



Yoga and Mental Health: A Short Summary

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ABSTRACT

Yoga has different traditional definitions. Some of the definitions commonly used are: “Yoga is the restraint of mental operation (process)” or “Yoga is balance (equanimity)”. Yoga means “Union” between one’s individual consciousness and the universal consciousness in contrast to the common understanding of union between body and mind, or body, mind and spirit. (Dr. M.G. Prasad, 2008). Swami Vivekananda translates the sutra as “Yoga is restraining the mind – stuff (citta) from taking various forms (vrittis)”. “Mental Health is the foundation for well-being and effective functioning for an individual and community. It is more than the absence of mental illness; it is a resource vital to individual, families and societies” (British Columbia, Ministry of Health, 2007).

Keywords: Yoga, Mental Health, Asan, Pranayama.

INTRODUCTION

A healthy mind is as important as a healthy body to your overall well-being. Good mental health helps you feel good about yourself, connect with others, find meaning in life and thrive at home, work and play. Good mental health doesn’t mean you will never be sad, insecure or worried. But good mental health can help you keep problems in perspective. Mental health is a positive concept related to the social and emotional well-being of individuals and communities. The concept is culturally defined, but generally relates to the enjoyment of life, ability to cope with stresses and sadness, the fulfillment of goals and potential and a sense of connection to others. The term “mental health” is often misunderstood and interpreted as referring to mental ill health. This can be confusing, especially since our “mental health” services have been mostly concerned with the treatment of mental illness, rather than mental health per se (Barry, M.M. and Jenkins, R, 2007).

Mental health is a desirable quality in its own right and is more than the absence of mental ill health. It is relevant to all people, regardless of whether they are currently experiencing or recovering from, a mental illness. In the Indian tradition, Yoga was conceived as a pathway towards attainment of joy in life, freedom from sorrows, mental balance and peace. Since antiquity, the seekers of self-realization (often called as Rishis or Yogis) have been using yogic practices for restoring mind-body balance in order to make them capable for attaining spiritual realization. The ultimate states of human mental health development, have been described using different terms. For example, Buddhists use notion of ‘Nirvana’, Samkhya system uses ‘Moksha’, Vedantists use ‘Atmasakshatkar’ etc. But all these notions converge in their meanings that it involves liberation from suffering. Sage Patanjali, who collated, coordinated and systematized the system of Yoga, declared the main objective of Yoga as regulation of mind in the first aphorism of famous Yoga Sutra (*Yogah Chittvritti Nirodhah*) (Iyengar BKS, 2005). Bhagavad Gita, which elaborates comprehensive typologies of Yoga, also states the need of Yoga for removing sorrow and increasing bliss in life. Hath Yoga, a yogic tradition focusing on physical modus-operandi for realizing deeper states of consciousness, emphasises on postures, breathing patterns, energy locks and contemplation to enhance energy and vitality.

Many features and practices of Yoga deal with psychological disorders and for promoting psychological wellness. First, Yoga can induce harmony in mind-body functioning (Singh AP, Misra G., 2012). Second, being experientially-rooted; it can be adopted considerably with much ease in comparison to the existing psychological practices (Kakar S, 2003). Third, since training and taking the service of yoga therapist is cost effective it has promising potential to address mental health concerns of the people. According to an estimate in India alone, by using yoga for treatment of mental illnesses in India, approximately \$145 billion month may be saved which are spent to meet medication cost, doctor’s fee, and travelling cost to meet the doctor. There are indirect savings also which accrue owing to loss of wages, disability, absenteeism and unimaginable substance abuse (Math SB, Srinavasaraaju R, 2010) Fourth, it can also alleviate multiple physical, emotional and social sufferings holistically. It may be noted that efficacy of any psychological therapy is multiply determined by factors either in the environment or in the attributes of the client or therapist but not by highly acclaimed theory-based techniques. Gradually demand for personalized, eclectic, and intuitive therapeutic approaches is on rise. Consequently, use of yogic practices as an adjunct to other forms of psychotherapy, is frequently reported.

