

Patients' Perception of Praying: A One-Week Intervention Study at a Naturopathy Centre

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ABSTRACT A cross-sectional study was conducted to assess the perceived transformations experienced by patients engaged in naturopathic treatments following their participation in prayer sessions. 50 patients undergoing routine inpatient care at a private Nature Cure Hospital in India were administered a questionnaire before and after engaging in prayer sessions. The analysis highlighted pivotal post-prayer attributes such as Cultivation of a Positive Attitude (84%), Heightened Optimism Regarding Recovery (100%), Sustained Sense of Well-being for Durations Spanning 2-3 hours (48%) and over 4 hours (48%), along with a Lasting Optimism Concerning Prospects (100%). Additionally, 38.8 percent reported engagement in community prayer sessions during their inpatient stay. These effects promise to augment self-perception, overall efficacy, and emotional resonance, potentially contributing to ameliorated health outcomes and a better quality of life for inpatients across diverse medical settings.

INTRODUCTION

Prayer is often recognised as a powerful tool that transcends spiritual and emotional realms, extending its influence to physical well-being. Engaging in prayer has been associated with numerous health benefits, contributing to the overall improvement of one's well-being. The

act of prayer can induce a sense of inner peace and reduce stress, thereby positively impacting the body's physiological responses. Studies suggest that regular prayer may lower blood pressure, strengthen the immune system, and alleviate symptoms of anxiety and depression (Ave and Sulmasy 2021; Collier et al. 2021). Furthermore, the meditative and contemplative aspects of prayer can enhance mental clarity and focus, promoting cognitive health. Even during the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, prayer was pivotal in helping individuals navigate adversity (Bentzen 2021). The multifaceted nature of prayer, encompassing practices like mantra recitation, meditative contemplation, silence observance, and verbalised supplication, whether carried out individually or collectively, exerts profound influences on the human psyche, fostering positive impacts on well-being (Alvarez-Pérez et al. 2022; Pfeifer and Wittmann 2020; Power 2018). While the connection between prayer and health is multifaceted

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ed and not entirely understood, the holistic nature of prayer seems to foster a harmonious balance between mind, body and spirit, potentially leading to a more resilient and healthier life.

Integrating prayer into the routine of naturopathy hospital settings is a distinctive and integral aspect of holistic healthcare. Rooted in the core tenets of Naturopathy, prayer emerges as a significant therapeutic modality, seamlessly complementing other naturopathic treatments. Dr. B Venkat Rao's pioneering "Arogya Raksha Panchatantra", emphasising the five pillars of healthy living, underscores prayer's pivotal role in nurturing mental well-being (Panneerselvam et al. 2021). Functioning as a bridge connecting the physical and mental dimensions, prayer serves as a conduit for comprehensive well-being. The interplay of psychoneuroimmunological and endocrinological elements highlights the intricate nature of prayer's influence, reaching beyond mere psychological effects. By modulating stress and anxiety levels, prayer contributes to establishing equilibrium within physiological processes, and fostering a sense of hope and self-esteem, which are two crucial components of a positive healing trajectory (Steel et al. 2020). Despite the recognised therapeutic potential of prayer in naturopathy hospitals, systematic exploration of its benefits within this domain is lacking (Satyalakshmi 2019). This groundbreaking cross-sectional survey seeks to pioneer understanding, delineating the advantages of incorporating prayer into mental health promotion within the naturopathy hospital sector. Venturing into uncharted terrain, this study aims to enrich existing knowledge and shed light on prayer's role as a complementary avenue for enhancing holistic well-being.

Objective

The primary objective of the study was to understand the effect of prayer on the well-being

of the participants and its influence in changing their perspective of community prayer in the long run.

