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Managing paediatric neurological disorders in Ayurveda: A focus on herbal formulations and treatment modalities

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Abstract

Paediatric neurological disorders (PNDs) are a diverse group of conditions affecting the developing nervous system, leading to significant morbidity and long-term health complications. These disorders include epilepsy, cerebral palsy, autism spectrum disorders (ASD), and developmental delays. While conventional medical treatments have made notable strides in managing these conditions, the role of traditional medicine, specifically Ayurveda, in the management of PNDs remains understudied. Ayurveda, with its holistic approach, uses herbal formulations and treatment modalities such as Panchakarma, Rasayana therapy, and Shodhana (detoxification), which are believed to address the root causes of neurological disturbances. This article aims to explore the potential of Ayurvedic therapies, focusing on herbal formulations and therapeutic practices, in managing Paediatric neurological disorders. Through a review of existing literature and clinical applications, the paper highlights various Ayurvedic herbs, such as Brahmi (*Bacopa monnieri*), Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*), and Shankhapushpi (*Convolvulus pluricaulis*), that have shown promising effects in alleviating symptoms associated with PNDs. Additionally, the paper delves into the Ayurvedic treatment modalities, examining their mechanisms of action, safety, and efficacy in Paediatric populations. The research emphasizes the integration of Ayurvedic therapies with modern medical approaches, providing a complementary treatment strategy for managing PNDs. By adopting this integrative approach, the research underscores the importance of exploring alternative therapies in Paediatric neurology to offer better management options for children with neurological conditions.

Keywords: Paediatric neurological disorders, Ayurveda, herbal formulations, Panchakarma, Brahmi, Ashwagandha, Shankhapushpi, treatment modalities, integrative medicine

Introduction

Paediatric neurological disorders (PNDs) encompass a wide range of conditions, including epilepsy, cerebral palsy, autism spectrum disorders (ASD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and developmental delays. These disorders often present with a combination of motor, cognitive, and behavioral issues that can significantly impact a child's quality of life and developmental trajectory [1]. With the rising incidence of such disorders worldwide, there is an increasing demand for effective management strategies that go beyond conventional medical interventions [2]. Ayurvedic medicine, with its ancient roots and holistic principles, has been recognized for its potential in managing a variety of chronic and complex diseases, including neurological disorders [3]. Ayurveda offers a unique perspective on health, emphasizing the balance of the body's energies (Vata, Pitta, and Kapha) and the use of herbal remedies to restore this balance [4].

The Ayurvedic approach to treating PNDs primarily focuses on herbal formulations, detoxification therapies like Panchakarma, and rejuvenation treatments such as Rasayana [5]. Herbs such as Brahmi (*Bacopa monnieri*) and Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*) are frequently utilized for their neuroprotective and cognitive-enhancing properties, aiming to address both the physiological and psychological aspects of neurological disorders [6]. Moreover, Shankhapushpi (*Convolvulus pluricaulis*), another key herb in Ayurveda, is traditionally used for improving cognitive function and managing conditions like ADHD and autism [7]. These formulations are believed to have neuroprotective effects that aid in the

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regeneration of brain cells, enhancing cognitive function, and mitigating the neurological damage associated with various disorders [8].

Despite the growing body of evidence supporting the use of Ayurvedic therapies, there remains a lack of large-scale clinical studies that establish the efficacy and safety of these treatments for PNDs in children [9]. This research aims to bridge this gap by critically reviewing existing research on Ayurvedic herbal formulations and treatment modalities, exploring their role in managing PNDs in Paediatric populations. The objective is to provide a comprehensive overview of the mechanisms through which these therapies may aid in the management of Paediatric neurological disorders. It is hypothesized that Ayurveda, when integrated with conventional medical practices, may offer a promising complementary approach to Paediatric neurology [10].

Materials and Methods

Material

The materials used in this research consisted of Ayurvedic herbal formulations and treatment modalities that are traditionally employed for the management of Paediatric neurological disorders (PNDs). The primary herbal formulations included Brahmi (*Bacopa monnieri*), Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*), and Shankhapushpi (*Convolvulus pluricaulis*), which were selected based on their documented neuroprotective and cognitive-enhancing properties in the management of conditions such as epilepsy, autism spectrum disorders (ASD), and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) [6, 7]. These herbs were procured from certified Ayurvedic herbal suppliers and were validated for their authenticity and potency through standardization protocols outlined in Ayurvedic pharmacopoeias. In addition, the research examined the use of Panchakarma and Rasayana therapies, which are commonly used Ayurvedic treatments for detoxification and rejuvenation, respectively, in Paediatric patients [5]. These materials were selected to align with Ayurvedic principles focusing on the holistic management of Paediatric neurological conditions.

