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A comprehensive cross-sectional investigation of individual, knowledge, awareness and practices of spiritual heritage: Yagya

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Abstract- In yagya, natural herbal/plant products are processed in fire and medicinal vapours, gases and phyto-chemicals are released. The present study was done with the objective to measure the awareness regarding yagya and its impact on holistic health of human beings as well as on environment. A cross-sectional study was conducted on 500 participants (both men and women) aged 34-90 years, who performed kalpwas in maghmela, Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, India, with the help of pretested and scheduled questionnaire. Descriptive, bivariate and chi-square test were used for data analysis. This survey method was used to understand the participant's views and feeling about yagya as a therapy. A number of families was found to perform yagya by using different plants resources and claimed healthier as compared to non-yagya performing ones. Several people also acclaimed happier and more energetic with positive feeling after performing yagya as a part of their cognitive test. In nutshell, it can be concluded that our rituals as yagya, as resource from various plants can make lots of population healthy and wealthy with pure and clean environment.

Keywords: Yagya therapy, Inhalation therapy, Cross-sectional study, Chi-square test, Maghmela.

INTRODUCTION

Yagya is an ancient and natural practice which was performed by sages for healthy environment and diseases treatment.¹ Vedic literature is full of interpretation of yagya, their pattern and importance in human life.² Several plants, bushes, trees were discussed to maintain human health by suppressing various diseases since ancient times.^{3,4} In order to conduct yagya as a component of spiritual and scientific studies for the benefit of humanity, the Yajur-Veda includes the necessary knowledge and concepts. The Sam-Veda, in contrast, places more emphasis on the musically arranged

mantra chanting sequences. Japa-yagya is the name given to the practise of chanting a Vedic mantra while in a state of meditation, and it correlates to mental oblation in the more primal levels of emotion. According to Pandaya, the therapeutic use of smoke is known as Dhoomnasya or Dhoomapana.⁵

We all know about the polluted environment and their side effects. The reasons are many more for instance, our lifestyle, our carelessness etc. Such environment affects our health, when we breathe polluted air and live in dirty environment, we become sick, step by step. Eight out of ten people suffer some stage of illness with communicable and non-communicable diseases like malaria, typhoid, high

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blood pressure, diabetes etc. Although, allopathic gave a good and quick result about the control of these diseases, many allopathic, ayurvedic and homeopathic medicine and treatment give their contribution to control of these diseases. But still a large no. of people is incapable of affording the treatment due to many reasons like financial problem, unawareness, medicine resistance etc.⁶ The development of new ideas on the effects of fragrances was sparked by the scientific study of aromatherapy. The scientific validation of the calming/sedative and energising effects of scents frequently uses the changes in physiological parameters following the inhalation of the aromas. Although the marketability of scent goods has increased significantly, the impacts of smells have been unpredictable.⁷ So, the yagya and yagya-therapy is a good and herbal method to the improvement of health and environment.

Now due to paucity of time people have yagya only on festivals and religious functions, such usual practice is disappearing. During corona pandemic when world was facing severe damage, yagya therapy with other traditional activities emerged as a hope.⁸ Post-pandemic, this practice is being followed by the people in large scale. This practice is also performed in religious gatherings such as Magh mela. Every year a month-long mela is organized in Prayagraj, in the month of January, in which people from across the country with different caste, culture and Creed join the bank of Triveni Sangam and stay for the purpose of physical and mental calmness called as kalpwas. During the period of one month, they perform various religious activities such as yoga, yagya and pravachans.

To determine the usage of herbal smokes and their effects on human health, several studies are being undertaken across various ethnic groups and geographical areas using a variety of approaches. Over the years, advance mode of treatments such as allopath, homeopathy has become a popular method of treatment amongst the population at large. The growing popularity of this type of treatment among population can be attributed to the factors such as population explosion, less time consuming, easily available and good affordability.⁶ This anthropological study focused on understanding the significance of herbal smoking, which is well captured in the Vedas and puranas, among other ancient texts.

In this study, people between the ages of 34 and 90 who regularly practise yagya in the Uttar Pradesh city of

Prayagraj, India, are examined to see what effect the fumes from their daily yagya rituals have on their health and the environment. Additionally, with the use of a questionnaire, the study seeks to explore participants' perceptions of the environment in which they reside as well as current generational awareness and attitudes about doing yagya.

