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Evaluation of an Ayurveda-Based Residential Stress Management Intervention Among Professionals in Nepal

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Abstract

Stress has emerged as a significant health concern in modern professional environments, especially among executives, where high workloads, long hours, and critical decision-making are common stress is associated with a range of psychosomatic disorders and decreased workplace productivity. Traditional systems like Ayurveda offer time-tested, holistic interventions for managing stress by promoting physical, mental, and emotional balance. This study explores a two-day residential stress management program for executives organized by the National Ayurveda Research and Training Center (NARTC) in Kirtipur, Nepal, tailored specifically for professionals from Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Government of Nepal. The program employed an integrative approach combining Ayurveda, Yoga, meditation, Panchakarma therapies, and lifestyle counseling. The article provides detailed insights into the program's objectives, methodology, implementation, and outcomes, highlighting its potential as a replicable model for managing stress through holistic health practices.

Keywords : Ayurveda, Holistic health, Occupational stress, Integrative healthcare

INTRODUCTION

Stress, a natural physiological response¹, becomes detrimental when chronic, leading to severe physical and emotional health

issues². Stress is a non-specific response of the body to a demand³. In today's fast-paced global economy, occupational stress is recognized as a

pervasive challenge, particularly among professionals in leadership and decision-making roles⁴. Executives often face intense mental pressure due to multitasking, performance demands, workplace politics, and lack of time for self-care.⁵ Chronic stress among executives has been linked to sleep disturbances, anxiety, burnout, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases⁶, and weakened immunity. World Health Organization (WHO) indicates increasing prevalence of stress and mental disorder⁷. Stress negatively affects workplace productivity, with chronic stress leading to reduced job performance⁸. The managerial stress effects on the performance of the organization, as well as on the health of their executives⁹. A study found that 26.59 percent of Executive officers were bearing with high stress and there was significant difference in occupational stress among executive officers working in different organizations in Nepal¹⁰. Despite increasing awareness, many workplace stress management solutions¹¹ remain limited to lacking personalization, and sustainability. Executives, often under immense pressure to meet deadlines¹² and manage diverse responsibilities, are particularly vulnerable.

Ayurveda, the ancient science of life¹³, offers a comprehensive understanding of stress and its management¹⁴ through the balance of Sharira (body), *Manas* (mind), *Satwa Guna* (truthfulness preoperty) and *Atma* (consciousness)¹⁵. It attributes stress-related disorders to an imbalance in the three *Doshas*, *Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*¹⁶ and promotes personalized regimens¹⁷ based on *Prakriti* (constitution), *Dinacharya* (daily routine), *Ritucharya* (seasonal adaptation), *Sattvic* diet, and therapeutic interventions like *Panchakarma* and *Rasayana* therapy¹⁸. *Ayurveda* integrates *Yoga*¹⁹, *Pranayama*, and meditation as part of mental health²⁰. The National *Ayurveda* Research and Training

Center (NARTC), under the Ministry of Health and Population, Government of Nepal, is a premier institute promoting *Ayurveda* research and training²¹. In response to rising stress levels among government officials, NARTC designed and implemented a two-day residential training titled "Residential Stress Management Program for Executives". This program aligns with its mission to integrate traditional healthcare practices into modern health systems, offering evidence-based solutions to contemporary challenges. This study assesses the implementation, experiences, and outcomes of this initiative, aiming to evaluate the effectiveness of *Ayurveda* based approaches in managing occupational stress.

METHODOLOGY

This case study employed a qualitative, observational design to explore the effect of residential stress management program based on *Ayurveda*, conducted by the National *Ayurveda* Research and Training Center (NARTC), Kirtipur, Nepal in September 2018. The focus was on understanding the effectiveness of an integrative, experiential training model designed specifically for high level government executives experiencing occupational stress. The program was held at the NARTC in Kirtipur, which provides access to *Ayurveda* services, *Panchakarma* facilities, training infrastructure, *Yoga* halls, and gardens, making it an ideal location for immersive learning and healing. The two-day training was residential, with participants staying on-site to minimize distractions¹⁶ and fully engage in the *Ayurveda* lifestyle and therapies. This residential format was crucial to the program's intent to offer a total lifestyle transformation experience, rather than just theoretical understanding of stress management. Participants included senior-level government executives and officers primarily from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology

(MOEST). Three cohorts of 8 participants in each participated sequentially over a period of scheduled sessions. All participants had full-time executive roles with considerable administrative, planning, and managerial responsibilities making them a representative sample of a high-stress professional demographic. Verbal consent was obtained for participation and the use of anonymized feedback for publication.

Qualitative data were collected through session group reflections and discussions, written feedback were taken at the end of program focusing on learning outcomes and suggestions for improvement or replication. Participant reflections were analyzed thematically to identify recurring insights, behavioral changes, and subjective improvements. No quantitative physiological measures (such as cortisol levels) were included due to logistical constraints, but rich narrative data formed the foundation of the case analysis. The training followed standard ethical practices in professional education programs. Data was anonymized for reporting, with confidentiality maintained.

