

ABSTRACT

The aim of this research was to understand the construct of equanimity as a psychological construct. An Explanatory Sequential Design was used in this research which is a type of Mixed Methods Design. The first phase of the study consisted of the analysis of equanimity as conceptualized in the Bhagavad Gita and in Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism. Phase II of the research was focused on understanding the experiential aspects of equanimity in the present-day context. Thirty experts from various traditions such as Buddhism, Vedic studies, meditation, and yoga were individually interviewed on their experiential insights into equanimity. In phase three, the quantitative study focused on the development of a measure of equanimity in the Indian context and exploration of its linkages with relevant psychosocial health variables such as emotional reactivity, neuroticism, loneliness, social media addiction, well-being, and perceived general health through the survey method with a sample of 836 individuals. The utilization of both qualitative and quantitative methods resulted in a thick and rich description of equanimity.

In the findings from Phase I of the research, 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. In Phase II, 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. 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.

In Phase III, in the development of a scale on equanimity, 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 wellbeing 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.

Keywords: Equanimity, Psychosocial health, Even-mindedness, Upekkha, Samatva