MATERIALS & METHOD

Place and people:

Prayagraj, the second-oldest ancient city in Uttar Pradesh, refers to the confluence of the three most important rivers: the Ganga, the Yamuna, and the Saraswati. This holy city is located at 25.45° degrees North (latitude) and 81.84° degrees East (longitude) in Uttar Pradesh's southern region. The area of this thriving metropolis is little around 5482 square kilometres. This city has a rather humid subtropical climate that lasts the entire year. The monthly mean temperatures fall within the range of 18°-29° degree C (64°-84° degree F), while the yearly mean temperature is recorded at 26.1° degree C (79° degree F). The Ganga, Saraswati, and Yamuna meet in Prayagraj, giving the city its name. This confluence between the three major Indian rivers elevates Prayagraj to a place of pilgrimage for tourists. Taking a holy bath in this "confluence" or "Sangam" is thought to be able to cleanse every one of their sins and free them from the cycle of rebirth. A total of 5954391 people were counted in the 2011 census by the Indian government; of these, 3131807 men and 2822584 women made up the population, which represents 2.98% of the total population of the state of Uttar Pradesh. The average literacy rate in Prayagraj increased from 62.11 in 2001 to 72.32 in 2011. The literacy rates for men and women, respectively, were 82.55 and 60.97%.

Sampling:

A study of those who participated in kalpwas during Magh Mela, lasting one month, was conducted to ascertain their daily routines and yagya practises. 500 people in the 34-90 age range from the Magh Mela in Prayagraj were the subject of a cross-sectional research. Using straightforward random sampling, the sample was chosen. The sample was chosen among a variety of individuals from different states in India who attended the Magh-mela for kalpwas and ranged in age from 34 to 90. Direct interviews were used to gather information from the participants. A pre-planned questionnaire was used to conduct interviews with the participants and gather data. The impact of yagya

performance on the body and the environment is discussed by the participants. The Magh Mela authorities in Prayagraj gave its permission before data collecting.

Measures:

A pretested, trustworthy, and validated questionnaire that had been adapted to fit the local context was used to conduct a structured interview in order to better understand the participants. To get precise answers from participants on their knowledge of and reactions to yagya, a questionnaire was created. Participants also submitted socio-demographic data, including their gender, education level, and other characteristics. Participants were asked if they were aware of the yagya's affects at the Magh mela, and they May either answer "Yes" or "No" to the question. Participants were specifically asked about how the yagya made them feel about their bodies. Effects were divided into two groups: effects on the body and effects on the environment. Heart disorders and other diseases (physical and mental) where the two groups into which diseases were divided. The average number of hours and days that participants spent on Magh mela during kalpwas were requested to report by the participants.

In order to acquire a thorough grasp of the medical and other varied effects of yagya, volunteers of a certain age range and gender conducted the yagya, and the influence on body and surroundings was also measured. Participants were asked to mention purpose in the orders of preferences to perform yagya. Responses included various circumstances under which participants perform yagya during kalpwas at Magh mela, Prayagraj. Awareness of effect of yagya options were: To clean the environment, to create peace of mind, for the happiness of God, others. To examine the change in environment, change in breathing and change in body after performing yagya daily at Magh mela were asked into "Yes" or "No" category. To understand the enhancement of concentration level and energy level after performing yagya were asked into "Yes" or "No" category. To examine the yagya helps to cure diseases and headache after performing yagya were also asked into "Yes" or "No" category. This method was used in an anthropological setting to determine the effects, significance, and knowledge of yagya in the population that has changed through time owing to a variety of factors.

Analysis:

Descriptive statistics and bi-variate analysis, including the chi-square test and p-value, were used to assess the

qualitative data. Socio-demographic traits, awareness of the effects of yagya, and the motivation for performing yagya were all assessed using descriptive analysis. The following outcomes- gender, literacy, and age disparities were examined using bi-variate analysis. Age and gender-specific distribution of yagya effects, kalpwas length and yagya impact, yagya purpose, knowledge of yagya effect, pattern, and hawan samagri. The Chi-square test was also used to evaluate the relationships between gender, age, kalpwas length, and the yagya impact. Software called MS-Excel was used to do the statistical analysis.

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics:

In a sample of 500 participants (devotees), men accounted for 51.4% and women 48.6% (Table 1). Participants in the research ranged in age group of 57.55 to 59.05. Younger (34–50 years) and older (51–88 years) participants in the study were separated into two age groups for comparison's sake. Of the total population, Prayagraj is home to 43.2% of participants, Pratapgarh to 24.2%, Jaunpur to 8%, and the remaining districts of Uttar Pradesh to the rest of 24.6% of participants. Most participants (43.2%) said that they belong to Prayagraj based on their own estimates. During kalpwas people perform some physical exercises along with Yagya to keep themselves fit, the details of which are given in the figure 1.

