

Chapter IV

Phase II – Interviews with the Experts

Introduction to Chapter IV

The analysis of equanimity from the scriptures and indigenous philosophies facilitated the understanding of equanimity from its origins and roots. However, to understand equanimity in the present-day context and delineate its subtle aspects, interviews were conducted with thirty experts from various contemplative traditions such as yoga, meditation, Buddhism, Vedic studies, and Indian psychology. The method and findings from the analysis of the interviews are presented in detail in this chapter.

4.1 Objective of Phase II of the Research

Phase II of the study aims to understand equanimity through the understanding and insights of various experts engaged in research/ teaching-learning of spiritual practices and contemplative traditions.

4.2 Method

The method used in the conduction of interviews with the thirty experts is outlined below.

4.2.1 Sample of the Experts

The Expert Sampling method was utilized. Expert sampling entails selecting key informants who are proficient in the field and can contribute to the research topic with their experience and expertise. (Frey, 2018).

Experts having knowledge and experience from various contemplative traditions such as Buddhism, Vedic studies, Indian Psychology, Mindfulness, Meditation, Yoga, and holistic mental health were requested for an interview. Twenty-seven experts were chosen considering their significant contributions, expertise, affiliation with reputed institutes, and have a minimum of ten years of experience in teaching, practice, or research in their field. The experts belonged to reputed institutes and universities majorly across India, Canada, and the United States of America. Two Ph.D. scholars and one Post-Doctoral Fellow from reputed academic institutes were also selected for the interview as their current research was very closely tied to equanimity and would add value to the study. Thus, the total sample constituted of 30 experts. Data saturation was attained at 30

interviews and hence additional experts were not identified. The sample characteristics are elaborated in Table 4 below.

Table 4

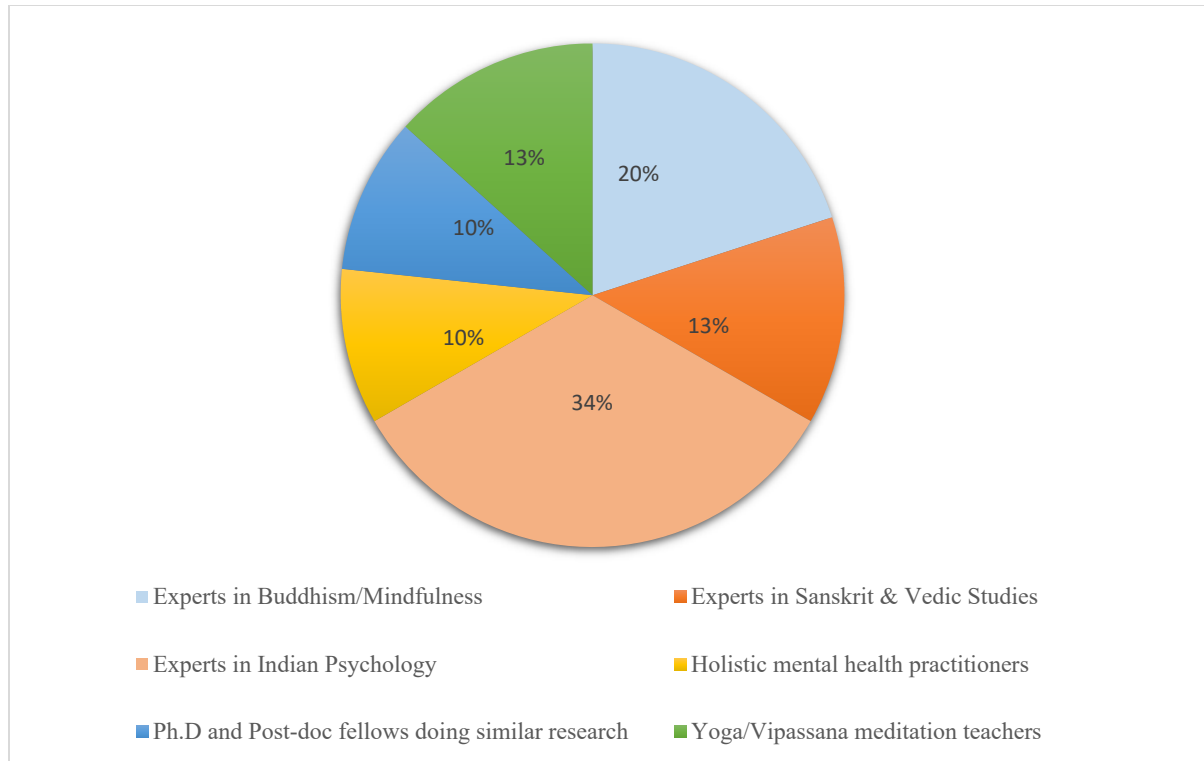
Sample Characteristics of Experts who were Interviewed

N	30
Gender	11 women and 19 men
Education	100 % completed graduation degree 18 Ph.D. doctorates 3 practitioners with medical degrees
Profession	Included academicians, researchers, monks, holistic mental health practitioners, Yoga and Meditation teachers

Figure 21 below showcases the distribution of experts in the sample.

Figure 21

Distribution of Experts in the Sample



4.2.2 Interview Schedule

A semi-structured interview schedule was designed, which included a few exploratory and open-ended questions regarding the conceptualization of equanimity, its underlying processes, and other key facets. Participants were encouraged to share their experiential understandings in context to equanimity during the interview. The details of the interview schedule are outlined in Table 5 below.

Table 5

Interview Guidelines

Dimensions to Explore	Aiming to Understand	Suggested Initial Questions followed by Probes
Understanding the construct	Conceptualization of equanimity	What according to you is equanimity? How would you describe it?
Underlying process	Factors underlying equanimity, Process, attributes, pre-requisites,	Could you elaborate on the processes underlying equanimity?

Cultivation	Need of equanimity in today's world, various contemplative and non-contemplative practices	Can equanimity be cultivated/ developed in individuals? If yes, what could be the various methods to cultivate equanimity?
Impact of cultivating equanimity	Physical and mental health correlates of equanimity, impact factors	How would cultivating equanimity impact an individual?
Personal experiences regarding equanimity	The personal learning process and experiential insights	Do you have any personal experiences related to equanimity?
Other significant issues	Key issues missed by the interviewer	Would you like to share any other thoughts on equanimity that may have been missed out?