2.CONCEPT OF YOGA

Yoga has been practiced in India over several centuries to promote positive health and well – being. It is considered to be a tool for both physical and mental development of an individual. It gives solves for the restless mind and can give great relief to the sticky person. It has become quite necessary even for all to keep fit. Some use yoga for developing memory, intelligence and creativity. With growing scientific evidence, yoga has been emerging as an important health behavior – modifying practice to achieve sound states of health, both at physical and mental levels. Several studies have demonstrated the beneficial effects of yoga on health behavior in many lifestyles – related somatic problems such as hypertension, bronchial asthma, diabetes including some psychiatric conditions such as anxiety neurosis and depressive illness etc. **(Deshpande S, Nagendra HR, Raghuram N, 2008)**.

Although yoga has been practiced for over 5000 years, it has only recently and Europe. In America, the Yoga market emerged as a 5.7 billion dollar industry in 2008, an increase of 87% from 2004.

According to Yogic Science, Psychological problems arise due to the imbalance speed in the mind. Yoga is the science to control the mind. The disturbance in the mind is the real cause of the problem. Many studies concluded that yoga improved balance of mind. A study showed that mindfulness meditation improved psychological well-being and reduced psychological symptoms of stress related problems, illness and anxiety, **(Carmody J, Baer RA, 2008)** concluded that lifestyle modification based on yoga and stress management led to remarkable reduction in anxiety score within a period of ten days. Yogic breathing relieve post-traumatic stress disorder and depression **(Descilo T, Vedamurtachar A, Gerbarg PL, Nagaraga D, Gangadhar BN, Damodaran B, et.al. 2010)**.

3.TYPES OF YOGA

Although there are many types of yoga, here various Yogis, meaning an adherent of yoga philosophy, have traditionally classified into the five major Margas (Paths). These five major paths are:-

1. Jnana yoga or JnanaMarga (Path of knowledge) which is the yoga of wisdom and develops the intellect or will.
2. Bhakti Yoga (Path of devotion), the yoga of devotion, opens the heart.
3. Karma Yoga (Path of self-less action), the path of action of selfless service.
4. Raja Yoga or Ashtanga Yoga (Eight – fold yoga), the royal or Psychological which involves the mind. Ashtanga Yoga forms the practical and scientific basis of Vedic (Hindu) Philosophy and spirituality. This yoga process, described in eight steps, is based on Aphorisms (Sutras) of Yoga by Maharishi Patanjali. Sutras are very short statements which deep insights and they are easy to memorize. Hatha yoga is a branch of Raja Yoga that Prepares the Yogi for the higher stages of Raja Yoga.
5. Mantra, Nada Yoga: This approach uses Mantra referring to spiritual invocation or incantation as well as sacred sounds as the medium to contemplate on the sacred object. The world of sound is also seen as a manifestation of Supreme Being. Every Yogi, or human being for that matter, possesses and identifies with each of these clients: Intellect, heart, body and mind. Therefore, everyone can practice certain techniques from each path, although different emphasis might be given to each path based on one’s own interest and capability.

4.YOGA – ASANA

Yoga – Asanas are designed to develop not only the body but also broaden the mental faculties and spiritual qualities. Yoga regards the body as a vehicle for the soul to reach ultimate consciousness and hence provide balance in the development of body mind. Yoga – Asanas, a term referring to steady pose, which increase body flexibility, is the key to being healthy. Yoga exercises focus on the health, strength and flexibility of the spine. The spinal column is important as it carries the complete nervous system of the body. By maintaining the spine’s flexibility and strength through exercise, circulation is increased and the nerves are ensured their supply of nutrients and oxygen. The Asanas also affect the internal organs and the endocrine system (glands and hormones).

Although there are so many asanas in scripture .some of them are following: **(1) Suryanamaskara or Sun Salutation (2) Halasana or Plough (3) Matsyasana or Fish (4) Sarvangasana or Shoulderstand (5) Paschimothanasana or Forward Bend (6) Bhujangasana or Cobra (7) Shalabhasana or Locust (8) Dhanurasana or Bow (9) ArdhaMatsyaendrasana or Spinal Twist (10) Kakasana or Crow Pose (11) Mayuraasana or Peacock Pose (12) PadaHasthasana or Standing Bend (13) Pavanamuktasana (14) Trikonasana or Triangle (15) Padmasana or Lotus pose.**

Pranayama – Prana is the vital energy required for sustaining the dynamic operation and coordination of each organ within a body. The continuous flow of Prana in the naadis, or subtle nerves in the body, is important for a disease free body. Pranayama is control and smooth flow of Prana through Yoga exercises. Pranayama or Prana – control can be achieved by the modification of breathing patterns. Pramayama exercise is done through proper regulation of inhaling, holding the breath and exhaling. While pranayama can be practiced alone, it can be integrated with several of the asanas (postures) for in proud benefits. **(M.K. Gopala Krishna, 2003)**.