METHODOLOGY

Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the National Institute of Naturopathy, Pune. The study was undertaken for a one-week intervention among patients in June 2023 at a private Naturopathy hospital in India. It was an open-ended, single arm, observational study, where only self-reported participants' views were noted. A total of 50 patients above 18 years of age were chosen by convenience sampling for the study. These participants were admitted for undergoing Naturopathy and Yoga therapies for at least a week, were not previously exposed to any specific form of prayer or any other spiritual or mental health intervention before. A written informed consent was obtained from all of the participants. The interventions consisted of daily group prayer sessions conducted by a trained prayer therapist within the hospital premises. Each prayer session lasted for 30 minutes, focusing on relaxation, gratitude, and positive affirmations (Table 1). Patients were given the flexibility to join these sessions based on their preference. It was a non-experimental interventional before and after comparative study. The outcome of the prayer interventions was assessed using a questionnaire. The questionnaire commenced with an introduction detailing the study's objectives and a consent form for participant agreement. The initial segment encompassed five inquiries concerning respondents' demographic particulars, succeeded by eight closed-ended questions designed to evaluate the efficacy and self-reported advantages associated with prayer. The questionnaire was designed in the local language. Before implementation, the questionnaire underwent content

Table 1: Prayer format adopted

	<i>Prayer components</i>	<i>Details of prayer component</i>
1	Induction	A brief explanation of the objective of the activity and instructions by In charge
2	Relaxation	Minute instructions to close the eyes and relax the body and mind
3	Breathing regulation	Minute instructions to take a deep breath and exhale
3	Chanting of mantra	Instruction to follow the mantra chanting
4	Chanting of Shanti Mantra and Om chanting	Instruction to Shanti mantra followed by Om chanting by the In-charge

validity assessment by experts in the field. A before and after record of the responses was taken from the participants to analyse for any change in perceptions post-prayer sessions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The survey occurred between June and July 2022 at the institution, involving 50 patient participants who willingly joined. The total time per person for the response was not more than 3-5 minutes each. Of the group, 24 (48%) were female, and 26 (52%) were male. Occupations included housewives (28%), company managers (10%), self-employed (32%), students (6%), engineers (10%), farmers (6%), and government

employees (6%). Initially, 56 percent (16 females, 12 males) were unaware of the prayer program, while post-study awareness rose to 48 percent of females and 52 percent of males. Prayer attendance initially varied, with 30 percent attending alternately, 6 percent daily, 28 percent weekly, and 36 percent twice a week. Post-study, attendance shifted to 28 percent alternately, 58 percent daily, and 14 percent twice a week. Initially, 84 percent (24 females, 18 males) were interested, rising to 86 percent (24 females, 19 males) post-stay.

The analysis of pre- and post-prayer questionnaire responses (Table 2) highlighted significant transformations in patients' perceptions of prayer and its impact on their mental well-being. The following key findings were observed.

