

"ALIGNING MIND AND PRANAYAMA: A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF YOGA'S IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH"

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Abstract:

The increasing prevalence of mental health problems around the world has increased the urgency with which effective strategies for promoting population mental health must be implemented. Current allopathic treatment methods fall short of ensuring patients' psychological health (citation needed). The potential for stress reduction to improve health and serve as a preventative measure is encouraging. Illness and physical health are up for debate. The rising popularity of yoga around the world is reflected in the proliferation of yoga centers where interested individuals can take classes. The widespread appeal of yoga can be attributed to its ability to cater to a diverse range of individuals, regardless of age, fitness level, or socioeconomic status. Those interested in a more economical, all-encompassing method of health maintenance should consider yoga. The outward appearance of a living thing; more specifically, the human body. Yoga is becoming increasingly popular as a self-directed therapeutic intervention for people looking to improve their mental health. Some people prefer non-medical methods because they believe they are safer and more effective than clinical intervention. It is also possible that some people will not react to these kinds of interventions. Medicine-based care. When compared to pharmaceutical interventions, the cost of yoga is much lower and its side effects are minimal. Psychotherapy is a form of talk therapy that aims to alleviate emotional suffering and boost mental health. Yoga has been shown to have beneficial effects on physical fitness and independence, which is just one more reason to give it a try. In this brief and to-the-point. In this article, we take a close look at the research on yoga's potential benefits for maintaining mental wellness, warding off disease, and treating a wide range of medical issues.

Keywords: Yoga, Mental health, Mind, Pranayama, wellbeing.

Introduction:

In the intricate tapestry of holistic well-being, the interconnection between mental health and physical vitality forms a cornerstone of optimal living. In recent decades, amidst the burgeoning

concerns surrounding mental health, ancient practices like yoga have garnered considerable attention for their potential to foster mental and emotional balance.

"Aligning Mind and Body: A Comprehensive Review of Yoga's Impact on Mental Health" endeavors to delve into the profound relationship between yoga and mental well-being. As a practice that harmonizes physical postures, breathing exercises, meditation, and mindfulness, yoga has emerged not just as a physical exercise regimen but as a powerful tool for cultivating mental clarity, emotional resilience, and psychological stability.

This comprehensive review aims to navigate through the multifaceted dimensions of yoga, exploring its transformative influence on mental health. By examining empirical studies, qualitative experiences, and the convergence of Eastern philosophy with Western psychology, this review seeks to illuminate the mechanisms underlying yoga's impact on mental health outcomes.

From stress reduction and anxiety management to alleviating symptoms of depression and enhancing overall psychological resilience, yoga appears to offer a holistic approach to mental health care. By examining the intricate interplay between yoga practices and mental health parameters, this review aspires to provide a nuanced understanding of how yoga serves as a catalyst for aligning the mind and body in the pursuit of mental well-being.

Moreover, in an era marked by escalating stressors and an increasing prevalence of mental health disorders, exploring accessible, non-pharmacological interventions like yoga holds immense promise. Understanding the empirical evidence, nuances of various yoga techniques, and their implications for mental health not only enriches our comprehension but also offers avenues for integrating these practices into mainstream mental health care strategies.

Intriguingly, the synergy between ancient wisdom and modern science continues to unveil the profound impacts of yoga on the intricate landscape of mental health. As this review unfolds, it endeavors to shed light on the potential of yoga as a holistic modality, fostering an alignment between the mind and body, ultimately contributing to the well-being of individuals on a profound and transformative level.

Yoga:

Yoga is an ancient practice that originated in India and encompasses a diverse range of techniques and disciplines aimed at achieving physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. At its core, yoga is a holistic system that integrates various elements, including physical postures (asanas), breathing exercises (pranayama), meditation, relaxation techniques, and ethical principles.

The word "yoga" itself stems from the Sanskrit word "yuj," meaning to yoke, unite, or join. It symbolizes the union of the individual consciousness with the universal consciousness, aligning the mind, body, and spirit.