Training Program Design

The training combined theoretical sessions, practical workshops, and group activities. Participants engaged in Yoga, meditation, Ayurveda-based *Panchakarma* therapies, and discussions on lifestyle modifications. The program design emphasized experiential learning to ensure practical application. The two-day residential training comprised following interactive and practical sessions.

Key Sessions:

1. **Course orientation & overview:** Introduction to the training objectives, and significance of *Ayurveda* in stress

management.

2. **Introduction to stress and *Ayurveda*:** Participants learned about the physiological and psychological impacts of stress and the foundational principles of *Ayurveda*.
3. ***Yoga and Pranayama*:** These sessions focused on physical postures and breathing techniques to alleviate stress. (e.g., *Nadi Shodhana*, *Anulom Vilom*)
4. **Meditation:** The meditation sessions highlighted various techniques and their benefits. Emphasis on breath awareness, chakra meditation.
5. ***Panchakarma*:** In this session participants received *Abhyanga* (therapeutic massage) and *Swedana* (herbal steam therapy).
6. **Lifestyle modifications:** Discussions on *Dinacharya* (daily regimen) and *Ritucharya* (seasonal regimen) emphasized the importance of routine and harmony with nature. Discussions on avoidance of stress-inducing habits (e.g., irregular sleep, excessive screen time, stimulants).
7. **Diet and nutrition:** The session provided insights into *Ayurveda's* dietary guidelines for stress prevention and overall health. Discussed *Aharaas* medicine, *Satvika* diet, meal timing, digestion enhancing spices, and *Rasayana* foods for mental rejuvenation.

The objectives of the residential stress management program aimed to enhance understanding of negative impact stress and introduce participants to *Ayurveda* and *Yoga* as effective tools for sustainable stress management. Provide practical experience with residential, lifestyle-based stress management techniques and promote self-care practices and healthy work-life integration.

Participant Reflections

Participants consistently expressed deep gratitude for the structure, content, and environment provided during the training. During the final group sharing and in written feedback forms, participants emphasized how the residential setting allowed them to engage meaningfully with the program without distractions. A common sentiment among participants was that the training offered a much-needed pause from their hectic schedules and gave them the tools to handle stress more consciously and holistically. Participants reported a shift in their perspective toward stress, recognizing it not as an unavoidable consequence of high responsibility, but as a condition that can be actively managed through daily discipline, lifestyle regulation, and inner awareness. Participants described a sense of “mental clarity” and “emotional grounding” following the integrated exposure to *Yoga*, meditation and *Panchakarma* therapies. In terms of behavioral outcomes, a majority of participants expressed a strong intention to incorporate *Ayurveda* principles into their daily lives. Some specific commitments shared during the concluding session included:

- Waking up earlier and adopting elements of *Dinacharya* (daily routine), such as oil self-massage (*Abhyanga*) and tongue scraping.
- Practicing *Pranayama* and meditation each morning or during work breaks to reset mental focus.
- Introducing dietary changes such as warm, freshly cooked meals, reduced intake of processed foods, and increased consumption of digestion-enhancing herbs.
- Taking short, mindful pauses throughout the workday to check in with breath and body awareness.

- Some participants also expressed the desire to advocate for similar programs within their departments or institutions.

RESULTS

The program successfully achieved its stated objectives, as evidenced by feedback assessments gathered during and after the training. 85% participants reported a significantly enhanced awareness of the multifaceted nature of stress, including its physiological, psychological, and behavioral dimensions. Through theoretical sessions complemented by practical learning, executives gained a deeper understanding of stress management strategies rooted in *Ayurveda* principles and Yogic practices. The practical sessions, particularly those involving *Yoga*, meditation, and *Panchakarma* therapies, were instrumental in helping participants internalize the techniques and experience their immediate calming and rejuvenating effects. 80% participants expressed that the *Yoga* and *Pranayama* sessions improved flexibility, respiratory efficiency, and mind-body coordination, while the meditation sessions provided profound mental stillness and emotional balance. *Panchakarma* therapies, such as *Abhyanga* (therapeutic oil massage) and *Swedana* (Sudaion), induced a deep sense of physical relaxation and tranquility that 90% participants had never experienced before.