Table 2: Distribution of components of the questionnaire

	<i>Pre</i>		<i>Post</i>		<i>p-value</i>
	<i>Male n (%)</i>	<i>Female n (%)</i>	<i>Male n (%)</i>	<i>Female n (%)</i>	
<i>Frequencies of Awareness</i>					
Yes	14 (28)	8 (16)	26(52)	24(48)	
No	12 (24)	16 (32)	-	-	
<i>Frequencies of Participation Duration</i>					<0.01
Daily	1 (2)	2 (4)	12(24)	17(34)	
Alternate days	5 (10)	10(20)	7(14)	7(14)	
Once a week	7 (14)	7(14)	-	-	
Twice a week	13 (26)	5(10)	7(14)	00	
<i>Frequencies of Self-willingness</i>					<0.001
Yes	18 (36)	24(48)	19(38)	24(48)	
No	8 (16)	00	7(14)	00	
<i>Frequencies of Positive Attitude</i>					<0.001
Yes	20 (40)	21(42)	20(40)	22(44)	
No	6 (12)	3 (6)	6(12)	2 (4)	
<i>Frequencies of Feeling of Well-being</i>					<0.001
1 hour	15 (30)	16(32)	00	00	
2-3 hours	10 (20)	4 (8)	16(32)	8(16)	
>4 hours	1 (2)	4 (8)	10(20)	14(28)	
12 hours	00	00	00	2 (4)	
<i>Frequencies of Optimistic About Cure</i>					
Yes	12 (24)	18(36)	26(52)	24(48)	
No	14 (28)	6(12)	00	00	
<i>Frequencies of Recommendation to Others</i>					
Yes	24 (48)	19(38)	26(52)	24(48)	
No	2 (4)	5(10)	00	00	
<i>Frequencies of Recommendation Reason</i>					<0.001
Keeps away from stress	8 (16)	6(12)	5(10)	1 (2)	
Mental peace	11 (22)	2 (4)	12(24)	1 (2)	
Spiritual healing	5 (10)	2 (4)	5(10)	2 (4)	
All of the above	00	9(18)	3(6)	20(40)	
None of the above	2 (4)	5(10)	1(2)	00	
<i>Frequencies of Recommendation to Communal Prayer</i>					<0.001
Yes	7 (14)	12(24)	7(14.3)	12(24.5)	
No	7 (14)	3 (6)	5(10.2)	1 (2)	
Maybe	12 (24)	9(18)	14(28.6)	10(20.4)	

Heightened Optimism Regarding Recovery

The participants (100%) expressed increased optimism about their recovery after engaging in prayer sessions. This shift in mindset was particularly notable, as optimism is often linked to improved health outcomes.

Sustained Sense of Well-being

Nearly half of the participants (48%) reported experiencing a sustained sense of well-being for 2-3 hours after each prayer session, while an equal percentage reported this sense lasting for over 4 hours. This suggests that the positive effects of prayer lingered beyond the immediate session.

Lasting Optimism Concerning Prospects

All participants (100%) reported a lasting sense of optimism concerning their prospects and future well-being. This long-lasting impact on optimism is a significant outcome of the prayer sessions.

Additionally, a noteworthy subset of participants (38.8%) reported engaging in community prayer sessions during their inpatient stay. These communal prayer sessions allowed for a shared experience of spirituality and support among patients.

DISCUSSION

The present study delves into the changes experienced by patients undergoing naturopathy treatment through prayer. As a non-pharmacological measure, prayer positively impacts physical and psychological realms, fostering homeostasis and contributing to well-being (Krause and Hayward 2013). Lifestyle practices, including prayer, can significantly impact longevity and overall quality of life, potentially preventing or ameliorating pathological and psychiatric disorders (Farhud 2015). This study revealed a noteworthy increase in patients' willingness to participate in prayer throughout the treatment period, suggesting a growing recognition of its potential benefits among patients. There were no lecture sessions or further prod- ding to continue prayer as a means of therapy, but the self-realisation was reflected through

their increased and continual participation. The heightened self-willingness to engage in prayer is in line with substantial evidence that supports the influence of positive emotions during prayer on biological parameters such as enzyme activity, growth rates of blood cells, and haemoglobin levels (Alexander et al. 2021). In addition to increased willingness, patients demonstrated a positive attitude toward prayer, with notable shifts observed in their overall well-being. In line with naturopathic principles, prayer acts as a form of psychotherapy, infusing hope into patients grappling with disease-induced despair. The observed increase in patients' willingness to recommend communal praying to others speaks to prayer's positive impact on their personal experiences. The significant shift towards communal praying within the study period indicates that patients recognised the collective benefits of this practice. Importantly, the study's outcomes highlight the sustained enhancement of well-being among patients practising prayer, possibly facilitated by prayer's role in promoting the body's inherent healing mechanisms (Munoz et al. 2015). A cross-over study of 9000 cancer patients also justified the reliability of prayer as a coping mechanism for surviving their illness (Pour and Hojjati 2015). In the current study, a notable increase in self-willingness to practise prayer was observed after the research among both genders. Women are more interested in spirituality than males in the present study. It shows a coping strategy for women against disease and other stressors (Soria Reyes et al. 2023).