Components of Yoga:

1.Asanas (Physical Postures): These are the physical poses or postures practiced in yoga. They are designed to enhance strength, flexibility, balance, and posture while also promoting relaxation and a sense of well-being.

2.Pranayama (Breathing Exercises): Pranayama involves breath control techniques. It focuses on regulating and deepening the breath to enhance vitality, calm the mind, and improve overall health by balancing the flow of life force energy (prana) in the body.

3.Meditation and Mindfulness: Central to yoga practice, meditation cultivates mental clarity, concentration, and inner peace. It involves various techniques to calm the mind, increase self-awareness, and connect with a deeper sense of self.

4.Relaxation and Stress Reduction: Yoga often incorporates relaxation techniques, including guided relaxation (Yoga Nidra) or deep relaxation postures, to alleviate stress and induce a state of deep rest.

5.Ethical Principles (Yamas and Niyamas): These are moral and ethical guidelines that form the foundation of yoga philosophy. They include principles of non-violence (ahimsa), truthfulness (satya), non-possessiveness (aparigraha), self-discipline (tapas), and contentment (santosha), among others.

Physical Benefits: Improved flexibility, strength, posture, and balance.

Mental and Emotional Benefits: Reduced stress, increased relaxation, enhanced mental clarity, and emotional balance.

Spiritual Benefits: Increased self-awareness, a sense of connection, and inner peace.

Holistic Well-being: Yoga's holistic approach addresses the interconnectedness of the mind, body, and spirit, promoting overall well-being.

Varieties of Yoga:

There are various styles and traditions of yoga, each emphasizing different aspects such as physical fitness, spiritual growth, or a combination of both. Some popular styles include Hatha yoga, Vinyasa, SKY yoga, Restorative yoga, krishnamacharya yoga tradition, Sivananda tradition, ISHA tradition, Art of living tradition, Brahmakumaries, swami Rama tradition, Ashtanga, Bikram (Hot) yoga, Kundalini yoga, and Iyengar yoga, Patanjali Yog Peeth, among others. Each style may vary in pace, intensity, emphasis on postures, breathing techniques, or meditation practices.

Yoga, in essence, offers a pathway to self-discovery, inner balance, and a harmonious connection between the individual and the larger universe.

Definition of Mind:

1. Manas (Sensory Mind): This aspect of the mind processes sensory input. It receives information from the senses and reacts to stimuli. It's associated with emotions, desires, and immediate responses.

2. Buddhi (Intellect): Buddhi represents the discriminating intellect or reasoning faculty. It's responsible for decision-making, analysis, judgment, and discernment.

3. Chitta (Memory): Chitta is the repository of memories, impressions, and experiences. It stores past impressions and influences the present perceptions and actions.

4. Ahankara (Ego): Ahankara refers to the ego or the sense of individuality. It creates the feeling of "I" or self-identity, distinguishing one's self from others.

These terms are stages or conditions of the mind described in yogic philosophy, particularly in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. They represent different states or levels of mental focus and concentration

Stages of Mental Focus:

1. Kshipta: It refers to a scattered or distracted state of mind. In this state, the mind is restless, agitated, and easily distracted by various thoughts, emotions, or external stimuli. It's characterized by an inability to focus or maintain attention.

2. Mudha: It signifies a state of mental dullness or lethargy. It involves a lack of clarity, sluggishness, or confusion in the mind. The mind in this state might feel heavy, inactive, and unable to engage or process information effectively.

3. Vikshipta: It represents a partially concentrated state of mind. It involves a fluctuating level of attention - sometimes focused but often wavering or easily pulled away by distractions. The mind in this state is somewhat concentrated but not steady or fully absorbed.

4. Ekagra: It refers to a state of one-pointed concentration or singular focus. In this state, the mind is completely absorbed and concentrated on a single object, thought, or point of focus. It is characterized by unwavering attention and deep absorption in the chosen focus.

