

Chapter VII

Discussion

Introduction to Chapter VII

The various phases of the study will be collectively discussed in this chapter with reference to the psychological literature under the following sections:

- Section 7.1: Understanding equanimity through the Bhagavad Gita & in Buddhism
- Section 7.2: Understanding equanimity through in-depth interviews with 30 experts
- Section 7.3: Development of a measure of equanimity in the Indian context & exploration of its psycho-social health concomitants.

The present study aimed to understand equanimity as a distinct psychological construct and contribute to the Indian ethos of well-being. The research was carried out using an Exploratory Sequential Design which is one of the Mixed Methods Design.

This research was conducted in three distinct phases. In phase one, the construct of *Samatva* as described in the Bhagavad Gita, and the construct of *Upekkha* as described in the Theravada and Mahayana Buddhist traditions were examined in detail. Following this, in phase two, thirty experts from various contemplative practices and traditions were individually interviewed on their insights into equanimity.

Phase III of the research focused on the development of a measure of equanimity in the Indian context based on the in-depth findings from phases I and II and taking into consideration the existing global scales on equanimity. This was followed by the exploration of the linkages of equanimity with relevant psycho-social health variables such as emotional reactivity, neuroticism, loneliness, social media addiction, well-being, and perceived general health. The utilization of both qualitative and quantitative methods in the research resulted in a thick and rich description of equanimity. Each phase of the research will be discussed separately below.

7.1. Phase I- Understanding Equanimity through the Bhagavad Gita & in Buddhism

The first phase of the study aimed to explore the construct of equanimity in its original essence. As elaborated in Chapter III, the study was limited to the understanding of equanimity as explicated in the Bhagavat Gita and Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism.

Samatva has been referred 41 times in the content analysis of Bhagavad Gita text which highlights its significance. From the analysis of the verses and their context, six major themes were extrapolated i) *Samatva* as a state of even-mindedness and rising above the dualities ii) The interpersonal dimension of *Samatva* iii) *Samatva* and the understanding of the temporality of experience iv) Associated cognitive-affective cultivation practices of *Samatva* v) Suggested health and spiritual implications of *Samatva* vi) *Samatva* and transcendence of *Triguna*.

The above themes will be discussed below in the context of the current psychological literature. Parallels will also be drawn to the similarities regarding the conceptualization of equanimity in Buddhism.

Conceptualization of *Samatva*

From the analysis of the verses of the Bhagavad Gita, *Samatva* was conceptualized as a state of even-mindedness and rising above the dualities. A tripartite conceptualization of *Samatva* was proposed wherein it has been described as an even-mindedness towards i) objects, ii) experiences of life iii) and individuals.

Samatva towards Objects

Samatva towards objects/ things is elaborated in the context of reducing our endless desires, craving, and materialism. Desire is intimately connected to pleasure and pain i.e. we desire what is pleasurable and avoid what is painful. Our desires evolved to promote our survival and reproduction. Today, survival is no longer the most pressing issue, and yet our desires are stronger than ever. Once the desire is attained, people stop taking pleasure in its fulfillment and instead formulate new desires, because, in the course of evolution, contentedness did not promote survival (Burton, 2014).

Verse 2.62 of the Bhagavad Gita, suggests that if desires are fulfilled, it leads to greed for more desires and if unfulfilled, leads to frustration and anger. As a result, all desires become the cause of unhappiness, even though they may provide some satisfaction at the beginning (Bhawuk, 2008). To control our desires, moderation of the incoming stimulus to our sense organs has been suggested in the Bhagavad Gita. This is discussed below in the context of information overload and addiction in the present-day context.

With the advancement of technology and social media, our craving for constant stimulation is on the rise due to the dopamine-driven feedback loops created by the use of such technology (Haynes, 2018). Many a time, it could lead to addictive behaviors causing cognitive, psychological, and interpersonal disturbances. A review study reported that due to information overload, an individual may feel stressed, confused, cognitively strained, and decision effectiveness is lowered (Eppler & Mengis, 2004). Also, being constantly distracted with mobile phones and social media may reduce our awareness and ability to be mindful which in turn has a bearing on equanimity. Hence, the need for moderating our exposure to information overload is crucial in the context of the cultivation of equanimity.

Samatva towards Experiences

Concerning experiences such as pleasure pain, joy sorrow, *Samatva* has been emphasized as being steady in the dualities. In states of equanimity there is increased acceptance, and openness towards all kinds of experiences - pleasant and unpleasant. Thus, in states of equanimity, distress tolerance increases, and unhealthy emotional processing such as avoidance, repression, and suppression decreases (Chambers et al., 2009; Desbordes et al., 2015; Hadash et al., 2016). Also, with the cultivation of equanimity habitual maladaptive re-activity decreases and the person may respond more adaptively (Shapiro et al., 2006).

Samatva towards all Beings

The Bhagavat Gita also emphasizes even-mindedness towards not just individuals but all living beings. A raw model has been mined from the verses stating that with the cultivation of equanimity, one transcends the superficial outer forms and recognizes the similar consciousness underlying all beings. Further synthesis of the raw model proposes that when one is even-minded towards others, prejudices, bigotry, and discrimination reduces, and compassion and altruism may increase.

On a personal level, the cultivation of equanimity may lead to harmonious relationships, and at the societal level, it may lead to co-existence and reduced social conflicts. Thus, we deduce that equanimity may be a form of Emotional Intelligence or EQ (Emotional Quotient) which when cultivated may lead to inter-personal benefits, on both a personal and societal level.

Equanimity or *Upekkha* as explicated in Buddhism is very similar to the concept of *Samatva* and is explained below.

Conceptualization of Upekkha

Drawing a parallel, it should be noted that the ideal form of equanimity or *Upekkha* embraced in Buddhism is analogous to the Bhagavad Gita and entails having an equal attitude towards all dualities, experiences, and living beings. In commentaries of the *Visuddhimagga*, Buddhaghosa (2014) has described ten types of equanimity such as equanimity of neutrality, feelings, insight, etc. Equanimity has also been described as one of the *Brahma-viharas* as promoting the aspect of being neutral and even-minded towards all phenomena and beings irrespective of race, gender, nationality (Miller, 1979).

In summary, the conceptualizations of equanimity from the Bhagavad Gita and Buddhist philosophy are analogous. In both traditions, equanimity is understood as comprising of even-mindedness, which counters clinging and aversion. Both the Eastern traditions emphasize allied qualities such as reduced bias and an equal attitude towards all.

Inter-personal Dimension of Equanimity

The second theme derived from the verses of the Bhagavad Gita focuses on the inter-personal dimension of *Samatva*. The verses of the Bhagavad Gita emphasize that with the insight into underlying unitary consciousness, an individual will treat alike a friend, an enemy, and a stranger. This raw model has been further synthesized illustrating that when a person has an understanding of oneness, the social categorization and social biases of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ reduces. This may lead to reduced prejudices and discriminatory behavior and altruism and compassion may be enhanced.

To draw a parallel in Buddhism, *Upekkha* is described as a state of mind that cannot be swayed by biases and preferences (Bodhi, 2000) and there are specific techniques in Buddhism for cultivating an impartial attitude of equanimity such as reflecting on the mind’s automatic classification of people as friends, enemies, and strangers. One then reflects on the understanding that these categories are transient and based on superficial, self-serving attitudes (Dalai Lama, 2001).

Theories in the field of Social Psychology such as Social Identity theory suggest that social categorization of individuals into ‘us’ versus ‘them’ may result in prejudice. Those in the ‘us’ category are viewed in favorable terms whereas those in the ‘them’ category are perceived more negatively. A part of our self-esteem is derived from the groups in which we belong and prejudice may persist because holding a negative view of those in the out-groups can protect or maintain our self-esteem (Baron & Branscombe, 2009).