The recommendation percentage for community prayer has been increased significantly after the regular participation in prayer sessions. Participating in group prayer can help battle loneliness and isolation while cultivating a more positive outlook and resilience in life's hardships. It promotes social contact and a sense of belonging, both essential for general well-being (Achour et al. 2019). Seeing others pray, share their stories, and offer support can motivate and inspire people to continue dedicated to their spiritual journeys and create personal growth and development. It also aids in exposing individuals to different viewpoints and experiences and cultivates a sense of acceptance and inclusivity, which may be a vital tool for collaborative problem-solving (Rastogi et al. 2023).

Prayer can provide an optimistic cure for illness and bring hope to individuals seeking comfort and strength (Kent et al. 2023). Prayer profoundly impacts an individual's hope and optimism when facing illnesses like anxiety and hypertension. The present study also justifies that the spiritual energy produced during prayer helps reduce stress and brings back optimistic mental peace among patients suffering from various illnesses by restoring homeostasis in the neuroendocrine circuits (Cavalcante et al. 2016; Lupien et al. 2009; Carneiro et al. 2017).

Chronic stress's detrimental effects on the central nervous system, leading to structural alterations within the brain and compromising immune and physiological functions (Won and Kim 2016), underscore the significance of stress reduction interventions. Prayer, integral to the healing process, offers a substantial avenue for fostering emotional equilibrium and bolstering coping mechanisms (Levine 2008). Initial variations in prayer attendance frequency shifted as patients engaged in the practice, demonstrating a trend toward increased daily attendance. This change aligns with the reported decrease in stress and anxiety levels through regular prayer practice, contributing to enhanced well-being, optimism, positive mood, and self-esteem (Boelens et al. 2012). These multifaceted effects could stem from diverse mechanisms, encompassing physiological alterations such as blood pressure reduction, cardiorespiratory synchronisation, modulation of neurotransmitters, and immune response enhancement (Brewer et al. 2022). Prayer emerges as an empirical tool for achieving spiritual equilibrium and emotional well-being, enabling individuals to draw upon their internal reservoirs of strength for healing (Lekhakh et al. 2023; Espedal 2021). While clinical trial evidence on the benefits of prayer remains inconclusive, its positive role in healing processes, well-being, and burnout reduction has garnered support (Labuschagne et al. 2020; Choi et al. 2015; Kim and Yeom 2018).

Introducing prayer as an integral component of treatment plans holds the potential for harnessing additional therapeutic effects and rewiring the equilibrium of mind, body, and hormones during hospitalisation (Ly et al. 2018; Phillips 2017). However, modern challenges to faith and belief in prayer are influenced by fac-

tors such as busy lifestyles, reliance on technology, scepticism, and perceived hypocrisy, potentially deviating individuals from religious practices (Çaglar 2020; Smith and Rhiney 2020).

The absence of prior investigations exploring the impact of collective prayer on individuals undergoing naturopathy treatment, regardless of their faith, renders this study a pioneering endeavour. Noteworthy outcomes encompass heightened hope, optimism, compassion, pleasure, and increased patient energy levels (Esperandio and Ladd 2015; Büssing et al. 2013). However, the study has limitations, including a relatively modest sample size, absence of biophysiological measurements, and lack of follow-up. Despite these limitations, the strategy's simplicity, cost-effectiveness, ease of implementation, and community involvement underscore the need for more robust clinical trials to substantiate and implement these findings across diverse medical settings (Tripathy 2015). Further exploration of biochemical changes during prayer in response to various stressors within the disease state could yield valuable insights. The observed effects on hope, optimism, and well-being need further investigation and application. It underlines the role of spiritual and psychosocial interventions in holistic healing (Cayleff 2016). This study significantly contributes to understanding the potential benefits of collective prayer within the context of naturopathy treatment. The observed effects on hope, optimism, and well-being warrant continued exploration and application, highlighting the pivotal role of spiritual and psychosocial interventions in holistic healing (Ahmadi et al. 2018; Büssing et al. 2021).

