

Chapter VIII

Summary and Conclusions

Introduction to Chapter VIII

In this chapter, the major findings of the research are outlined below. The key implications of the research in various domains such as management, education, holistic well-being, and indigenous therapeutic practices are enumerated. The limitations of the study are acknowledged and suggestions for future research are outlined. The conclusions of the research are presented towards the end of this chapter.

8.1 Major Findings:

The major findings are elaborated for each phase of the research below.

Phase I: Analysis of Equanimity in Bhagavad Gita and Buddhist philosophy

- A tripartite conceptualization of *Samatva* from the Bhagavad Gita is suggested in which it is conceptualized as an even-mindedness towards objects, experiences, and individuals. In Buddhism, *Upekkha* is understood as a state or dispositional tendency of even-mindedness towards experiences that counters clinging and aversion.
- In both, the Bhagavad Gita and Buddhism, equanimity is emphasized towards all living beings in the context of having an equal attitude towards all with reduced biases and prejudices.
- Understanding and insight into the transience and impermanence of experiences are highlighted in both the Bhagavad Gita and in Buddhism to facilitate equanimity towards experiences.
- The pathways for the cultivation of equanimity elaborated in the Bhagavad Gita include insight into underlying oneness, sensory control, reducing attachments and desires, through devotion, faith, and surrender. A few key analytical meditations suggested in Buddhism to facilitate equanimity include contemplations into the transience of experience, the role of attachments in relationships, inter-dependence, and inter-connectedness among all living beings.

- The cultivation of *Samatva* in the Bhagavad Gita has been associated with peace, tranquillity, reduced suffering, self-realization freedom from karmic reactions, and liberation from bondage. In Buddhism, the cultivation of equanimity is central to cultivating universal compassion, or *Bodhicitta* which relates to attaining the highest possible enlightenment for the benefit of all beings.

Phase II: Understanding Equanimity through Interviews with Experts

- The in-depth findings from the interviews with the thirty experts suggested that equanimity broadens our cognitive-affective evaluative systems to widen our perspective on the experience.
- The Cognitive-affective-conative model of equanimity processes that the underlying cognitive aspects of equanimity include awareness, insight into the true nature of experiences, openness to experience, and reduced bias and judgments. The affective aspects underlying equanimity include increased tolerance for distress and reduced avoidance. The conative aspects of equanimity include reduced reactivity and enhanced compassion and altruism towards others.
- In states of equanimity, there is a broadening of one's view of others which is extended towards all beings as an even-minded disposition of reduced bias, judgment, and preconceived notions. Empathy, sense of connection, and compassion underlie the state of equanimity.
- Equanimity may be rooted in wisdom and insight into the transience of experiences and non-duality, as well as the awareness of the conditioned nature of experiences.
- There may be a few myths and misconceptions surrounding equanimity and it may seem similar to states such as apathy, passivity, and indifference. However, remaining indifferent or passive is contrary to states of equanimity where there is a high level of compassion and a sense of connectedness.

- Mindfulness and equanimity may often be conflated together but are distinct constructs. The practice of mindfulness could build the foundation on which equanimity may be cultivated.
- Various methods and pathways for the cultivation of equanimity for adults include breath practices, meditation, generative practices such as loving-kindness and compassion, the various pathways of yoga and reflection into inter-dependence, impermanence, and transience.
- In the context of the development of equanimity in children, the findings suggested that parents and teachers play an important role and may model equanimous behavior. Stories and uncensored expression through art may also be used as indirect means to facilitate states of equanimity in children.
- The cultivation of equanimity is a long-term process and maintaining one's practice was one of the major challenges reported. A few of the other challenges reported included letting go of one's attachments, desires, and rigid dichotomies. Furthermore, practicing equanimity without proper understanding or knowledge may run the risk of suppressing the experience.
- A multitude of health concomitants may be associated with the cultivation of equanimity such as reduced emotional fluctuations and reactivity which may lead to less stress and burnout, wiser decision-making, and enhanced well-being. The cultivation of equanimity may lead to better inter-personal relationships and less bias and prejudice which may lead to reduced conflicts, disputes, and aggression.

Phase III: Development of a Scale on Equanimity in the Indian Context

- A total of six factors were derived in the developed scale on equanimity: Hedonic Independence, Tolerance for distress, Reduced reactivity, Inter-connectedness, Affective equipoise, and Impartial view. The scale showed good reliability and satisfactory convergent validity with the Mental Health Continuum and with Perth Emotional Reactivity Scale-18.