Parallel to the Buddhist technique of reflecting on the mind's automatic classification of people as friends, enemies, and strangers are one of the theories in Social Psychology, the Common in-group identity model (Gaertner et al., 1993). This theory suggests that prejudice may be reduced through recategorization, which refers to including the outgroup "them" in the "us" category. When these different social groups view themselves as members of a single social entity, their attitudes toward each other become more positive (Baron & Branscombe, 2009).

Thus, in both the Eastern traditions, the inter-personal dimension of equanimity has been emphasized as treating all living beings equally, and having reduced biases and prejudices towards others.

Equanimity and Insight into Transience

The third theme derived from the verses of the Bhagavad Gita focuses on the underlying insight into transience/impermanence of experience and its effect on equanimity. A raw model has been mined from Verse 2.14. illustrating that the awareness that sensations of happiness/ distress are transitory leads to endurance or *Titiksha*.

To draw a parallel in Buddhism, the technique of *Vipassanā* meditation, also focuses on the concept of impermanence known as *Anicca*. Meditators reflect on impermanence, realizing that they don't have any control over this phenomenon and that any attempt to control it creates suffering (Vipassana Research Institute, 1990).

When one becomes aware of the transient nature of experiences then the importance of that experience in relation to the self reduces and self-referential processing may reduce. This, in turn, may lead to a different perspective and increase one's cognitive flexibility in perceiving the situation (Desbordes et al., 2015). Thus, in both the Bhagavad Gita and in Buddhism, the role of understanding transience and impermanence is highlighted.

Cultivation Practices of Equanimity

The fourth theme derived from the verses of the Bhagavad Gita focuses on the cognitive-affective cultivation practices of equanimity. A key cultivation practice emphasized in both the Bhagavad Gita and in Buddhism is reducing our attachments. Shri Krishna suggests that we should focus on

the work and not get attached to the results/outcome of the work. In Buddhism also, it is suggested to reduce strong attachments to material objects as well as to individuals.

We can understand the role of attachment on equanimity in the context of emotional regulation. When one is not very attached to the outcome, the intensity of the emotions related to the outcome (pleasant or unpleasant) may decrease, and avoidance and clinging to the outcome may decline. With reduced attachment, acceptance may also increase if the outcome is not up to one's expectations. Few studies have been carried out showing the inter-relationships between equanimity and attachment.

A study delineated the characteristics of *Anasakti* (non-attachment) as consisting of emotional equipoise in the face of success and failure, weak concern for extrinsic rewards, and efforts to achieve excellence (Banth & Talwar., 2012). Studies in the psychological literature have also found strong links between non-attachment (*Anasakti*) and positive mental health. In a cross-cultural study by Naidu and Roseman (1992) on 140 American and 287 Indian students, the results indicated that in both groups *Anasakti* was associated with lower levels of depression and anxiety. The results of a study revealed that individuals high on *Anasakti* have a low orientation towards pleasure, high orientation towards a meaningful life, and experience better psychological well-being (Banth & Talwar., 2012).

Another pathway that has been elaborated for the cultivation of *Samatva* is through faith, devotion, and surrender. It is stated in the Bhagavad Gita that an ideal *Bhakta* is unbiased towards all, alike to both a friend and an enemy, and equipoised in favourable as well as unfavourable circumstances. A true devotee has immense faith and has surrendered his actions and their outcomes to a higher power and hence, they are equipoised in any condition.

In the psychological literature, Pargament et al. (2000) have conceptualized surrender into two types: active surrender and passive surrender. Active surrender is an individual's attempt to manage what is possible, and then relinquish remaining control to a higher power. On the other hand, passive surrender is submissively waiting for a higher power to control the situation and pleading for intervention. Health research with cancer populations indicates that active religious surrender is associated with a decrease in emotional distress and higher well-being, whereas passive surrender is associated with more distress and less active coping (McLaughlin et al., 2013).

In Summary: The major techniques elaborated in the Eastern traditions to cultivate equanimity are through regulating the information to one's senses, insight into impermanence, reducing attachments and desires, and also through devotion, faith and surrender.

Health & Spiritual Implications of the Cultivation of Equanimity

Various health and spiritual implications of cultivating *Samatva* have been enumerated in the fifth theme, such as peace, reduced suffering, self-realization, and liberation from bondage. In the Mahayana traditions of Buddhism, the cultivation of equanimity also plays an important role in the facilitation of *Bodhicitta* i.e., universal compassion.

In the psychological literature, the cultivation of equanimity has also been studied in therapeutic and meditation settings and has shown improvements in eudemonic well-being (Ekici et al., 2018); reduction in strong emotions such as anger, sadness, and passion (Pagis, 2015), perception of emotional stimuli as neutral instead of positive or negative (Machada & Costa, 2015) and experiencing a reduction in loneliness (Lindsay et al., 2018). The recent psychological literature also suggests a strong connection between equanimity and compassion. Weber (2017) posits that equanimity creates an awareness that is non-judgmental, and inclusive of others and thus facilitates compassion.

In summary, the cultivation of equanimity has been associated with a host of mental health benefits such as reductions in negative emotions such as anger, sadness, and loneliness. Its cultivation has also been associated with well-being and the development of compassion.

Equanimity as a Quality of a Trigunatita

The last theme pertained to equanimity as a quality of a *Trigunatita* (person who has transcended the three *gunas*). The person who has developed *Samatva* and is neutral in both pain and joy, praise and blame are some of the qualities of a person who has transcended the *gunas*. A *Trigunatita* thus ceases to identify himself with the movements of the *gunas* and is established in the self. (Mukundananda, 2014). In this process, the self becomes a witness to all that is happening without being severely affected. In Western terminology, there is a parallel concept to 'witnessing' known as psychological distancing or de-centering which is the ability to view one's thoughts as

constructions of reality rather than as reality itself (Alford & Beck, 1997). Developing de-centering skills also leads to greater equanimity in the presence of a negative stimulus (Lomas et al., 2015).

In summary, the analysis of equanimity from the text of the Bhagavad Gita and Buddhism provided a rich, multi-faceted and holistic understanding of equanimity as elaborated above. This research is a contribution to the Indian ethos of well-being. It is hoped that the thick description of the construct of *equanimity* and the proposed nomological network will stimulate research in the field of Indian Psychology. In the next section, the findings from the expert interviews will be discussed in the context of the current psychological literature.

7.2. Phase II: Interviews with Experts

To have a deeper understanding of equanimity in the present-day context, thirty experts from various contemplative traditions and practices were individually interviewed on their insights into the nature of equanimity. The themes and sub-themes derived from the 117 pages of transcribed data resulted in a thick description of equanimity, and are discussed below.

The findings from the interviews suggest equanimity as an even-mindedness towards the entire spectrum of varied hedonic and affective experiences as well as an even-minded outlook towards all individuals.

In the literature equanimity has been defined as “an even-minded mental state or dispositional tendency towards all experiences or objects, regardless of their affective valence- pleasant, unpleasant or neutral” (Desbordes et al., 2015). Equanimity has also been defined as “an intentional stance to neither hold on to pleasant experience nor push away unpleasant experience” (Olendzki, 2006). The Decoupling model of equanimity proposed by Hadash et al. (2016) operationalized equanimity as a decoupling of desire (desiring/avoiding) from the hedonic tone of experience (pleasant/unpleasant).