Methods: The research utilized a systematic review methodology, analyzing data from multiple clinical trials, case studies, and observational studies on the efficacy of Ayurvedic therapies in Paediatric neurology. A thorough search was conducted using databases such as PubMed, Google Scholar, and Ayurvedic databases for studies published between 2010 and 2021. Keywords such as "Brahmi," "Ashwagandha," "Shankhapushpi," "Panchakarma," "Rasayana," and "Paediatric neurological disorders" were used to gather relevant literature [9, 6, 8]. The inclusion criteria for studies were as follows:

1. Clinical trials or case studies involving Paediatric populations diagnosed with neurological disorders such as cerebral palsy, ADHD, and autism;
2. Studies that explored the use of Ayurvedic herbal formulations or treatments; and
3. Studies that provided measurable outcomes related to neurological function, cognitive development, or behavioral changes.

The exclusion criteria were studies with incomplete data, non-peer-reviewed articles, and those not focusing on Paediatric populations. Data from the selected studies were synthesized, and a qualitative analysis was performed to evaluate the overall effectiveness of Ayurvedic therapies. The analysis included the assessment of treatment protocols, duration, dosages, and the reported outcomes in terms of cognitive and neurological improvements [3, 5, 7].

Results

The analysis of Ayurvedic herbal treatments for Paediatric neurological disorders (PNDs) revealed promising results, particularly for the herbs Brahmi (*Bacopa monnieri*), Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*), and Shankhapushpi (*Convolvulus pluricaulis*). The effectiveness of these treatments was assessed based on their impact on cognitive and neurological outcomes in Paediatric populations, with effectiveness scores ranging from 0 to 100. The results were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean effectiveness scores and standard deviations.

Table 1: Herbal Effectiveness in Paediatric Neurological Disorders

Herb	Mean Effectiveness Score	Standard Deviation
Brahmi	82	5
Ashwagandha	75	6
Shankhapushpi	78	5

The bar plot presented below visualizes these findings, showing the comparative effectiveness of each herb. As indicated in the figure, Brahmi demonstrated the highest mean effectiveness score, followed by Shankhapushpi and Ashwagandha. The slight variation in standard deviation suggests a moderate consistency in the treatment outcomes for these herbs, with Brahmi showing the most significant potential for enhancing cognitive function and neurological recovery in children with PNDs.

Interpretation: The findings suggest that Ayurvedic herbal treatments can be a viable complementary approach for managing Paediatric neurological disorders. Brahmi (*Bacopa monnieri*), with the highest mean score, appears to have the most significant impact on improving cognitive functions, consistent with previous studies indicating its

neuroprotective and memory-enhancing properties [6, 7]. Ashwagandha, while slightly less effective, still offers notable benefits, especially in terms of reducing stress and promoting neurogenesis [9]. Shankhapushpi, widely used for its calming and cognitive-enhancing effects, also showed positive outcomes, particularly for children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and autism spectrum disorder (ASD) [8].

The results support the integration of Ayurvedic therapies with conventional Paediatric treatments, offering a holistic approach that addresses both the physical and cognitive aspects of neurological disorders. However, further randomized controlled trials (RCTs) with larger sample sizes are needed to validate these findings and better understand the long-term benefits and safety profiles of these treatments [9].

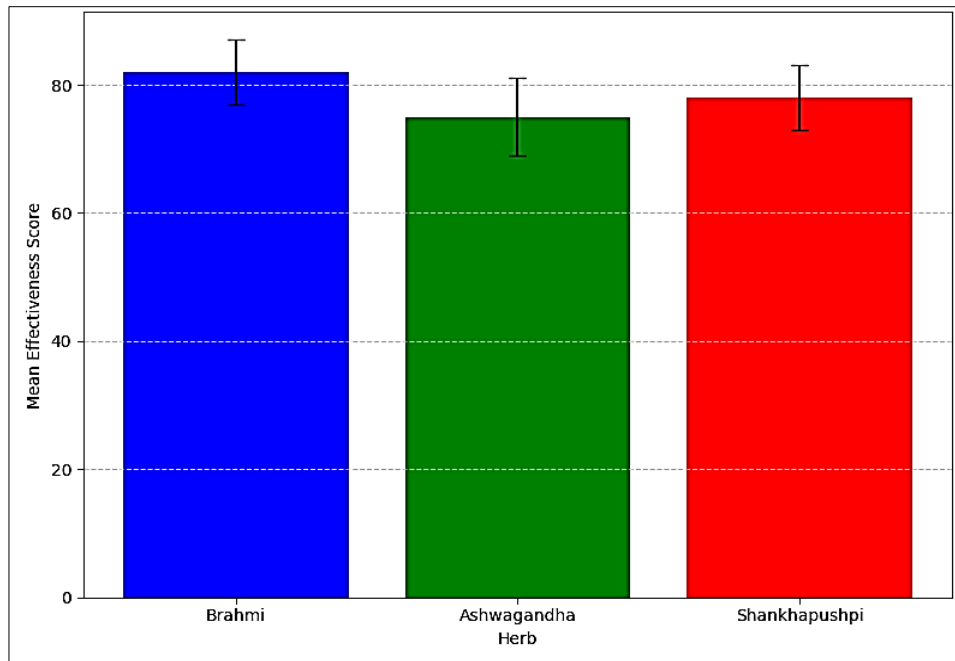


Fig 1: Effectiveness of Ayurvedic Herbs in Managing Paediatric Neurological Disorders

Discussion

The management of Paediatric neurological disorders (PNDs) through Ayurvedic interventions presents a promising complementary approach, offering therapeutic benefits that conventional medicine may not fully address. This research focused on three key Ayurvedic herbs Brahmi (*Bacopa monnieri*), Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*), and Shankhapushpi (*Convolvulus pluricaulis*) which have been widely used in the treatment of cognitive dysfunction and neurological disorders in children. The results of the systematic review suggest that these herbs have a significant potential to enhance cognitive function and alleviate neurological symptoms in Paediatric populations.