5. Niruddha: It signifies a state of mental suppression or control. It involves the complete cessation or restraint of mental fluctuations. This state transcends the distractions and modifications of the mind, leading to a state of profound stillness and control over mental activities.

Yogic Practice and Mental States:

Yogic teachings emphasize the importance of cultivating mental focus and concentration to progress along the path of yoga. Through practices like meditation, pranayama, and mindfulness, individuals aim to move from scattered or distracted states towards more concentrated and ultimately still states of mind. The goal is to achieve a state of deep concentration (Ekagra) and,

ultimately, mental stillness (Niruddha), facilitating self-awareness, inner peace, and spiritual growth.

Yoga defines Pranayama as the practice of breath control or regulation. It encompasses various techniques that manipulate the breath to enhance vitality, balance the mind, and elevate consciousness. Pranayama combines two Sanskrit words: "Prana," meaning life force or vital energy, and "Ayama," meaning extension or expansion. Therefore, Pranayama can be understood as the extension or expansion of life force through breath control.

States of Pranayama:

In the practice of Pranayama, different states or phases are recognized, each signifying a level of control and mastery over the breath and its influence on the mind and body:

1. Puraka (Inhalation): Puraka is the initial phase where the breath is drawn in slowly and consciously through the nostrils, filling the lungs completely. It involves a controlled and measured inhalation process, focusing on the expansion of the chest and the intake of fresh air.

2. Kumbhaka (Retention): Kumbhaka refers to the phase of breath retention or suspension. There are two types:

Antara Kumbhaka (Internal Retention): This is the pause after inhaling, where the breath is held within, allowing the prana to be absorbed and contained within the body.

Bahya Kumbhaka (External Retention): This occurs after exhaling, where the breath is held out, facilitating a state of stillness and control.

3. Rechaka (Exhalation): Rechaka is the phase of controlled exhalation, where the breath is released slowly and steadily through the nostrils. This phase involves the expulsion of stale air and toxins, aiding in purification.

4. Kevala Kumbhaka (Spontaneous Retention): Kevala Kumbhaka refers to a state of spontaneous breath retention that occurs naturally and effortlessly without intentional control. It is a state of mastery attained through prolonged Pranayama practice.

Yogic Perspective on Pranayama:

From a yogic standpoint, Pranayama serves as a powerful tool to influence the flow of prana (vital energy) within the body. Through regulating the breath, practitioners aim to balance the Prana and the mind, leading to enhanced vitality, mental clarity, and spiritual awakening. The various states of Pranayama signify stages of control and mastery over the breath, eventually leading to a state of effortless retention and profound connection with the life force energy.

Pranayama, the practice of breath control in yoga, has long been regarded as a powerful tool for enhancing mental well-being in yogic science. Its impact on mental health is believed to be profound, influencing various aspects of the mind and emotions:

Calming the Mind:

Stress Reduction: Pranayama techniques, particularly slow, deep breathing, activate the parasympathetic nervous system, inducing relaxation responses that counteract the body's stress response.

Anxiety Management: Controlled breathwork can calm the mind, reduce anxiety, and alleviate symptoms of panic disorders by regulating the body's physiological and psychological response to stress.

Enhancing Mental Clarity and Focus:

Improved Concentration: Pranayama practices like Nadi Shodhana (alternate nostril breathing) and Ujjayi breathing promote mental focus, enhancing concentration and attention.

Clarity of Thought: Regular pranayama sessions are believed to clear mental fog, sharpen cognitive abilities, and improve mental clarity.

Emotional Regulation:

Mood Enhancement: Pranayama influences the flow of prana, impacting the subtle energy channels in the body (nadis) associated with emotional well-being. Balancing prana through breathwork is believed to uplift mood and emotional stability.

Stress Response Regulation: By training individuals to modulate their breath in challenging situations, pranayama assists in regulating emotional reactions and stress responses.

