



A Study of Mental Health Among Regular Yogic Practitioners

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Abstract: Mental health issues such as stress, anxiety, and depression are increasingly prevalent in modern society, adversely affecting individuals' quality of life and productivity. Yoga, a holistic mind-body practice with origins in ancient India, combines physical postures, controlled breathing, and meditation to promote overall health and well-being. This study explores the mental health status of adults who regularly practice yoga compared to non-practitioners. Using standardized psychological measures including the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21) and General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12), mental health parameters of 175 participants (75 regular yogic practitioners and 75 non-practitioners) were assessed. The study found that regular yogic practitioners exhibited significantly lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress, along with improved psychological well-being compared to non-practitioners. These findings support existing literature on yoga's positive effects on mental health and suggest that integrating yoga into daily routines can be an effective complementary approach to managing psychological distress. The study also discusses potential mechanisms behind yoga's benefits, including regulation of the autonomic nervous system, reduction of cortisol levels, and enhancement of mindfulness and emotional regulation. Limitations such as sample size and self-report measures are acknowledged, with recommendations for future longitudinal and experimental research. This research reinforces yoga's role as a valuable tool in promoting mental wellness in diverse populations, highlighting its potential for inclusion in mental health promotion and prevention programs.

Keywords: Yoga, Mental Health, Stress Reduction, Anxiety, Psychological Well-being

I. INTRODUCTION

Mental health is a crucial aspect of overall health, influencing individuals' ability to function effectively and enjoy life. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) defines mental health as a state of well-being in which individuals recognize their abilities, cope with normal stresses, work productively, and contribute to their communities. However, rising global incidences of stress-related disorders, anxiety, and depression have emerged as significant public health concerns (Kessler et al., 2017). These conditions affect millions, leading to diminished quality of life, reduced productivity, and increased healthcare costs (World Health Organization, 2022).

Yoga, originating from ancient Indian philosophy, is a mind-body practice encompassing physical postures (asanas), breathing techniques (pranayama), and meditation (dhyana). It aims to foster harmony between body and mind (Khalsa, 2013). Over the past few decades, scientific research has increasingly validated yoga's beneficial effects on mental health, showing reductions in stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms (Field, 2011; Sharma & Haider, 2020). Yoga appears to influence mental health by modulating the autonomic nervous system, decreasing sympathetic activity, and enhancing parasympathetic tone, which leads to physiological relaxation and improved emotional regulation (Streeter et al., 2012). Moreover, yoga promotes mindfulness, which helps individuals manage negative thoughts and emotions more effectively (Gard et al., 2014).

Despite these promising findings, there remains a need for studies focusing specifically on regular long-term practitioners to better understand the sustained effects of yoga on mental health across diverse populations. This study aims to fill this gap by comparing the mental health status of regular yogic practitioners with that of non-practitioners, hypothesizing that regular yoga practice is associated with better psychological well-being.

II. METHODOLOGY

Participants

The study included 175 adult participants aged between 20 and 75 years, recruited through purposive sampling from local yoga centers and community groups. The sample was divided into two groups:



- **Group A (Yogic Practitioners):** 75 individuals who practiced yoga regularly (minimum four days per week for at least six months).
- **Group B (Non-Practitioners):** 75 individuals matched by age, gender, and socioeconomic background who did not engage in any form of yoga or meditation.

Instruments

- **Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21):** A widely used self-report tool measuring the severity of depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms.
- **General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12):** A brief screening instrument assessing overall psychological well-being and mental distress.

Both instruments have demonstrated high reliability and validity in mental health research (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995; Goldberg, 1978).

Procedure

Participants were invited to complete the DASS-21 and GHQ-12 questionnaires in a quiet, supervised setting to ensure accuracy and reduce response bias. Demographic data including age, gender, education level, and duration of yoga practice (for Group A) were collected. Data were anonymized to maintain confidentiality.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were calculated for all variables. Independent sample t-tests were conducted to compare mental health scores between yogic practitioners and non-practitioners. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

III. RESULTS

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Group Comparison on Mental Health Measures

Variable	Yogic Practitioners (n=75)	Non-Practitioners (n=75)	t-value	p-value
Depression (DASS-21)	Mean = 6.4, SD = 3.2	Mean = 11.7, SD = 4.5	-7.12	<0.001
Anxiety (DASS-21)	Mean = 5.8, SD = 2.9	Mean = 10.2, SD = 4.0	-6.53	<0.001
Stress (DASS-21)	Mean = 7.0, SD = 3.1	Mean = 13.1, SD = 4.7	-8.03	<0.001
General Well-being (GHQ-12)	Mean = 11.9, SD = 2.8	Mean = 18.4, SD = 3.5	-9.21	<0.001

IV. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study underscore the significant positive impact of regular yogic practice on various dimensions of mental health, including depression, anxiety, stress, and overall psychological well-being. Participants who engaged in consistent yoga practice demonstrated substantially lower mean scores on the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21) and the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) compared to non-practitioners. These results align with a growing body of literature that supports the therapeutic role of yoga in enhancing mental health outcomes.

Yoga's influence on mental well-being can be attributed to multiple mechanisms. Physiologically, yoga practices modulate the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, resulting in reduced cortisol levels and enhanced parasympathetic nervous system activity (Streeter et al., 2012). This shift facilitates a relaxation response, lowering physiological arousal associated with stress and anxiety. Psychologically, the meditative and breath-focused components of yoga promote mindfulness, which helps practitioners regulate emotions, reduce rumination, and enhance self-awareness (Gard et al., 2014; Sharma & Haider, 2020).

Several studies have reported similar findings. For instance, a randomized controlled trial by Javnbakht et al. (2009) observed significant reductions in anxiety and depression following two months of yoga practice. Similarly, Field (2011) found that regular yoga was associated with improved mood and decreased symptoms of post-traumatic stress. These parallels further validate the present study's results.

Nevertheless, certain limitations should be acknowledged. The study's cross-sectional design does not allow for causal inferences. Additionally, the reliance on self-report measures may introduce social desirability and recall bias. Future longitudinal or experimental studies are warranted to explore the causal relationship between yoga and mental health, and to examine variations across age, gender, and clinical populations.



V. CONCLUSION

This study provides compelling evidence that regular yoga practice is associated with significantly better mental health outcomes, including lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress, and improved general psychological well-being. Yoga emerges as a cost-effective, accessible, and holistic intervention that can be incorporated into public health and mental health promotion programs. As mental health challenges continue to rise globally, especially in urban and high-stress populations, yoga offers a non-pharmacological, culturally rooted solution with proven benefits. Institutions, healthcare providers, and policymakers should consider promoting yoga-based interventions as part of integrated mental health strategies.

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