4.2.3. The Procedure followed for the Interviews

Thirty experts from various traditions and fields related to equanimity were identified and requested for an interview. Informed consent was obtained from all the interviewees and they were assured of the confidentiality of their responses especially related to their personal experiences and challenges. The majority of the interviews were conducted in person with a prior appointment. However, few interviews were taken telephonically (with informed consent for audio recording) from the experts who were at a significant geographical distance. Twenty-eight interviews were conducted in English and two interviews were conducted in Hindi. On average each interview lasted for around 30 minutes. The 30 interviews consisted of a total of 964 minutes of audio recording. Data saturation was attained at thirty interviews and hence additional experts were not identified.

4.2.4. Analysis of the Interview Data

The 964 minutes of audio recording were transcribed and totaled 117 pages of raw data. The interview data was well suited to a Thematic Analysis approach, various categories and patterns in the data were identified around the core phenomena. The Thematic Analysis method (Braun and Clarke, 2006) as outlined below was used in analyzing the data:

- Familiarization with data by reading, re-reading, and immersion in the data
- Generation of initial codes
- Sorting the different codes into potential themes and collating the relevant data extracts within the relevant themes
- Reviewing and refining the themes, illustration of thematic maps
- Further definition of the themes along with sub-themes and analyzing inter-relations among the themes
- Writing the final report

4.3 Findings from the Expert Interviews

The findings from these interviews have resulted in a rich and thick description of equanimity and have been presented in two parts: Conceptualization of equanimity and Cultivation of equanimity

The section on the conceptualization of equanimity focuses on the elaboration of the key psychological facets of equanimity. Equanimity is further distinguished from seemingly similar states such as indifference, apathy, and passivity.

The section on the cultivation of equanimity focuses on the various methods for the cultivation of equanimity which have been elaborated separately for adults and children. The contextual precursors, challenges, and suggested health concomitants related to the cultivation of equanimity are also discussed in detail. Thematic maps and theoretical models have also been illustrated to outline the key facets of equanimity.

4.3.1 Conceptualization of Equanimity

Interviews were conducted with thirty experts across various contemplative traditions. The interview raw data consisted of 964 minutes of an audio recording which when transcribed totaled 117 pages. The interview data were analyzed using the Thematic Analysis approach by Braun & Clarke (2006). The themes and sub-themes derived from the in-depth analysis of the interviews are presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6

The Psychological Conceptualization of Equanimity

What equanimity Is		
Theme	Sub-themes	Illustrative Quotes
1. Widening perspective on experience	1a. Hedonic neutrality	<i>You are not overly drawn towards one nor are you running away from one, you can experience different things as they are...</i>
	1b. Increased distress tolerance and acceptance	<i>What happens is you allow yourself to feel a range of emotions and experiences...</i>
	1c. Reduced reactivity	<i>In states of equanimity, the intensity and the gap between major episodes will come down gradually and the time taken to come back to the regular state will come up...</i>
2. Broadening concerning one's view of others	2a. Reduced bias and preconceived notions	<i>Equanimity is treating everyone equally, it is linked with universal love, we reduce our in-group out-group kind of biases...</i>
	2b. Increased empathy & compassion	<i>With equanimity, you would have the same response if your child falls or a stranger's child falls...</i>
3. Rooted in wisdom and insight	3a. Clarity in the interpretation of experiences	<i>Equanimity is the wisdom of being able to see and being present to things the way they truly are...</i>
	3b. Insight into the transitory nature of experiences	<i>With equanimity we understand that friends turn into enemies, the enemy turns into a friend nothing is permanent...</i>
	3c. Awareness of the role of conditioning	<i>It's an awareness of this particular introjection realizing that these things are part of my conditioning and don't belong to me....</i>
What Equanimity may be Misconstrued as		
4. Misconceptions of Equanimity	4a. Apathy	<i>Equanimity doesn't mean that you are not affected, indifferent, or uninterested...</i>
	4b. Reduced connection with people	<i>Many people can take equanimity to mean that you don't care and are not affected but that is not true...</i>
	4c. Passivity	<i>In the name of equanimity, a few practitioners have become passive but this is not an indicator of equanimity...</i>
	4d. Conflated with Mindfulness	<i>Mindfulness may be one of the steps towards equanimity but is it not equanimity ...</i>

The themes and sub-themes listed in Table 11 above are elaborated in detail below.

i) Widening Perspective on Experience

In states of equanimity, there is a broadening of the perspective towards various hedonic experiences facilitated through hedonic neutrality, acceptance, and enhanced tolerance for distress.

Equanimity entails an even-mindedness towards the entire spectrum of varied hedonic and affective experiences; i.e., there is reduced craving for the pleasant and reduced aversion /avoidance of the unpleasant. The experts suggested that in states of equanimity, there is less rigidity towards one's likes, dislikes, and preferences. In this process, acceptance increases. As one expert who is a certified mindfulness practitioner and therapist elaborated,

For me equanimity is translated as a ground of stability where there is no fixed preference for one way or the other, or rigid likes or dislikes, equanimity is a stable welcoming ground of becoming...

A few of the experts also mentioned that in advanced practitioners', equanimity entails transcending or going beyond the dualities. As one expert who is an experienced practitioner of Vipassana and a Psychology professor shared,

We generally oscillate between negative and positive. Because of socialization, conditioning, and culture, this dichotomy was created. Beyond this dichotomy lies equanimity...

In states of equanimity, one is more open to a range of experiences, and the capacity for tolerating distress increases. The experts also mentioned that avoidance strategies or defense mechanisms such as suppression, repression, denial are reduced with the cultivation of equanimity. In the view of a senior psychologist and professor having a vast background in Indian psychology and scriptures,

You allow your being to experience everything, not censoring and bearing the polarities alike, acceptance increases, and there is a metaphorical death of your preconceived notions.

When there is increased acceptance and openness to experiences, one may value the importance of both dualities. In the context of valuing polarities, an expert who is a professor of Sanskrit and

the Indian scriptures mentioned the interesting analogy of *Chakra Parivartan*– the rotation of the spokes of the wheel from the Bhagavat Gita,

In equanimity we understand that Sukkah and dukkha (happiness and sorrow) are like the spokes of the wheel, they don't remain at the same point, they just keep on rotating. If there is no darkness, you would not value the light.

The experts mentioned that in states of equanimity, there is decreased identification with our emotions and desires, and thus in provoking situations instead of immediately reacting, one may adaptively respond. An expert who is an academican, a clinical psychologist, and a researcher of the Indian Knowledge traditions elaborated,

In equanimity, there is a space like a synapse between your self-identity and the emotions that happen to you. The ebbs and flow happen, but you are not identifying and reacting very strongly to them.