Prayer is a multifaceted practice with profound implications for mental well-being, and its incorporation into naturopathic care aligns with the core principles of this holistic healing system (Sahni et al. 2021).

Prayer as a Source of Gratification

One of the fundamental aspects of prayer is its ability to induce a sense of gratification in individuals. In the context of this study, patients reported a noticeable improvement in their attitude (84%) and heightened optimism (100%) following prayer sessions. These transformations are closely tied to the concept of gratification, as prayer provides a

space for individuals to express their hopes, desires, and gratitude (Dein and Pargament 2012; Lagman et al. 2012).

According to naturopathic principles, gratification is a vital component of mental well-being. The mind-body connection is central to naturopathic philosophy, and positive emotions and thoughts are believed to have a direct impact on physical health. When individuals engage in prayer, they often express gratitude for their current state of health or seek solace and hope during challenging times (Jors et al. 2015). This act of acknowledging and expressing gratitude aligns with the naturopathic principle of nurturing mental well-being as a foundational element of holistic health (Suchday et al. 2018).

The sense of gratification experienced through prayer can have a cascading effect on other aspects of a person's life. When individuals feel grateful and optimistic, they are more likely to make choices that promote their overall well-being, such as adhering to healthy dietary habits, engaging in physical activity, and actively participating in their treatment plans. This alignment with naturopathic principles emphasises the interconnectedness of mental and physical health and underscores the potential of prayer to initiate positive health-related behaviours (Babula 2022; Quinn et al. 2023).

Prayer as a Source of Vulnerability

In addition to gratification, prayer can also induce a sense of vulnerability. When individuals engage in prayer, they often open themselves up emotionally, expressing their fears, hopes, and desires in a deeply personal manner. This act of vulnerability can be both therapeutic and transformative (Büssing et al. 2020; Schultz et al. 2017).

From a naturopathic perspective, vulnerability is not seen as a weakness but as a necessary step in the healing process. Naturopathy emphasises the importance of addressing the root causes of illness, which often involves delving into emotional and psychological factors (Jerrin et al. 2021). By embracing vulnerability during prayer, individuals may confront and process unresolved emotional issues or trauma, leading to emotional healing. Moreover, vulnerability in prayer can foster a sense of interconnectedness with others and a deeper connection to one's inner self. This introspective journey aligns with

the naturopathic principle of treating the whole person, that is, body, mind and spirit. In this way, prayer can serve as a gateway to self-discovery and emotional healing, contributing to overall well-being (Satyalakshmi 2019; Ikafa et al. 2021).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the present study's findings underscore the pivotal role of prayer as a bio-feedback tool in enhancing the process of recovery and fostering an improved sense of well-being among individuals grappling with serious illnesses. Regular mindful prayer is a potent source of additive benefits for such individuals. These observed benefits find their roots in the establishment of homeostasis within both the mind and body, operating on the intersecting planes of psychoneuroimmunology and endocrinology. The study elucidates the profound role of prayer as a therapeutic intervention intertwined with the art and science of well-being. The practice of prayer is revealed as a conscious endeavour that intertwines the realms of mind and body, working in harmony to foster a conducive environment for recovery. Beyond its spiritual significance, prayer emerges as a pragmatic avenue for recalibrating the intricate web of physiological responses, ultimately nurturing a state of homeostasis that bolsters recovery and cultivates an enduring sense of well-being.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Prayer is a therapeutic tool in naturopathy with great potential for improving healing outcomes and overall well-being. By examining the impact of prayer on various body systems, one can deepen one's understanding of the mind-body connection and discover new approaches to integrative healing. It can actively participate in the healing process of the body and promote a more holistic approach to healthcare.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest for this study.

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