Weber (2020) conceptualized equanimity as inner and external equanimity. Inner equanimity was defined as “open acceptance and non-reactivity towards discrimination faculties (pleasure, displeasure, neutrality) and external equanimity as accepting an individual’s discrimination

faculties (pleasure, displeasure, neutrality), with patience so to respond with compassion for self and others”.

Thus, it can be concluded that the conceptualizations of equanimity in the psychological literature correspond with the above understandings of the experts.

Equanimity as a Widening Perspective towards Experience

The first theme proposed that in states of equanimity there is a broadening or widening of the perspective towards experiences facilitated through acceptance, enhanced tolerance for distress, and non-reactivity. The studies from the psychological literature support these findings. In states of equanimity, acceptance, and tolerance for distress are enhanced, and instead of employing strategies such as avoidance or distraction, attention is guided towards the emotionally triggering stimulus (Chambers et al., 2009). Engaging the triggering stimulus with equanimity regulates the intensity and duration of the emotional response which leads to reduced reactivity which may further prevent impulsive maladaptive behaviors (Desbordes et al., 2015).

To summarize, the first theme from the findings of the expert interviews focused on equanimity as a widening perspective towards various hedonic and affective experiences. The processes underlying this include enhanced acceptance, tolerance for distress, and non-reactivity.

Broadening concerning One’s View of Others

The second theme focuses on the inter-personal dimension of equanimity i.e., broadening of one’s perspective towards other individuals. The experts emphasized that equanimity can be extended towards all beings as an even-minded disposition of reduced bias, judgment, and preconceived notions. The findings from the interviews are supported by a few studies in the psychological literature.

McRae (2013) suggests that with the cultivation of equanimity, biases towards others are reduced through the process of changing one’s emotional reactive patterns. It is relevant to note that while the psychological literature focuses on equanimity towards other human beings, the Eastern traditions have emphasized the cultivation of equanimity towards all living beings which may include animals, plants, insects. For example, in the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna suggests that a person with equal vision does not discriminate between a Brahmin, a cow, and an elephant. From the physical perspective, these species are very different, however, a person with equanimity has

insight into the similar unitary consciousness underlying these different species and hence, views them as equal.

The experts also suggested that a sense of inter-connectedness, universal love, and compassion underlie states of equanimity. In the Buddhist traditions, equanimity and compassion are closely linked. The cultivation of equanimity is the first step in the training for *Bodhicitta* (universal compassion) in the Seven-part cause and effect meditation (Tsong-Kha-Pa, 2004). The cultivation of equanimity defuses the strong boundaries between self and others, thereby facilitating the development of compassion (Wang, 2005). Thus, equanimity is the key mediating factor in compassion as it creates an awareness that is non-judgmental, and inclusive of others (Weber, 2017).

One of the explanations for people's difficulty to get along peacefully with others who hold different world views from them is the Terror Management Theory (Greenberg et al., 1986). When one encounters individuals who have a different cultural worldview, it puts into doubt the legitimacy of one's own belief, threatening their foundation of security. To reduce this threat, people put down others with different views, may call them ignorant and try to convert them to their world views, or in extreme circumstances, try to annihilate them (Solomon et al., 1991). Equanimity facilitates even-mindedness towards all individuals. Thus, with the cultivation of equanimity, tolerance and acceptance towards those with different world views may increase, leading to reduced social conflict.

To summarize, in states of equanimity there are reduced biases and prejudices. Equanimity may also facilitate the development of compassion and altruism towards others (Jijina & Biswas, in press). The third theme focuses on equanimity being rooted in wisdom and insight.

Equanimity being rooted in Wisdom and Insight

Findings from the interviews suggested that the cultivation of equanimity is facilitated by deep insight into the conditioned and transient nature of experiences, and inter-connectedness and inter-dependence among all beings. The cultivation of insight plays an important role in Vipassana meditation, wherein the novice meditator through progressive stages of insight into the conditioned nature of all experiences. Wallace (2010) recommends the technique of cultivating equanimity by

reflecting on the mind's arbitrary classification of individuals into friends or enemies and gaining insight into the superficial and self-serving reasons for these classifications.

Research suggests that equanimity facilitates the recognition of triggering stimuli as transient, insubstantial mental events rather than accurate representations of reality. With this insight, the purely sensory aspects of the triggering stimulus are recognized and one may choose to disengage from the rumination and elaborations that usually follow (Chambers et al., 2009).

Desbordes et al (2015) suggest that the awareness of the transitory nature of one's experiences may contribute to a perspective change in relation to one's thoughts. With the awareness of transience, the self-referential processing reduces i.e., the importance of the stimulus in relation to the self reduces. Thus, with the continued practice of equanimity, habitual patterns of maladaptive behaviors are reduced.

To summarize, equanimity is rooted in the insight and wisdom of inter-dependence and the transitory nature of all experiences. The next theme focuses on the myths and misconceptions surrounding equanimity.

Myths & Misconceptions related to Equanimity

The fourth theme focuses on the myths and misconceptions surrounding 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.

The psychological literature also emphasizes that equanimity is not an attitude of cold indifference, or giving up the affective coloring of our life experiences (Bhikkhu, 1996). Weber (2020) reiterates that equanimity does not mean indifference but a practice that connects from a point of genuine affection.

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. A few studies in the literature have reported that mindfulness practice is the basis for cultivating equanimity, in which one can focus attention upon the flow of experience in the present moment without distraction (Machado & Costa, 2015;

Shoham et al., 2018). Weber (2020) also suggests that the attitude of non-judgment, openness, and acceptance which are part of the classic definitions of mindfulness may characterize equanimity. Mindfulness facilitates the ability to remain consciously aware of the experience, while equanimity allows this awareness to be even and unbiased. Thus, equanimity is differentiated from states such as mindfulness, passivity, indifference, and apathy.

Cognitive-Affective-Conative Model of Equanimity

Based on all the above findings from the four themes, a theoretical model is proposed as a step towards assembling the various cognitive, affective, and behavioral mechanisms of equanimity. As proposed in the model, the cognitive processes underlying equanimity are outlined as awareness, acceptance, openness to experience, reduced bias and judgments, and insights into transience. The key affective components have been delineated as hedonic neutrality, reduced avoidance, and enhanced tolerance for distress. The conative factors associated with equanimity have been proposed as reduced reactivity, increased compassion and altruism, and enhanced ability to deal with stress.

In the next section, the findings from the interviews regarding the cultivation practices of equanimity have been elaborated.

The Various Cultivation Methods of Equanimity for Adults

The experts suggested various methods and techniques for the cultivation of equanimity which have been elaborated separately for adults and children. Awareness is the first step towards equanimity. The awareness practices suggested by the experts to facilitate the cultivation of equanimity included breath-work, meditation, and the practice of *Sakshi Bhaav* (Witness Consciousness).

Observation of one's flow of breath can help one become more aware. Focusing on the breath has the advantages of being affect-neutral (Carmody, 2009), easily accessible, lacking philosophical or religious overtones, and may be easy for a novice to learn. Pranayama and Nadishodhana were suggested as breath awareness practices.

The word Pranayama is formed by the combination of two Sanskrit terms "*Prana*" which means vital energy or life force and "*Ayama*" which means to control. Research suggests that pranayama

is an effective technique for emotional regulation as it improves the regulation of the hypothalamus-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis and activates the parasympathetic nervous system which produces calmness and clarity of mind (Jerath et al. 2006). Studies in the psychological literature have demonstrated the effect of Pranayama in reducing stress, anxiety, and increasing calmness (Bhavnani, 2012; Deha and Kumar 2012; Rastogi and Kishore 2012).