Thus, the first theme focused on the broadening perspective towards experience in states of equanimity facilitated by hedonic neutrality, increased decreased tolerance, and reduced reactivity. The next theme focuses on equanimity towards other individuals.

ii) Broadening in relation to One's View of Others

The experts emphasized that equanimity can be extended towards all beings as an even-minded disposition of reduced bias, judgment, and preconceived notions. Empathy, sense of connection, universal love, and compassion underlie the state of equanimity. A senior Buddhist monk who is the head of a monastery in Dharamshala elaborated,

In states of equanimity, one practices love and compassion not just for human beings, but for animals and all sentient beings, it is the ground for universal love. Equanimity starts happening when you experience the underlying oneness or the unity...

iii) Rooted in Wisdom and Insight

Findings from the interviews suggested that the cultivation of equanimity is facilitated by deep insight into the transient nature of experiences and the insight into inter-dependence among all beings. The experts also referred to the insights into non-duality underlying the states of equanimity. The awareness of the conditioned nature of experiences that shape our biases and prejudices was also suggested by the experts as aiding in the cultivation of equanimity. An expert

who is an academician and senior meditation teacher indicated that equanimity could be developed based on ego or pride but that these are not true states of equanimity. In states of genuine equanimity, there is reduced egoism.

Equanimity is a product of the wisdom of being able to see things as they truly are, you understand the true nature of reality, and the nature of things as impermanent, and interdependent...

iv) Misconceptions and myths related to Equanimity

The most significant point emphasized by the experts was the illusions and misconceptions surrounding the construct of equanimity. The experts emphasized that equanimity may seem deceptively similar to apathy, indifference, or passivity. However, remaining indifferent to suffering is, in fact, contrary to states of equanimity where there is a high level of compassion and a sense of connectedness. Findings from the interviews also indicated that many people put on a 'mask' of equanimity, and such people will have reduced authenticity. An experienced practitioner of Vipassana and a researcher of cognition in Mindfulness elaborated,

I did some meditation camps where they would scold us if we got annoyed, so they used to force us to be equanimous. But this is not equanimity at all, this is suppressing, or wearing a mask of equanimity.

The experts also suggested that mindfulness and equanimity may often be conflated together but are distinct constructs. Most of the experts suggested that the practice of mindfulness could build the foundation on which equanimity may be cultivated. As one expert elaborated,

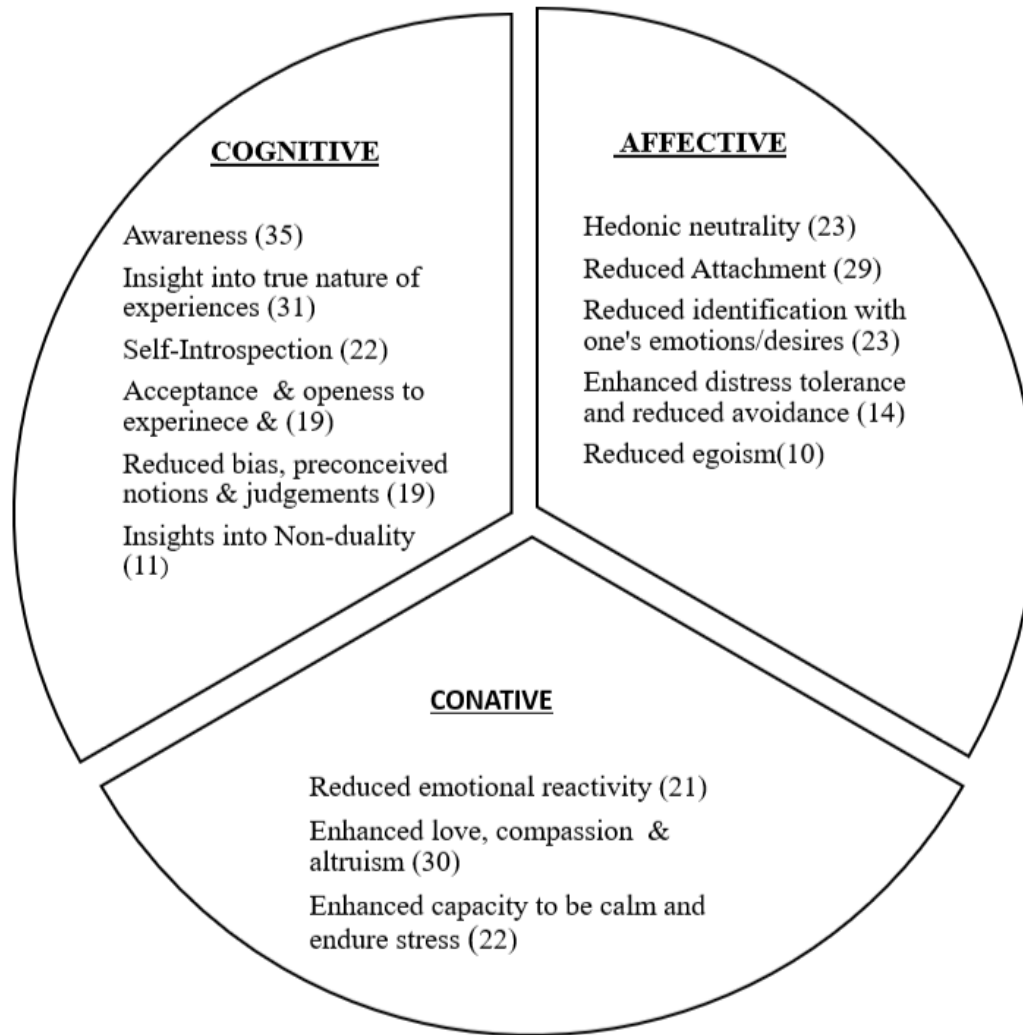
Mindfulness is always rooted in wisdom and that's where equanimity comes in...

In summary, as seen from the findings above, equanimity entails various cognitive, emotional, and conative mechanisms. Equanimity broadens our cognitive-affective evaluative systems to widen our perspective on the experience.

To encapsulate the above findings, a theoretical model highlighting the various cognitive, affective, and behavioral mechanisms of equanimity is proposed in Figure 22 below.

Figure 22

Cognitive- Affective-Conative Model of Equanimity



Note. The numbers in brackets depict the number of references for the particular theme.

