Letter to Editor

Suicide and its Prevention - Ayurvedic Approach

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According to the World Health Organization, almost eight million people in the world lost their life by suicide, every year. Suicide prevention is the most complex and highly debated issue in contemporary mental health scenario and was the topic of discussion for this year’s Mental Health Day. The current statistics points to a global mortality rate of 16/lakh, or one death every 40 seconds and one attempt every 3 seconds, on an average. India also had the third-highest female suicide rate (14.7) in the world. As per WHO suicide rates, India ranks 43rd in descending order with a rate of 10.6/lakh reported in 2009.

Misconcepts regarding suicide

Some of the prevailing common notions in the society have a significant impact in this issue. Common misconception about suicide is that, the people talking about suicide won’t perform it. In fact, large percent of people who converse about suicide accomplish their threats. Another misconception is that nobody can bring to a halt or help a person who really wants to die. The truth is that most people thinking of suicide are ambivalent about their decision. Some believe that one should not discuss about suicide as it will push them over the edge. On the contrary, they might be relieved and may change their decision, if anybody happens to talk to them, in an appropriate manner.

Causes/risk factors

There may be combination of various factors to augment a person’s risk of suicide. Mental illnesses such as depression, bipolar affective disorder, schizophrenia, borderline-antisocial personality disorders, anxiety disorders and substance abuse disorders are the major risk factors for suicide. Pain associated with serious or chronic health conditions, or being diagnosed with incurable diseases such as cancer, AIDS etc., are also significant risk factors. Interpersonal conflicts and domestic violence also pose noteworthy risk. Studies reports that divorced and hence single are more likely to commit suicide. Acute life events such as death of the near ones, loss of job, bankruptcy, and love failure may also lead people to think in a similar manner. The underlying psychological factors are poor problem-solving skills, extremely negative self-image, cognitive rigidity (thinking all or nothing), aggression and impulsivity. Factors that make a person vulnerable include the male sex, old age, family history of suicide and preceding attempts of suicide. Male suicide attempts are more lethal because they use more fatal methods when compared to women. Some of the studies state that marital status lessens the risk of suicide.

Warning signs

There might be obvious changes in talk, behaviour and mood in a person who is destined to commit suicide. They may make direct statements like ‘I will end my life’, ‘I can’t go on’ etc. or may make indirect talks such that he is a burden to others or there is no reason to live further. Behavioral signs such as acting recklessly, isolating from

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The prime and foremost rationale of every human being is to live a comfortable as well as happy life. The quest for knowledge leads them to exploit unending possibilities in the world of science with great vigour and enthusiasm. He makes use of these achievements to lead a life of physical, mental and social perfection. Nevertheless, we can observe the significant impacts of the various circumstances, in the quality of life of people at different walks of life. Nowadays, the physical and mental health issues are being dealt with utmost care throughout the world. But in developing countries such as India, desirable activities in the field of mental health are still compassionate.

As per Ayurveda, there are three basic pursuits of life for every individual which moves the life forward. The first and foremost among these is the desire to live (Praanaishana). Long life without physical and mental illness is the ultimate desirable. Physical body is inevitable for achieving purusharthas such as dharma, artha, kaama and moksha. The famous quote “Sareeram aadyam khalu dharma sadhanam” emphasises the importance of maintenance of our health and moksha. The famous quote “Sareeram aadyam khalu dharma moksha” emphasises the importance of maintenance of our health and moksha. The famous quote “Sareeram aadyam khalu dharma moksha” emphasises the importance of maintenance of our health and moksha.

A mentally healthy person realises his or her own abilities, can cope with normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make creative contribution to his or her community. When mental health grievances are not adequately addressed, the individuals face a hard time coping with the adverse circumstances and solving the problems. Most of the time, many of the individuals think about suicide, as one of the possible solutions.

Once a thought of suicide occurs in the mind of a person and becomes compulsive, he acts contrary to the knowledge which he acquired, socially or even religiously. When we scrutinize the history of suicide, social milieu of each era is particularly important. A slavery-based suicide gives such example. When an individual is deprived of liberty and subjected to physical and psychological violence, he is compelled to give up the desire for a quiet life. We can get rid of such liberty and subjected to physical and psychological violence, he is compelled suicide gives such example. When an individual is deprived of liberty and subjected to physical and psychological violence, he is compelled to give up the desire for a quiet life. We can get rid of such liberty and subjected to physical and psychological violence, he is compelled to give up the desire for a quiet life. We can get rid of such liberty and subjected to physical and psychological violence, he is compelled to give up the desire for a quiet life.