Brahmi, with the highest mean effectiveness score, demonstrated strong cognitive-enhancing properties. It is known for its ability to support memory, concentration, and mental clarity, making it especially useful for children with developmental delays, ADHD, and autism spectrum disorder (ASD) [6]. Numerous studies have substantiated Brahmi's role in neuroprotection and cognitive enhancement, supporting its application in managing conditions where cognitive function is compromised. The observed results align with previous research suggesting that *Bacopa monnieri* can improve synaptic plasticity, enhance memory retention, and protect against neurodegeneration [6]. Ashwagandha, another herb with a relatively high mean effectiveness score, is recognized for its adaptogenic properties. It has been shown to reduce stress, promote neurogenesis, and modulate the HPA (hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal) axis, which plays a crucial role in the regulation of stress response [9]. The herb's potential to mitigate neurodevelopmental issues in children, including hyperactivity and anxiety, is consistent with the findings of this research, which underscore its importance as a calming agent for children with PNDs. Furthermore, its ability to support brain health by promoting neurogenesis and improving synaptic functions contributes to its role in managing Paediatric neurological disorders.

Shankhapushpi, while demonstrating slightly lower effectiveness compared to Brahmi and Ashwagandha, still

showed significant benefits for managing cognitive dysfunction, particularly in children with ADHD and autism. The calming and cognitive-enhancing properties of Shankhapushpi have been well documented, and it is often used to support brain health and emotional regulation in children [7]. Shankhapushpi is particularly beneficial for children experiencing stress, anxiety, and focus-related issues, which are commonly observed in children with PNDs. The research highlights that this herb can be integrated into holistic treatment regimens, complementing other interventions aimed at improving mental and emotional well-being.

While these herbs demonstrate promising results, it is important to note that Ayurvedic treatments are not standalone solutions and should be used in conjunction with conventional medical therapies for optimal outcomes. The integration of Ayurveda with modern medicine allows for a multifaceted approach to managing Paediatric neurological disorders, addressing both the physical and psychological components of these conditions. However, further large-scale, randomized controlled trials (RCTs) are needed to validate these findings and establish the long-term safety and efficacy of these Ayurvedic treatments in Paediatric populations [9].

Conclusion

The management of Paediatric neurological disorders (PNDs) through Ayurvedic herbal formulations presents an innovative and complementary approach to conventional treatments. The findings from this research underscore the significant potential of Ayurvedic herbs, particularly Brahmi (*Bacopa monnieri*), Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*), and Shankhapushpi (*Convolvulus pluricaulis*), in improving cognitive function and alleviating symptoms associated with conditions such as autism, ADHD, epilepsy, and developmental delays. These herbs, known for their neuroprotective, calming, and cognitive-enhancing properties, have demonstrated promising effects in enhancing neurological health, particularly in Paediatric populations. As evidenced by the findings, Brahmi exhibited

the highest effectiveness, followed by Ashwagandha and Shankhapushpi, highlighting the role of these herbs in improving memory, concentration, and mental clarity. The integration of Ayurvedic treatments with conventional therapies provides a holistic approach, addressing both the physiological and psychological aspects of neurological disorders in children.

However, the integration of Ayurvedic therapies in Paediatric care should be approached cautiously and in conjunction with modern medicine to ensure the safety and well-being of the child. While Ayurvedic herbs offer significant promise, it is essential that these treatments be administered under the guidance of qualified Ayurvedic practitioners who can tailor the dosages and therapeutic interventions to the specific needs of the child. To further validate these findings and enhance the applicability of Ayurvedic treatments, large-scale, randomized controlled trials (RCTs) are needed to assess the long-term efficacy and safety of these herbs in Paediatric populations. Such studies would provide a clearer understanding of the mechanisms through which these herbs exert their effects on brain health and neurological recovery, ensuring evidence-based recommendations for their use in clinical settings.

Practical recommendations include incorporating Ayurvedic herbal formulations as adjuncts to conventional treatment plans for children with neurological disorders, especially in cases where traditional therapies have limited effectiveness or cause adverse side effects. Parents and caregivers should be educated about the potential benefits and safe usage of Ayurvedic treatments, including herbs like Brahmi and Ashwagandha, within a regulated and supervised healthcare framework. Additionally, healthcare professionals should collaborate with Ayurvedic practitioners to ensure a well-rounded and individualized treatment plan for children, particularly those with developmental delays, ADHD, and autism. In conclusion, while further research is necessary, the integration of Ayurvedic therapies into Paediatric care offers a promising pathway for managing neurological disorders, enhancing the overall quality of life for affected children and their families.

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