Participants were fully immersed in rhythm of *Ayurveda* living, which included early rising, scheduled meals, nature exposure, minimal digital engagement, and uninterrupted time for self-care practices. This immersive format allowed them to directly experience the benefits of a *Sattvic* lifestyle, rather than just learning about it theoretically. 85% participants expressed that this sense of detachment from the high-pressure environment enabled them to reconnect with themselves

mentally, emotionally, and spiritually and foster a renewed sense of purpose and calm. Participants also described these therapies help them facilitating not only relief from accumulated stress but also deeper sleep and enhanced mental clarity. Participants could observe real-time changes in their mental and physical state, which not only validated the effectiveness of the interventions but also motivated them to adopt and continue these practices post-training. Participants reported a notable decrease in muscle tension, headaches, and fatigue, along with improved concentration and reduced mental chatter. These changes were most evident following the combined effect of physical *Asana*, oil therapies, and breathing practices. The concept of *Dinacharya* (daily routine) and *Ritucharya* (seasonal regimen) provided them with a structured framework for self-care and the importance of setting personal boundaries, practicing self-regulation, and aligning professional responsibilities with personal well-being. Executives learned to incorporate brief *Yoga* breaks, breathing exercises during work hours, and periodic digital disengagement as strategies to manage workplace pressures without compromising performance.

DISCUSSION

The residential format of the program emerged as a pivotal element contributing to its overall effectiveness and transformative impact on participants. Unlike conventional, short duration workshops or fragmented online modules, the residential setting offered a controlled, distraction-free environment that allowed professionals to step away from the demands and pressures of their daily professional lives. Participants could detach from their habitual stress triggers emails, meetings, noise, and multitasking and instead focus on self-

awareness and healing. This physical and psychological separation from the routine workplace stressors created a therapeutic retreat like atmosphere, conducive to deep engagement, self-reflection, and holistic learning. Importantly, the program addressed the intersection between traditional healing systems and modern professional health needs. Executives are typically skeptical of interventions that lack evidence or appear unstructured. However, by strategically integrating Ayurveda principles with practical stress management tools tailored to executive lifestyles, the training provided a scientifically grounded, culturally relevant, and accessible model of holistic wellness. Tools like breath awareness for emotional regulation, dietary adjustments for digestion and clarity, and personalized daily routines were presented not just as ancient practices, but as rational, preventive health strategies compatible with high-demand modern professions.

This observation aligns with previous findings of *Ayurveda* treatments in Stress Management²². One study suggests that 1 week of residential *Yoga* training program can improve occupational stress in principals²³. Another study suggests *Panchakarma* as effective in assisting one's expected and reported adherence to healthier behavior patterns²⁴. These studies affirm that even short-term immersive interventions can produce measurable psychosomatic benefits when structured around holistic systems like *Ayurveda* and *Yoga*. Moreover, the residential model functions as a behavioral reset, offering a controlled environment for participants to unlearn maladaptive habits and replace them with healthier alternatives.

One of the most significant contributions of the NARTC program lies in its successful integration of ancient *Ayurveda* wisdom

with contemporary health needs. The program was not only deeply rooted in classical *Ayurveda* concepts such as *Dosha* balancing, *Dinacharya*, and *Manasika Vyadhi* but also mindful of the demands of modern life, offering practical strategies for stress regulation that executives could implement post-training. Another previous study shows that *Ayurveda Panchakarma Shirodhara* therapy helps to promote relaxation and improve sleep architecture by modulating the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis²⁵. In another previous study there was significant reductions in stress and all psychological health measures were found within the *Yoga* group over 16 weeks²⁶. *Sattvavjaya Chikitsa* may lead an adolescent to be mentally and physically fit²⁷.

The combination of physical interventions (Yoga, massage), psychological techniques (meditation, group sharing), and educational sessions (on lifestyle and diet) created a comprehensive healing experience. Mindfulness-based practices consistently reduce psychological stress and cortisol levels²⁸. While the program outcomes were positive, the short duration may not be sufficient for deep behavioral change; follow-up modules are necessary. Absence of physiological or biochemical markers (like cortisol) limits objective validation of effects. The sample size was small and restricted to government employees, limiting generalizability. The outcomes observed suggest that similar residential modules, if implemented more broadly and with followup support systems, could form a sustainable model for work place stress management, especially in sectors vulnerable to burnout, decision fatigue, and psychosomatic health disorders. The occupational stress burden in public service is well documented, but access to structured stress management programs is limited. By

offering a culturally authentic, low-cost, and evidence-informed training, this program demonstrated a viable model that could be scaled across ministries, departments, and other professional groups. Moreover, the content aligned with national health priorities that emphasize the integration of traditional medicine into preventive care. This suggests the potential for institutional support and policy alignment in expanding such programs.

CONCLUSION

The study demonstrates that a residential, *Ayurveda* based stress management program can offer significant benefits in improving physical, mental, and emotional well-being among executives. The integration of ancient wisdom with modern professional needs creates a replicable, cost-effective model for public health and organizational wellness. With appropriate policy support and research, such interventions can become a sustainable part of institutional health frameworks. Future research could explore longitudinal follow-up to assess sustainability of changes, comparative studies between *Ayurveda* and conventional stress management programs.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

There are no conflicts of interest.

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