OM NAMAH SHIVAYA CHANTING FOR MANAGEMENT OF STRESS IN ELDERLY WOMEN WITH HYPERTENSION

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ABSTRACT: Stress is part and parcel of our life and stress management is gaining importance day by day. Traditional mantras are reported to be very effective for and safe methods. Hence the traditional knowledge of mantras should be practiced, preserved and propagated. Om Namah Shivaya is a most potent and popular mantra, which is at the heart of the Vedas and Tantra. The present study was aimed to observe beneficial effects of OM Namah Shivaya chanting for stress management in elderly women with hypertension. The study was conducted at Sattva Cultural Space and Research Centre, Angamaly, Kerala. 8 elderly women aged 55-65 years with stage 2 hypertension were recruited in the present study after obtaining written informed consent. After recording baseline values, participants underwent practice sessions for 3 days under supervision of yoga teacher from the centre. After the practice sessions, participants chanted Om Namah Shivaya for 108 times by using japa malas and beds and in the morning for 40 days under supervision of yoga teacher. Participants were instructed to follow the routine diet pattern and life style and medications. Assessment of stress was performed by DASS questionnaire. Blood pressure was recorded by using Diamond digital sphygmomanometers (BPDG024). Cognitive functions were assessed by MMSE scores. We have observed significant decrease in depression, anxiety, stress scores and increase in MMSE scores followed by chanting. Though the blood pressure values were decreased, it was not statistically significant. Our study provides preliminary evidence for beneficial effects of Om Namah Shivaya chanting. We recommend further detailed studies in this area to understand role of chanting Om Namah Shivaya in stress management.

INTRODUCTION: In Hindu tradition, Lord Shiva was considered as lord of meditation, who enlightens the universe.

Om, na, mah, shiv, vaa, ya are the six syllables present in Om Namah Shivaya Mantra, which is one of the oldest mantras in Hinduism 1, 2. It is a part of Shri Rudram Chamakam and it means “I bow to Shiva” 3. Chanting Om Namah Shivaya should be practiced in a calm, relaxed, and gently focused state, in mindfulness that the mantra is a salutation to the divine forces of life 3. Paramahamsa Muktananda explained that “everyone can chant Om Namah Shivaya Mantra...
because: “This mantra is free of all restrictions. It can be repeated by anyone, young or old, rich or poor, and no matter what state a person is in, it will purify him” 4. It was reported that by chanting Om Namah Shivaya mantra, it nullifies almost 99% of the negative impact of the planets. 5 However, scientific evidence is lacking on this aspect. The present study was aimed to observe beneficial effects of OM Namah Shivaya chanting for stress management in elderly women with hypertension.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:
Study design: Experimental study (Pre and post without control)

Participants: 8 elderly women aged 55-65 years with stage 2 hypertension were recruited in the present study after obtaining written informed consent. The following inclusion and exclusion criteria was used in recruiting the participants.

Inclusion criteria:
1. Willing women with stage 2 hypertension
2. Those on allopathic treatment for hypertension
3. Not suffering with any other disease or complications

Exclusion criteria:
1. Unwilling participants
2. Women with extreme blood pressure (BP) values,
3. those who already practicing any other alternative therapy

All the participants were requested not to change their medication and life style during the study. Participants acted as self controls. Pre and post intervention scores were recorded by standard methods.

Laboratory setting: The present study was conducted at Sattva Cultural Space and Research Centre, Angamaly, Kerala, India, after obtaining institutional human ethical committee clearance. (IEC/SCSRC/2/2015)

Om Namah Shivaya chanting: After recording baseline values, participants underwent practice sessions for 3 days under supervision of yoga teacher from the centre. After the practice sessions, participants chanted Om Namah Shivaya for 108 times by using japamala with 108 beds at 6:30 in the morning for 40 days under supervision of yoga teacher at our centre. All parameters were collected at 9a.m to prevent diurnal variations.