Cultivating Mindfulness and Awareness:

Enhanced Mindfulness: Conscious breathing practices in pranayama promote present-moment awareness, aiding individuals in staying grounded and mindful.

Increased Self-awareness: Through focused breathwork, practitioners develop a deeper connection with their inner states, fostering self-awareness and introspection.

Balancing Energy:

Harmonizing Prana: Pranayama techniques are designed to balance the flow of prana within the body, facilitating a state of equilibrium and vitality. This balanced energy is considered vital for overall mental and emotional health.

Preparing for Meditation:

Preparation for Meditation: Pranayama serves as a preparatory practice for meditation by calming the mind, focusing attention, and facilitating a smoother transition into deeper states of meditative awareness.

In yogic philosophy, the interplay between the breath and the mind is profound. Pranayama is seen as a foundational practice that harmonizes the body, mind, and spirit, impacting mental health by regulating the breath, balancing energy, and cultivating inner awareness and peace. Regular and disciplined practice of pranayama is believed to be an integral component of holistic well-being, influencing mental health positively on multiple levels

Literature review:

In the medical journals that are peer-reviewed, we discovered approximately thirty review articles and three hundred individual studies on the topic of yoga and mental health. The fact that this is still a relatively new area of research makes it challenging to contrast one study with another, in part because of the difference in sample sizes variation, differences in the length of the trial, and differences in the type of yoga practiced. Iyengar was the subject of a number of studies, the majority of which focused on asanas. The Sudarshan Kriya is a series of patterned pranayam exercises that progress from slow to fast paces calming to rapid and stimulating, followed by emotional self-expression in a supine position, savasana (deep relaxation), and yoga nidra (deep sleep) are some of the postures that are practiced in yoga. The Sahaja Yoga a type of meditation several distinct time periods, ranging from yogic interventions lasting anywhere from two weeks to six months also made it difficult to conduct studies to look at something from multiple angles. Research on yoga and mental health has generally shown positive results would benefit from increased methodological rigor, especially improved a process of randomization.

Peer-Reviewed Literature on Yoga and Mental Health

According to the Patanjali Sutras, yoga is defined as the practice of achieving mental tranquility (Patañjali 2003). Positive mental health can be defined as a condition of overall wellness wherein individuals are able to recognize and utilize their own capabilities, effectively manage the typical pressures and challenges of life, engage in productive and meaningful work, and actively contribute to the betterment of their community (World Health Organization 2014)]. Our study focused on the identification of scholarly articles that investigate the utilization of yoga as a means of enhancing mental well-being among individuals who are in good physical health. However, the majority of the existing literature in this particular field primarily concentrates on enhancing the quality of life for individuals who are affected by cancer and other similar ailments. The existing body of literature pertaining to the relationship between mental health and yoga exhibits a bias towards individualized mental health imbalances, much like the bias observed in literature concerning physical health and individualized disease. Approximately 30 review articles (2002-2014) were identified pertaining to the utilization of yoga as an intervention for diverse mental health conditions, encompassing Major Depressive Disorder (MDD), Anxiety Disorders, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Schizophrenia, and other related disorders. The findings of this study indicate that yoga exhibits notable efficacy as a therapeutic intervention for individuals suffering from depression. Further investigation is necessary to establish definitive evidence-based guidelines. Currently, the body of peer-reviewed literature presents encouraging findings regarding the potential of yoga as a means of promoting and treating mental health, specifically in relation to depression.

Enhancing Quality of Life: Exploring the Impact of Yoga on Depression and Well-being:

Research has demonstrated that the practice of yoga has the potential to improve the overall well-being and quality of life for individuals, regardless of their health status, whether they are in good health or experiencing illness. A comprehensive meta-analysis revealed that yoga demonstrates comparable or superior efficacy. Engaging in exercise can contribute to the enhancement of both mental and physical well-being. Various indicators, including stress levels, quality of life assessments, mood states, and heart rate measurements, are commonly employed to evaluate and quantify certain aspects of individuals' well-being.