Cognitive-Affective-Conative Model of Equanimity

A theoretical Cognitive-Affective-Conative model of equanimity is proposed as a step towards assembling the various underlying mechanisms and manifestations of equanimity. As seen in the figure above, underlying equanimity is an awareness of one's experiences and psychological processes (thoughts, feelings, and sensations). Equanimity facilitates this awareness to be even and unbiased such that there is reduced clinging towards pleasant experiences or aversion towards unpleasant experiences. With the cultivation of equanimity, openness and acceptance towards experiences (regardless of their hedonic value) enhances.

In states of equanimity, there are fewer rigid preferences and biases. An insight into the sublime nature of phenomena such as impermanence and non-duality may underlie states of equanimity. There may be reduced identification with one's emotions, desires, and attachments. Distress tolerance may increase, and maladaptive responses such as avoidance/suppression/repression may reduce.

With the cultivation of equanimity, the habitual impulsive reactivity decreases, and the individual may respond more adaptively. Capacity for enduring stress may adaptively increase. Most significantly, equanimity includes compassion, altruism, and enhanced connection with others.

In the next section, the findings from the interviews regarding the key aspects of the cultivation of equanimity have been delineated. The findings from the interviews also helped to provide for a detailed understanding of the cultivation methods of equanimity for both adults and children. The contextual pre-cursors, challenges and suggested psycho-social health concomitants of equanimity are also outlined below.

4.3.2 The Various Cultivation Methods of Equanimity for Adults

The interviews with the thirty experts provided an in-depth understanding of the various direct and indirect pathways leading towards the cultivation of equanimity for adults. The findings have been encapsulated in Table 7 below.

Table 7

Various Practices for the Cultivation of Equanimity for Adults

Theme	Sub-theme	Few Illustrative quotations
1. Practices facilitating awareness	<p>1.1. Breath practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pranayama - Nadishodana <p>1.2. Meditation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Vipassana – Mindfulness – 7-point mind training <p>1.3. Practicing Witness Consciousness (Sakshi Bhava)</p>	<p><i>When you are aware of your breath, it automatically turns on the relaxation system, stimulates the parasympathetic branch, and modulates emotional reactivity...</i></p> <p><i>Meditation helps an individual to remain anchored in the true self. We become more inward-oriented so that helps to travel on the path of equanimity...</i></p> <p><i>If you can shift the center of your identity from the ego on the surface, to the witness consciousness inside, then equanimity comes by itself because the witness consciousness is just watching, and not reacting...</i></p>
2. Broadening perspective towards experience	<p>2.1. Introspection into</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Nature of dualities – Impermanence – Inter-dependence – Role of conditioning 	<p><i>Because of socialization, conditioning, and culture, the dichotomy was created and equanimity is the understanding that the dichotomy was created, that's it...</i></p>
3. Generative practices	<p>3.1. Loving kindness Compassion</p>	<p><i>Equanimity is not a kind of intellectualization of philosophy, it needs to occur with compassion and wisdom...</i></p>
4. Pathways of Yoga	<p>-Raja Yoga -Karma Yoga -Bhakti Yoga -Jnana Yoga</p>	<p><i>Karma Yoga is freedom from desire for the fruit of the action, this facilitates equanimity as you are not attached to the results of your actions...</i></p>
5. Non-contemplative practices	<p>Aiding emotional regulation via diet</p>	<p><i>In certain traditions, they eat more Sattvic food as it aids in emotional regulation...</i></p>

The various themes and sub-themes in the table above are elaborated on below.

i) Practices facilitating Awareness

Awareness is the first step towards equanimity. The awareness practices suggested by the experts to facilitate the cultivation of equanimity included breath-work, meditation, cultivating insight into the emotional triggers of one's mind through the practice of *Sakshi Bhaav* (Witness Consciousness). Awareness can be facilitated through observing one's flow of breath. Focusing on the breath has advantages of easy accessibility, lacking religious tones, and maybe easy for a novice to learn. Various breath exercises were suggested by the experts to enhance awareness such as *Pranayama* and *Nadishodana*. In the practice of *Pranayama*, the flow of breath is controlled consciously through the process of inhalation, retention, and exhalation of breath. *Nadishodana* is a slow type of *Pranayama*. As one expert elaborated,

When we focus on the breath, it trains our body, so it does not get aroused quickly in an unhelpful way in critical situations....

In addition to focusing on the breath, most of the experts also suggested meditation as one of the most significant methods to cultivate equanimity. The various meditations suggested were *Vipassana*, Mindfulness Meditation, and Seven-point training meditation.

Vipassana, which means to see things as they are, is one of India's most ancient techniques of meditation. *Anapana* is the initial part of *Vipassana* meditation in which one objectively observes one's natural breath (What is *Anapana*, 2010). The main instruction in *Vipassana* meditation practice is to observe sensations and thoughts without reacting or identifying with them, which facilitates the cultivation of equanimity. Mindfulness meditation which was suggested by the experts is a secular technique derived from *Vipassana* Meditation, with a focus on mental health and less emphasis on spiritualism and Buddhist theology. Mindfulness is emphasized as the ability to remain in the present and aware of what is happening in the field of experience. Many of the experts suggested that mindfulness is a step towards cultivating equanimity, through which one can focus awareness upon the flow of experience. As one expert suggested,

Mindfulness is more in terms of holding awareness, and I think as the awareness starts to be more and more constant then, there is this feeling of openness, this spaciousness within oneself, and a feeling of equanimity which comes with it...

A few of the Buddhist experts suggested that the practice of the Seven Points of Mind Training meditation can aid the cultivation of equanimity. Seven-point Mind training in Buddhism is an advanced practice that facilitates the cultivation of equanimity as it focuses on generating love and compassion for all sentient beings including those who one does not like.

The experts further suggested that the practice of *Sakshi Bhaav* or witness consciousness would facilitate awareness of one's emotional conflicts and triggers. The witness consciousness is a state in which one stands back as an observer or witness of one's thoughts and feelings. In this state, identification with one's self and thoughts are reduced. The witness consciousness implies some degree of detachment from mental and other inner activities and has been emphasized in Aurobindo's Integral Yoga. As one expert shared his experience,

One of the first steps in developing Samatva is to develop a capacity of the witness consciousness. In witness consciousness, the idea is can I step back and see what I am doing and come back to the central alignment?