- Equanimity is significantly less in the 18-30 years age group compared to the other age groups. Similarly, the results also suggest that equanimity increases with higher levels of education.
- In respect to the psycho-social health concomitants of equanimity, it was found that equanimity is more strongly correlated with negative emotional reactivity compared to positive emotional reactivity.
- Equanimity is also significantly negatively correlated with neuroticism, loneliness, and social media addiction. Well-being and perceived general health are significantly positively correlated with equanimity.
- Equanimity has emerged as a negative predictor of neuroticism, emotional reactivity, social-media addiction, and loneliness. Equanimity positively predicts variance in well-being and general health.
- The practice of meditation has a significant impact on total equanimity. Other spiritual practices such as yoga, prayers, and religious activities do not appear to have a significant effect on total equanimity.

8.2 Implications of the Research:

The key implications of the research are outlined below.

➤ *De-conflating Mindfulness and Equanimity*

Over the years, the construct of equanimity has been conflated within mindfulness and the terms have been used interchangeably by academicians and trainers (Zeng et al., 2013; Desbordes et al., 2015). However, recently researchers have been more sensitive to the conceptual differences between equanimity and mindfulness. The findings of this research have described the construct of equanimity in-depth and may be used to further distinguish equanimity from mindfulness. The research has also proposed a cognitive-affective-conative model of equanimity. Understanding the differences between mindfulness and equanimity, as well as the cognitive-affective processes that underlie them, can help in the delineation as distinct constructs and the creation of precise assessment scales.

➤ ***Leadership and Management***

The findings from this study may be used to sensitize leaders and managers on the workplace benefits that may be derived through the cultivation of equanimity. Leaders and managers who make decisions from a place of equanimity can see the larger picture, may be less reactive and have a balanced approach to solving problems (Connaughton, 2016). Cultivating equanimity may also help leaders in truly being unbiased towards their employees. This is significant considering the negative role that bias may play in appraisals and promotions. Rather than being stuck in maladaptive ways of responding, cultivating equanimity may enable the leader to find flexible and adaptive solutions for the greater good. Leaders who practice equanimity may also be better at adapting to challenges and have a calm approach to solving problems, which offers reassurance to the employees that they are in the hands of a capable leader.

➤ ***Work-place Behaviour and Relationships***

Maher and Cordova (2019) reported that cultivating equanimity promotes understanding and beneficially affects one's interpersonal relationships. As equanimity is strengthened over time and integrated into one's practice of healthily responding to any situation, it may contribute to better interpersonal relationships at work. Research also suggests that employees who practice mindfulness-based practices have higher job performance (Dane & Brummel, 2013), may be more adaptable, experience difficulties as challenges rather than threats, and have positive inter-personal interactions at work (Hunter and McCormic, 2008). Thus, simple ways of cultivating equanimity may be integrated into the employees' wellness programs so that when faced with stress and failure at work, they don't avoid pain or discomfort with unhealthy coping mechanisms and are better able to adapt to the situation.

➤ ***Work-place Diversity***

Equanimity facilitates an even-mindedness towards other individuals and reduces bias, prejudices, and intolerance. Thus, the cultivation of equanimity may facilitate workplace diversity and strengthen the organizational environment in terms of non-discriminatory and accepting attitudes.

➤ ***Adaptive Coping during a Global Pandemic***

The findings of this study may be useful for the mental health professional to help individuals adaptively cope during a global pandemic. Equanimity increases one's distress tolerance and reduces avoidance or suppression of distressing experiences (Chambers et al., 2009). As equanimity is strengthened over time and integrated into one's practice of responding adaptively, it may moderate the physiological response to stress and anxiety (Gard et al., 2012). The cultivation of equanimity may thus facilitate individuals to adaptively cope with the uncertainties and anxieties of living in a global pandemic.

➤ ***Balanced Approach towards Well-being***

With the advent of Positive Psychology, the present approach to well-being appears to be aimed at sustaining happiness. However, Desbordes et al. (2015) suggest that learning to cultivate equanimity as an effective state for responding effectively to the present moment and as a trait that can be strengthened over time may be more beneficial for holistic well-being. The cultivation of equanimity may also aid in sustaining long-term happiness over short-term satisfaction based on the pursuit of pleasure (Juneau et al., 2020).

➤ ***In Education***

It is recommended that the goals of education need to be reframed to prioritize socio-emotional competencies along with academic learning. This is especially true in countries such as India, where academic achievement and marks of the child may be highly prioritized. Teacher training courses such as B.Ed. (Bachelor of Education), may focus on orienting future teachers to teach children in a way that may facilitate openness to experience, cognitive flexibility, and curiosity.

➤ ***Indigenous Therapeutic Practices***

Understanding equanimity as a distinct concept with its specific cognitive, affective and behavioral mechanisms will also be useful for the development of indigenous therapeutic models/skills for emotional regulation. Particularly in India, *Samatva* may be an emic embedded cultural construct that may be accepted easily by clients. Practitioners can also

investigate the challenges/barriers that have been identified in the cultivation of equanimity and devise appropriate ways for managing them.