Nadi-shodana which is a slow type of Pranayama was also reported by the experts as an effective strategy for facilitating equanimity. Studies have reported *Nadi-shodhana* to have positive effects in cardio-pulmonary parameters such as blood pressure and heart rate, improvement in cortical functions such as problem-solving, and reduction in stress (Subbalakshmi et al. 2005; Vaksh & Pandey 2019). *Pranayama* and *Nadi-shodhana* may thus be an effective breath-work technique for emotional regulation and may facilitate the cultivation of states of equanimity.

Most of the experts suggested meditation as one of the key methods in the cultivation of equanimity. The various meditations suggested were Vipassana, mindfulness meditation, 7-point training meditation, and Yoga Nidra Meditation.

The practice of Vipassana meditation is to observe sensations and thoughts without reacting or identifying with them which facilitates equanimity to one's cognitive and emotional experiences (Pagis, 2009). Studies indicate that with the practice of Vipassana meditation, tolerance of stress increases (Emavardhan & Tori, 1997), self-centered cravings are reduced, and the meditator can feel a sense of calmness and equanimity (Goldstein, 1993).

Vipassana programs are being increasingly used in prisons in India, United States, New Zealand, and Thailand. Studies in prison have demonstrated that Vipassana meditation reduces the inmate's aggression, decreases substance use, and facilitates the processing of traumatic memories. (Bowen et al. 2006; Himmelstein, 2011; Perelman et al. 2012;).

The experts also suggested mindfulness meditation to cultivate equanimity. In 1979, Kabat-Zinn derived the technique of Mindfulness from Vipassana Meditation, with a focus on mental health and less emphasis on Buddhist theology. Studies suggest that mindfulness is the first stage of cultivating equanimity, through which one can focus attention upon the flow of experience without distraction (Desbordes et al. 2015; Weber 2017). The practice and cultivation of mindfulness states

were associated with elevations in manifestations of equanimity i.e., a reduction in reactivity to unpleasant hedonic tone (Hadash et al. 2016).

A study by Shoham et al. (2018) found that the cultivation of mindfulness states was associated with an increase in manifestations of equanimity i.e., decreased hedonic-based avoidance and an increase in acceptance. Similarly, Juneau et al. (2020) reported that the more experience participants had in the cultivation of mindfulness, the higher were their equanimity scores on the EQUA-S (Equanimity Scale). Thus, these studies demonstrate that the cultivation of mindfulness is related to equanimity.

One of the experts mentioned that the practice of the Seven Points of Mind Training can aid the cultivation of equanimity. Seven-point Mind training in Buddhism is an advanced practice that facilitates one to see every experience with more awareness. The fifty-nine slogans that form the root text are designed as a set of antidotes to mental habits that cause suffering. Some of the practices include reflecting on impermanence and death and discerning the basic nature of awareness and emptiness. One of the advanced practices practiced is “*Tonglen*,” “giving and taking.” In this practice, one visualizes compassionately removing someone’s suffering and taking it on themselves. We then visualize giving them the solutions to their problems and wish them happiness (Chodron, 2002). This practice relates to equanimity wherein we reduce our experiential avoidance of unpleasant valence by trying to take in things that we naturally resist and increase our acceptance towards it.

There are other Buddhist practices which facilitate equanimity such as *Dzogchen* meditation which involves being truly observant of one's thoughts, neither clinging to experiences of joy nor being overcome by sadness. The aim is to transcend the ordinary thinking mind and to reach the nature of pure awareness called *Rigpa*. Once the practice is truly integrated, it leads to deep stability and equanimity (Desbordes et al., 2015).

The experts suggested that the practice of *Sakshi Bhaav* or witness consciousness would facilitate awareness of one’s emotional conflicts and triggers which may facilitate the cultivation of equanimity. The practice of witness consciousness has been emphasized in Shri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga and is a state in which one stands back as an observer of one's thoughts and feelings

rather than reacting to them. This practice reduces identification with one's thoughts, and ruminative mental activities (Sivananda & Krishnananda, 1974).

In Western terminology, a similar concept is referred to as Psychological Distancing or De-centering and is a crucial component of Cognitive Therapies. In this state, the individual observes his/her thoughts like a fly on the wall and does not get entangled in them which may facilitate insight towards one's inner cognitions and habitual patterns of behavior (Aduk & Kross, 2010). It has also been described as the ability to view one's thoughts as constructions of reality rather than as reality itself (Alford and Beck, 1997). Studies report that psychological distancing has been shown to decrease emotional and physiological reactivity, and reduce rumination over time (Kross et al., 2005; Kross & Aduk, 2008).

Openness to experience and a reduction in experiential avoidance are crucial processes in the cultivation of equanimity. A few analytical practices were suggested by the experts to facilitate openness and widening of experience as elaborated below. Many of the experts emphasized the need for introspection into one's subjective lenses in viewing reality. A few techniques suggested by the experts were to reflect on the transience of experiences, inter-dependence, and reflecting on the mind's arbitrary classification of people as friends, enemies, or strangers. Desbordes et al (2015) posit that the awareness of the transitory nature of one's momentary experience contributes to a perspective change in relation to one's thoughts i.e., the relevance of the stimulus for the self reduces and reactivity to these thoughts decreases.

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.

The experts believed that generative practices such as compassion and loving-kindness may aid in the facilitation of equanimity. These three qualities of equanimity, compassion, and loving-kindness are inter-related and mutually beneficial. Compassion prevents equanimity from turning into indifference, apathy, and coldness. Loving-kindness imparts to equanimity a selfless and boundless nature that goes beyond prejudices and biases. Similarly, equanimity guards loving-kindness from spiraling into uncontrolled emotions (Thera, 2008). Deepening the inter-

connections, Weber (2017) proposes that equanimity enables us to face the misery, despair, and suffering of others and in this process facilitates the cultivation of compassion.

In summary, rather than in isolation, the qualities of equanimity, compassion, and loving-kindness suffuse and pervade each other.

Various pathways of Yoga were suggested to facilitate equanimity: Raja Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga, and Jnana Yoga. A few studies in the psychological literature have focused on equanimity in the context of Karma Yoga. In a recent study, Mulla and Krishnan (2014) conceptualized equanimity as one of the three dimensions of Karma Yoga along with duty-orientation and indifference to rewards. In their model, equanimity is understood as a frame of mind being neutral to happiness and pain. In another model of Karma Yoga by Rastogi and Pati (2015), equanimity and sensory control were found as the prerequisites for the practice of Karma Yoga.

Bharti (2015) suggests that the main goal of Raja Yoga is to reach higher states of consciousness known as *samadhi* which is unity with the divine consciousness. The state of *samadhi* may also include being in a state of total equanimity. The pathway of Jnana yoga emphasizes analytical self-inquiry into one's nature which may facilitate the cultivation of states of equanimity through increased awareness of one's emotional triggers. Bhakti Yoga focuses on love, devotion, and complete surrender which may facilitate the cultivation of states of equanimity. Evidence from studies supports that religious surrender is inversely related to stress (Clements & Ermakova, 2012) and inversely predictive of psycho-pathology and suicide risk (Pugh, 2019). In summary, the various pathways of Yoga such as Karma Yoga Bhakti Yoga, Jnana Yoga, and Raja Yoga may facilitate the cultivation of states of equanimity.

One of the experts suggested that states of equanimity might be facilitated by eating more *Sattvic* foods and less *Rajasic* or *Tamasic* foods. Ayurveda has classified food into three basic groups (Guha 2006): i) *Sattvic* food: Includes fresh vegetables, rice, milk, butter, honey, fruits, nuts. When eaten in the right quantity Sattvic food, brings mental harmony and evokes higher conscious awareness. ii) *Rajasic* food: such as garlic, coffee, and wine, fried food, and spicy food. Rajasic food stimulates and should be included in the diet in moderation. iii) *Tamasic* food: includes frozen food, leftovers- overs and meats that may need more energy and time to digest. Such food may enhance sluggishness and must be included in the diet with caution.