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family and friends, sleeping too much or too little and giving away his own possessions may be shown. Changes in the mood include depression, irritability, anxiety and even fear.

**Prevention & management**

Ayurveda is a qualitative and comprehensive science on health and longevity, a system that heals a person's body and mind. As suicide is a psychiatric emergency, much attention is to be paid to the diagnosis and treatment of the underlying mental illness. In most of the suicides, a diagnosed or hidden mental disease can be the reason which leads to the suicide among which the most important being depression.

The doshas in relation with the body and mind plays an imperative role in maintaining the dynamic balance in the healthy individual. The status of manodoshas, the satwa, rajas as well as tamas should be assessed while dealing a person with suicidal thought and ideation. A person can't be suicidal due to the mere presence of tamas which is one among the doshas of the mind. It is also unlikely that someone would think about the suicide without the involvement of the dosha, rajas. Some patients are reported to commit suicide being recovered from severe depression. Diminished tamas and increased in rajas in moderate depression can be attributed to the same. So balancing the doshas of the mind is having utmost importance in this regard.

Persons with reduced mental strength (heena satwa) are established to have much more suicidal ideations. Uplifting the satwa over the rajas and tamas is aimed through satvavajaya chikitsa mentioned in Ayurveda, which enables the individuals to boost their psychological threshold and face the adverse life situations with ease.

Prajnaparadha (Intellectual blasphemy) results when the mind and its actions are not going in a controlled manner and becomes the cause for all kinds of psychological diseases. The remedy mentioned is Satvavajaya which is nothing other than manonigraha or controlling the mind by using several techniques from ahita artha or harmful areas or things. It can be achieved by intervening in the functioning of the mind by regulating the thought process(cintyam), replacing the ideas (vicaryam), channeling the presumptions (uyham), polishing the objectives (dhreyam) and by proper guidance and advice (sankalpam), which are the basic steps we adopt in recently established Cognitive behavioral therapy.

Various psychotherapeutic modalities mentioned as satvavajaya cikitsa in Ayurveda can be effectively used in dealing with a case of suicide. The key for prevention is to listen and talk to them in an open manner. It is crucial to avoid talking with prejudice to anyone in distress. When dealing with suicide-related issues, it is very essential to understand what all things to be avoided. Care should be taken not to use personal ethics in this matter. The approach includes suggestions for troubleshooting, awareness for the family members, community awareness and counseling which include physical and mental support.

There is a considerable imbalance of emotions in any case of suicide. Emotions have their own proper physical expression and when expressed constructively, can be an antidote to many diseases of the body as well as the mind. The basic emotions of the mind are kama (desire), krodha (anger), lobha (greed), moha (confusion), mada (intoxication) and matsarya (competition). By controlling and surpassing the fundamental mental drives raga and dvesa, so many psychic ailments could be healed at its best.

The great ayurveda scholar vagbhata has mentioned exact awareness of dhi dhairya and atma as the best remedy for mano dosa viz. rajas and tamas. Dhee is the sense of discrimination between right and wrong and leads an individual to high-quality actions. Driti refers to the stability of mind. It is the ability to adhere to good or to avoid bad and to withstand difficulties with strong power. The knowledge of self in a very preliminary level is the knowledge of atma. It is actually the knowledge of our self in relation to our native, our society, the climatic conditions, etc., and also knowing the capabilities as well as the weakness.

The ultimate goal of any therapy in Ayurveda is to bring back the equilibrium of doshas, both of the body as well as the mind. Sodhana therapies such as vamana, virechana, nasya etc are to be administered as per the condition, have been found to be effective in conditions including depression. Judicious administration of various ghrita preparation such as pancagavya grita, mahat pancaghavya grita and kalyanaka grita have been found to be effective in reducing the suicidal ideations, associated with depression. Other procedures like anjana (collyrium), doopana (fumigation) are also effective in correcting the abnormalities in the thought to a better extend. Study has also proved the effect of vilwadigulika in the form of nasya in mild to moderate depression.

The physician has to identify and understand the problem and create an atmosphere for expressing and finally should facilitate the patient to emerge of the issue and live with a positive attitude. Sadvritta and Achara rasayana mentioned in Ayurveda including the absolute code of conduct, to be practiced for living a elongated life which is of mentally and physically healthy. It is mentioned that one with good intellect or buddhi, can put effort to discriminate between good and bad and to involve in hita or good and not to involve in ahiha. Calming rajas and developing satva helps the person to transform his self-motivated action in to selfless service and thus contributing to the mankind in an enormous manner.