➤ ***Dealing with Addictive Behaviors***

Studies have reported that during the global pandemic, internet use, substance abuse, and intake of high-calorie food are on the rise (Király et al., 2020; Rolland et al., 2020). Research suggests that equanimity is negatively correlated with the frequency of addictive behaviors as well as sensitivity to reward which is a risk factor for addiction (Juneau et al., 2020). Thus, the findings from the study may help mental health professionals in helping clients adaptively responding to cravings and satiation of desires.

➤ ***Dealing with Compassion Fatigue / Burn-out***

Weber (2019) suggests that equanimity is the key mediating factor in being non-judgmental and therefore may generate compassion towards other individuals. The cultivation of equanimity may also help therapists/frontline healthcare workers/healthcare leaders in reducing their compassion fatigue and burn-out.

➤ ***Peace and Reduced Social Conflicts***

Equanimity may lead to greater awareness of inter-connectedness and inter-dependence, which may foster compassion and altruism. Developing an even-minded outlook towards all may also result in reduced social categorization, biases, and prejudices, which may lead to less discriminatory behavior and fewer societal conflicts.

In summary, the research has significant implications for leadership and management, holistic well-being, the development of indigenous therapeutic techniques, and education. The cultivation of equanimity may also help in dealing with addictive behaviors and managing compassion fatigue.

8.3. Limitations of the Research:

The limitations of the research are acknowledged below.

- Though many Western and Eastern philosophies and texts indicate the cultivation of equanimity, this research was only limited to the understanding of equanimity from the Bhagavad Gita and in Buddhism.

- While a self-report assessment scale on equanimity may be useful, some individuals may not be able to accurately assess their equanimity (Desbordes et al., 2015). As a compliment method to the self-report scale, further research could focus on the assessment of the physiological markers of equanimity in the laboratory.
- The sample for the scale development was taken from the general community. With regards to the sample, fifty percent of the participants had post-graduate qualifications, about two-thirds were female and the individuals above sixty years were the least represented age group in the sample, thereby limiting the generalizability of the results.
- One of the limitations of the study was that it did not assess social desirability and its effect on equanimity.
- This research focused on the relation between equanimity and perceived health. Objective physical health parameters were not included in the study.

Despite these limitations, the present study aims to contribute to the understanding of our native indigenous constructs by exploring the construct of equanimity and its underlying factors. It is hoped that the thick description of the construct of *Samatva* and the proposed nomological network will stimulate research in Indian Psychology.

8.4. Suggestions for Future Research:

The suggestions for future research are proposed below.

- Future studies could focus on understanding equanimity from other traditional scriptures such as the Upanishads, Ashtanga Yoga, and also in Western philosophies such as Stoicism.
- *Bhakti* i.e., faith and surrender are embedded in the Indian ethos. Equanimity may also be studied in the context of *Bhakti* and its application in indigenous therapeutic techniques.

- Future research could also explore how the various expressive arts facilitate the expression of equanimity and its implications in the field of Art Therapy which may be very useful for helping clients with traumatic experiences.
- Researchers could also focus on understanding the objective physiological markers of equanimity in the laboratory such as brain imaging, autonomic nervous system markers, and stress markers such as cortisol.
- To help advance our understanding, research may also focus on the development of implicit behavioural tasks to assess the effect of equanimity on craving and avoidance.
- Based on the findings of the study, the relationships among the derived factors and other psycho-social parameters can be further tested in the form of models using Confirmatory Factor Analysis.
- As this study was limited to the general community sample, future studies could explore the factor structure of the developed scale on equanimity on experienced practitioners of contemplative practices such as monks, nuns as they may be better able to assess their equanimity.
- Researchers may plan long-term intervention studies about the cultivation of equanimity and the developed scale of this research may be utilized for pre-post intervention assessment.
- This research focused on the relation between equanimity and perceived health. Future studies could assess the impact of equanimity on objective physical health parameters such as blood pressure, immunity markers, etc
- Given the significant findings of the study that equanimity negatively predicts social media addiction, future research could focus on the therapeutic effects of the cultivation of equanimity in addicted populations.

8.5. Conclusions of the Research

This research is a contribution to the Indian ethos of well-being. Based on the in-depth findings from the qualitative research, equanimity is proposed as a state or dispositional tendency of even-mindedness towards affective and hedonic experiences. Equanimity is also extended towards individuals as an even-minded outlook with reduced bias and prejudices. A major contribution of the research has been the development of a scale on equanimity which has been validated and verified for internal consistency. The research reports that equanimity negatively predicts emotional reactivity, neuroticism, loneliness, and social media addiction, and positively predicts well-being and perceived general health. In comparison to other spiritual practices such as yoga, prayers, and religious activities, the practice of meditation has the strongest relation with equanimity. The research findings have potential for the promotion of health and holistic well-being. In future, indigenous intervention modules can be developed and used as adjunct therapeutic processes.