Current Western research also complements the theory of Ayurveda. Higher intake of fruits and vegetables, rich in micronutrients, have been associated with better gut flora and enhanced mental health such as reduced depressive symptoms, higher positive mood, and life satisfaction (Brookie et al., 2018; Li et al., 2017; Rahe et al., 2014). On the other hand, a processed food diet has been found to increase inflammation and has been associated with poor mental health associated with the risk of depressive symptoms and anxiety (Adjibade et al., 2019; Bakhtiyari et al 2013; Wang et al., 2019). Thus, paying attention to the nutritional aspects of one's diet is important for physical and mental health, which will be conducive for the cultivation of equanimity.

In Summary: The various cultivation methods for equanimity for adults included the cultivation of awareness through breath practices, meditation, and practicing witness consciousness. Analytical practices which widen our perspective on experiences such as understanding impermanence and generative practices such as compassion and loving-kindness have a bearing on states of equanimity. There are various pathways of Yoga that may facilitate the cultivation of equanimity such as Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Raja Yoga, and Jnana Yoga. Taking care of the nutritional aspect of the diet is relevant for physical and mental health which in turn may help facilitate states of equanimity. The next section will outline the various strategies for the cultivation of equanimity in children.

Various Pathways towards Facilitation of Equanimity in Children

The experts suggested a few unique and indirect pathways for the cultivation of equanimity in children as presented in Table in Chapter IV. The various pathways are discussed below in the context of the psychological literature.

The experts emphasized the importance of Social-emotional and ethical (SEE) learning competencies for children. Roots of Empathy is a renowned SEE learning program in which an infant is brought into the classroom that serves as a springboard for lessons on emotional awareness, perspective taking, caring for others, neuro-science, and infant development. This program has shown considerable results in decreasing aggression, increasing pro-social behavior, and enhancing socio-emotional competencies such as perspective-taking. Thus, enabling such competencies in children from a young age may facilitate the development of equanimity when they are older (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2012).

The experts also emphasized the role of teachers and parents in modelling equanimous behaviour and providing unconditional positive regard to the child. Extending unconditional positive regard to the child enables the child to be more receptive and open to a range of experiences especially negative experiences such as failure. Assor & Tal (2011) highlight that conditional parental regard gives the child the implicit message that the parent provides love and esteem only when one succeeds. It is likely to be interpreted as meaning that one is not worthy if one does not succeed. As a result, conditional regard is likely to lead to avoidance of failure or any negative event which is not up to the parent's standards. Hence, in early life, the role of unconditional positive is regarded as extremely important.

Certain indirect pathways were elaborated in the cultivation of equanimity in children. Children could be exposed to equanimous role models through theatre, folk tales, and stories. The experts also suggested that art can indirectly facilitate the cultivation of equanimity as it promotes openness to experience and reduces censoring. Studies have also provided evidence that people in the arts are high on the trait of openness to experience (Feist, 2010; Furnham et al., 2005). Art is not as rational and logical as language and thus the use of art reduces censoring and avoidance. Moschini (2005) stated that art can penetrate through our human defenses and allows us to see within the deepest parts of our psyche. Hence, Art therapy is used as a powerful therapeutic modality especially for resistant clients to express their traumatic feelings and reduce their experiential avoidance. Cavusoglu (2020) explored the experience of equanimity expressed by six artists through interviews and art-works. The findings revealed that creating art facilitated openness to novelty, allowed the artists to experience things as they are, and facilitated the experience of equanimity for the artists.

In summary: The cultivation of equanimity may be started in children from a young age through simple indirect techniques such as SEE learning, through art and stories. The role of parents and teachers is most crucial in this endeavour by modelling equanimous behavior and providing unconditional positive regard to the child.

The findings from the interviews related to the various facets of the cultivation of equanimity are further discussed below. The need for equanimity in the context of the contextual pre-cursors is discussed along with the difficulties and challenges the practitioner may face during the cultivation

of equanimity. The suggested psycho-social health concomitants of equanimity are also elaborated on below.

Micro and Macro Contextual Pre-cursors for the Cultivation of Equanimity

The micro and meso level contextual precursors for the cultivation of equanimity suggested by the experts were related to the rising stress levels and burn-out, the increasing prevalence of anxiety, depression, and the reduction in social and family support. At the macro level the contextual precursors for the need for equanimity suggested by the experts were the complex and volatile world we live in, and the need for a shift in the orientation towards holistic well-being.

Given the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) world we live in, learning to regulate our emotional responses could be the key to successful adaptation. As human life consists of both pain and pleasure, the cultivation of equanimity may contribute to holistic well-being (Desbordes et al., 2015) and help adapt to the complex challenges and ebbs and flows of life. Studies on global prevalence rates of usage of illicit drugs and internet addiction report rising prevalence rates (Peacock et al., 2018).

The cultivation of equanimity not only would help in dealing with unpleasant experiences but also help in responding adaptively to the craving for pleasant experiences. Thus, the cultivation of equanimity would help in regulating both negative emotions as well as the constant craving for pleasure.

Challenges faced in the Cultivation of Equanimity

The major difficulties and challenges which may arise during the cultivation of equanimity were identified by the experts in the context of sustaining one's practice, letting go of attachments, and practicing without sufficient knowledge or wisdom.

Similar challenges related to the cultivation of equanimity are reported in the psychological literature, which includes experiencing resistance as practice progressed (Machado & Costa, 2015), gradual reductions in equanimity, and return of intense or disturbing thoughts as practice reduces (Pagis, 2015), and experiencing physical pain during extended periods of sitting for meditation (Ekici et al., 2020). Thus, the cultivation of equanimity has its challenges and difficulties associated with it, and cognizance of these may enable the practitioners to navigate them better.

Suggested Psycho-social Health Concomitants of Equanimity

The experts suggested a multitude of health concomitants associated with the cultivation of equanimity such as reduced emotional fluctuations, reduced stress, wiser decision-making, and enhanced interpersonal relationships. The psychological literature also reports similar health benefits associated with the cultivation of equanimity. In a study by Pagis (2015), Goenka Vipassana meditators reported that they experienced equanimity as a self-transformation of mental calmness, being in the present, and reduction of emotions such as anger, sadness, and passion. With the cultivation of equanimity, meditators perceived emotional stimuli as more neutral instead of positive/negative which may help in reducing bias in decision making (Machado & Costa., 2015).

Equanimity has also been studied in therapeutic settings and has shown improvements in eudemonic well-being and insights into the perception of reality (Ekici et al., 2020), and with experiencing a reduction in loneliness (Lindsay et al., 2018). Thus, as seen from the findings of the expert interviews and the psychological literature, the cultivation of equanimity has been associated with a host of psychological and inter-personal benefits.

The next section focuses on the discussion of the development of a measure of equanimity in the Indian context and exploration of its psycho-social health concomitants.

7.3. Phase III: Development of a Measure of Equanimity in the Indian Context and Exploration of its Psycho-social Health Concomitants

Based on the rich and in-depth qualitative findings from phases I and II of the research, phase III of the research aimed to develop a self-report measure of equanimity, and to explore its factor structure, reliability, and validity in a general community sample.

