

## Pediatric mental health: identifying early warning signs through Ayurvedic concepts

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### ABSTRACT

The childhood diseases described as Bal-Rog in ancient Ayurveda science, this is the state of mental and physical development. Ayurveda consider *Dhatri Stanya Dushti* as causative factor of diseases in *Ksheerada Avastha*. The physiological participation of *Dosh, mala* and *Dushysa* are different in children as compared to adult therefore the type and prevalence of diseases are also different in children and thus pediatric care needed utilization of various approaches for the management of *Bal-Rog* such as herbal remedies, discipline life style, Rasayan and *Panchkarma*. The rising prevalence of mental health disorders in children, including anxiety, depression, ADHD, and behavioral disturbances, necessitates early detection and intervention. Ayurveda, the traditional Indian system of medicine, provides a unique framework for understanding pediatric

mental health through concepts such as Prakriti (constitution), Manasika Doshas (mental humors), and *Balagraha* (psycho-spiritual influences in children). This review explores early warning signs of mental health issues in children from an Ayurvedic perspective, supported by classical texts and contemporary research.

**KEYWORDS:** Pediatrics mental, adolescence, Mental crisis, *Balagraha*

### INTRODUCTION

Childhood and adolescence are critical periods to promote mental health as more than half of mental health problems start at these stages, and many of these persist throughout adult life<sup>1</sup>. Currently, this has become a priority as worldwide data shows an increase in the prevalence of mental health issues in childhood and adolescence<sup>2</sup> and the percentage of those afflicted reaching nearly 20%<sup>3</sup>.

As the current definitions of mental health and mental illness do not seem to have been successful in guiding how these concepts are perceived, literature has emphasized the importance of understanding individuals' ideas of health and illness<sup>4</sup>. The World Health Organization (WHO) broadly defines mental health as a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively and fruitfully and make a contribution to his or her community<sup>5</sup> capturing only positive aspects. According to The American Psychology Association<sup>6</sup>, mental illness includes several conditions with varying severity and duration, from milder and transient disorders to long-term conditions affecting daily function. The term can thus cover everything from mild anxiety or depression to severe psychiatric conditions that should be treated by healthcare professionals. As a guide for individual experience, such a definition becomes insufficient in distinguishing mental illness from ordinary emotional expressions. According to the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare et al.<sup>7</sup>, mental health works as an umbrella term for both mental well-being and mental illness: Mental well-being is about being able to handle life's difficulties, feeling satisfied with life, having good social relationships, as well as being able to feel pleasure, desire, and happiness. Mental illness includes both mild to moderate mental health problems and psychiatric conditions. Mild to moderate mental health problems are common and are often reactions to events or situations in life, e.g., worry, feeling low, and sleep difficulties.

Mental health disorders in children often present through subtle behavioral, emotional, and cognitive changes before developing into more severe conditions. Modern medicine relies on diagnostic

criteria and pharmacological treatments, whereas Ayurveda emphasizes a holistic approach, balancing physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. Classical Ayurvedic texts like Charaka Samhita and Kashyapa Samhita discuss childhood mental health, attributing imbalances to Dosha disturbances, improper diet (Ahara), lifestyle (Vihara), and environmental factors.

### EARLY WARNING SIGNS OF MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS IN CHILDREN<sup>8</sup>

#### 1. Behavioral Indicators (*Kriya-Bhramsha*)

- A. -Hyperactivity & Impulsivity (*Vata Prakopa*) – Restlessness, inability to focus, excessive talking.
- B. -Aggression & Irritability (*Pitta-Vata Imbalance*) – Frequent tantrums, anger outbursts.
- C. -Withdrawal & Lethargy (*Kapha-Tamas Dominance*) – Lack of interest in play, excessive sleep.

#### 2. Emotional Symptoms (*Bhava-Vikara*)

- A. -Excessive Fear & Anxiety (*Vataja Manasika Vikara*) – Nightmares, separation anxiety.
- B. -Mood Swings & Depression (*Pittaja & Kaphaja Imbalance*) – Sudden sadness, emotional instability.
- C. - Attachment Issues (*Alasya* – Laziness or excessive clinginess due to Kapha imbalance).

#### 3. Cognitive & Developmental Signs (*Medha-Dhi Bhramsha*)

- A. -Poor Concentration & Memory (*Smriti Bhramsha*) – Difficulty in learning, forgetfulness.
- B. -Delayed Speech & Social Skills (*Vata-Kapha Imbalance*) – Shyness, speech delays.
- C. - Sleep Disturbances (*Nidra Nasha*) – Insomnia or excessive sleep.

## Ayurvedic Pathophysiology of Pediatric Mental Health

### Ayurveda describes mental health through:

1. *Tridosha* Theory – Imbalances in *Vata* (anxiety, hyperactivity), *Pitta* (anger, irritability), and *Kapha* (depression, lethargy).

2. *Manasika Doshas* – *Sattva* (clarity), *Rajas* (hyperactivity), *Tamas* (delusion). Excess *Rajas* and *Tamas* lead to behavioral disorders.

3. *Balagraha* Concept (*Kashyapa Samhita*)<sup>9</sup> – Psychic disturbances in children due to environmental, dietary, and subtle energy influences.

### AYURVEDIC INTERVENTIONS FOR EARLY MANAGEMENT

#### 1. Dietary Modifications (Ahara)

- *Sattvic* Diet – Fresh fruits, milk, ghee, almonds to enhance *Medha* (intellect).

- Avoid *Rajasic* (spicy, fried) and *Tamasic* (processed, stale) foods.

#### 2. Herbal Support (*Aushadha*)<sup>10</sup>

- *Brahmi* (*Bacopa monnieri*) – Enhances memory and reduces anxiety.

- *Shankhpushpi* (*Convolvulus pluricaulis*) – Calms the mind and improves focus.

- *Ashwagandha* (*Withania somnifera*) – Reduces stress and improves sleep.

#### 3. Lifestyle & Behavioral Therapies (*Vihara & Sattvavajaya*)<sup>11</sup>

- *Abhyanga* (Oil Massage) – Calms *Vata* with *Bala Taila* or *Brahmi Taila*.

- *Yoga & Pranayama* – Improves concentration and emotional regulation.

- *Sattvavajaya Chikitsa* – Psychotherapy through counseling and positive reinforcement.

### Conclusion

Early identification of mental health warning signs in children through Ayurvedic principles can facilitate timely

and holistic interventions. Integrating Ayurveda with modern pediatric psychology may offer a more comprehensive approach to managing childhood mental health disorders. Further clinical research is needed to validate Ayurvedic protocols in contemporary settings.

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