Assessment of depression, anxiety and stress: Depression Anxiety Stress Scale DASS- 42 was used to assess depression, anxiety and stress levels 6. Serum cortisol was also used to assess stress levels.

Assessment of autonomic functions: Blood pressure was recorded by using Diamond digital sphygmomanometer (BPDG024).

Assessment of cognitive functions: The Mini Mental State Examination (MMSE) was used to assess cognitive functions 7.

Statistical analysis: The results were expressed in terms of Mean±SD. Data was analyzed by SPSS 20.0. Paired t-test was used to compare the values of the groups. P value<0.05 was considered as significant.

RESULTS: Demographic data was presented in Table 1. We have observed significant decrease in depression, anxiety, stress scores, cortisol levels and increase in MMSE scores (Table 2) followed by chanting. Though the blood pressure values were decreased, it was not statistically significant (Table 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Mean±SD</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>59.37±3.62</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height</td>
<td>150.25±7.30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight</td>
<td>54.5±6.16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 2: DEPRESSION, ANXIETY, STRESS AND COGNITION BEFORE AND AFTER CHANTING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Pre (n=8)</th>
<th>Post(n=8)</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>19.72±1.37</td>
<td>19.72±1.37</td>
<td>0.079*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>8.93±2.62</td>
<td>8.93±2.62</td>
<td>0.0292*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>147.12±5.22</td>
<td>147.12±5.22</td>
<td>0.0892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serum cortisol</td>
<td>13.42±2.61</td>
<td>13.42±2.61</td>
<td>0.0017***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MMSE scores</td>
<td>24.71±2.62</td>
<td>24.71±2.62</td>
<td>0.0381*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data was expressed as Mean±SD. *P<0.05 is significant, **P<0.01, ***P<0.001.

TABLE 3: AUTONOMIC MEASURES BEFORE AND AFTER CHANTING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Pre (n=8)</th>
<th>Post(n=8)</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Systolic BP (mmHg)</td>
<td>147.12±5.22</td>
<td>147.12±5.22</td>
<td>0.0892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diastolic BP (mmHg)</td>
<td>88.36±6.51</td>
<td>88.36±6.51</td>
<td>0.1799</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data was expressed as Mean±SD. *P<0.05 is significant, **P<0.01, ***P<0.001.
DISCUSSION: The origin of mantras can be observed from Vedas of Indian tradition. It was reported that chanting mantras will create vibratory sensation around the ears and these sensations are transmitted through branches of vagus nerve. Deactivation of limbic areas, amygdala, hippocampus, parahippocampal gyrus, insula, orbitofrontal cortex, cingulated cortex and thalamus was observed followed by mantras chanting. It was reported that chanting OM mantra regularly will stabilizes the brain, removes of worldly thoughts and increase the energy and improves attention. Interestingly it was reported that, chanting only Om can have adverse effects if the person chanting is of a lower spiritual level as he may not have the capacity to tolerate the spiritual energy generated from the chant. It was reported that mantras can be used in the management of stress and associated disorders. It was reported that, regular practice of mantras promotes strength, endurance and flexibility and cultivates a sense of calmness and well being. Further mantras were reported to contribute positively to cognition processes. It was reported that, chanting increases control over breath and expiratory output levels and reduces anxiety and improves mood. Our study agrees with earlier reports as we have observed significant decrease in the depression, anxiety and stress levels followed by chanting and significant improvement in MMSE scores. Though blood pressure decreased followed by chanting, it was not statistically significant.

LIMITATIONS: Major limitation in our study was lower sample size. As study was conducted at one centre only, it was not possible to generalize the results.

CONCLUSION: Our study provides preliminary scientific evidence for beneficial effects of “OM NAMAH SHIVAYA” chanting. We recommend further detailed studies with more sample size and including both the genders to recommend inclusion of chanting in routine day life style and also in clinical practice for the benefit of population in general.

REFERENCES:
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