Thus, various practices were suggested by the experts to facilitate awareness of one's experiences which may further facilitate the cultivation of equanimity.

ii) Practices for facilitating openness and broadening perspective towards experience

Openness to experience and acceptance is a crucial process in the cultivation of equanimity. A few cognitive and analytical practices were suggested by the experts to facilitate a broadening perspective towards various hedonic and affective experiences. Many of the experts highlighted the importance of introspection into one's subjective lenses in viewing reality and the role of conditioning in forming those lenses,

I think Samatva would be starting with an awareness of what are one's lenses of viewing the world and how are those filters or lenses colored by preferences and dislikes. Then comes the ability to be able to have a very rigorous kind of objectivity about cleaning those lenses...

The experts further suggested that reflecting on the nature of dualities, the impermanence of experiences, and the inter-dependence of existence also aid in widening our perspective on the experience. One expert shared,

Even a tiny awareness of the introjection of conditioning, realizing that these are all things that are a part of conditioning and don't belong to me, is the

disequilibrium of the conditioned self. And then making yourself aligned is the process of cultivating equanimity...

Other analytical techniques mentioned by the experts were to reflect on the commonality that all human beings seek happiness and want to be free of suffering, and reflecting on the mind's classification of people as friends, as enemies, and that these are based on self-serving attitudes and are transient. One expert elaborated,

In Vipassana meditation, there is a practice of becoming aware of impermanence, the insight that everything is changing so it dawns on you that it is futile to react to something which is continuously changing...

To summarize, the above analytical techniques may promote cognitive flexibility in the form of increased acceptance and reduced avoidance towards distressing stimuli and thus facilitate states of equanimity.

iii) Generative practices

The experts believed that generative practices such as Compassion and Loving- Kindness were significant aids in the cultivation of equanimity. Compassion is an orientation of mind that has the capacity to meet suffering and pain with kindness, empathy, and patience. Loving-kindness, also known as *Metta* (in Pali), refers to a mental state of unconditional kindness to all beings. In Loving-kindness meditation, typically warm feelings are initially directed toward oneself and then extended to an ever-widening circle of others, from loved ones to neutral people and finally to one's enemies. The experts suggested that these three qualities of equanimity, compassion, and loving-kindness are inter-related, and essential for each other. As per one expert,

If equanimity grows without compassion and love then it is artificial, impersonal, and indifferent...

In summary, rather than in isolation, the qualities of equanimity, compassion, and loving-kindness suffuse and work in tandem.

iv) Pathways of Yoga

The experts also suggested that the different limbs of yoga such as Raja Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga, and Jnana Yoga may be indirect pathways for the facilitation of equanimity. Raja yoga is the science of controlling the body and mind. It is also known as Ashtanga Yoga or the

eight-fold path. *Asanas* (body postures), *Pranayama* (breathing exercises), *Dharana* (concentration practices) are an integral part of this yoga path. As one expert said,

Raja yoga is the king of yoga, it posits that when we do sadhana (practice) then everything comes in balance

Jnana Yoga is a path of learning and knowledge that is best suited to people who are analytical and intellectual. Jnana yoga stresses analytical self-inquiry into one's actual nature. Bhakti yoga is the pathway of devotion suited for individuals with an emotional temperament. Through love, prayer, and worship one realizes the Divine consciousness. One expert shared the experience she has observed with her clients,

If a person is surrendered to a divine form or formless, then they start taking every event as part of their learning or part of their karma; when something happens, they don't say why it should happen to me? They may say my god is blessing me or maybe I need to learn or it's a test for me...

Karma Yoga is the path of action and suits people with active temperaments. Performing actions selflessly, not focusing on the reward, and instead focusing on one's duty is the path of Karma yoga. The experts also elaborated in the context of Karma Yoga that reducing desires, attachments, and having control over one's senses is a step towards equanimity.

I think equanimity and Anasakti (detachment) are mutually co-existing concepts, because if they are not focusing on the outcome, meeting their expectations and desires, then they would be able to stay in that equanimous state...

One expert elaborated his personal experience through his understanding of Karma yoga,

I follow karma yoga. I remember I was working on a conference paper for 15 hours a day. After sending the paper I was happy with the process which I went through but the outcome whatever it may be didn't make me anxious...

In summary, the various pathways of Yoga such as Karma Yoga Bhakti Yoga, Jnana Yoga, and Raja Yoga may facilitate the cultivation of equanimity.

v) Non-contemplative Methods for Facilitating Equanimity

The 6000-year-old Indian medicinal system of Ayurveda places special emphasis on *Ahara* (diet) and *Anna* (food) as a means to health and wellness. Ayurveda asserts that the quality of food eaten,

food preparation, appearance, aroma, and freshness of the food regulates digestion and also regulates emotion, mental agility, and mental vigor (Guha, 2006). One of the experts mentioned that equanimity may be facilitated through regulating our diet with more Sattvic food and less Rajasic or Tamasic food. Sattvic food includes fresh vegetables, rice, milk, butter, honey, fruits, and nuts. Ayurveda asserts that when eaten in the right quantity Sattvic food, brings mental harmony and evokes higher conscious awareness. Thus, accounting for the nutritional aspect of the diet is significant for emotional regulation and good mental health which in turn may facilitate states of equanimity.