The study conducted by the researchers focused on examining the relationship between variability and pulmonary function, among other factors Ross A, Homas S (2010). A comprehensive synthesis of multiple studies, known as a meta-analysis, It has been determined that weight gain and toxicity are adverse effects associated with the aforementioned condition. Among the different pharmacotherapies available, yoga has been identified as a potentially effective and less toxic intervention. Auxiliary interventions for individuals with severe mental illness have been explored (Cabral P, et.al., 2011). In a particular study, the practice of yoga was examined. Enhanced subjective wellbeing, mental health, and executive functioning. Operating within correctional facilities (Bilderbeck AC, et.al., 2013).

The practice of yoga has been found to enhance the overall quality, The quality of life experienced by pregnant women has been investigated in multiple studies, leading to its improvement. Interpersonal relationships have been extensively studied in the field of social sciences (Rakhshani A, et.al., 2010). Over the course of the previous 15 years, numerous studies have been conducted. Research has demonstrated that the practice of yoga has the potential to enhance psychological well-being in individuals who have undergone breast-related experiences. The efficacy of cancer treatment (Cramer H, et.al., 2012) and its impact on health-related quality of life in individuals. Patients who have been stabilized on antipsychotic medication (Vancampfort D, et.al., 2012).

Promising outcomes have been observed in the management of mild to moderate Major Depressive Disorder (MDD). It has been suggested that yoga has the potential to be utilized as a standalone therapeutic intervention [Pilkington K, et. al., 2005]. The user's text, "Level Two," could be rewritten in an academic manner as follows: "The subject matter under consideration pertains to the available evidence substantiates the utilization of yoga as a supplementary therapeutic intervention (Ravindran AV et.al., 2009). Several studies have reached the consensus that yoga is more effective than receiving no treatment in the intervention aims to enhance mild to moderate depressive symptoms in individuals diagnosed with Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) (Krishnamurthy MN, Telles S 2007); Yoga demonstrates comparable efficacy to tricyclic antidepressants (TCAs) in the treatment of severe Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) has been extensively studied, and one treatment approach that has shown promise is the combination of yoga and anti-depressant medication. The use of anti-depressant medication as a standalone treatment for depressive symptoms has been documented in previous studies (Sharma VK et.al., 2005).

Numerous studies in peer-reviewed literature have extensively explored the relationship between yoga practices and mental health outcomes. Here's a concise summary of key findings:

Stress Reduction and Anxiety Management:

A significant body of research supports yoga's efficacy in reducing stress levels and managing anxiety symptoms.

Studies have demonstrated that regular yoga practice can lower cortisol levels (stress hormone) and decrease perceived stress, contributing to improved emotional well-being.

Depression Alleviation:

Several clinical trials have indicated that yoga interventions can be effective as adjunctive therapies in reducing symptoms of depression.

Findings suggest that yoga may enhance mood, alleviate depressive symptoms, and improve overall quality of life.

Cognitive Function and Mental Clarity:

Research indicates that yoga practices, including meditation and mindfulness, can positively impact cognitive function and promote mental clarity.

Studies show improvements in attention, memory, and executive function among individuals engaging in regular yoga practice.

PTSD and Trauma Recovery:

Evidence suggests that yoga-based interventions may be beneficial for individuals with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or those recovering from trauma.

Yoga's emphasis on body awareness, breathing techniques, and mindfulness may aid in trauma recovery by reducing symptoms and enhancing resilience.

Well-being and Self-Regulation:

Studies highlight yoga's role in enhancing emotional regulation and promoting overall well-being. Regular yoga practice is associated with increased self-awareness, emotional balance, and improved coping strategies in dealing with daily stressors.

Neurobiological Changes:

Neuroscientific research suggests that yoga practices induce changes in brain structure and function.