Table 1: Demographic characteristic of the study populations

Demographic Variables	Total	Male	Female
Frequency	500 (100%)	257 (51.4%)	243 (48.6%)
Mean age	57.55 years	57.55 years	57.55 years
Mean time of awakening	04:00 AM	04:00 AM	04:00 AM
Literate participants	57.8%	55.3%	44.6%
Non-literate participants	42.2%	42.1%	57.8%
Physical Exercise			
a) Walking	8.6%	79%	20.9%
b) Yoga	8.8%	93.1%	6.8%
c) Pranayam	02%	70%	30%
d) Meditation	100%	51.4%	48.6%

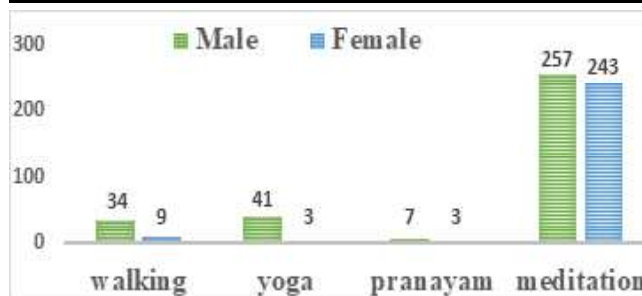


Figure 1: Graphical representation of physical activities among male and female

Literacy and yagya effect:

Literacy is the main factor to express the feeling of the effect of yagya on human body and environment, logically. On separate analysis, it was found that nearly 58% participants were literate. Only 42% population were illiterate found during survey. Figure 2 and Table 2 depicts the relationship between literacy and yagya effects. The value of chi-square dependent variables is calculated lower than 0.05 (Table value= 5.99 (df=2)) significant value. So, the chi-value is significant and it can be said with the distribution of null hypothesis that there is no difference between literacy and dependent variables, means literacy does not barrier to performance of yagya.

Table 2: Relationship between Literacy and yagya effects

Dependent Variables	Literate	Illiterate	X ² -Value	Total
Difference in surrounding	69.4%	30.5%	1.028**	96.8%
Changes in body	69.3%	30.6%	0.176**	81%
Felt in breathing	69.4%	30.5%	1.584**	98.2%
Concentration	68.8%	31.1%	3.445**	93.6%
Headache	67.4%	32.5%	1.497**	52.8%
Energy level	69.4%	30.5%	2.627**	98.8%
Heart diseases	78.1%	21.8%	1.124**	6.4%
Treatment	77.7%	22.2%	0.002*	56.2%
Other diseases	84.7%	15.2%	5.394**	9.2%
Treatment	84.3%	15.6%	0.013*	69.5%

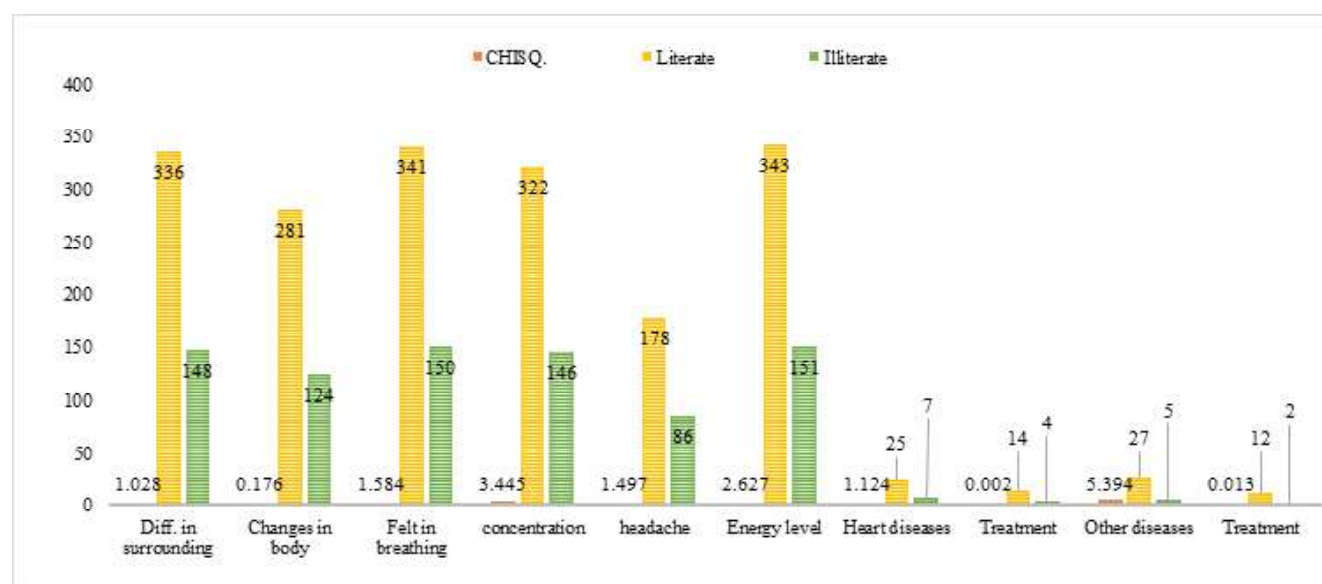


Figure 2: Graphical representation of relationship between literacy and yagya effect

