. Yoga provides eight paths (*ashtanga yoga*) for disciplining the mind, controlling emotions, and achieving mental stability.

Yoga as *citta-vrtti-nirodha* Patanjali defines yoga as "the cessation of fluctuations in the mind" (Yoga Sutras 1.2). By calming the mind, the individual achieves mental clarity and peace.

Ashtanga Yoga (Eight Limbs)

Each limb contributes to mental well-being:

1. **Yama** (moral discipline) - promotes social harmony.
2. **Niyama** (Self-discipline) - Increases personal purity.
3. **Asana** (Position) - Strengthens the body-mind connection.
4. **Pranayama** (Breath control) - Controls emotions and reduces anxiety.
5. **Vathara** (Withdrawal of the senses) - Reduces distractions.
6. **Dharana** (Concentration) - Improves concentration.
7. **Dhyana** (Meditation) Practices such as asana, pranayama, meditation and samadhi are seen as therapeutic tools to reduce anxiety, stress and restlessness.

Vedanta and Upanishad Thoughts

In Vedanta philosophy, mental suffering is compared to *avidya* (ignorance) and temporary body-mind entanglements and it is said that the elimination of this *avidya* called *Maya* through self-realization leads to an encounter with Brahman, a state of mental stability where only mental peace prevails. Nothing else. Realizing one's true self (*atma*) and achieving unity of one's soul (*jivatma*) with Brahman (*Paratma*) removes mental pain and fear and leads to liberation from the soul or mind. Therefore, mental health is associated with self-knowledge and the transcendence of ego.

Ayurveda

Ayurveda, the Indian system of medicine, explicitly addresses mental health through the concept of *sattvavyajaya* medicine (psychiatry). It explains mental states in terms of the three *gunas* (*sattva*, *rajas*, *tamas*) and the three *doshas* (*vata*, *pitta*, *kapha*). Mental health is

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achieved by cultivating sattva (clarity, harmony) and balancing the doshas through diet, lifestyle, herbs and meditation.

Bhagavad Gita and Ethics

The Gita teaches mental balance (samatvam) as a characteristic of a healthy mind. The Bhagavad Gita talks about the way to get rid of mental suffering through the observance of ethics and through the practice of non-attached actions. Where it is said that if a living being does an action that does not produce results, then the living being is also free from the pain or mental suffering that the tongue experiences for enjoying that result. The Gita emphasizes non-attached actions (action without attachment) and stable knowledge (steady knowledge) as the path to mental stability. Mental balance, detachment and devotion are seen as essential for mental well-being.

Buddhist and Jain perspectives

Buddhism, which is closely related to Indian thought, defines mental health as freedom from suffering (dukkha) through mindfulness, meditation and ethical behavior. Buddhist philosophy talks about the four noble truths, which discuss how spiritual liberation or liberation from suffering is possible. Buddhist philosophy has mentioned eight paths as the path to spiritual liberation from suffering, which are collectively called the Ashtangika Marga. By following this Ashtangika Marga, the living entity attains liberation from suffering and is free from mental suffering.

Jain philosophy has mentioned choosing the path of non-violence to attain mental peace. It is said that one should strictly observe the vow of non-violence and strictly practice self-discipline through the observance of the Panchasila Vrata, which will improve mental health and also provide relief from various human sufferings.

Now we must first examine how Indian philosophy conceptualizes the mind.

Manas and Chitta

Manas often translated as "mind", it is the faculty of perception, emotion, and will. It processes sensory information and creates desires.

Chitta refers to consciousness and mental impressions. It is the memory and experience.

Relevance to modern mental health

Some current studies have shown that yoga and meditation reduce stress, anxiety, and depression. For example, research published in the journal *Frontiers in Psychiatry* (2020) confirms that yoga improves mental control and brain function. Therefore, yoga is both a philosophical and therapeutic system for mental health.

Mental Health in Vedanta

Vedanta, the philosophical outgrowth of the Upanishads, provides a metaphysical perspective on mental health. Vedanta teaches that most of human suffering comes from Maya (illusion) - mistaking the temporary for the permanent. In fact, through ignorance, we believe that this world is real. Which is not true at all, everything in this world is bound by Maya. Maya has two types of power, covering and distraction, through these two types of power, Maya does not let the truth be known, but if a living being can cut through this Maya, then he realizes

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with the truth that both Brahman and Atma are one, that is, the soul and the Supreme Soul are actually one, then the living being attains mental peace. Anxiety and depression overcome attachment to temporary objects and the mind emerges towards ultimate peace. Jnana Yoga (the path of knowledge) by differentiating between the real (soul) and the unreal (body mind), a person overcomes mental instability. This self-inquiry (who am I?) is a powerful method for overcoming existential anxiety.