Imaging studies have shown alterations in brain regions associated with emotion regulation, stress response, and self-referential processing in individuals practicing yoga.

In summary, the peer-reviewed literature consistently supports the positive impact of yoga on mental health across various domains, including stress reduction, anxiety management, depression alleviation, cognitive enhancement, trauma recovery, emotional regulation, and neurobiological changes. These findings underscore the potential of yoga as a complementary approach to promote mental well-being and augment traditional mental health interventions.

Mechanism behind the effectiveness of yoga:

The mechanisms that contribute to the perceived effectiveness of yoga in promoting health, preventing diseases, treating ailments, facilitating rehabilitation, and providing palliative care. The understanding of interventions remains incomplete. Numerous scholars one could postulate that

the mechanism by which yoga exerts its effects is through its positive influence on the nervous system. The topic of discussion pertains to the cardiovascular system and its relationship with gene expression. The act of inducing or provoking a response or reaction. The stimulation of the vagal nerve leads to heightened parasympathetic activity within the body. The autonomic nervous system is responsible for regulating various bodily functions, and it has been observed that it also enhances the production of gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), a neurotransmitter with inhibitory properties. The activity of neurotransmitters in the brain has been found to be significant (Streeter et al., 2012). Similar to other types of Physical exercise, respiration, and bodily movement have a beneficial effect. Regarding cardiovascular health. There have been numerous studies conducted to compare gene expression in individuals with long. Numerous studies comparing individuals who practice yoga with control groups indicate that yoga has a beneficial impact. The study investigates the impact of a on the gene expression profiles in immune cells [Saatcioglu F 2013]. In accordance with the principles of yoga, the breath serves as a conduit connecting the mind and the physical structure of an organism, typically referring to the main part excluding the head, limbs. Nearly all forms of breathing involve the practice of slow diaphragmatic breathing. The practice of yoga. The essential factor in achieving mental tranquility is the deliberate deceleration and intensification of cognitive processes. Respiration enhances overall well-being. Tranquility is primarily achieved through the practice of controlled breathing techniques. Practitioners. Individuals possess the capacity to establish internal connections by means of the state of tranquility and absence of sound. Virtually all yogic practices, such as asana (physical postures) and pranayama (breathing exercises), are commonly observed. The practices of asanas (physical postures), pranayama (breathing exercises), and dhyana (meditation) promote a state of tranquility and stillness. Engaging in introspection. Practicing greater kindness and compassion towards oneself and others constitutes an integral aspect regarding the practice both on and off the mat.

Conclusion:

Yoga has potential to improve the emotional well-being of the general public. It's helpful in teaching independence and fostering social acceptance. When practiced in a community setting, yoga has a multiplicative effect on its health benefits for individual participants. It has a social element, like other holistic practices like tai chi, qigong, meditation, and so on. Practicing yoga together, in workplaces, schools and other group settings have shown to promote population mental health (Hartfiel et al., 2011). Although yoga does not directly address the underlying causes of mental illness, it can help its practitioners relax and calm their minds.

It appears that the deep, slow breathing that is practiced in yoga, in addition to the movement and other aspects of yoga, is what gives people the sense of calmness that they seek. It achieves the threefold goal of better health, better care, and lower costs. Recently published research casts doubt on whether or not yoga should be recommended by primary care physicians to their patients. "Yes," says the evidence (strength of recommendation [SOR]: B, systematic reviews of randomized controlled trials [RCTs] with significant heterogeneity). Independently and in combination with other treatments, yoga has been shown to reduce anxiety and depression

symptom scores by an average of 40% across a wide range of randomized controlled trials (RCTs). There have been no negative reports of side effects. Yoga is sometimes provided at no cost, as in the case of some yoga clubs in India and elsewhere. Yoga may not be for everyone, but with a dedicated practice, many people (including those without mental health issues) can find relief from stress and anxiety.

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