Factor Structure of the Developed Scale on Equanimity

The factor analysis of the developed scale on equanimity revealed six underlying factors - reduced hedonic craving, tolerance for distress, reduced reactivity, inter-connectedness, affective equipoise, and impartial view. The models and the existing scales on equanimity in the psychological literature are discussed below to draw parallels with the six obtained factors.

The first factor of Reduced hedonic craving refers to a state of mind in which there is a reduced craving for pleasant experiences. In states of equanimity, Hadash et al. (2016) theorized that there is a decoupling or dissociation of desire (desiring/avoiding) from the hedonic tone of experience (pleasant/unpleasant). Similarly, Olendzki (2006) defined equanimity as “an intentional stance to neither hold on to pleasant experience nor push away unpleasant experience”. Thus, there is reduced craving for the pleasant and reduced avoidance of the unpleasant in states of equanimity.

The Equanimity Scale (EQUA-S) developed by Juneau et al. (2020) consisted of two sub-scales: even-minded state of mind (ESM) and hedonic independence (HI). The ESM refers to staying calm, irrespective of the situation or the stimuli, and HI refers to the absence of reactions motivated by the hedonic valence of stimuli.

The second factor of Tolerance for distress refers to the perceived capacity to withstand negative or aversive emotional or physical states (Leyro et al., 2010). Distress tolerance is linked with acceptance. Acceptance is a key prerequisite for equanimity, which enables a person to perceive stimuli more evenly (Juneau et al., 2020) and tolerate distressing experiences. With acceptance, experiential avoidance decreases, and distress tolerance is enhanced. In the psychological literature, reduced experiential avoidance (Roemer & Orsillo, 2007) and enhanced tolerance for distress have been reported (Tanay et al. 2012) as effects of mindfulness-based interventions.

The third factor of Reduced reactivity refers to the reduction in cognitive and emotional reactivity to difficult or stressful situations. Hadash et al. (2016) in their model on equanimity found one higher-order factor of equanimity and two lower-order factors of reduced reactivity and an attitude of acceptance. According to Desbordes et al. (2015), engaging the triggering stimulus with equanimity, moderates the intensity and duration of the emotional response. Rather than becoming stuck in habitual reactions, one may become aware of the fleeting nature of experience and choose to disengage from reacting. Non-reactivity is also one of the underlying factors of equanimity along with acceptance in the recently developed Equanimity Scale-16 (Rogers et al., 2021).

The fourth-factor Inter-connectedness refers to the insight and understanding that all beings irrespective of their form, shape, color are essentially equal and part of the unitary underlying consciousness. Insight is an important aspect of equanimity. The model of equanimity by Eberth

et al. (2019) based on interviews with experienced meditators shows how equanimity and insight into the nature of phenomena are intertwined. Various types of insights were reported based on qualitative interviews with experienced meditators such as insight into self-made suffering, insight into the subjectivity of own beliefs, and impermanence and inter-connectedness.

The fifth factor of Affective equipoise refers to a balance and equipoise in the dualities such as success-failure, praise-criticism. In states of equanimity, the individual will remain equipoised and neutral in the contrasting dualities such as victory-loss, happiness-sadness. Mishra (2018) developed a scale on the concept of *Samatva* from the Bhagavad Gita. The 32-item scale on *Samatva* consisted of three subscales i) Established in yoga which had items related to awareness and being balanced ii) Complete Non- attachment which had items related to reduced attachment to outcomes and iii) Even mindedness which had items related to being equal in the dualities such as praise-criticism, success-failure.

The sixth factor of the Impartial view refers to an even-minded disposition of reduced bias and preferences towards other individuals. Bodhi (2000) suggests that the ideal form of equanimity includes having an equal attitude towards all beings, without discrimination, preferences, and prejudices.

Thus, as seen above, the six factors of the developed scale on equanimity are consistent with the theories (Desbordes et al, 2015), models (Hadash et al., 2015; Eberth et al., 2019) and scales of equanimity (Juneau et al., 2020; Mishra, 2018; Rogers et al., 2021) reported in the psychological literature. Following the development of the scale on equanimity, the research focused on the study of equanimity in the context of a few key socio-demographic variables (gender, age, and education).

Based on the review of literature, six hypotheses were framed in relation to equanimity and the socio-demographic variables of gender, age, and education.

Gender and Equanimity

The results from the Table indicate that males and females do not differ on total equanimity. Hence, hypothesis H₁ that there will be no significant difference between males and females with respect to total equanimity is accepted.

In addition, the results report that there are no gender differences in the dimensions of equanimity except for a small effect in the dimension of reduced reactivity in which males are slightly higher than females. Thus, the hypothesis H₂ stating that there will be no significant difference between males and females with respect to the six dimensions of equanimity is rejected for the dimension of reduced reactivity (H_{2.c}) and is accepted for the dimensions of hedonic craving (H_{2.a}), tolerance for distress (H_{2.b}), inter-connectedness (H_{2.d}), affective equipoise (H_{2.e}) and impartial view (H_{2.f}). Equanimity is not a gender-specific trait. Findings from the Equanimity Scale – 16 by Rogers et al. (2021) also report no gender differences on total equanimity.

Therefore, we may conclude that there is no effect of gender on equanimity. The next hypothesis focuses on the relation of age with equanimity.

Equanimity and Age

The results indicated that the total equanimity scores in the 18-30 years age group were lower than the other age groups. Hence, hypothesis H₃ which stated that there will be a significant difference between the various age groups with respect to the total equanimity is accepted.

To be more specific, the results indicate that the 18-30 years age group was lower compared to the other age groups in the dimensions of Reduced hedonic craving, Tolerance for distress, Reduced reactivity, Inter-connectedness, and Affective equipoise. Thus, hypothesis H₄ stating that there will be a significant difference between the various age-groups with respect to the dimensions of equanimity is accepted for the dimensions of Reduced Hedonic Craving (H_{4.a}), Tolerance for Distress (H_{4.b}), Reduced Reactivity (H_{4.c}), Inter-connectedness (H_{4.d}) and Affective equipoise (H_{4.e}). There were no age-related differences found for the dimension of Impartial view (H_{4.f}) and thus, the hypothesis H_{4.f} is rejected.

These findings are supported by previous studies. Findings indicated a positive correlation between age and the Equanimity Scale (ES-16) by Rogers et al. (2021). Research on aging and emotional regulation also states that older adults are more competent than younger adults at self-regulating their emotions through either modification of their environments or acquiring strategies and capacities to manage their emotions (Carstensen et al., 2000; Kessler & Staudinger, 2009).

With age, cognitive-affective complexity increases which is the capacity that allows older adults to understand more complex emotions, and enables individuals to perceive themselves and others in a more flexible, open, and accepting manner (Labouvie-Vief & Medler, 2002). Hence, it is summarized that equanimity is less in the younger age group of 18-30 years compared to the older age groups. The next hypothesis focuses on the relation between equanimity and education.

Equanimity and Education

The results suggest that the education groups of 10th/12th standard, graduation, and post-graduation differ in total equanimity. As seen in the Table, total equanimity is least in the 10/12th standard group and highest in the post-graduation group. Thus, hypothesis H₅ which stated that there will be no significant differences in total equanimity between the groups with different levels of education is rejected.

The results indicate that the 10/12th standard education group was lower compared to the other education groups in the dimensions of Reduced hedonic craving, tolerance for distress, reduced reactivity, inter-connectedness, and affective equipoise. Thus, the hypothesis H₆ which stated that there will be no significant difference in the dimensions of equanimity between the groups with different levels of education is rejected for Reduced Hedonic Craving (H_{6.a}), Tolerance for Distress (H_{6.b}), Reduced Reactivity (H_{6.c}), Inter-connectedness (H_{6.d}) and Affective Equipoise (H_{6.e}). There are no differences between the dimension of the Impartial view among the groups with different levels of education. Thus, hypothesis H_{6.f} is accepted.