Kalpwas duration and yagya effect:

The no. of years kalpwas is performed at Magh-mela varies from person to person, depending on their age and stamina. On separate analysis, it was found that nearly 80% participants perform kalpwas from 10 or less than 10 years. Only 20% population perform kalpwas from more than 10 years (Table 3). Figure 3 depicts the relationship between year of yagya performed and yagya's effects. The value of chi-square of approximately nine dependent variables is calculated lower than 0.05 (Table value= 5.99 (df=2)) significant value. So, the chi-value is significant and it can be said with the distribution of null hypothesis that there is no difference between kalpwas duration and dependent variables.

Table 3: Relationship between kalpwas duration and yagya effects

Dependent Variables	<10 years	>10 years	X ² -Value	Total
Difference in surrounding	79.5%	20.4%	0.1956*	96.8%
Changes in body	79.01%	20.9%	0.1958*	81%
Felt in breathing	79.6%	20.36%	0.9085*	98.2%
Concentration	79.7%	20.2%	0.4046*	93.6%
Headache	79.9%	20.07%	0.0939*	52.8%
Energy level	79.5%	20.4%	0.6019*	98.8%
Heart diseases	75%	25%	0.4046*	6.4%
Treatment	66.6%	33.3%	1.523*	56.2%
Other diseases	60.8%	39.1%	10.635**	9.2%
Treatment	62.5%	37.5%	0.1173*	69.5%

*Significant at 0.05, **Significant at 0.01 level

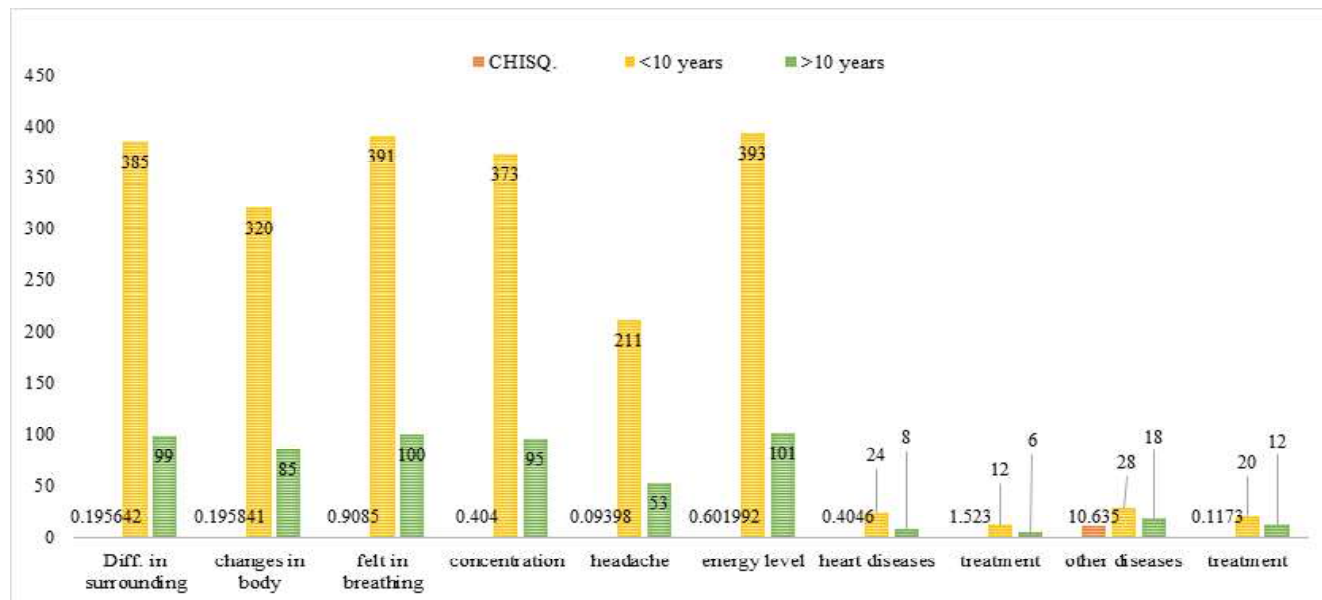


Figure 3: Graphical representation of relationship between kalpwas duration and yagya effect

Purpose of yagya:

Participants were asked to indicate mainly three reasons to perform kalpwas and daily yagya at Magh mela. The first was social and religious purpose to perform yagya, nearly 40.8% population engaged in the same. The second was cultural purpose to perform yagya, nearly 23.8% population engaged in this purpose. The third was to follow the traditions, nearly 25% population engaged in this purpose. Approximately 10.8% population of Maghmela had their own personal reasons to perform yagya daily (Figure 4).