Devotion and Mental Health

Devotion (bhakti) to a higher reality provides mental security and love, reduces loneliness and fear. Modern research on spirituality and mental health confirms that devotion and prayer improve mental well-being. Thus, Vedanta presents mental health as liberation from ignorance and realization of one's true nature. Mental Health in Ayurveda Ayurveda, the traditional medical system of India, explicitly addresses mental health under the Satvahana system (psychiatry).

Doshas and Mental Health

- Vata imbalance: anxiety, fear, insomnia.
- Pitta imbalance: anger, resentment, aggression.
- Kapha imbalance: depression, laziness, addiction.

Mental health requires balancing the doshas through diet, lifestyle, and herbs. Sattvabhaya treatment **mental therapy** includes:

Jnana (knowledge) understanding reality.

Vigyan (viyāsamyā) making wise choices.

Dhriti (willpower) developing mental strength.

Smriti (memory) remembering positive experiences.

Samadhi (Ekasadhana) Calming the mind.

Ayurvedic practices for mental health

- Herbs like Brahmi, Ashwagandha and Shankhapushpi to calm the nerves.
- Meditation, yoga and pranayama for mental clarity.
- Dinacharya (daily routine) for stability.

| Aspect | Philosophy | Modern psychology |
|--------------|--|--|
| View of mind | Integrated with body and spirit | Often separated from body, viewed biologically |
| Goal | Liberation(moksha)and mental balance | Symptom relief and functional improvement |
| Methods | Yoga, meditation, self-inquiry, ethics | Psychotherapy, meditation, cbt |
| Approach | Holistic, spiritual | Scientific, clinical |

Indian philosophy views mental health as a holistic state of being, where the mind is calm, the body is balanced, and the self is aligned with higher consciousness. Unlike modern

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psychology, which often focuses on symptom relief, Indian thought emphasizes self-realization, ethical living, and spiritual harmony as the ultimate foundations of mental health.

ANALYSIS OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT ON MENTAL HEALTH

Western philosophy has a long history of examining mental health through metaphysics, ethics, epistemology, and philosophy of mind. Let's start with the ancient Greeks.

Ancient Greek Philosophy

Plato (427–347 BCE) talked about dualism soul (rational) vs. body (irrational). Mental health, for him, meant harmony between the rational soul and appetitive desires. In Republic (Book IV), he says justice in the soul (reason ruling over spirit and appetite) mirrors a healthy psyche.

Aristotle (384–322 BCE) focused on eudaimonia flourishing through virtue (arete). Mental health, for Aristotle, meant living in accordance with reason and fulfilling one's telos (purpose). In Nicomachean Ethics, he talks about moderation (golden mean) to prevent extremes of passion (e.g., excess fear → anxiety).

Stoicism Stoics like Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, and Seneca talked about apatheia — freedom from destructive emotions through rational control. Mental health, for them, meant aligning judgments with nature, accepting what's beyond control. Marcus Aurelius, in Meditations, practices self-examination to curb anxiety and grief.

Existentialism & Phenomenology

Kierkegaard (1813–1855) saw anxiety (Angst) as a response to freedom and possibility. Mental distress, for him, comes from avoiding authentic choices.

Heidegger (1889–1976) talked about Dasein (being-in-the-world) — mental health tied to authentic engagement with existence. Anxiety reveals our finitude; fleeing it leads to inauthenticity and mental breakdown.

Sartre (1905–1980) said bad faith (self-deception) causes existential guilt and neurosis. Freedom and responsibility are sources of both health and distress. Jaspers (1883–1969), in phenomenological psychiatry, emphasized understanding subjective experience of illness (delusions, hallucinations) as meaningful structures.

Social Constructionism & Critical Theory

Foucault (1926–1984), in *Madness and Civilization*, said mental illness is a product of power structures and societal norms. Institutions (asylums) created to control deviance, shaping the definition of “mental health.” Szasz (1920–2012), in *The Myth of Mental Illness*, said psychiatric diagnoses are social labels, not diseases. He critiques medicalization of behavior (e.g., ADHD, depression).

PHILOSOPHY OF MIND

René Descartes on Mental Health

René Descartes (1596–1650), a key figure in Western philosophy, approached mental health indirectly through his dualism and philosophy of mind. He talked about dualism — mind (res cogitans) separate from body (res extensa). Mental health problem: interaction between

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immaterial mind and material brain. Descartes described emotions as perceptions of bodily changes that affect the soul. He suggested that reason and willpower can regulate passions, leading to mental stability. For an example, understanding the cause of fear or anxiety can reduce its intensity.