Highlighting the role of sustained and conscious practice

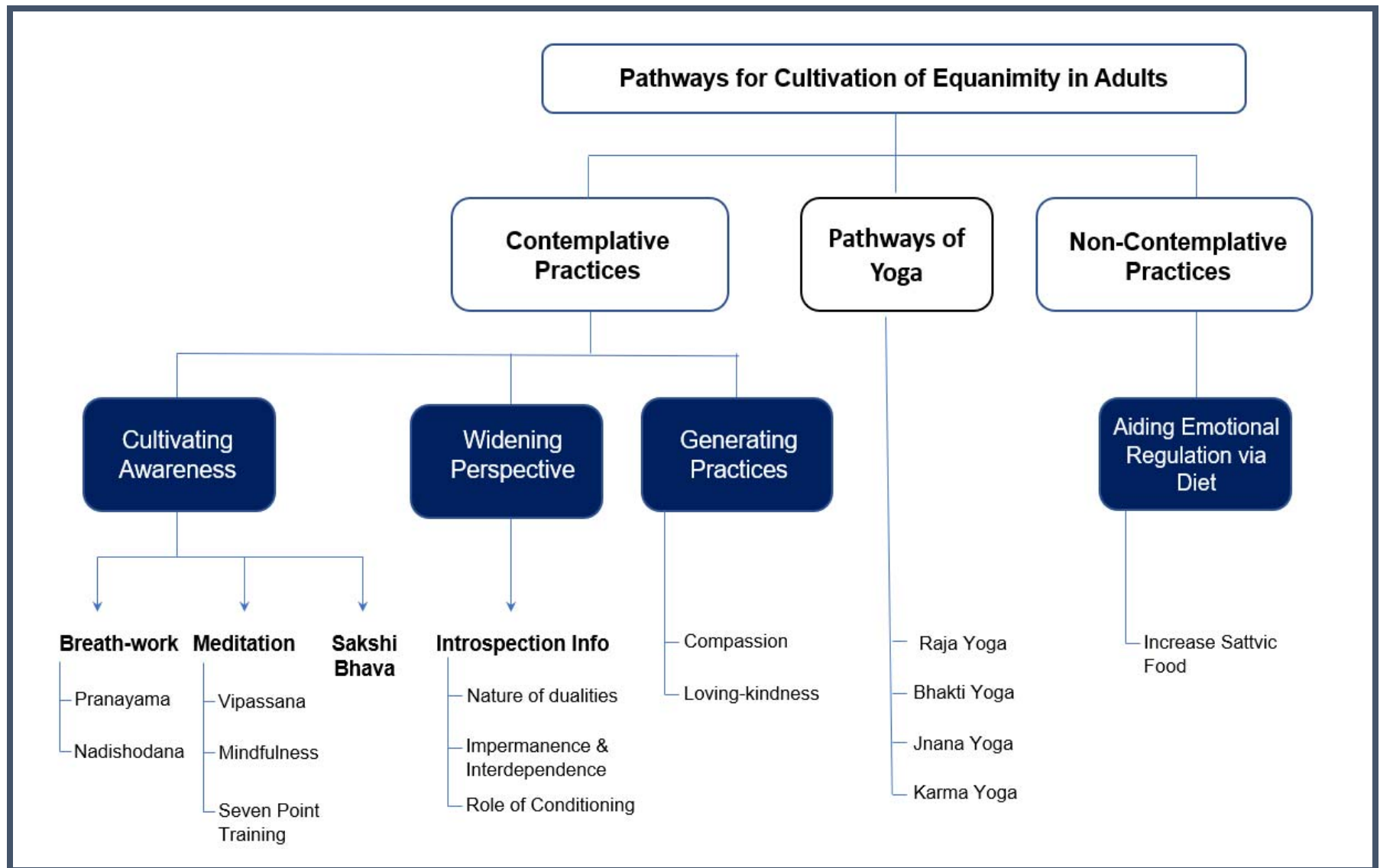
All the experts highlighted the crucial role of sustained practice in the cultivation of equanimity and the importance of practicing consciously and not mechanically or superficially. As they shared,

I see people doing Yoga for 10 to 20 years but they are where they are, not many gains, they keep doing things mechanically, they are not gaining any virtues because there is no reflection. So, reflective practice is important ...

Figure 23 on the next page outlines the practices suggested for the cultivation of equanimity in adults. The next section will trace the various strategies for the cultivation of equanimity in children.

Figure 23

Cultivation Practices for Cultivation of Equanimity in Adults



4.3.3 Various Pathways towards Facilitation of Equanimity in Children

The experts suggested a few unique and indirect pathways for the cultivation of equanimity for children as presented in Table 8 below.

Table 8

Various Pathways for Cultivation of Equanimity for Children

Theme	Sub-theme	Illustrative quotations
1. Learning beyond academics in school	1.1. Socio-emotional ethical learning	<i>One of the greatest endeavors of HH, the Dalai Lama, is to introduce universal ethics, in schools in India, in which the basic skeleton is compassion, and for cultivating compassion the base is equanimity</i>
	1.2. Learning through different perspectives	<i>In one school I remember if the children were learning about light, for example, they learned about light from the perspective of science, art, then in poetry, so we can help facilitate this widening...</i>
2. Facilitation by parents	2.1 Extending unconditional positive regard	<i>Unconditional positive regard from the parents is beneficial for creating equanimity in children, but unfortunately, parents teach kids all kinds of norms and that leads to distress,</i>
	2.2. Modelling of equanimous behavior	<i>First, I need to look into my behavior as a parent at home...</i>
	2.3. Broadening the perspective of reality	<i>When a rubber goes away the child would bawl, you teach him that he can get it back, and show them the transient nature of things so that they learn to interpret reality correctly.</i>

3. Indirect pathways	3.1. Art	<i>Usually, art teachers just tell the kids to draw a sun and a house, we need to have the teachers understand the non-censoring approach to art...</i>
	Stories & literature	<i>Through stories, children come to know about the morals, and exemplars of equanimity...</i>

Thus, as seen from the table above the experts suggested various ways for the cultivation of equanimity in children. They emphasized that the goals of education need to be reframed to prioritize social, emotional, and ethical learning (SEEL) competencies along with academic learning. SEEL may enhance socio-emotional competencies such as perspective-taking which may increase pro-social behavior such as compassion. The experts also suggested that as a part of SEEL, the teachers can facilitate environments that enable the children to experience moments of silence in the school day instead of constant stimulation. These moments of silence will enable awareness and reflexivity. Teachers may facilitate openness to experience by having discussions in the class to examining an idea completely before rejecting it or understanding one concept through various perspectives.