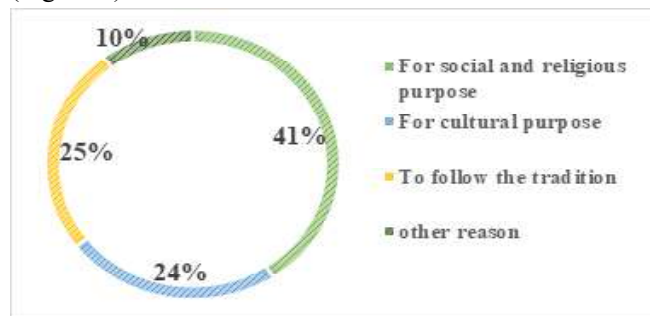


Figure 4: Graphical representation of purpose of yagya perform among population

Awareness of yagya effect and pattern:

Figure 5 shows the awareness of participants about yagya impact on body and environment. After survey, found that the effect of gender and age was not seen on awareness. Only 3% participants were not aware about effects of yagya, because they were not interested to know the reason behind performing yagya, they only follow tradition of family and

some other reasons. 97% participants were aware about yagya a effect, that means most of the participants know the yagya's importance in their life.

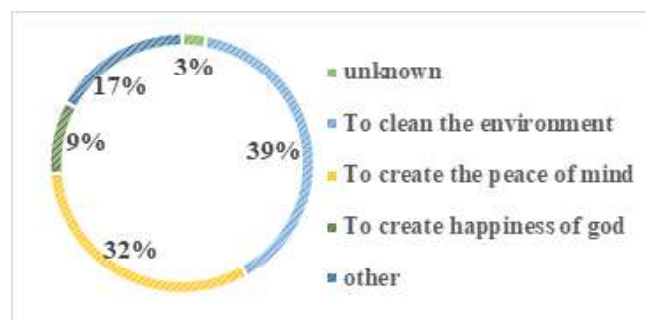


Figure 5: Graphical representation of awareness of yagya effect among population

Awareness about hawan samagri:

Hawan samagri means that the appropriate ingredients of herbs which used to perform yagya. Based on analysis most participants used the readymade hawan samagri that is easily available in the market with different names and brands. More than half of the participants (57.4%) were aware that which ingredients used to perform yagya and they use the same hawan samagri daily. Nearly 42.6% participants did not know about hawan samagri that used to perform yagya daily. In which 70% participants were male because of their dependent attitude on their wives.

Age wise distribution of yagya effects:

Age is the main factor to feel the awareness about yagya effects. For comparison, Participants were divided

in two categories: 50 or less than 50 years and more than 50 years. Then it was found that people who are above 50 years have more ability to feel the effect of yagya in their body, environment, breathing, concentration level, and reducing headache, enhance energy level and treating diseases. Figure 6 and Table 4 reveals that the association between age and yagya effects. The value of chi-square of approximately seven dependent variables is calculated lower than 0.05 (Table value= 5.99 (df=2)) significant value. So, the chi-value is significant and it can be said with the distribution of null hypothesis that there is no difference between kalpwas duration and dependent variables, means age is not barrier to performance of yagya.

Table 4: Relationship between age and yagya effects

Dependent Variables	<50 years	>50 years	X ² -Value	Total
Difference in surrounding	42.9%	57%	4.179**	96.8%
Changes in body	41.9%	58.02%	2.8831*	81%
Felt in breathing	43.9%	56%	0.4078*	98.2%
Concentration	43.8%	56.18%	3.4722*	93.6%
Headache	44.3%	55.6%	0.0610*	52.8%
Energy level	43.5%	57.6%	1.29*	98.8%
Heart diseases	21.8%	71.4%	6.676**	6.4%
Treatment	12.5%	40.6%	0.0029*	56.2%
Other diseases	19.5%	80.4%	12.087**	9.2%
Treatment	6.25%	93.75%	11.845**	69.5%