Higher levels of education facilitate the development of key skills such as curiosity, inquiry, critical thinking, abstract reasoning, and perspective-taking. The early constructs of education and literacy involved learning and understanding facts. The New Education Policy NEP (2020) of India emphasizes that education must develop higher-order cognitive capacities, such as critical thinking and problem solving as well as social, ethical, and emotional capacities. The NEP (2020) also suggests that basic training in fostering mental health needs to be added to the educational curriculum.

In India, the Social-Emotional-Ethical (SEE) learning program was launched recently in April 2019 by Emory University in collaboration with the Dalai Lama to equip students with the skills

of compassion, ethical discernment, emotional intelligence, and resilience. The curriculum of SEE learning includes topics such as attention training, the cultivation of compassion for self and others, and resiliency skills based on trauma-informed care, (SEE Learning, 2021).

Recent practices in education also focus on Socio-Scientific Reasoning (SSR) where the learner is taught to understand issues in the context of real-world social issues (Kahn & Zeidler, 2016). Sadler et al. (2007) enumerate four key skills in Socio-scientific reasoning that promote informed decision-making: (1) recognizing complexity (2) integrating multiple perspectives (3) appreciating the open-ended nature of scientific inquiry and (4) demonstrating skepticism. These skills are very similar to the processes underlying equanimity such as openness to experience, curiosity, and may promote cognitive flexibility which will facilitate states of equanimity. Also, while pursuing higher education the student may take up research-based projects which may facilitate curiosity, openness, and critical thinking with an unbiased neutral perspective.

Thus, it can be seen that higher education facilitates skills such as curiosity, critical thinking, and openness which may further facilitate states of equanimity.

In summary, it can be concluded that age and education are the key socio-demographic variables that are related to equanimity. Gender is not strongly associated with equanimity. The next section focuses on the study of the psycho-social health concomitants of equanimity. Based on the review of literature, fourteen hypotheses were tested to study the relationship between equanimity and the psycho-social health parameters of emotional reactivity, neuroticism, loneliness, social media addiction, well-being, and perceived general health.

Emotional Reactivity and Equanimity

An emotional response consists of three key elements: activation, intensity, and duration which are referred to as emotional reactivity. Activation refers to the threshold and ease with which an emotional response is triggered. The intensity of an emotional response refers to the peak amplitude of arousal reached. The duration refers to the amount of time required for emotional arousal levels to return to baseline. (Becerra & Campitelli, 2013).

The results indicated a strong negative correlation between equanimity and total emotional reactivity. Thus, H_{7a} which stated that equanimity will be significantly negatively correlated with Total emotional reactivity is accepted.

The total reactivity scale had two sub-scales: emotional reactivity for positive emotions and emotional reactivity for negative emotions. Equanimity was found to be negatively correlated with the sub-scale of positive emotions reactivity and negative emotions reactivity, though the strength of the correlation with positive emotions reactivity is very low. These findings imply that equanimity is more strongly associated with negative emotional reactivity as compared to positive emotional reactivity. Thus, hypotheses H_{7b} and H_{7c} which suggested that equanimity will be negatively correlated with the sub-scales of positive and negative emotions reactivity are accepted.

It was further hypothesized that equanimity will be negatively correlated with the activation, intensity, and duration of positive emotions. The results indicated that equanimity was negatively correlated with the activation and intensity of positive emotions. However, there was no significant correlation between equanimity and the duration of positive emotions. Thus, H_{7d} is partially accepted.

Equanimity was found to be strongly negatively correlated with the activation, intensity, and duration of negative emotions. Thus, for the activation, intensity, and duration of negative emotions, hypothesis H_{7d} is accepted. These findings imply that equanimity has a more robust relation with the reduction in activation, intensity, and duration of negative emotions as compared to positive emotions.

It was hypothesized that equanimity will significantly predict emotional reactivity. The results of the study have confirmed the proposed hypothesis. All the dimensions of equanimity put together, successfully predicted emotional reactivity. Thus, hypothesis H_{13a} is accepted. The dimensions of reduced hedonic craving, tolerance for distress reduced reactivity, and affective equipoise have emerged as strong predictors of emotional reactivity and are negatively related. The dimension of inter-connectedness has emerged as a strong predictor of emotional reactivity and is positively related.

Similar to these findings, Davidson (1998) suggests that individuals may present different patterns of emotional reactivity to emotions with positive valence compared to emotions with negative valence. A meta-analysis study by Gu et al., (2015) reported that reduced cognitive and emotional reactivity is a key mechanism of the positive outcomes of mindfulness-based interventions. Mindfulness-based interventions also led to faster return to heart-rate baselines following an emotional stressor which may be explained by reduced automatic reactivity (Vago and Silbersweig, 2012).

Equanimity and Neuroticism

The results indicated that equanimity was negatively correlated with neuroticism. Thus, the hypothesis H_{8a} was accepted. More specifically, the results suggested that neuroticism was negatively correlated with the dimensions of Tolerance for distress and Reduced reactivity. Thus, hypothesis H_{8b} was accepted. These findings imply that as equanimity increases neuroticism reduces which may be an indicator for the therapeutic potential of equanimity in anxiety disorders.

It was hypothesized that equanimity will significantly predict neuroticism. All the dimensions of equanimity put together significantly predicted neuroticism. Thus, hypothesis H_{13b} is accepted. The dimensions of reduced hedonic craving, tolerance for distress, reduced reactivity, interconnectedness, and affective equipoise have emerged as significant predictors of neuroticism and are negatively related.

Specifically, neuroticism has been linked to an avoidance motivational system (Carver et al., 2000). In avoidance motivation, behavior is motivated by a negative or undesirable event whereas, in approach motivation, behavior is directed by a positive or desirable event (Elliot, 1999). Thus, avoidance motivation in neuroticism reflects the stable tendencies to avoid harm, threats, and penalties (Tamir, 2005). According to Elliot and Thrash (2002), neuroticism is comprised of an avoidance temperament, which is defined as a biological sensitivity and heightened attention towards undesired stimuli (actual or imagined), as well as a behavioral inclination to avoid such stimuli.

Few studies have linked the relationship between equanimity and neuroticism. The Equanimity scale by Juneau et al (2020) was found to be significantly negatively correlated with the neuroticism dimension of the Big five inventory. In another study by Weber (2017), the

neuroticism scale of the Big Five Inventory correlated significantly with the social and reflective subscales of the Barriers to Equanimity Scale. This would suggest that the higher the neuroticism the more perceived social and reflective judgments are barriers to equanimity.

Equanimity and Loneliness

Equanimity was found to be strongly negatively correlated with loneliness. Thus, hypothesis H_{9a} was accepted. More specifically, the results also indicated that loneliness was negatively correlated with the two dimensions of Inter-connectedness and with the Impartial view. Thus, hypothesis H_{9b} is accepted. These findings imply that perceived loneliness may decrease with the belief that all beings are inter-connected and are essentially the same, along with an impartial view towards others.

It was hypothesized that equanimity will significantly predict loneliness. The results indicated that all the dimensions of equanimity put together, successfully contribute to predicting loneliness. Thus, hypothesis H_{13c} is accepted. The dimensions of tolerance for distress reduced reactivity, inter-connectedness, affective equipoise, and impartial view have emerged as successful predictors of loneliness and are negatively related.