Well-being is significant to good life and the continuing goals of individuals. It is major criterion for the evaluation of the success of government and societies; if the people in a country enjoy overall well-being, it reflect in a good national public health (Raj, 2004). Recently, healthcare reform in Thailand is changing the focus of care from caring for the sick to health promotion. Therefore, individual need to be empowered to develop personal skills for a healthy living. In addition , the shift of health problem for infectious acute disease to non infectious chronic disease call for more attention on holistic healthcare and the integration of complementary therapies to care. In order to battle these diseases, the Thai government has implemented a new strategy called the Thailand Healthy Lifestyle Strategic Plan (2007-2016) (Konnarck, 2011); which involves the promotion of the contented life way and the use of complementary therapy to promote a healthy and peaceful life. Several technique provide health and well-being such a music listening, Tai chi, Gi gong, yoga and meditation (Biley, 2000; Chen, Hsu, Chen, Tseng, 2007; Dossey, &Guzzetta, 2005; Hodges, 2003; Sjogren, et al 2006; Thaweepkul, 2004). Among those, yoga is quite popular because it is used extensively in both health services throughout governmnt and private hospital, public health service and non-governmental organisation (NGO's). moreover, a survey by the Thai Bureau of Health Policy and Strategy reported that yoga was one of the most popular forms of complementary therapy that most Thais have used at some point in their lives (Terachaiskul, 2005).

5.CONCLUSION

Yoga is considered one of the oldest forms of exercise and although there are many different styles, from gentle to rigorous, yoga practice generally involves stretching, breathing and a period of deep relaxation or mediation.A growing number of studies from the 1970s through to today, suggest that yoga can have a positive outcome for people managing symptoms of depression, anxiety or stress, among other benefits. When you do yoga, your brain cells develop new connections, and changes occur in brain structure as well as function, resulting in improved cognitive skills, such as learning and memory. Yoga strengthens parts of the brain that play a key role in memory, attention, awareness, thought, and language. Think of it as weightlifting for the brain.Studies using MRI scans and other brain imaging technology have shown that people who regularly did yoga had a thicker cerebral cortex (the area of the brain responsible for information processing) and hippocampus (the area of the brain involved in learning and memory) compared with nonpractitioners. These areas of the brain typically shrink as you age, but the older yoga practitioners showed less shrinkage than those who did no yoga. This suggests that yoga may counteract age-related declines in memory and other cognitive skills.

All exercise can boost your mood by lowering levels of stress hormones, increasing the production of feel-good chemicals known as endorphins, and bringing more oxygenated blood to your brain. But yoga may have additional benefits. It can affect mood by elevating levels of a brain chemical called gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), which is associated with better mood and decreased anxiety.

Meditation also reduces activity in the limbic system—the part of the brain dedicated to emotions. As your emotional reactivity diminishes, you have a more tempered response when faced with stressful situations.Drugs and talk therapy have traditionally been the go-to remedies for depression and anxiety. But complementary approaches, such as yoga, also helps, and yoga stacks up well when compared with other complementary therapies.

A review of 15 studies, published in the journal *Aging and Mental Health*, looked at the effect of a variety of relaxation techniques on depression and anxiety in older adults. In addition to yoga, interventions included massage therapy, progressive muscle relaxation, stress management, and listening to music. While all the techniques provided some benefit, yoga and music were the most effective for both depression and anxiety. And yoga appeared to provide the longest-lasting effect.A number of small studies have found that yoga can help with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It is not used by itself, but as an add-on treatment to help reduce intrusive memories and emotional arousal and to produce calmer, steadier breathing. Deep, slow breathing is associated with calmer states because it helps activate the parasympathetic nervous system.

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