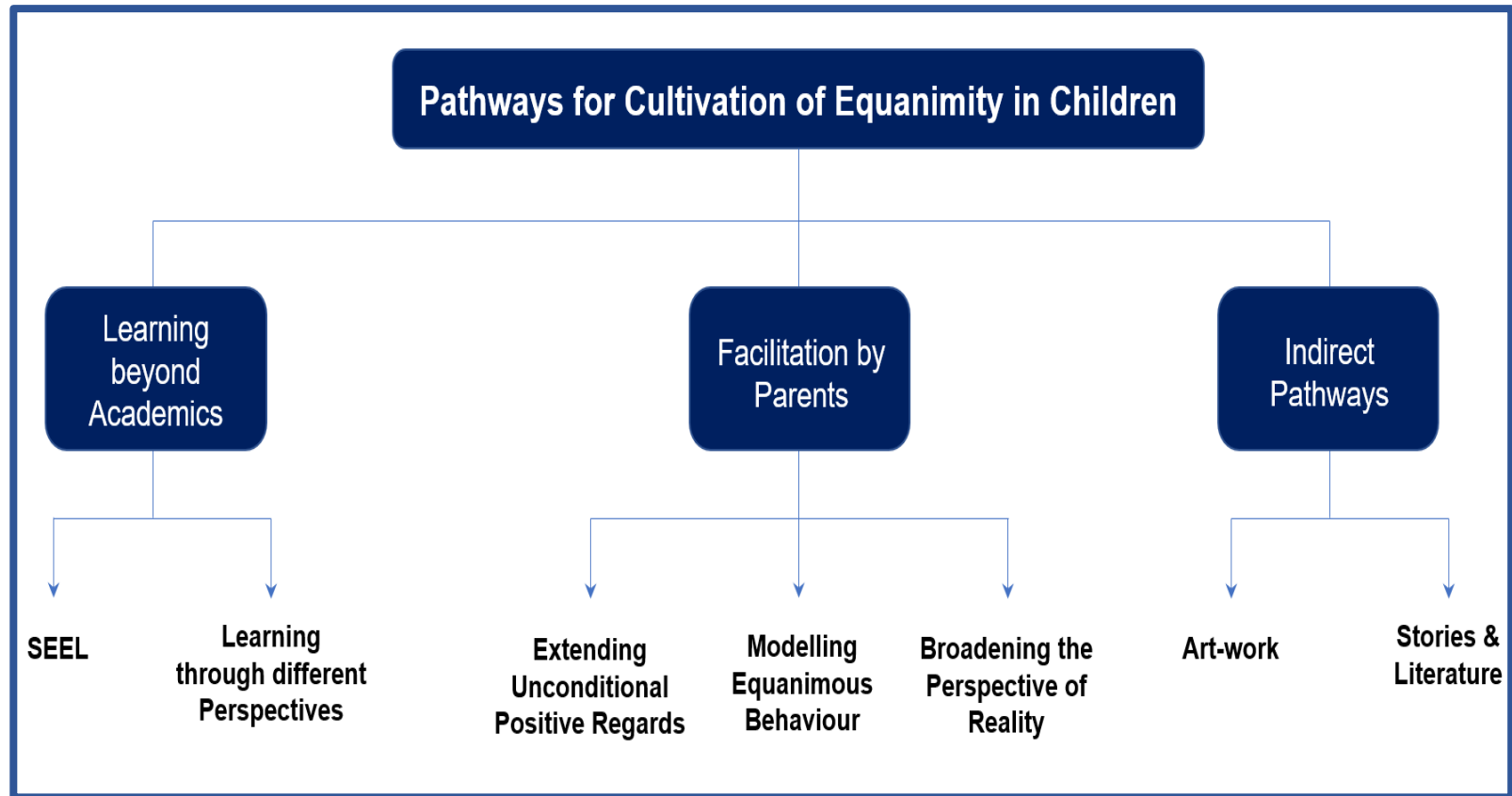
The experts suggested that parents play a major role in the facilitation of equanimity in children. Parents need to first cultivate equanimity in themselves and demonstrate equanimous behavior to their children before expecting their children to cultivate this state. Parents can also facilitate cognitive flexibility in their older children by introducing concepts such as impermanence. Extending unconditional positive regard to the child will also help the child to be more open to experiences and more comfortable with negative experiences such as failure.

Certain indirect pathways were elaborated in the cultivation of equanimity in children. The experts shared that training in the expressive Arts art can indirectly facilitate the cultivation of equanimity as it allows the child to express themselves without censoring and reduces experiential avoidance. Introduction to literature and stories may also provide the child with exemplars of equanimous role models. In summary, the cultivation of equanimity can be started in children from a young age through various simple techniques, and the role of parents and teachers is most crucial in this

endeavor. Figure 24 below outlines the practices suggested for the cultivation of equanimity in children.

Figure 24

Pathways for Cultivation of Equanimity in Children



4.3.4 Cultivating Equanimity: Contextual Pre-cursors, Challenges & Health Concomitants

The findings from the interviews related to the various facets of the cultivation of equanimity are elaborated in detail below.

Contextual Pre-cursors and Need for the Cultivation of Equanimity

The need and contextual precursors for the cultivation of equanimity suggested by the experts were related to the rising stress levels, increasing prevalence of anxiety, depression, and emotional instability. The experts also shared the concern that due to work-related stress, healthcare professionals such as doctors, nurses, and psychologists are increasingly reporting compassion fatigue and burnout. One expert, who is a senior psychologist with a background in contemplative practices shared the need particularly for psychologists to develop equanimity,

It is crucial for psychologists to develop equanimity; you cannot objectively observe if you get carried away by your likes and dislikes.

Currently, there is an emphasis on materialism, chasing happiness, and reducing distress. A shift in the orientation towards holistic well-being was suggested

Equanimity is needed as Positive Psychology may not have a base of stability on which the whole edifice is standing. So, when the constant striving towards happiness fails, then the cultivation of equanimity may be the internal resource one can turn to...

One of the experts also suggested that the construct of equanimity may be seen as limited to a religious setting. Formulation of the construct in a more scientific light might make the construct more appealing to individuals. The experts also suggested that given the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) world we live in, the cultivation of equanimity not only would help in dealing with distressing experiences but also help in responding adaptively to the craving for pleasant experiences.

Challenges Faced in the Cultivation of Equanimity

The challenges and barriers that the practitioner may face during the cultivation of equanimity were identified by the experts. The cultivation of equanimity is a process that takes time and regular practice. Sustaining one's practice towards the cultivation of equanimity was one of the most frequently reported challenges by the experts. They shared that letting go of one's attachments, desires, and rigid dichotomies is one of the most challenging aspects of the

cultivation of equanimity. Cultivating equanimity without sufficient knowledge may also pose the danger of turning towards suppression or indifference. As one of the experts who has a vast experience of more than 30 years in teaching contemplative practices elaborated,

Anything you try to change becomes stronger at the beginning, which makes the cultivation of equanimity difficult initially. The power of the senses and appearances is so powerful, which makes it difficult for one to sustain this state of mind.

The experts also suggested that certain contextual factors in today's world such as corruption, materialism, and personal factors such as one's temperament and dealing with painful emotional conflicts such as loss of a loved one, dealing with grief may pose certain challenges for the cultivation of equanimity.

Suggested Health Concomitants of Cultivation of Equanimity

The experts suggested a multitude of health concomitants associated with the cultivation of equanimity such as reduced emotional fluctuations and reactivity which in turn may lead to less stress and burnout. Peace, well-being, wiser decision-making, and enhanced interpersonal relationships were also a few of the suggested concomitants of equanimity. A few experts mentioned that cultivating equanimity may also help us get control over our senses, attachments, and desires. Hence, our dependence on the pursuit of external things would be significantly lessened. Below is an excerpt from the interview with an academician researching *Anasakti* (Non-attachment).