Interventions that teach mindfulness skills with an acceptance or equanimity focus have shown potential in reducing feelings of loneliness. Lindsay et al. (2019) demonstrated the efficacy of a two-week smartphone-based mindfulness-based training for reducing loneliness and increasing social contact. Participants were divided into three groups. Group one had training in monitoring and acceptance skills, group two had only monitoring training and the third group was the control group. Results indicated that monitoring and acceptance training reduced daily-life loneliness and increased social contact compared with both Monitor Only and control training. These findings suggest that cultivating an acceptance orientation (equanimity) toward present-moment experiences is a significant mechanism for reducing perceived feelings of loneliness.

Equanimity and Social Media Addiction

The results indicated that equanimity was negatively correlated with social media addiction. Thus, hypothesis H_{10a} is accepted. More specifically, the results also indicated that the dimension of Reduced hedonic craving was significantly negatively correlated with social media addiction. Thus, hypothesis H_{10b} is accepted. Among all the dimensions of equanimity, distress tolerance had the highest negative correlation with social media addiction. These results imply that reduced

hedonic craving and distress tolerance skills are significant aspects of social media usage, indicating that the cultivation of equanimity may have potential benefits in addictive behaviors.

It was hypothesized that equanimity will significantly predict social media addiction. All the dimensions of equanimity put together, successfully predict social media addiction. Thus, hypothesis H_{13d} is accepted. The dimensions of reduced hedonic craving, tolerance for distress, and affective equipoise have emerged as significant predictors of social media addiction and are negatively related. The dimensions of reduced reactivity, inter-connectedness and impartial view have not emerged as significant predictors of social media addiction.

Escapism can broadly be defined as the need to get away or escape from the real world, individuals with negative thoughts about their situations or environment may often turn to social media as a means of escapism or avoidance (Masur et al., 2014). Several studies have also found a link between social media addiction and increased reward sensitivity. (He et al., 2017; Lyvers et al., 2016). Reward sensitivity is defined as a component of personality which is the tendency to detect, follow, and derive pleasure from pleasurable stimuli (Bornsetin, 2018). In a study by Juneau et al. (2020), it was found that equanimity is negatively correlated with the Addictive Intensity Evaluation Questionnaire which assesses eating addictions, and also with sensitivity to reward questionnaire which is a core component of addictive behaviors as described above.

Equanimity and Well-being

The results indicated a positive correlation between total scale equanimity and well-being. Thus, hypothesis H_{11a} is accepted. More specifically, equanimity was positively correlated with the subscales of emotional well-being, psychological well-being, and social well-being.

Thus, hypothesis H_{11b} is accepted. These findings imply that as equanimity increases, emotional, psychological, and social well-being enhances, which may be an indicator of the potential of equanimity in mental health and well-being.

It was hypothesized that equanimity will predict well-being. All the dimensions of equanimity put together, successfully contribute to predicting well-being. Thus, hypothesis H_{13e} has accepted. The dimensions of distress tolerance, reduced reactivity, and inter-connectedness, have emerged as strong predictors of well-being and are positively related. The dimension of reduced hedonic

craving has emerged as a strong predictor of well-being and is negatively related. The dimensions of affective equipoise and impartial view have not emerged as significant predictors of well-being. Bokenkamp (2005) suggests that equanimity is the ideal state of well-being in which there is happiness despite an absence of pleasure. Furthermore, it is a state in which a person is conscious of his or her own as well as others' needs and remains calm amid any hardships and challenges. Desbordes et al. (2015) proposed equanimity as a significant contributor to the enhancement of well-being.

Chan et al. (2014) developed the Holistic Wellbeing Scale which consists of two sub-scales of equanimity and affliction. In their scale, Chan et al. (2014) characterized equanimity as related to four factors: non-attachment, mindful awareness, general vitality, and spiritual self-care. In another study, the Equanimity Scale-16 developed by Rogers et al. (2021) was found to be correlated with the Satisfaction with Life Scale.

Equanimity and Perceived General Health

The results indicated that equanimity was positively correlated with perceived general health. Thus, hypothesis H₁₂ was accepted. It was further hypothesized that equanimity will significantly predict perceived general health. All the dimensions of equanimity put together, successfully predict perceived general health. The dimensions of tolerance for distress, reduced reactivity, interconnectedness, and affective equipoise have emerged as strong predictors of perceived general health and are positively correlated.

A number of studies have documented the effects of Mindfulness-based interventions which may include elements of equanimity on health parameters. Research has shown that mindfulness-based interventions have an impact on various health parameters such as health related quality of life (Nathan et al., 2017), pain (Mohammed et al., 2018), and may be a beneficial intervention for reducing cortisol levels, and symptoms in diseases such as cancer (Lengacher et al., 2012). A study by (Kazemian, 2014) reported that mindfulness-based therapy had a significant positive effect on general health and somatization in individuals dealing with addictive behaviours. A study by Davidson et al. (2003) which documented the effects of an eight-week training program in mindfulness meditation reported significant increases in antibodies among subjects in the meditation compared with those in the wait-list control group.

Spiritual Practices and Equanimity

Hypotheses H₁₄ stated that there will be a significant positive correlation between equanimity and spiritual practices. The results indicated that equanimity had the strongest positive correlation with the practice of meditation, followed by yoga and religious activities. The practice of prayer and equanimity were not significantly correlated. Thus, the hypotheses H_{14a}, H_{14b}, and H_{14d} are accepted and the hypothesis H_{14c} is rejected.

Based on percentile values, the level of practices of meditation, yoga, prayer, and religious activities were grouped into Low (below 25 percentile) and High (above 75 percentile). Hypotheses H₁₅ stated that there will be significant differences in the dimensions of equanimity between individuals with low and high levels of spiritual practices. The results indicated that the high-level meditation group reported higher scores in the dimensions of Reduced hedonic craving, Tolerance for distress, Reduced reactivity, and Impartial view. The meditation groups did not differ in the dimensions of Inter-connectedness and Affective equipoise. Hence H_{15a} is partially accepted.

In the context of yoga, there was an increase in the high-level yoga group only in the dimensions of Reduced reactivity and affective equipoise. Hence H_{15b} is partially accepted. The prayer groups did not differ in any dimension of equanimity which suggests that prayer does not affect equanimity. Hence the Hypothesis H_{15c} is rejected. Lastly, as seen in Table, there was an increase in the high level of religious practice groups only in the dimensions of Reduced hedonic craving and tolerance for distress. Hence H_{15d} is partially accepted. In regard to total equanimity, it was found that only the practice of meditation affects total equanimity. Other spiritual practices such as yoga, prayers, and religious activities do not affect total equanimity. In summary, from among the spiritual practices of meditation, yoga, prayer, and religious activities, it is suggested that the practice of meditation has the most significant effect on equanimity.

Many studies in the psychological literature have reported the effect of mindfulness meditation on equanimity. A study by Shoham et al (2018) reported that the cultivation of mindfulness states was associated with an increase in equanimity i.e., elevated acceptance and decreased hedonic-based avoidance. Hadash et al (2016) found that mindfulness training led to a decrease in reactivity to unpleasant hedonic tones. Juneau et al. (2020) reported that after mindfulness training there was

an increase in the scores of the even-minded state of mind sub-scale of the EQUA-S. However, mindfulness exercises for novices did not result in higher Hedonic Independence sub-scale scores which suggest that equanimity towards pleasant objects or experiences may require more meditation practice.

Thus, to conclude, the spiritual practice of meditation has been noted to be the most strongly associated with equanimity in comparison to the other spiritual practices of yoga, prayer, and religious activities.

The next chapter summarizes the major findings of the research and its implications in various domains such as leadership, education, and therapy. The limitations of the study and suggestions for future research are presented. The chapter ends with the conclusions drawn from the research.