*Significant at 0.05, **Significant at 0.01 level

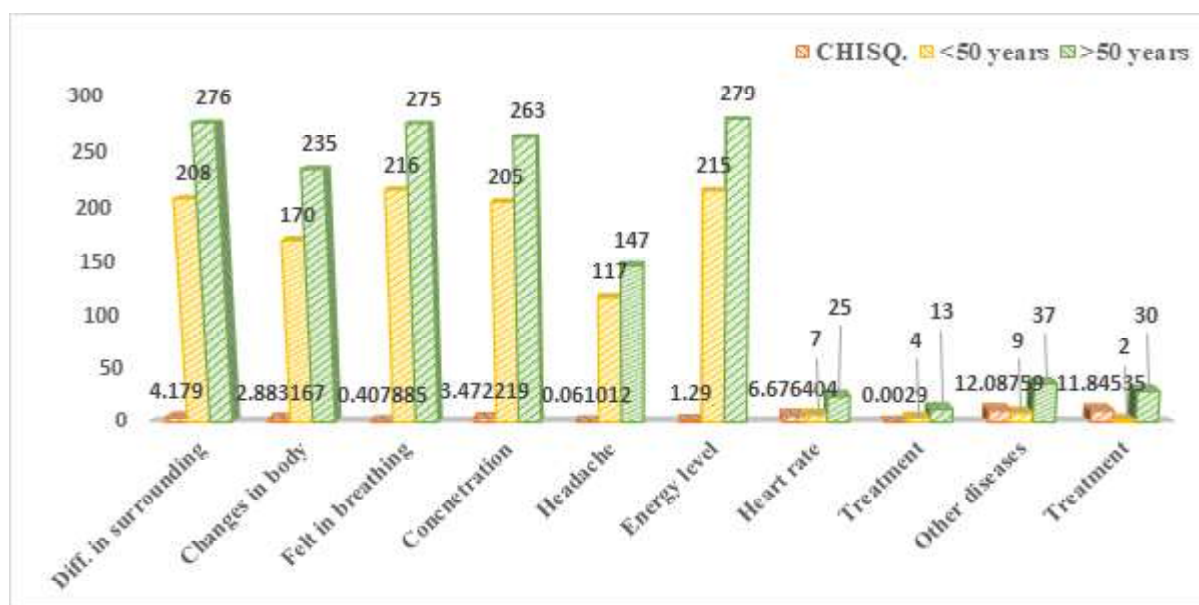


Figure 6: Graphical representation of relationship between age and yagya effect

Gender wise distribution of yagya effects:

Gender analysis of this survey is bivariate analysis. In present analysis, it was found that very little difference between male and female towards the feeling effect of yagya in their body, environment, breathing, concentration level, reducing headache, enhance energy level and treating diseases. Figure 7 and table 5 reveals that the association between gender and yagya effects. The value of chi-square of approximately seven dependent variables is calculated lower than 0.05 (Table value= 5.99 (df=2)) significant value. So, the chi-value is significant and it can be said with the distribution of null hypothesis that there is no difference between kalpwas duration and dependent variables, means gender is not barrier to performance of yagya.

Table 5: Relationship between gender and yagya effects

Dependent Variables	Male	Female	X ² -Value	Total
Difference in surrounding	51.8%	48.1%	1.278*	96.8%
Changes in body	52.3%	47.6%	0.763*	81%
Felt in breathing	51.7%	48.2%	1.197*	98.2%
Concentration	51.9%	48.07%	0.800*	93.6%
Headache	53.4%	46.5%	0.903*	52.8%
Energy level	51.8%	48.17%	2.932*	98.8%
Heart diseases	75%	25%	7.622**	6.4%
Treatment	83.3%	16.6%	1.523*	56.2%
Other diseases	71.7%	28.2%	8.389**	9.2%
Treatment	84.3%	15.6%	8.280**	69.5%