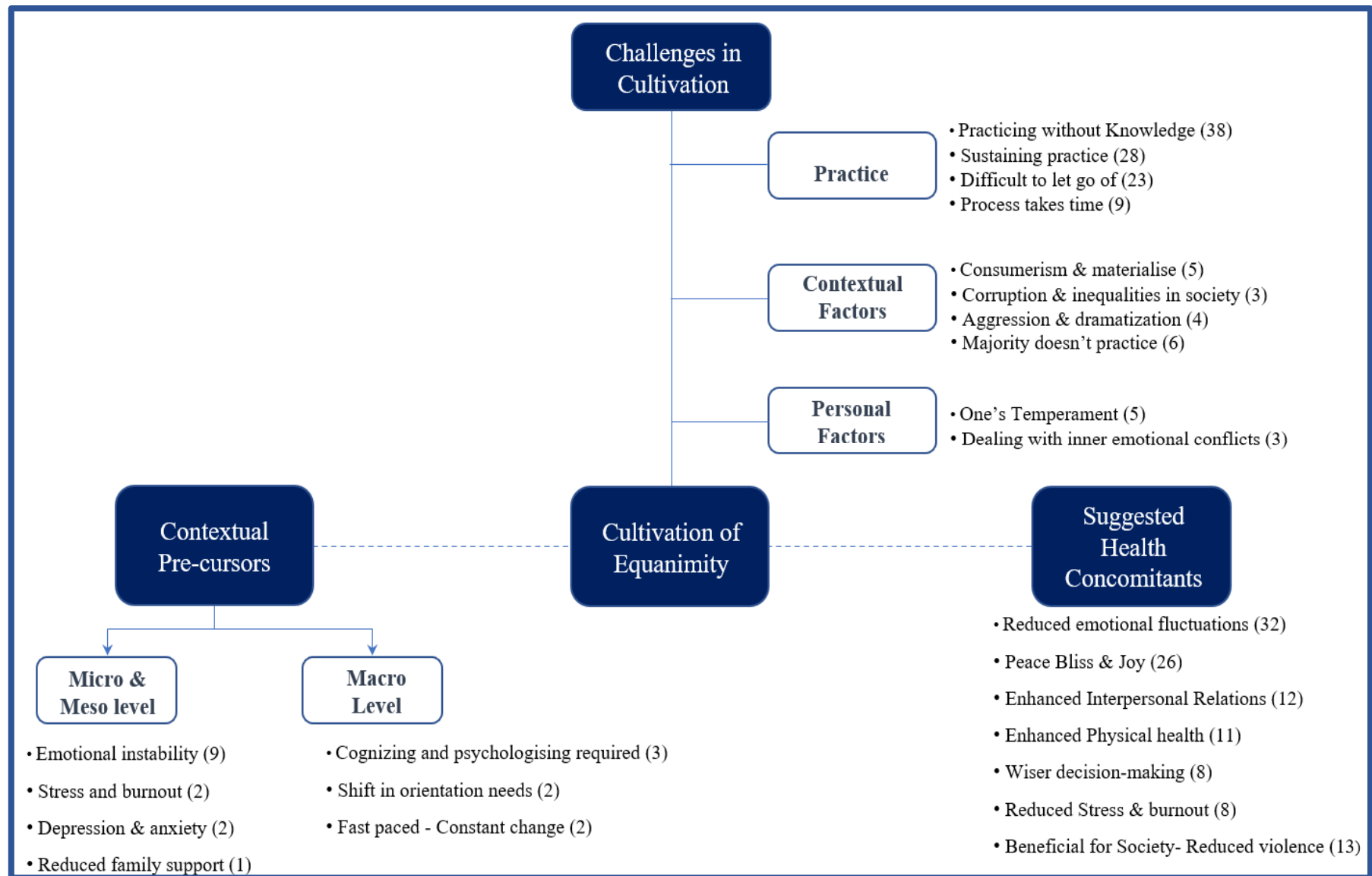
Equanimity augments our ability to deal with life and increases our capacities that are often lost in useless agitation. With equanimity, you become aware that your happiness does not always depend on external factors, so it is a liberating experience.

The experts mentioned that the cultivation of equanimity may lead to enhanced inter-personal relationships at the societal level which may further lead to reduced conflicts, violence, and aggression.

Based on the above findings, a thematic map has been outlined in Figure 25 related to the various facets of the cultivation of equanimity. The numbers in brackets depict the number of references for the particular sub-theme.

Figure 25

Cultivation of Equanimity: Contextual Pre-cursors, Challenges & Health Concomitants



Note. The numbers in brackets depict the number of references for the particular theme

In summary,

In states of equanimity, there is an even-mindedness towards the entire spectrum of varied hedonic and affective experiences; i.e., there is reduced craving for the pleasant and reduced avoidance of the unpleasant. In states of equanimity, one is more open to a range of experiences, and the capacity for tolerating distress increases. With the cultivation of equanimity, impulsive habitual emotional reactivity decreases, and the individual may respond more adaptively.

The experts emphasized that equanimity also includes an even-minded disposition extended towards all beings in which there are reduced prejudices, bias, and preconceived notions. Empathy towards others, a sense of inter-connectedness, universal love, and compassion underlie the states of equanimity. Equanimity may be rooted in wisdom and insight into the transitory nature of all experiences and the role of conditioning in shaping our experiences.

The experts emphasized that equanimity may seem deceptively similar to apathy, indifference, or passivity. However, in states of equanimity, there is a high level of compassion and a sense of connectedness. The experts also suggested that mindfulness and equanimity may often be conflated together but are distinct constructs, and the practice of mindfulness could build the foundation on which equanimity may be cultivated. Various methods and pathways were suggested for the cultivation of equanimity separately for adults and children.

The findings from the interviews further encapsulate the need for equanimity, delineate the various challenges that one could come across during cultivation, and suggest the psycho-social health concomitants of equanimity. The increasing prevalence of anxiety, depression, and burnout in today's world suggests a need for the cultivation of equanimity.

The key challenges which one may face during the cultivation of equanimity include sustaining one's practice and letting go of one's attachments, desires, and rigid dichotomies. The psycho-social health concomitants of equanimity suggested were reduced emotional reactivity, well-being, wiser decision making, enhanced inter-personal relationships.

The next chapter focuses on the quantitative results of the study. Based on the qualitative findings of the study, the Phase III of the research focused on the development of a scale on equanimity in the Indian context which is described in detail in the next chapter.