Spinoza on Mental Health

Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), a Dutch philosopher, approached mental health through his ethics and philosophy of mind, emphasizing reason, emotions, and human nature.

1. Conatus and Mental Well-being- Spinoza's concept of conatus (striving to preserve and enhance one's being) is central to mental health. Mental health means aligning one's thoughts and actions with this striving, increasing power and understanding.

2. Emotions (Affects) and Reason- Spinoza classified emotions as passive (affects) or active (actions).

Passive emotions (like fear, hatred, jealousy) arise from inadequate ideas and external causes, leading to mental disturbance.

Active emotions (like joy, love, understanding) come from adequate ideas and increase mental strength.

Mental health involves transforming passive emotions into active ones through reason and understanding. Spinoza views mental health as a state of rational self-understanding, emotional mastery, and alignment with one's nature (conatus). By transforming passive emotions into active ones and gaining adequate knowledge, one achieves mental well-being and freedom.

John Locke on Mental Health

Locke's philosophy suggests that mental health is shaped by experience, reason and environment. By understanding how ideas form and associate and by cultivating reason and reflection, individuals can improve their mental well-being.

David Hume on Mental Health

Hume's philosophy suggests mental health is about balancing emotions and reason, managing associations of ideas, embracing skepticism, and nurturing social empathy. Mental well-being comes from understanding human nature as driven by passions and learning to navigate them wisely.

Emmanuel Kant on Mental Health

Kant's philosophy links mental health to rational autonomy, self-respect, and moral duty. Mental well-being enables individuals to act according to reason and fulfill their ethical responsibilities, making mental health a foundation for moral agency.

Ethics and Mental Health

Ethics asks how should society treat people with mental illness? Autonomy vs. paternalism should patients always have the right to refuse treatment, even if they're at risk? Stigma's a big issue. People with mental illness face discrimination in jobs, education, family life. That's

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about recognition justice (Honneth). Care ethics (Joan Tronto) says mental health care should be relational, compassionate, context-sensitive.

Philosophy says mental health isn't just fixing symptoms. It's about understanding self, accepting reality, creating meaning, and living ethically. Coping means aligning mind, body and action with these principles.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Let's compare Western and Indian Philosophy on Mental Health

| ASPECT | WESTERN PHILOSOPHY | INDIAN PHILOSOPHY |
|--------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| Goal | Symptom relief, Autonomy, Flourishing | Balance (Sattva), self realization (Moksha) |
| Method | Therapy, Medication, Ethics of care | Yoga, Meditation, Ayurveda, Ethical Conduct |
| Key Concepts | Reason, Freedom, Power | Chitta-vritti-nirodha, Trigunas, Atman-Brahm |
| View Of Mind | Dualist (Mind-Body) or functional | Integrated (Mind-Body-Spirit) |

COPING WITH MENTAL HEALTH PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES

Indian Philosophy

Yoga (Patanjali): Calm mind fluctuations (chitta-vritti-nirodha).

Practice: Asanas, pranayama, meditation, ethical discipline (Yamas/Niyama's).

Vedanta: Realize true self (Atman) beyond ego.

Practice: Self-inquiry, detachment from transient thoughts, contemplation.

Ayurveda: Balance mind-body through sattva and doshas.

Practice: Diet, routine, herbs, meditation, lifestyle alignment.

Bhagavad Gita: Cultivate equanimity (samatvam).

Practice: Nishkama karma (action without attachment), steady wisdom.

Buddhism: Mindfulness and compassion.

Practice: Meditation, ethical living, observing impermanence.

Western Philosophy

Stoicism: Accept what's beyond control. Focus on rational response to emotions.

Practice: Daily reflection, journaling, reframing challenges as opportunities for growth.

Existentialism: Embrace freedom and create meaning.

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Practice: Acknowledge anxiety, make authentic choices, engage in purposeful actions.

Phenomenology: Understand lived experience.

Practice: Mindful observation of thoughts, empathy for self and others.

Social Critique (Foucault, Szasz): Recognize how society labels “mental illness.”

Practice: Question stigma, seek supportive communities, advocate for humane treatment.

Integrated Approach

Mind: Reflect, journal, meditate.

Body: Exercise, breathwork, diet.

Spirit: Seek meaning, purpose, connection.

Society: Build supportive networks, challenge stigma, practice compassion.

CONCLUSION

Mental health is a complex, multidimensional issue. Western philosophy brings critical analysis of power, meaning, and individuality, while Indian philosophy offers practical tools for balance and self-transcendence. Integrating these perspectives can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of mental health — one that addresses not just symptoms, but also meaning, ethics, and spiritual well-being.

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