*Significant at 0.05, **Significant at 0.01 level

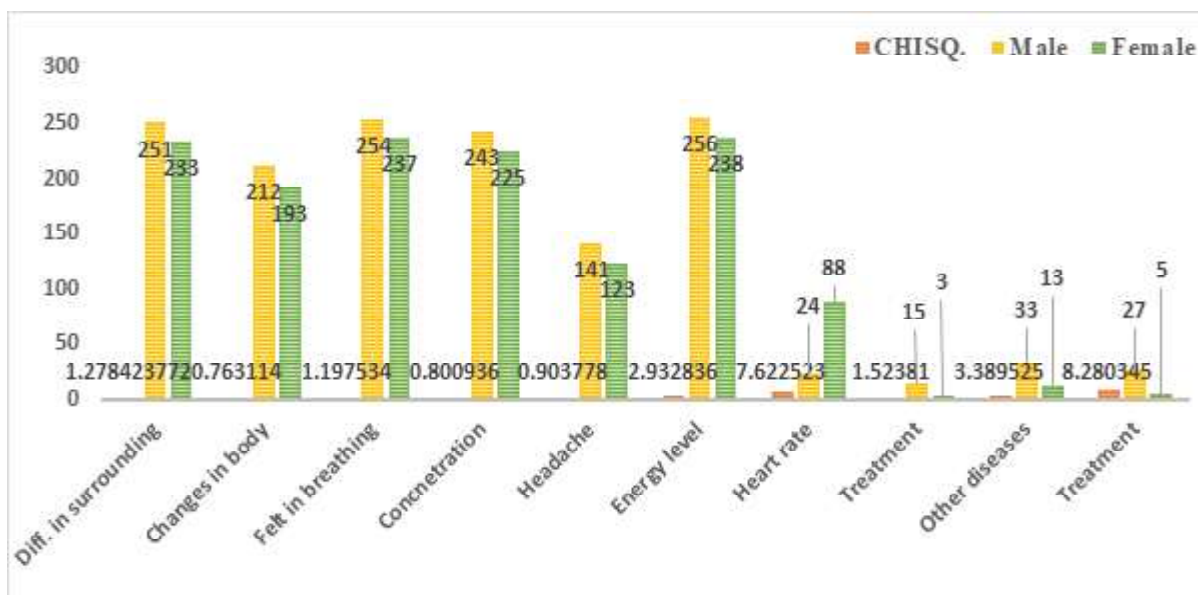


Figure 7: Graphical representation of relationship between male, female and yagya effect

DISCUSSION

It was seen in India that for a better comprehension of the cognitive influence on their surroundings and body related to religious topics. The current study offers a thorough understanding of cognitive behaviour and its effects on one's body and surroundings. This study also tells that even today how many people are connected to their traditions and are following it. It was found out during this study; how beneficial it can be for someone to perform a yagya and lives this type of lifestyle.

Traditional medicines and therapies are so much vital but underestimated part of our healthcare system. Today, particularly in the wake of COVID-19, its demand is rising steadily in the form of preventive medication or alternative treatments.¹⁰ Traditional medical practises use a variety of ethno-medicinal plants to cure a variety of diseases. According to Tausha *et al.* (2018)¹¹, 80 percent of people in poor nations relies on medicinal plants to heal illnesses and prolong their generation's lives. Indigenous societies have amassed traditional knowledge via oral and spiritual practises, which has a long history, rich cultural legacy, and natural resources.¹²

According to reports, traditional herbal medicine has been used to treat or prevent a wide range of illnesses and conditions, such as gastro-oesophageal reflux disease¹³, prevent small hepatocellular carcinoma from recurring after surgery¹⁴, adjuvant for chemotherapy and radiation therapy for cancer¹⁵, adjunctive therapy for nasopharyngeal

cancer¹⁶, resectable gastric cancer¹⁷, treat viral infections, reduce stress, and improve mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic^{18,19}, to name a few.

The result of our study shows that, nearly 44% participants belong to Prayagraj district, and 25% participants belongs to Pratapgarh, which indicates the ease of movement and good connectivity has an impact on performing religious activities. Almost 58% participants were found literate during survey that means literacy is not barrier to do religious activity and beliefs towards spiritual attitudes. Around 20% participants have been doing kalpwas for more than 10 years this shows beliefs of participants towards religious things. This study shows that some participants who performed yagya daily and various physical activity, improved the participants and environment health in a better way. During the survey it was found that now people (70%) do hawan not only for a religious belief but also because they know scientific reasons behind yagya performance. 80% of participants are feeling the differences by staying in that environment is giving them more happiness and comfort. More than two-third of the participants (90%) feel the differences in breathing that they know that the air here has become more purified by performing yagya daily. More than half of the participants feel the relax in headache during kalpwas, because they believe in yagya's positive impact. 98% of the population believes that doing daily yagya and

worshipping keeps energy in the body and throughout the day. They believe that there is God or some supreme power here which helps to keep them energetic throughout the day. Sick people are rarely found among participants (15%) doing kalpwas, they believe that their regular balanced and healthy lifestyles and faith in God has kept them away from diseases. But even more than half of hearts patients believe that by performing daily yagya and living in such a lifestyle, they have felt a lot of relief in their diseases.

On comparing people's own experiences with performance of daily yagya during kalpwas, the following observations were made:

There is much difference in the lifestyle:

Participants reported that they spend more time in doing religious things like: hearing religious songs and lectures on scriptures, to worship, perform daily yagya and tried to make God happy. Some participants reported that they learned about the Holy Scriptures to spend their time in a better way. During kalpwas one meet other people from different place and environment, and there is an exchange of ideas and knowledge among them. All participants wake up in early morning and meditate and perform yagya by dealing with the daily routine, which helps them to stay away from many diseases along with mental satisfaction. Some of the participants performed daily yagya to calm their mind and enhance energy to their body. Most of the participants believed that they utilized their time in good way during kalpwas period with doing many religious things. At the same time, they also believed that by doing all this, they get a different energy to spend their life ahead happily. Some participants came to do kalpwas at Maghmela on the fulfilment of any of their wishes. One told that "because of his illness, the doctor asked him to eat simple food and same lifestyle as here. But he could not do this because of many reasons. But coming here to do kalpwas has really helped him in curing his illness, but with this he got a different energy, that motivated him, to continue this lifestyle even after the mela". Some participants believe that it helped them to live a relaxed life, away from the hustle and bustle of the city, that's why they come every year to do kalpwas.

Kalpwas is tradition of their family:

Many participants come to do the kalpwas just because it has been tradition of their house which was followed by their grandparents and now, they are doing it. Some participants came here to do kalpwas after hearing

the grandeur of Maghmela and the importance of kalpwas. One of elderly couple said that "they now live alone in their house; their children have gone to live outside. So, it is the same thing for them to stay there or stay here, that's why they come here every year to do kalpwas". There are some pandits who came here to perform yagya and kalpwas because their father also used to come here to perform yagya. Many religious leaders and people of religious institutions come here to propagate their religious ideas to the hugely gathered crowd. Many of them believe that before dying, everyone should do kalpwas once, bathing with the water of Ganga and Yamuna and worshipping it daily, all sins are washed away and they get to heaven.

Participant knowledge about hawan samagri:

A total of 500 including 257 males and 243 females were interviewed from Maghmela, Prayagraj. On further dividing population in two groups; 50 and under 50 years and more than 50 years, it is found that the population above 50 years is more conscious of the hawan samagri performed daily. On distributing same population on the basis of gender, it is found that females only bring hawan samagri home-made hawan samagri for daily use and they were well aware of it. By distributing the population on the basis of literacy, it is found that literate people are so much aware about their hawan samagri. During the conversation with some participants, it came to the knowledge that they deliberately do not want to know about what is used in hawan samagri, because they feel that it is not their job, only the women of their house are always making hawan samagri, so what is the need of knowing them?

Some Saints perspective towards yagya:

During conversation with Jagatguru swami Shree Nischlanand Maharaj ji, he told that yagya is an integral part of human life; all the rituals of a human being from birth to death are related to yagya (Agni). He performs yagya daily for more than 35 years and preaches his knowledge by visiting from place to place and also performs kalpwas in Maghmela, Prayagraj, every year. Further he also told that by getting up regularly in the morning, reciting worship, and meditating, mind as well as body gets peace and energy.

Strength and limitations

The study reveals the extent to which the people in India's Prayagraj city are exposed to and engage in everyday yagya rituals. This study reveals the impact and exposes the yagya's awareness. Other significant strengths of the

study are its moderate sample sizes and in-depth qualitative examination of participant questionnaire responses. The research does have some drawbacks, though. First, the results of the current study were based on participant self-reports, which are prone to social desirability and recollection bias. Second, the study did not identify the clinical test of how exposure to yagya affected the participants' feelings and was restricted to estimating the amount and daily performance of yagya among those who conduct kalpwas during the Magh mela. Third, since the qualitative approach was used to analyse how yagya and attitudes affected how the yagya was performed from one generation to the next, statistical associations could not be found to support the conclusions that needed to be made. Future efforts can be made to investigate the relationship between participants' execution of yagya and its effect on participants while taking the aforementioned constraints into consideration.

CONCLUSION

For the purpose of understanding the effects of biological resources on the local environment and human population, ethno-pharmacological research is crucial. Numerous ethno-botanical studies have been conducted in various parts of the world to investigate herbal remedies for prevalent illnesses. However, relatively few ethno-botanical studies have been conducted in various parts of the world to investigate herbal remedies for prevalent illnesses. However, there haven't been many ethno-botanical studies done in India to examine how yagya treatment affects the biota. The goal of the current study was to provide evidence of the traditional knowledge of medicinal plants and the effects of medicinal smoke on the people. It is anticipated that study and development in this area will continue and be reliable in determining the psychological impacts of aromas. The endocrine, immunological, and pharmacological impacts of aromas are the subject of ongoing, sophisticated study that will likely soon provide major findings.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The Authors have no relevant financial or potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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